



ISSN 1584-4404

Yearbook of the George Barițiu History Institute of Cluj-Napoca Series *Humanistica*



humanistica.ro

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How to cite this article:

Faiciuc, Lucia-Elisabeta (2023) *Moral Competence and Moral Judgment Measures in Association with Indices of Impartiality in the Self-Reported Moral Attitude*, Yearbook of the George Barițiu History Institute of Cluj-Napoca, Series Humanistica, Vol. 21, pp. 21–75. DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.8367320



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**MORAL COMPETENCE AND MORAL JUDGMENT MEASURES
IN ASSOCIATION WITH INDICES OF IMPARTIALITY
IN THE SELF-REPORTED MORAL ATTITUDE**

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Abstract: *MORAL COMPETENCE AND MORAL JUDGMENT MEASURES IN ASSOCIATION WITH INDICES OF IMPARTIALITY IN THE SELF-REPORTED MORAL ATTITUDE. Theoretical reflection generally favors the idea that a higher level in moral thinking and behavior would be characterized by impartiality as long as they are based on moral principles, which should not be applied differently to different people. Despite its spread, this theoretical idea has been empirically investigated to a rather limited extent, especially regarding the degree to which popular psychological measures of the moral judgment and competence are indeed positively associated with impartial attitudes in various particular situations with moral valence. In the current research, in a series of three studies, the relationship of two such psychological measures (Moral Competence Test: MCT and Socio-moral Reflection Questionnaire-Short Form: SRM-SFO) with several indices for impartial benevolence was investigated. The results of the three studies indicate that SRM-SFO instrument may reflect better than the MCT instrument the impartial benevolence aspect of moral thinking in both of its investigated types (the situation that requires breaking a moral law and the one requiring the observance of a moral law). Of all the investigated impartiality indices, the impartiality score for saving someone else's life computed based on the SRM-SFO items was the most closely linked to the moral judgment status assessed both with SRM-SFO and with MCT. The preference for the SRM-SFO postconventional moral arguments of level 4 (the highest one) was the index that was the most positively related with all the investigated indices for the impartial benevolence. Future studies on larger and more heterogeneous samples and with better measures for impartiality are needed to see to what extent the obtained results can be replicated.*

Keywords: *Moral Judgment, Impartiality, Moral Competence Test, Socio-Moral Reflection Questionnaire-Short Form, Principled Moral Reasoning.*

Who is my neighbor?
Luke 10:25–29

Impartiality is a leitmotiv in the scientific and philosophical literature regarding morality. For example, Rachels and Stuart (2012) note that a definition

of morality includes two elements: “first, moral judgments must be backed by good reasons; and second, morality requires the impartial consideration of each individual’s interests” (p. 10). Also, moral Golden Rule can be interpreted as a principle of impartiality or fairness, as notes Duxbury (2008). The tight relationship between impartiality and morality is explained by DeScioli (2023) based on an evolutive hypothesis: “Moral judgment evolved as a strategy for choosing sides in conflicts by impartial rules of action—rather than by hierarchy or faction.” (p. 1). Theoretical reflection generally favors the idea that a higher level in moral thinking and behavior would be characterized by impartiality as long as they are based on moral principles, which should not be applied differently to different people. In other words, the psychological/social distance towards a person should not count when she/he is the target of an action with a moral content, based on a principled reasoning. In the same time, this means that moral circle, *i.e.*, the circle of people to which one feels the obligation to behave morally is extended (*e.g.*, Pizarro, Detweiler-Bedell & Bloom, 2006). So, impartiality issue is related with those studies that investigate the role in moral decisions of proximity, defined as a dimension of moral intensity by Jones (1991) to be “the feeling of nearness (social, cultural, psychological, or physical) that the moral agent has for victims (beneficiaries)” (p. 376) of an evil (beneficial) act. In other words, from an impartial point of view, proximity should count less in a moral decision or judgment.

Despite its spread, the above-mentioned theoretical idea has been empirically investigated to a rather limited extent. The existing research regards mainly the impartiality in decisions in situations of moral dilemmas of a sacrificial type (*e.g.*, Cikara, Farnsworth, Harris & Fiske, 2010; Kahane, Everett, Earp, Farias & Savulescu, 2015; Kurzban, DeScioli & Fein, 2012; Lucas & Livingston, 2014; Tassy, Oullier, Mancini & Wicker, 2013; Thomas, Croft & Tranel, 2011), the level of condemnation for harmful acts or harmful omissions when the relationship between the victim and the author of the immoral act varies in closeness (*e.g.*, Haidt & Baron, 1996), the relationship between moral identity and the extension of the circle of moral regard (*e.g.*, Hardy, Bhattacharjee, Reed II & Aquino, 2010; Smith, Aquino, Koleva & Graham, 2014; Reed II & Aquino, 2003), the prosocial behavior of religious people (*e.g.*, Lang *et al.*, 2019; Saroglou, Pichon, Trompette, Verschueren & Dernelle, 2005;), the relationship of prosocial behavior to known others (*e.g.*, family, friends) vs. to strangers with age (*e.g.*, Karan *et al.*, 2022) or with personality traits (*e.g.*, agreeableness: Graziano, Habashi, Sheese & Tobin, 2007), the relationship between prosocial lies to people with different social status and age (Fu & Lee, 2007; Nagar, Caivano & Talwar, 2020; Sierksma, Spaltman & Lansu, 2019; Williams, Kirmayer, Simon & Talwar, 2013; Xu, Bao, Fu, Talwar & Lee, 2010), the relationship between the types of lies and the nature of social relationship in adulthood (Cole, 2001; DePaulo & Kashy, 1998; Ennis, Vrij & Chance, 2008). The above-mentioned studies are less relevant for the current research. The studies that are more relevant for it will be presented below in a more extensive manner.

McManus, Kleiman-Weiner and Young (2020), among others, investigated empirically the link between special obligations and impartiality in moral judgment, obtaining results that suggest the social norms regarding this link. In their research, “agents who helped a stranger were judged as more morally good and trustworthy than those who helped kin” (p. 1), but, in the same time, “agents who helped a stranger, instead of kin were judged as less morally good and trustworthy than those who did the opposite” (p.1), and “agents who simply neglected a stranger were judged as less morally bad and untrustworthy than those who neglected kin” (p.1). Based on empirical data, Hughes, Creech and Strosser (2016), too, note that people believe that “one’s true character is revealed when interacting with close others” (p. 173). The social role of the agents was also important in McManus *et al.*’s (2020) research: “when occupying roles requiring impartiality, agents who helped a stranger instead of kin were judged as more morally good and trustworthy than agents who did the opposite.” (p. 1). Shaw, Choshen-Hillel and Caruso (2018) provide data that indicate the importance of the public status of a decision in such situations of conflict between partiality and impartiality: in public decisions, managers avoided to give a bonus to a deserving employee who was a friend of theirs, preferring a non-friend in order to prevent the appearance that they are biased, if they believe that others would judge them to be unfair, but, in private decisions, they were willing to give the bonus to a deserving person whether she/he was a friend or not. So, the manifest preference for impartiality may be linked with social desirability. Such a link is supported also with data by Shaw (2013), who assumes that “fairness functions to signal the fair individual’s impartiality to others” (p. 413), as even children are willing to waste resources in the name of fairness.

In another study, McManus, Mason and Young (2021) obtain data that indicated the importance of the values endorsed by the person that judges one’s moral character in situations of conflict between special obligations and impartiality: “endorsement of family values and ingroup-loyalty correlated positively with obligations toward family, whereas endorsement of impartial beneficence correlated positively with obligations toward strangers” (p. 1). In Kahane *et al.*’s (2018) study, impartial beneficence was positively associated with obligation judgments to help strangers and sometimes positively associated with obligation judgments to help family members, but in McManus *et al.*’s (2021) study, impartial beneficence did not correlate with obligation judgments to help family members. Contrary to the expectations of McManus *et al.* (2021), impartial beneficence was also not associated with obligation differences, *i.e.*, with “the gap in judgments about obligations toward distantly related (or unrelated) others and closely related others” (p. 15). They explain this result by assuming that “familial obligations may belong to a special class of obligations that are relatively immune to individual differences in expansiveness of moral concern” (p. 15), as “people who believe that they (and others) have obligations to humanity in general may

believe that they (and others) have even stronger obligations to their family members.” (as suggested also by Fowler, Law & Gaesser, 2021). In the same time, McManus *et al.* (2021) note that they are not aware of research that has tested the relationship between impartial beneficence and expansiveness of moral concern. A second explanation given by them for the above-mentioned result is related with the design of their research: they used scenarios in which help was made through the “distribution of a finite but divisible resource” (p. 15). They believe that the expected correlation mentioned above would have been occurred, if those scenarios were involved a kind of help through which “agents can allocate a limited resource either equally or unequally” (p. 15).

The cited studies of McManus and his collaborators, and the related studies suggest that social norms regarding moral impartiality are not clearly defined.

From a developmental and cultural point of view, Marshall *et al.* (2022) support with data a view that “children’s initial sense of prosocial obligation in social-relational contexts starts out broad and generally becomes more selective over the course of development.” (p. 1866). Their studies indicated that children from USA and other cultures generally judged that everyone is obliged to help someone-in-need, no matter her/his relationship with that person (see also Shaw, 2013), but older children and adults tended to have judgments more discriminant in that respect. These results are in agreement with Kohlberg’s theory (1984, as cited by Wendorf, Alexander & Firestone, 2002) regarding the distributive justice conceptions characteristic for each moral development stage. In the first stage (Heteronomous/Naive Realism), individuals prefer strict equal distributions, with no contextualized considerations. At the second stage (Individualistic/Instrumental), individuals try to maximize their own outcomes, focusing on outcome favorability, taking into account also need differences. In Stage 3 (Interpersonally Normative), the focus is on the notions of merit and equity, besides of the need differences. At Stage 4 (Social System), distributive justice is characterized by the focus on social merit and contributions to the society. In Stage 5 (Human Rights/Social Welfare), distributive justice is based on the notions of social cooperation and agreement (as an expression of an increased interest for procedural justice) and respect for human rights. At the highest stage 6, general principles, not rules or laws, are used to define rights and responsibility, which should not involve preference for a certain person or group based on the personal relationship with such a person or group, the main focus of distributive justice being the need of any person, the universalizability and reversibility of a moral choice. So, equal distribution that is preferred by children develops into complex forms of equity as they grow older, with a changed focus on procedural justice and development of universal principles.

Research regarding the link between empathy and morality is relevant also for the issue of the relationship between partiality and impartiality in moral thinking and behavior (Decety and Batson; 2009; Fowler *et al.*, 2021; Graziano *et*

al., 2007; Matthiesen & Klitmøller, 2019). As noted by Decety and Batson (2009), even though altruism tends to be equated with morality, “empathy-induced altruism does not necessarily produce moral behavior; it can produce immoral behavior as well” (p. 122). They support this stance on the above-mentioned idea that moral principles, like the principles of fairness and justice, are universal and impartial. Therefore, in their view, “altruism stands in the same relation to morality as does egoism” (p. 122), as an altruistic behavior in the favor of a person may put unfairly that person’s needs and interests in front of other persons’ needs and interests in the same way in which one’s egoistic behavior puts the personal needs and interests in front of other persons’ needs and interests. In that way, both an egoistic action and an altruistic one do not respect the principle of fairness. On the one hand, as altruism can be produced by the empathic concern, which is higher for close persons, it follows that the acts of altruism towards close persons can be in conflict with the impartiality requirement of moral principles. It is an issue also raised within the context of the care-justice debate, or Gilligan-Kohlberg debate, regarding the role of gender in moral judgment (see, for example, Juujärvi, Myyry & Pessa, 2010; Puka, 1991). Whereas “care focuses on avoiding hurt and maintaining relationships” (Juujärvi, 2006, p. 193), justice principle would require an undifferentiated altruism. Juujärvi (2006) obtained data that suggest that idea, that care and justice might be integrated into the mature moral thought. They showed that almost all those investigated by them who achieved the postconventional level in the justice development, achieved also the highest levels of care development, but not vice versa, as those who achieved the highest level of care were at various levels of the justice reasoning (starting from the level of maintaining norms morality). The possible conflict between empathic concern and the fairness principle was supported by data obtained by Batson, Klein, Highberger, and Shaw (1995) in an experimental design: participants who were induced to feel empathic concern were significantly more likely to violate the principle of fairness by allocating resources preferentially to the target person of their empathy (even though they agreed that acting with partiality in the investigated situation was less fair and less moral) than those who were not induced to feel empathic concern, who tended to observe the principle of fairness in a strict manner. On the other hand, the prosocial motives of justice and empathic concern or care can also work in the same direction, as noted by Decety and Batson (2009): for example, when empathic concern is evoked in the favor of the victims of injustice. The same idea in which justice and empathy are seen as working together was supported by Fowler *et al.* (2021), who noted, in their research, that, although a moral preference for empathy towards close persons over strangers occurred, in the same time, the moral perspective that was the most valued was that of an equal empathy for all people. Their data indicated a negative association between endorsement of impartial beneficence and judgments of the morality of

parochial empathy. The expansion of moral circle would be partially explained by reason (Pizarro *et al.*, 2006). Hazony (2022) see a relationship between partiality and impartiality that is founded on the loyalty motivation, which also would lead to the extension of the moral circle. In her view, impersonal obligation does not have its source in impartial rules, but in the loyalty to a group, institution, society or tradition, so that a person responds to the needs of the members of large social groups as they respond to the needs of close persons, based on personal obligation, because they are a part of the person's extended self.

The relationship between empathy/partiality and impartiality is approached by Rest, Narvaez, Bebeau and Thoma (1999) from the perspective of the concepts and macro- and micromorality, as different levels of organization of the moral thinking. Macromorality is linked with the formal structure of society, whereas micromorality concerns the face-to-face relationships from everyday life. In macromorality, impartiality and acting in principle are valued, but, in micromorality, "loyalty, dedication, and partisan caring to special others" (p. 293). In their view, Kohlbergian theory of moral development was formulated at the level of macromorality. So, both partiality and impartiality should be judged in relationship with one of the two interpretative frameworks, and not as being necessarily in direct conflict. Moral development may entail a better articulation of the two levels of interpretation of the moral situations.

Several studies investigated the relationship between various moral judgment measures and indices that might be linked indirectly with impartiality.

Data obtained by Pohling, Bzdok, Eigenstetter, Stumpf & Strobel (2016) may be relevant for the discussed issue, as moral value of universalism ("understanding, appreciation, tolerance, and protection for the welfare of all people and for nature", as defined by Schwartz, in 1994 and cited by Pohling *et al.*, 2016, p. 5) and the personality trait of openness to experience from the Big five model of personality may be indirectly linked with impartiality notion. They examined on two large samples of German undergraduate students the relationship of moral competence and moral orientation, measured with Moral Competence Test (formerly Moral Judgment Test, elaborated by Lind, 1978), with the values assessed with the German version of the Schwartz Value Survey (Schwartz, 1992) and with personality traits assessed with a German short version of the Big Five Inventory (BFI-K; Rammstedt & John, 2005). In the first sample, moral competence index correlated with the following relevant values: positively with universalism ($r = .12$, $p < .05$) and benevolence ($r = .09$, $p < .05$), and negatively with conformity ($r = -.21$, $p < .001$), security ($r = -.18$, $p < .001$), and power ($r = -.24$, $p < .001$), and correlated positively with the personality trait of openness to experience ($r = .18$, $p < .01$). Surprisingly, the preference for the two highest stages of moral orientation, corresponding the Kohlbergian postconventional level, did not correlate positively significantly with universalism value, but only with benevolence value ($r = .19$, $p < .001$, in both cases), and with self-direction,

defined as “independent thought and action; choosing, creating, exploring” (Schwartz, 1994, as cited by Pohling *et al.*, 2016, p. 6): $r = .11, p < .05$, for stage 5, and $r = .12, p < .05$, for stage 6. Preference for the stage 5 of moral orientation correlated also positively unexpectedly with the value of hedonism: $r = .11, p < .05$, which was associated also positively with the preference for the lowest stage of moral orientation: $r = .18, p < .01$. Instead, the preference for the lowest stages of moral orientation, corresponding the Kohlbergian preconvention level, correlated negatively, as expected, with universalism ($r = -.21, p < .001$, in both cases) and, in the case of the second stage of moral orientation, also with benevolence ($r = -.14, p < .05$). The preference for the stage 5 of moral orientation correlated also positively with openness to experience ($r = .16, p < .01$), whereas the preference for the lower stages of the moral orientation (at pre-conventional and conventional levels) correlated negatively with openness to experience ($r = -.18, p < .01$, and, respectively, $r = -.14, p < .05$). The preference for the stage 5 of moral orientation correlated also positively with the personality trait of agreeableness ($r = .12, p < .05$). In the second sample, moral competence no longer correlated with openness to experience, but only to one of its facets: values ($r = .17, p < .05$), but, this time, it correlated positively with agreeableness ($r = .30, p < .001$), and with three of its facets: straightforwardness ($r = .33, p < .001$), tender-mindedness ($r = .30, p < .001$), and compliance ($r = .19, p < .05$), and tended to correlate positively with altruism, as another facet of agreeableness. In this sample, the preference for the highest stage of moral orientation, stage 6 (post-conventional), did not correlate with openness to experience, but only with agreeableness ($r = .21, p < .05$) and its compliance facet ($r = .22, p < .05$), and with conscientiousness ($r = .19, p < .05$), and two of its facets: self-discipline ($r = .18, p < .05$) and deliberation ($r = .19, p < .05$). The preference for the stage 5 of moral orientation (post-conventional) correlated positively only with one of the facets of openness to experience: actions ($r = .18, p < .05$), with agreeableness ($r = .27, p < .001$) and almost all of its facets, with the exception of modesty: trust ($r = .18, p < .05$), straightforwardness ($r = .21, p < .05$), tender-mindedness ($r = .26, p < .01$), altruism ($r = .24, p < .01$), compliance ($r = .23, p < .05$). The lowest stage of moral orientation correlated negatively only with the tender-mindedness facet of agreeableness ($r = -.30, p < .001$). The second pre-conventional stage of moral orientation correlated negatively with one of the facets of openness to experience: values ($r = -.24, p < .01$), with agreeableness ($r = -.21, p < .05$) and two of its facets: straightforwardness ($r = -.22, p < .05$), and tender-mindedness ($r = -.29, p < .001$).

Pohling *et al.* (2016) investigated also the relationship of moral competence and orientation with the four aspects of empathy measured with a German version of Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI, Davis, 1983). Moral competence correlated positively with perspective taking ($r = .17, p < .001$), empathic concern ($r = .20, p < .001$), and empathic phantasy ($r = .16, p < .01$), but not with personal

distress. The preference for the highest stage of moral orientation (stage 6, postconventional) correlated positively only with empathic concern ($r = .12$, $p < .05$), the preference for the stage 5 correlated positively with perspective taking ($r = .17$, $p < .01$), and empathic concern ($r = .19$, $p < .001$). In the same time, the preference for the two lowest stages of moral orientation correlated negatively with perspective taking (stage 1: $r = -.16$, $p < .01$, stage 2: $r = -.12$, $p < .05$), empathic concern (stage 1: $r = -.12$, $p < .05$, stage 2: $r = -.16$, $p < .01$), and empathic phantasy ($r = -.20$, $p < .001$, in both cases), but not with personal distress.

Myyrya, Juujärvi and Pessa (2010) investigated on a large sample of first-year students also the relationship between Schwartz's values, using Portrait Value Questionnaire (PVQ, Schwartz, Lehman & Roccas, 1999), empathy, measured with Interpersonal Reactivity Index (Davis, 1983) and moral judgment, but using as measure a short version of the Defining Issues Test (DIT, Rest, 1979). Postconventional score of DIT correlated positively with universalism ($r = .33$, $p < .01$), benevolence ($r = .14$, $p < .01$), self-direction ($r = .13$, $p < .05$), empathic perspective taking ($r = .22$, $p < .01$) and empathic concern ($r = .22$, $p < .01$). The score for the personal interest schema correlated negatively with universalism ($r = -.18$, $p < .01$), and perspective taking ($r = -.13$, $p < .01$). Helkama *et al.* (2003) obtained also a positive association between universalism value assessed with Rokeach Value Survey and the level of moral judgment assessed with a written Kohlberg Moral Judgment Interview (MJI, Colby & Kohlberg, 1987, as cited by Helkama *et al.*, (2003).

The results obtained in the series of the above-mentioned studies suggest that the indices for higher moral judgment measured with three popular instruments (MCT, DTI, and MJI) were in general positively associated with universalism, as an indirect measure of impartiality, although this association was sometimes unstable and generally rather weak. Correlatively, the indices for lower moral judgment were associated negatively with universalism, also rather weakly. The pattern of correlations with other values of the above-mentioned indices, with a few exceptions, were the one expected theoretically and in accordance with the data regarding universalism. The relationship of these indices for moral judgment with empathy was also in accordance with the theoretical predictions, as the relevant aspects of empathy (assessed with IRI, or indirectly with the relevant Schwartz's values or personality traits) were associated positively with the indices for the higher moral judgment, and negatively with those for the lower moral judgment, although the obtained associations were also rather weak. It is notably that the presented data indicate that at higher levels of the moral judgment empathy and universalism seem to be compatible and integrated, that macro- and micromorality can be articulated together. This articulation may be linked partially with the personality trait of openness to experience, or with its facet for values or actions, with which the moral judgment indices were also associated as theoretically predicted, but in a more unstable manner than in the case of their

association with universalism and empathy. It is to be noted that the results presented above were not based on absolute scores and that social desirability was not taken into account, so they might have been influenced by it or other response biases. Moreover, in Pohling *et al.*'s study (2016), the scores for the moral competence index were transformed (square rooted), because they were not normally distributed.

Wendorf *et al.* (2002), building on Kohlberg's theory (1984), as cited by them, investigated the relationship of 15 measures of various criteria for distributive (equity, need, equality, status, and ability) and procedural justice (procedural consistency, bias suppression/neutrality, accuracy, correctability, representativeness, and ethicality, trust in the benevolence of the decision-maker, status recognition, decision and process control), applied to three dilemmas of DIT (Rest, 1979), as well as a global measure for outcome favorability and the scores for the three types of moral schemas of Defining Issues Test (DIT). They found that each schema of moral reasoning was significantly predicted by different concerns about social justice. The preference for personal interest schema was the only one associated positively with the concerns over favorable outcomes ($r = .523, p < .01$), and was additionally associated positively with the global preference for distributive justice criteria ($r = .289, p < .01$), positively associated with some component factors of distributive and procedural justice, synthesized by the cited authors as "Specialized Distributive Concerns" ($r = .477, p < .01$), and, respectively, "Participation/Appeals" procedure ($r = .433, p < .01$), *i.e.*, especially with justice components designed to account "for individual preferences, and procedures that allow personal input" (Wendorf *et al.*, 2002, p. 10). Preference for the maintaining norms schema was associated positively with "concerns over consistent procedures and distributions" (p. 10), which are linked with "impartial codes and procedures" (p. 10) that requires a focus on following rules. It correlated positively with the global score for distributive ($r = .265, p < .01$) and procedural justice ($r = .215, p < .01$), and with the factors "Decision-Maker Procedural Fairness" ($r = .285, p < .01$), "Participation/Appeals Procedures" ($r = .230, p < .01$), "Equitable/Consistency Concerns" ($r = .334, p < .01$). The preference for the postconventional moral schema was associated with justice criteria as ethicality, accuracy, neutrality, and trustworthiness, but they shared with those preferring personal interest schema the concerns for procedures that allow for individual participation in all decisions, motivated not by self-interest as in their case, but because of the protection of the individual human rights that such procedures would secure. The preference for this schema correlated positively with the global score for distributive ($r = .204, p < .01$) and procedural justice ($r = .254, p < .01$), and with the factors "Decision-Maker Procedural Fairness" ($r = .348, p < .01$), "Specialized Distributive Concerns" ($r = .199, p < .01$), "Participation/Appeals Procedures" ($r = .302, p < .01$), "Equitable/Consistency Concerns" ($r = .149, p < .01$). Higher moral schema scores were associated positively with higher justice

importance ratings. The global N2 index, as a weighting of Postconventional Schema preference and Personal Interest Schema rejection, was not associated with any justice components, but was linked positively with the global evaluations of Procedural Justice ($r = .197, p < .01$), and negatively with the global score for Outcome Favorability ($r = -.202, p < .01$). Neutrality, defined as bias suppression, the justice criterion that is the most relevant for the present research (“Whether the judge is unbiased and impartial in making decisions”), correlated significantly only with the preference for the maintaining norms schema ($r = .256, p < .01$), and with the one for the post-conventional schema ($r = .185, p < .05$). Other particular justice criteria that might be relevant regarding the impartiality issue were: consistency (“Whether the judge treats all defendants in the same way”, which correlated positively only with the preference for maintain norms schema: $r = .237, p < .01$), equality (“Would the judge make the same decision for anyone else who might steal the drug?”, which correlated positively only with the preference for maintain norms schema: $r = .161, p < .05$), respect (“Does the judge show respect for Heinz as a person?”, which correlated positively with the preference for postconventional schema: $r = .342, p < .01$), need (“Should the judge’s decision be influenced by the fact that Heinz’s wife really needs the drug?”, which correlated positively with the preference for personal interest schema: $r = .519, p < .01$, and preference for postconventional schema: $r = .199, p < .01$), status (“Should Heinz’s position in the community be considered by the judge?”, which correlated positively only the preference for personal interest schema: $r = .363, p < .01$), and ability (“Should the judge’s decision be influenced by Heinz’s ability to contribute to society?”, which correlated positively with the preference for personal interest schema: $r = .339, p < .01$, and preference for postconventional schema: $r = .229, p < .01$). Wilhelm, Weber, Douglas, Siepermann and Abuhamdieh (2021) studied also the relationship of the N2 score of DIT2 with impartiality, but using a particular index: anti-immigrant bias. In their moral reasoning regression model, anti-immigrant bias negatively predicted N2, as an index of principled moral reasoning. In these cases, it is important to note that the above-mentioned results were obtained with absolute scores, without measuring social desirability or controlling for other response biases, and that the relevant correlations were weak or moderate.

A series of studies have investigated the relationship between measures of the moral judgment and moral foundations, which include fairness and care, as moral foundations. Baril and Wright (2012) used Moral Foundations Questionnaire (MFQ, Haidt, 2010, as cited by Baril & Wright, 2012) and Defining Issues Test (Rest, 1979) on three undergraduate samples. In two of them, Fairness moral foundation and P-score and, respectively, the preference for the post-conventional schema of DIT were slightly, though not significantly, negatively related. Noting that, in DIT2 measure, the answers are prioritized, whereas, in MFQ, they are not, the cited authors computed for MFQ relative scores of the preference for the

individualizing moral foundations relative to the binding ones. In this case, they obtained a significant positive correlation between the relative preference for fairness and the P-score ($r = .27, p < .05$). In the third sample, Fairness moral foundation and P-score and the absolute preference for the post-conventional schema of DIT correlated positively significantly ($r = .27, p < .05$). Baril and Wright (2012) noted that, in this sample, comparative with the other two, participants were the least distracted when completing the two instruments, being tested in private rooms (in one of the other samples, they were experimentally distracted with a cognitive load task, and, in the other sample, they were distracted by completing collectively in a class the two instruments). The two authors hypothesized that postconventional moral schema (assessed with P-score), because it is more recently developed, might be more susceptible to cognitive disruption, and that the preferences for moral foundations were also changed through cognitive disruption. The samples differed also regarding the DIT version: in the sample in which it was administered collectively, it was DIT-1 (Rest, 1993, as cited by Baril & Wright, 2012), and, in the sample in which it was administered in a private room, it was DIT-2 (Bebeau & Thoma, 2003, as cited by Baril & Wright, 2012). So, the DIT version may explain also the differences regarding the results between the samples, not only the cognitive distraction variable. Glover *et al.* (2014) also used Harm, Fairness, Ingroup, Authority, and Purity from Moral Foundations Questionnaire (MFQ, Graham *et al.*, 2011) to predict schema scores of Defining Issues Test-2 (DIT-2, Rest, Narvaez, Thoma & Bebeau, 1999, as cited by Glover *et al.*, 2014) using responses from a large sample of undergraduates. As in the case of the two samples from Baril and Wright's study (2012), the preference for the fairness foundation correlated negatively, but not statistically significant, with the preference for the postconventional schema, and with N2 score, and had no significant correlation with the preference for the schemas for personal interest and maintaining norms. The preference for personal interest schema was not predicted by any of the investigated moral foundations. Preferences for the maintaining norms schema and postconventional schema and N2 score were predicted negatively by those moral foundations included in the Bounding foundations category (loyalty, duty, and purity). Glover *et al.* (2014) conclude that moral foundations are less representative for postconventional moral reasoning, and more representative for the pre-conventional and conventional levels of the moral reasoning. Finally, Clancy (2021) investigated the relationship between a version of DIT: Engineering and Science Issues Test (ESIT, Borenstein, Drake, Kirkman & Swann, as cited by Clancy, 2021) and MFQ (Graham *et al.*, 2011) on a large sample of Chinese engineering students. The preference for Fairness moral foundation correlated positively significantly with the N2 score of ESIT ($\rho = .29, p < .01$), and with the preference for the postconventional schema ($\rho = .35, p < .05$), and negatively significantly with the preference for the conventional schema ($\rho = -.25, p < .05$). The preference for postconventional schema and N2

score correlated positively significantly only with individualizing moral foundations (harm/care and fairness). The preference for conventional schema, instead, correlated negatively significantly with all moral foundations, with the exception of Authority moral foundation. The preference for pre-conventional schema did not have any relationship with moral foundations.

Gay, Vitacco, Hackney, Beussink and Lilienfeld (2018) investigated the same relationship between moral foundations and moral judgment, using also MFQ (Graham *et al.*, 2011), but, instead of DIT, he administered Moral Competence Test (MCT, Lind, 1978) to assess the level of moral competence on two samples. In the sample of undergraduate students, they found no significant relationship between the preference for the Fairness moral foundation and the index for moral competence, the correlation being weakly positive. In the sample of community residents (with a mean age 41,82 years, with a moral competence similar with the one from the first sample), instead, the preference for the Fairness moral foundation correlated significantly positively with the index for moral competence: $r = .15, p < .05$. In this sample, moral competence index also correlated negatively significantly with the binding moral foundations of loyalty and purity. Trups-Kalne and Dimdins (2017) investigated also on two samples the relationship between MFQ (Graham *et al.*, 2011) and MCT (Lind, 1978), but they added the moral orientation scores of MCT in their analysis. In the first sample, the preference for Fairness moral foundation correlated negatively with the moral competence index of MCT ($\rho = -.12, p < .05$). The moral competence index correlated also negatively significantly with the bounding moral foundations ($\rho = -.29, p < .001$). The preference for Fairness moral foundation did not correlate significantly with the preference for any of the six stages of moral orientation of MCT. In the second sample, very similar with the first one, the preference for Fairness moral foundation correlated also negatively with the moral competence index of MCT ($\rho = -.11, p < .05$), and moral competence index correlated also negatively significantly with the bounding moral foundations ($\rho = -.25, p < .001$). In this second sample, instead, the preference for Fairness moral foundation correlated positively significantly with the preference for the first four stages of moral orientation ($\rho = .14, p < .01$, for the first stage, and $\rho = .13, p < .05$, for the second, third, and fourth one), and with the preference for the highest moral orientation of stage 6 ($\rho = .18, p < .001$), and with social conservatism ($\rho = .19, p < .001$). The two cited authors concluded, based on the obtained results, that the importance of individualizing moral foundations, which include fairness, is distinct from the ability to use them in related arguments for moral reasoning. They also speculated that respondents who consider as important both types of moral foundations: individualizing (care/harm and fairness/cheating), and binding (in-group loyalty, respect for authority, and concern with sanctity/purity) may be confronted with a more complex analytical problem when solving the MCT moral task, a situation that may lower their moral competence score. Popoveniuc (2021) used also MFQ

(Graham *et al.*, 2011) and MCT (Lind, 1978) scores for moral competence and moral orientation on a large sample. He found a small, but significant, positive correlation between the moral competence index of MCT and the preference for individualizing moral foundations ($\tau = .048$, $p = .042$, 1-tailed). For the relationship of moral competence index with the preference for Fairness moral foundation, the correlation was positive, but not statistically significant ($\tau = .042$). It was statistically significant only for those with a moral competence index higher than 20 ($\tau = .084$). The preference for fairness correlated statistically significantly positively with the last four stages of the moral orientation assessed with MCT ($\tau = .083$, $p < .01$, for stage 3, $\tau = .067$, $p < .05$, for stage 4, $\tau = .095$, $p < .01$, for stage 5, and $\tau = .139$, $p < .01$, for stage 6). The preference for these stages correlated also positively with the preference for the binding moral foundations. Based on the obtained data, Popoveniuc (2021) suggests that those with a higher level of moral competence may be more able to operate consistently (principally) with all types of moral foundations, being more able to face the complex analytical problem of the persons that consider important all the moral foundations that was presumed by Trups-Kalne and Dimdins (2017).

So, data regarding the link between fairness as a moral foundation and measures that assess the level of moral thinking or moral competence are inconclusive, sometimes indicating a small positive association, sometimes no association, and sometimes even a negative association. In this case, too, the results were based, with only one exception, on absolute scores, without measuring social desirability or controlling for other response biases. The interpretation of the results of the series of studies that investigated the link between fairness as a moral foundation and various indices of moral judgment should take into account that fairness meaning may vary individually and culturally (see, for example, Shaw *et al.*, 2018), and that its meaning only partially overlaps with the meaning of impartial moral reasoning. For example, Snarey and Samuelson (2008) note that, in Piaget's view, fairness is interpreted different at different ages, in heteronomous and autonomous moral thinking: from a heteronomous perspective, fairness is understood as obedience/conformity to authority, and to its associated sacred rules, whereas from an autonomous perspective, as mutual agreement in cooperation and reciprocity in exchange. Bicchieri and Chavez (2010) obtained data that suggest that what is considered to be fair depends on context, on the normative expectations associated with a particular situation. Stouten, De Cremer and van Dijk (2005), note, based on empirically data, that equality rule may be incorrectly equated with fairness, because this rule can be used based on fairness concerns (predominantly by people who have a prosocial orientation, *i.e.*, individuals who prefer to maximize equal outcomes and joint benefits), or on efficiency concerns (predominantly by people with a proself orientation, who want to maximize their personal outcome). Based on similar empirical data, which indicate the instrumental value of equality, as providing collective effectiveness, simplicity in the regulation of social interactions, and inhibition of conflict (Messick, 1993),

several authors (*e.g.*, Lu, Au, Zhu & Jiang, 2019; Messick, 1993; van Dijk, Leliveld & van Beest, 2009) distinguished between true fairness and instrumental fairness. Equality is used in true fairness to promote equal treatment of the members of a group, whereas, in the instrumental fairness, it is used to solve social or personal problems. Data obtained by Lang *et al.* (2019) suggest also that religion may favor fairness, as higher ratings of gods as monitoring and punishing predicted decreased local favoritism and increased resource-sharing with distant co-religionists, although the effect varied regionally. Finally, Shaw *et al.* (2018, p. 15) note that even though equality is generally viewed as impartial, because it does not constrain distribution so that to favor one recipient over another, inequality “may also be viewed as impartial, to the extent that the distribution is based on a socially agreed upon justification (*e.g.*, merit, need, or a randomization procedure)”, *i.e.*, when inequality results from a procedural justice.

To my knowledge, no studies have investigated directly whether popular psychological measures of the moral judgment or competence are indeed positively associated with impartial attitudes in various particular situations with moral valence, if they indeed reflect this aspect that traditionally characterizes the highest levels of moral thinking and behavior in the WEIRD (Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic) culture, which is centered on the justice principle.

The objective of this research was to explore the above-mentioned link, using data obtained previously in three different investigations. It is an investigation important not only from a theoretical point of view, but also pragmatically, as a way to examine the construct validity of the psychological measures that aim to assess moral judgment and behavior, providing also data important for the social problem of corruption (see Shaw *et al.*, 2018). Three different psychological measures of the moral judgment and competence were chosen from these investigations, mainly because of their theoretical base, which indicates a strong implicit link with the idea of impartiality of some of their items or of the way they were constructed.

The first measure is Moral Competence Test (Lind, 1978), which assesses one’s moral competence and orientation, as also noted above. The way Lind (1985, 2015) operationally defines moral competence has an obvious relationship with the impartiality in the assessment of the moral arguments, no matter if they support or contradict one’s own personal opinion regarding the acceptable solution for moral dilemmas. This kind of impartiality may be indirectly linked with the impartiality in the assessing of other people’s moral arguments. In Lind’s (1985, 2015) view, the more morally competent is a person, the more she/he would be able to recognize and appreciate the quality of a moral argument even if that argument contradicts the position supported by that person in a moral matter. This would imply that that person would be able to overcome the bias of her/his own personal opinion or of the adopted socially dominant opinion, especially when she/he prefers moral arguments of higher quality, which derive from a principled moral

reasoning, in accordance with the cognitive affective parallelism supported by Lind (1985, 2015). Moral competence is seen as the cognitive aspect of the moral judgment development, tightly linked with moral orientation, which is its affective aspect, indicated by the preferred level of moral arguments that vary in their quality (preconventional, conventional, or postconventional). The more morally competent a person is, the more she/he will prefer high-level moral arguments.

The second measure is Socio-moral Reflection Questionnaire-Short Form Objective version (SRM-SFO, Brugman, Basinger & Gibbs, 2007; Brugman, Beerthuisen, Helmond, Basinger & Gibbs, 2021), which assesses the level of a person's moral judgment based not on moral dilemmas, but on the preferred moral arguments that support the importance attributed by the respondent to several behaviors that have a moral valence (related to moral values): keeping a promise, telling the truth, respecting other people's property, helping, saving another person's life, obeying the law, and enforcement of the law by a judge through jail sentencing. In the case of the promise-keeping and of the saving another person's life, two different situations were considered by the authors of the measure: the case in which one has to keep a promise made to a friend or, respectively, to save the life of a friend, and the case in which one has to keep a promise made to a stranger or, respectively, to save the life of a stranger. Respondents are asked to assess how important it is for people to keep a promise or to save another person's life and then to justify why those behaviors are assessed as important. The importance ascribed to those behaviors is a measure of their moral value, indicating the perceived moral obligation that was assigned to them. An impartial attitude would require that a respondent to assess the importance of the two behaviors to be the same in the case of a friend and in the case of the stranger. It is likely that the authors of the SRM-SF measure (Gibbs, Basinger & Fuller, 1992), from which the objective version was developed, included the two different cases as a way to investigate the extension of the respondents' moral circle and as a way to find out if those behaviors are considered important because of the personal relationship with the person affected by those behaviors or because of a genuine universalized respect for any person, deriving from a principled moral reasoning.

Finally, the third measure is a questionnaire through which the motivation to hide the truth was investigated (C5 Questionnaire, elaborated by Faiciuc, 2016b; see also Faiciuc, 2016a), based on the preferred reasons for which the respondents hid the truth in the past or would be tempted to do so in the present. The possible reasons for hiding the truth that are to be evaluated by respondents include prosocial reasons regarding the relationship with a close person and with a stranger. The correspondent items from the C5 questionnaire can be used as an index for the impartiality of one's reasons and willingness to break a moral law to bring a benefit to another person, not only for one's willingness to respect a moral law no matter the involved beneficent person, as it is the case for the two previously presented instruments. Such prosocial lies were linked with empathy and compassion in previous research, having an ambiguous moral status and acceptability, as they vary with the kind of benefit associated with them (Fang, Chen, Wang, Zhang & Mo, 2020; Lupoli, Jampol &

Oveis, 2017; Nagar, Caivano & Talwar, 2020). It is important to know if this kind of impartiality envisioned by the third instrument, which has not been investigated before, has the same relationship with moral judgment level as the kind of impartiality involved in the first two presented instruments.

The *general working hypotheses* were formulated based on the presented theoretical reasons, and taking into account the above-mentioned empirical results that supported such theoretical reasons. It was expected that the level of impartial benevolence, as measured using the two above-mentioned instruments (SRM-SFO and C5), should have a positive association with the preferred level of moral judgment (the level of moral development), measures with MCT and SRM-SFO. In other words, the preference for the lower levels of moral arguments should be associated negatively with the indices for the impartial benevolence computed based on the above-mentioned instruments, and the preference for the higher levels of moral arguments should be associated positively with those indices. Additionally, moral competence, as an index of impartiality in the assessment of the moral arguments, should be associated positively with the impartiality indices derived based on the SRM-SFO and C5.

STUDY 1

The objective of this exploratory study was to investigate the relationship of moral competence and orientation as defined by Lind (1985, 2015) with the impartiality of the reasons for hiding the truth. Three types of benevolent motivations for hiding the truth were considered:

- Maintaining a social relationship or civility by avoiding situations that may hurt another person, which supports social relations with a close person or with a stranger (this motivation was synthetically discussed by Nagar *et al.*, 2020; see also, Williams *et al.*, 2013);
- Avoiding someone else's suffering: of a close person or of a stranger (partially corresponding to the compassion for other's survival in suffering in the distinction made by Fang *et al.*, in 2020, regarding the motivation for prosocial lies);
- Bringing an advantage to someone else: to a close person or to a stranger (partially corresponding to the compassion for other's development in suffering in the distinction made by Fang *et al.*, in 2020, regarding the motivation for prosocial lies).

The following hypotheses were tested:

- Moral competence, which indicates also impartiality in moral argumentation, should be associated positively with the impartiality in the considered reasons for hiding the truth;

- The preference for the higher levels of moral orientation (which indicates also the preference for principled reasoning, implicitly linked with an impartial moral judgment) should be associated positively with the impartiality in the considered reasons for hiding the truth. The preference for the lower levels of moral orientation should be associated negatively with the impartiality in the considered reasons for hiding the truth.

Method

Participants

The studied sample was composed of 90 undergraduate students at a fine arts university, with a mean age of 20,30 years (66 females, 22 males, 2 with undisclosed gender). Participants received credit points for completing the instruments. The number of participants may vary for each computed correlation, depending on the number of participants who gave answers for all the items used to compute the correlated scores.

Instruments

- **Moral Competence Test: MCT** (formerly Moral Judgment Test, MJT), elaborated by Lind in 1978, in its Romanian version (Lupu, 2009). It is an instrument for which there are numerous studies regarding its validity (see, for example, Lind, 2000). It was renamed in 2014 by Lind as Moral Competence Test to reflect better its purpose and to avoid possible confusions. The test includes two moral dilemmas (The workers' dilemma and the mercy-killing/doctor's dilemma), for which a solution is given by the author of the test. The respondents have to rate (on a Likert scale with 7 points from "I strongly disagree" to "I strongly agree") the extent to which they agree or disagree with the given solution. They also have to rate to what degree they consider acceptable or not (on a Likert scale with 9 points from "I completely reject" to "I completely accept") six arguments in the favor of the given solution of a dilemma and six counterarguments for that solution. Each of the six arguments or counterarguments corresponds to one of the six types of moral orientations (matching the stages of moral judgment development), as they were conceived by Lind (1978), taking into consideration the Kohlbergian theory. They are described by Lind (2015) as follows:

Type 1: Use of physical or psychological force as a criterion of moral rightness: "The stronger party has the right of way."

Type 2: “I do to you what you do to me.”

Type 3: Appeal to group solidarity and cohesion: “It is not good if this will harm the relationship to my family or my friends.”

Type 4: Appeal to the law as the ultimate arbiter: “The law and order must be preserved.”

Type 5: Keeping social contracts: “Promises and contracts must always be kept.”

Type 6: Referring to universal moral principles: “This maxima must be followed by everyone if we want to live in a world of peace.” (p. 3)

A participant would have a higher score for moral competence if she/he agrees or disagrees in a consistent way with the same types of moral arguments, no matter if they are pro or contra the solution preferred by her/him in solving the two dilemmas, taking into consideration only their moral quality. Lind (2000) states that C score of the moral competence (or C index) indicates the degree to which a respondent lets that her/his moral judgment to be determined by moral principles and considerations and not by “psychological forces”, like the human tendency to select and accept only arguments that support a personal opinion or a personal decision. The C index ranges from 0 (lowest score) to 100 (highest score). Regarding the significance of the C index, Lind (2015) describes several patterns of the answers of the respondents, in the ascending order of their corresponding C index:

1. Cannot distinguish between ‘arguments’ and ‘opinions’ on an issue: The participant says his/her opinion but refuses to rate the arguments.
2. Uses arguments only as justification for an opinion (“rationalization”) but would not let argument inform opinion: The participant strongly accepts all arguments supporting own opinion, and strongly rejects all arguments opposing it.
3. Can distinguish the moral quality of arguments regardless of their opinion-agreement: The participant rejects inadequate arguments even if they support his/her opinion.
4. Uses counter-arguments as a source of own knowing and reflection: The participant rates also counter-arguments high if they relate to a shared moral principle. (p. 14)

Given that MCT is rather a cognitive ideographic experimental task through which it is evaluated a competence that is changeable, especially through experience, Lind (2000) does not recommend the computation of a coefficient of internal consistency or the assessment of the fidelity of this instrument.

- **Questionnaire of Reasons for Hiding the Truth: C5** (elaborated by Faiciuc in 2016b; see also Faiciuc, 2016a). which assesses the tendency to hide the truth and its reasons. It is an instrument with 31 items for which respondents were required to assess on a 5-point Likert scale (from 0: “not at all” to 5: “completely”) to what extent the given statements are true in their case, *i.e.*, if they have hidden or would hide the truth in the stated conditions. The following six items from C5 were used in this study:

10. I preferred / would prefer to hide the truth in order to keep my relationship with a person I care about, who is important to me.

11. I decided / would decide to hide the truth in order to spare the feelings of a stranger to me.

12. I preferred / would prefer to hide the truth in order to avoid causing suffering to a close person who would have been / would be affected by finding out the truth.

13. I preferred / would prefer to hide the truth in order to avoid causing suffering to a stranger who would have been / would be affected by finding out the truth.

14. I preferred / would prefer to hide the truth in order to bring an advantage through my silence to a close person who needed / would need this advantage.

15. I preferred / would prefer to hide the truth in order to bring an advantage through my silence to a stranger who needed / would need this advantage.

Procedure

The instruments were administered collectively, on paper, in the same session, with no time limit.

Using the idea that impartiality would be indicated by the difference between the willingness to hide the truth for the sake of a stranger and the willingness to hide the truth for the sake of a close person (the smaller the difference in absolute value, the higher would be the impartiality), the following scores were computed based on the answers to the above-mentioned items selected from C5 Questionnaire:

- *General impartiality* for all the considered items, no matter the reason for hiding the truth;
- Impartiality of the reason to hide the truth for the sake of a social relationship (item 11-item 10);
- Impartiality of the reason to hide the truth to avoid someone else's suffering (item 13 – item 12);
- Impartiality of the reason to hide the truth to bring an advantage to someone else (item 15 – item 14).

For the MCT instrument, besides the C index for the moral competence, scores for the preference for each of the six levels/types of moral arguments were computed. They indicate what was called by Lind (2000) the moral orientation aspect of the moral judgment, the affective one, depending on the levels of the moral arguments that are the most or the least preferred ones. To reduce the possible response biases, the preference scores were ipsatized by subtracting from the absolute preference for each moral argument of MCT the mean preference for all moral arguments of MCT, obtaining thus a relative preference for that moral argument.

Results

As the distribution of almost all variables involved in investigation was significantly departed from the normal distribution, the nonparametric Spearman rank correlation was used.

A statistical significance threshold of $p = .05$ was considered. As the study is exploratory, and taking into account the controversy around the application of the Bonferroni correction (*e.g.*, Streiner, 2015), this correction was not used in the present research.

In the correlational analysis, the ipsatized scores for MCT were used, because, by computing the relative preference scores, some response tendencies may be canceled as it might have happened when impartiality scores were computed, those scores indicating a relative preference for the considered reasons for hiding the truth.

Unexpectedly, some participants had answers indicating a higher preference for the prosocial reasons for hiding the truth regarding a stranger than for the prosocial reasons for hiding the truth regarding a close person in at least one of the three examined situations. As the answers in these cases may have a different psychological meaning than the one for the cases in which the preference for the prosocial reasons for hiding the truth regarding a close person is higher than or equal with the preference for the prosocial reasons for hiding the truth regarding a stranger that was taken into consideration when the hypotheses were formulated, a separate correlational analysis was made for each of the two categories of cases, no matter the number of cases in each category. For the correlations of the MCT variables with the total impartiality score, in the first category were included only the cases for which the preference for a reason to hide the truth regarding a close person was higher than or equal with the preference for the reason to hide the truth regarding a stranger in all the three considered situations, and, in the second category, were included all the other cases.

The obtained results regarding the relationship between MCT variables and impartiality scores of C5 are presented in Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1

Spearman rank correlations, one-tailed, between the impartiality scores of C5 and MCT variables (moral competence index and the ipsatized preference scores for the six moral judgment stages) for those cases in which the preference for the prosocial reasons for hiding the truth regarding a close person was higher than or equal with the preference for the prosocial reasons for hiding the truth regarding a stranger

MCT scores	Spearman rank correlations (one-tail)	General impartiality	Maintaining relationship impartiality	Impartiality for avoiding someone else's suffering	Impartiality for bringing an advantage to someone else
Preference for stage 1	Coefficient	.176	.287**	.013	.040
	Significance	.073	.007	.454	.359
	N	69	74	83	85
Preference for stage 2	Coefficient	.074	.192	-.039	-.052
	Significance	.273	.051	.364	.317
	N	69	74	83	85
Preference for stage 3	Coefficient	-.042	.065	-.059	-.035
	Significance	.367	.291	.297	.375
	N	69	74	83	85
Preference for stage 4	Coefficient	.121	-.058	.215*	.092
	Significance	.161	.311	.026	.200
	N	69	74	83	85
Preference for stage 5	Coefficient	-.181	-.309**	-.166	.073
	Significance	.069	.004	.067	.252
	N	69	74	83	85
Preference for stage 6	Coefficient	-.097	-.232*	.025	-.068
	Significance	.214	.023	.413	.267
	N	69	74	83	85
Moral competence Index (C index)	Coefficient	-.070	-.170	-.048	.004
	Significance	.284	.074	.332	.485
	N	69	74	83	85

Table 2

Spearman rank correlations, one-tailed, between the impartiality scores of C5 and MCT variables (moral competence index and the ipsatized preference scores for the six moral judgment stages) for those cases in which the preference for the prosocial reasons for hiding the truth regarding a stranger was higher than the preference for the prosocial reasons for hiding the truth regarding a close person

MCT scores	Spearman rank correlations (one-tail)	General impartiality	Maintaining relationship impartiality	Impartiality for avoiding someone else's suffering	Impartiality for bringing an advantage to someone else
Preference for stage 1	Coefficient	-.234	-.207	.103	-.825*
	Significance	.160	.230	.413	.043
	N	20	15	7	5
Preference for stage 2	Coefficient	-.239	-.496*	.204	.447
	Significance	.155	.030	.330	.225
	N	20	15	7	5
Preference for stage 3	Coefficient	.401*	.459*	.204	.224
	Significance	.040	.043	.330	.359
	N	20	15	7	5
Preference for stage 4	Coefficient	.182	.399	-.204	-.335
	Significance	.221	.070	.330	.291
	N	20	15	7	5
Preference for stage 5	Coefficient	.035	-.167	-.204	-.803
	Significance	.443	.277	.330	.051
	N	20	15	7	5
Preference for stage 6	Coefficient	-.109	-.088	.204	-.335
	Significance	.324	.377	.330	.291
	N	20	15	7	5
Moral competence Index (C index)	Coefficient	.199	.092	-.612	-.112
	Significance	.200	.372	.072	.429
	N	20	15	7	5

As the relationship between MCT variables and impartiality scores of C5 may be influenced by the level of the tendency to hide the truth for the sake of close persons (depending on what close persons the respondent had in mind and on the respondent's level of empathy) or for the sake of the relationship with them (items 10, 12, and 14), nonparametric partial correlations were computed for the considered cases, controlling for the corresponding variables that indicate such a tendency in each situation (*i.e.*, item 10, item 12, or, respectively, item 14). In the case of the impartiality scores that were smaller than or equal to zero, the following statistically significant or marginally significant nonparametric partial correlations (one-tailed) were obtained between:

- *the impartiality score for maintaining social relationships* and:
 - the relative preference for moral arguments of stage 1: $r = .302$, $p = .005$, $df = 71$;
 - the relative preference for moral arguments of stage 5: $r = -.271$, $p = .01$, $df = 71$;
 - the relative preference for moral arguments of stage 6: $r = -.206$, $p = .04$, $df = 71$;
- *the impartiality score for avoiding someone else's suffering* and the relative preference for moral arguments of stage 4: $r = .214$, $p = .026$, $df = 80$,
- *the impartiality score for bringing an advantage to someone else* and the relative preference for moral arguments of stage 1: $r = .168$, $p = .064$, $df = 82$.

In the case of the impartiality scores that were bigger than zero, the following statistically significant nonparametric partial correlations were obtained between the *impartiality in maintaining social relationships* and:

- the relative preference for moral arguments of stage 2: $r = -.495$, $p = .036$, $df = 12$
- the relative preference for moral arguments of stage 3: $r = .464$, $p = .047$, $df = 12$;

Discussion

With only one exception, the obtained results did not support the hypotheses. On the contrary, some of them indicate in some cases a significant negative relationship or a tendency toward such a relationship between impartiality scores and the considered MCT variables, not a positive one, as it was predicted. They also indicate that the

relationship of impartiality when breaking a moral law (hiding the truth) based on prosocial reasons with moral competence or moral orientation depends on the kind of reason for which the moral law is violated, a result that may be linked with the results of Fang *et al.* (2020) regarding the different motivations for prosocial lying.

The data of this study suggest that the case in which a person tends more to hide the truth to bring an advantage to a close person than to bring an advantage to a stranger does not have relevance to her/his moral competence or moral orientation. It may be that bringing an advantage to a close person by breaking a moral law is considered morally less relevant than avoiding the suffering of such a person through breaking a moral law (Fang *et al.*, 2020).

Impartiality in hiding the truth to avoid someone else's suffering was the only one that had a statistically significant positive correlation (as predicted) with the relative preference for a higher moral orientation (the higher stage of the conventional level): "appeal to the law as the ultimate arbiter". It tended, instead, to have a negative relationship or no relationship with the relative preference for the highest types of moral orientation: "keeping social contracts" and "referring to universal moral principles". A possible explanation for this result may be based on the relationship between the corresponding kind of lying and the compassion/empathy for other's survival in suffering (supposedly, such compassion is greater for a close person than for a stranger), which can be a powerful motivation that can prevail over the moral motivation to maintain impartiality. The two kinds of motivations may be absent, in competition, canceling each other's influence, or winning, depending on the kind of moral orientation, or they may work in tandem. This explanation is also suggested by data obtained by Pohling *et al.* (2016), which indicated a significant negative relationship between the preference for the stage 4 of MCT and empathic perspective taking and empathic concern ($r = -.14, p < .05$, and, respectively, $r = -.11, p < .05$), whereas the preference for the stage 5 of MCT correlated positively with empathic perspective taking and empathic concern ($r = .17, p < .01$, and, respectively, $r = .19, p < .001$), and the preference for the stage 6 of MCT correlated positively with empathic concern ($r = .12, p < .05$). So, when empathy is lower, as in the case of those who prefer moral arguments of the stage 4 from MCT, impartiality concerns, maybe of an instrumental type, would prevail, especially since stage 4 is one that is linked with a "cold" legalist view of morality ("The law and order must be preserved."). The fact that the positive relationship between the discussed impartiality score and the relative preference for stage 4 was maintained after controlling for the tendency to hide the truth for the sake of a close person may suggest that the preference for the moral arguments of the stage 4 might be linked with impartiality independent of the involvement of empathy in this relationship. To support this interpretation other results of Pohling *et al.* (2016) might be important, which indicate the possible involvement of a personality trait

with which the preference for stage 4 of MCT correlated significantly positively: conscientiousness ($r = .24, p < .01$), together with its four facets: dutifulness ($r = .26, p < .01$), competence ($r = .18, p < .05$), self-discipline ($r = .20, p < .05$), and deliberation ($r = .25, p < .01$).

It is notable that only the preference for the highest stage of the MCT (stage 6) correlated also significantly with self-discipline ($r = .18, p < .05$) and deliberation ($r = .19, p < .05$), which may be associated positively with principled reasoning, but its correlations with these personality traits were smaller, and that it correlated positively, not negatively with the above-mentioned aspects of empathy. When empathy (especially for the close persons) is higher as the preference for the highest level of moral judgment (stage 5 and stage 6 of moral orientation) increases, whereas impartiality concerns may not change at a significant rate, the relationship between this impartiality score and the preference for these stages of moral argumentation may become negative, because of the way the impartiality score was computed.

The impartiality in breaking the moral law of truth telling in order to uphold a close social relationship or civility was the most tightly related to the variables of MCT, but in the opposite direction to the expected one. Such an impartiality was associated positively with the relative preference for the lowest types of moral orientation (“use of physical or psychological force as a criterion of moral rightness” and, as a tendency, with “morality of simple exchange”), and negatively with the relative preference for the highest types of moral orientation: “keeping social contracts” and “referring to universal moral principles” and, as a tendency, with the moral competence index (the one that may indicate impartiality in the assessment of moral arguments). In this last case, more participants presented the unexpected bias in the favor of maintaining civility in relation with a stranger, their number being higher enough to comment the way this bias was related with the MCT variables. The fact that this bias was significantly related positively to the relative preference for the third type of moral orientation (“appeal to group solidarity and cohesion”) and negatively with the relative preference for the second type of moral orientation (“morality of simple exchange”) suggests that the balancing of the tendency to break a moral law for the sake of a relationship with a close person may come also from the attachment to the group and the recognition of its authority, not only from a principled autonomous reasoning as it was initially predicted or from a psychological force of a lower kind (*i.e.*, an egocentric, instrumental kind of “impartiality”, which may spring, for example, from indifference or gregariousness, or the one of an indiscriminate submission to commandments regarding impartiality of a higher authority) as the obtained data suggest (the positive correlations of the relative preference for the lowest type of moral orientation of stage 1 and stage 2 with the impartiality regarding the maintenance of social relationships).

The data pattern for this kind of impartiality indicates that, on the contrary, an autonomous moral thinking, whether principled or characteristic of the “morality of simple exchange”, might get in the way of impartiality when it comes to upholding social interactions by breaking moral laws, because it may be associated negatively for some respondents with the motivation to maintain civility (in fact, the score for item 11 correlated negatively with the relative preference for the stage 2 of MCT $\rho = -.235, p = .021, N = 75$), which may be linked with a heteronomous moral thinking. The results in this case might have been also influenced by the ambiguity of meaning of the item 11, which can be put in relationship with the meaning of the item 13 (*i.e.*, an interpretation with a focus not on the relationship maintaining, but on the empathic reaction to suffering, which could have been favored by those who prefer moral arguments of stage 5 and 6), or by the meaning of the item 10, which is the only one referring to a close person in a more detailed manner, underlying the emotional link with her/him. This emotional content may be linked with the competition between different moral motivations: the higher one’s moral competence or the preference for the impartiality in moral argumentation and for the principled reasoning, the higher should be the motivation able to canceled it. Such a motivation could come in this case more likely from the emotional involvement in a close social relationship, not from superficial relationships as relationships with strangers are. Because empathy may be an important motivation for prosocial decisions (*e.g.*, Lupoli *et al.*, 2017; Nagar *et al.*, 2020), and because empathy should be higher for close persons, the emotional involvement in prosocial decisions in the favor of close persons should be higher.

Lin, Clark and Maher (2017) suggest that another aspect may be important in a related issue, namely the willingness to help strangers based on the perceived harm. The results of their research suggest that “the higher the level of spiritual intelligence and the higher the level of “perceived harm” to the stranger, the higher the likelihood of acting to help” (p. 54). So, the level of perceived harm (see also Fang *et al.*, 2020) is an aspect that may count in a person’s impartial thinking or behavior, taking into consideration that the harm for a close person might be perceived to be greater than in the case of a stranger. In the case of the impartiality for avoiding someone else’s suffering, the perceived harm of not hiding the truth may be more similar for the close person and for a stranger than in the case of the impartiality in maintaining social relationships. The results from this research support partially such an interpretation, linked with the empathy issue. The tendency to hide the truth for the sake of maintaining the relationship with a close person correlated significantly positively with C index: $\rho = .279, p = .008, N = 74$, one-tailed, whereas the tendency to hide the truth for the sake of maintaining the relationship with a stranger only tended to correlate positively with C index: $\rho = .167, p = .076, N = 75$, one-tailed. In the same time, the tendency to hide the truth to avoid someone else’s suffering correlated significantly positively with the

C index, regardless of whose suffering is spared (in the case of a close person: $\rho = .272, p = .006, N = 83$, one-tailed; in the case of a stranger: $\rho = .232, p = .017, N = 83$, one-tailed), whereas C index did not correlate with the tendency to hide the truth for bringing an advantage to a close person or to a stranger. The fact that the pattern of the obtained associations was maintained after controlling for the tendency of the respondents to hide the truth for the sake of a close persons or for the sake of the relationship with them is an indication that this tendency, presumably linked with empathy or egocentric motivations, cannot explain entirely the paradoxical result. Moreover, the above-mentioned pattern of data may be put in relationship with the results cited in the introductory part of Baril and Wright (2012), Glover *et al.* (2014), and Trups-Kalne and Dimdins (2017), who have found on some samples a negative relationship (statistically significant or as a tendency) between C index of MCT and Fairness moral foundation, and that Fairness was not related to the moral orientation as measured with MCT, or that it was positively related only with the preference for the first four stages of moral orientation. The obtained results also are in agreement with Pohling *et al.*'s (2016) findings that showed that, moral competence correlated positively with facets of the agreeableness as a personality trait, as compliance, that the preference for the stage 5 and 6 of MCT did not correlate positively with the Schwartz's value of universalism, but only with the value of benevolence and self-direction, with empathic concern, and with the personality trait of agreeableness (inclusively with its facet regarding compliance), whereas the preference for the stage 5 of MCT correlated with the hedonism value, and the preference for the stage 6 of MCT with the conscientiousness as a personality trait. The fact that the preference for the highest stages of moral orientation of MCT correlated with the straightforwardness facet of agreeableness indicate that they may be associated with a reluctance to hide the truth in general, which could have also played a role in the obtained associations between the preference for them and the impartiality scores of C5, which are linked the willingness to hide the truth. All these results suggest that the preference for the stages 5 and 6 of MCT may not be pure in their assessment of mature moral judgment, of a higher level, being positively associated with aspects that are in general more characteristic for the lower levels of moral judgment (*e.g.*, hedonism, or compliance, which might be related with social desirability), even though, maybe, these aspects have a different meaning in the context of a more mature moral judgment, or that the preference for the above-mentioned stages of MCT is the fragile result of the competition between the mature moral orientation and the immature one. These considerations could be valid, at least partially, not only for MCT, but also for DIT, as suggested by Wendorf *et al.*'s (2002) results that indicated that the preference for the postconventional schema in DIT shared with the preference for the personal interest schema the same positive associations with some justice criteria, related to procedures that allow for

individual participation, although the motivation in the two cases was presumed to be a different one: protection of the individual human rights, and, respectively, self-interest.

The results for the maintaining relationship impartiality may be also linked with the results obtained by Haidt and Baron (1996) in a different context, *i.e.*, hiding the truth in order to obtain a personal gain, that suggested that the actor who hid the truth was generally judged more harshly when he was in a close relationship (friendship) with the deceived person than when he had an anonymous (contract) relationship with the deceived person (who was a stranger). In the first case, lying by omission was considered as reprehensible as active lying, whereas in the second case, lying by omission was considered less reprehensible than active lying. The two cited authors mention that there were also respondents who considered that the distinction friend-stranger is not important when condemning the truth hiding, by appealing to consequences or arguing that rules should apply independently of roles. Although in the case of the items 10 and 11 of C5, the truth is hidden not to obtain an explicit personal gain, but rather for more altruistic reasons, *i.e.*, for the sake of maintain a relationship and to not hurt the feelings of another person, such a personal gain cannot be entirely excluded (see Fang *et al.*, 2020; Fu & Lee, 2007; Nagar *et al.*, 2020; Xu *et al.*, 2010), the items being rather ambiguous in this respect. So, respondents might have interpreted them in the sense of a personal gain, in which case the situation is more similar with the one from the Haidt and Baron's (1996) research.

Haidt and Baron's (1996, p. 215) note that "Moral judgement is affected by social role manipulations, although the nature of this interaction may be complex, and is not yet fully understood." In the present research, as in their research, the effect of social role varied in the three moral situations in which the impartiality was assessed. It may be that, because hiding the truth to maintain social relationship may have egocentric motivations in the considered cases or because close relationships impose morally a higher level of protection of relationship or a higher level of openness required for maintaining the relationship (see, for example, Cole, 2001; DePaulo & Kashy, 1998, Ennis *et al.*, 2008, who present data to support an inverse relationship between deception, including prosocial deception, and emotional closeness), respondents might have considered that it would be more reprehensible to spare the feelings of a stranger or to want to maintain a relationship with her/him as much as in the case of a close person. Data obtained by Saroglou *et al.* (2005) support such an assumption. Their results showed that female students' religiosity, which might be linked with the level of moral judgment, was associated with willingness to help close persons in hypothetical situations, but not to help unknown targets.

The results for the relationship between MCT variables and the general impartiality score reflect partially and only as weak tendencies the results obtained for the impartiality in breaking the moral law in order to uphold a close social

relationship or civility. They indicate that MCT scores are not linked with a self-reported general tendency toward an impartial prosocial attitude in the behavior that breaks a moral law as the one to not hide the truth.

More data would be needed to clarify the unexpected results that suggest that the more one prefers principled reasoning or the lowest stage of the moral argumentation the more inclined would be to break a moral law (to not hide the truth) only for the sake of her/his relationship with a close person, but not for the sake of the relationship with a stranger (which would be affected if telling the truth would hurt the stranger's feelings). Such a person would have a more direct style of communication with strangers than with close persons. The way in which C index of MCT was conceived might play a role in explaining these unexpected findings, in case they are not spurious. C index was aimed (Lind, 1985, 2015) to be a measure of moral behavior, assessing respondents' actual reaction to a moral situation: the assessment of moral arguments that support one's preferred solution to a moral dilemma in contrast with the moral arguments that contradict it. Empirical data suggest that there is a weak relationship between moral behavior and principled morality, one invoked reason for that weak relationship being the rationalization tendencies that are favored by moral principles, because of their abstractness and multiplicity (see, for example, Batson, Ahmad & Tsang, 2002; Blasi, 1980). People may find ways to see themselves as fair/impartial, or at least not unfair, avoiding, in the same time, the personal cost of being actually fair by convenient forgetting, active rationalization, moral disengagement, or moral hypocrisy (Batson *et al.*, 2002). From another perspective, C index, as a measure of a moral behavior, might be closer to what Rest *et al.* (1999) named micromorality, which is supposedly more tightly linked with "loyalty, dedication, and partisan caring to special others" (p. 293), and which might be more easily influenced by contextual factors. The way in which moral orientation is computed in MCT could also play a role in explaining the above-mentioned unexpected results. The preference for each type of moral argumentation is a sum of the preference for the moral arguments of that type that support the favored solutions for the two dilemmas and of the preference for the moral arguments of that type that contradict it. It is one reason for which this preference is linked with C index, because it is contaminated by the influences associated with the status of that moral argument in relationship with a favored solution.

STUDY 2

In order to clarify the results obtained in the first study, in the second study another instrument was used to assess moral judgment and its level, an instrument with a different theoretical basis, but related to that of MCT: Sociomoral Reflection Measure – Short Form Objective (SRM-SFO), elaborated by Brugman, Basinger,

and Gibbs (2007), which was also mentioned in the introductory part. Both MCT and SRM-SFO were built on theoretical contributions that develop Kohlberg's theory of moral judgment in different, but related, directions. Data obtained by Faiciuc (2015) showed the correspondence of the moral orientation levels assessed with the two instruments. The aim of the second study was to see if the results obtained regarding the relationship between moral orientation, measured with MCT, and impartiality of the prosocial reasons for breaking a moral law, measured with C5, are replicated when moral orientation is measured with SRM-SFO, when it is not influenced by the status of an assessed moral argument in its relationship with the solution to a moral dilemma. Because of the influence of the above-mentioned status, the hypothesis was that those results would not be replicated, and that the findings should be more in line with the general hypotheses formulated in the introductory part. Based on the theoretical arguments presented in that above-mentioned part that support the view that people with a higher level of morality should have a higher level of impartiality, it was also expected that the average importance attributed to the ten behaviors with moral values that were examined with SRM-SFO should be associated positively with the impartiality scores of C5. Additionally, as SRM-SFO allows the computation of impartiality scores regarding the importance attributed to two moral values (keeping promises and saving lives), as noted above, in the introductory part, in this study, the relationship between the impartiality scores of C5, regarding the impartiality of the willingness to break a moral law from prosocial reasons, and the impartiality scores of SRMS-SFO, regarding the impartiality of the willingness to uphold a moral law, will be also explored. The working hypothesis was that the two kinds of impartiality should be associated positively, if there is a general tendency of a person to value impartiality in moral issues, which might be based on a principled reasoning.

Method

Participants

The studied sample was composed of 45 undergraduate students at a fine arts university, with a mean age of 20,68 years (18 females, 6 males, 21 with undisclosed gender). Participants received credit points for completing the instruments.

Instruments

- **Questionnaire of Reasons for Hiding the Truth: C5** (elaborated by Faiciuc in 2016b; see also Faiciuc, 2016a), which was presented above, in the first study.

- **Sociomoral Reflection Measure – Short Form Objective (SRM-SFO)**, elaborated by Brugman, Basinger, and Gibbs (2007), translated in Romanian by the author of the present study. Its psychometric qualities on the investigated sample were presented in Faiciuc (2015). Data regarding the psychometric qualities of the SRM-SFO are found in Brugman *et al.*'s (2007) and Brugman *et al.*'s (2021) studies. As presented also in Faiciuc (2015), each of the ten items of the SRM-SFO has three requirements. The first one is the assessment of the personal importance attributed by a respondent (on a Likert scale with three points: not important, important, very important) to a moral value in the context of a social situation with which it is linked. The second requirement is to appreciate the degree to which four given arguments through which the importance of that moral value may be supported, corresponding to four levels of moral arguments, each having attributed a different score (from 1 to 4, depending on the corresponding level of moral judgment) is close or not to the argument that that respondent would prefer to use in order to support the importance of that moral value (the available answers were: yes, no, and not sure). In this case, there is no forced choice, as a respondent may choose all the four arguments to be close to the one they would use. The third requirement implies a forced choice: the respondent has to choose one of the previous four arguments that is the closest to the way they would support the importance of that moral value (the available answers were: yes, no, and not sure). The instruction of the SRM-SFO may be ambiguous for some respondents who interpret the closest option as excluding the close option, and not as it is usually seen as including it. That is why, in this study, the interpretation that favors the excluding relationship between the close and closest answers was not considered as a validation criterion for the answers given by a respondent. The domains of the moral values that were taken into consideration in SRM-SFO regard the contract and truth (4 items), affiliation (1 item), saving life (2 items), law and property, and legal justice (3 items). The first level of moral arguments assessed with SRM-SFO, an immature one, is characterized by the unilateral focus on the personal concrete, physical interest regarding the consequences of a moral decision and when arguing the importance or the lack of importance of a moral value. It corresponds theoretically to the moral orientation of stage 1 from MCT. The second level of moral arguments assessed with SRM-SFO, still an immature one, is the one in which the importance of a moral value is regarded from an instrumental perspective, in the context of a reciprocal exchange, so that to avoid negative personal consequences or to obtain a personal benefit. It corresponds theoretically to the moral orientation of stage 2 from MCT. The third level of moral arguments from SRM-SFO, the first mature one, is characterized by a reflection on the moral values from a prosocial and empathic perspective, being centered on mutual trust and reciprocity. The conformity to the norms of a social groups is less prominent in this level assessed with SRM-SFO, as it is included partially in the next level. Nevertheless, this level implies knowledge of social norms and values. Finally, the fourth level of moral arguments, the fully mature one, is characterized by personal conscience and a reflection in the terms of social norms and

the reasons for which they are necessary for a particular social system, at first, or for any complex social system in general, ultimately. The third and fourth levels of moral arguments from SRM-SFO do not have a clear theoretical and empirical link with the third, fourth, fifth, and sixth stages of moral orientation of MCT.

Procedure

The instruments were administered collectively, on paper, in the same session, with no time limit. For C5, the same impartiality scores were computed. For SRM-SFO, a global score for the average level of the close and closest moral arguments for all the ten items was calculated: SRMS score, with values that correspond to the four levels of moral judgment, between 1 to 4, that is from the lowest to the highest level of the moral arguments of the SRM-SFO. Another global index of the level of moral judgment was that of the average percentage of mature answers (of level 3 and 4) for each item: SRMP. The average level of the preferred moral arguments was computed also separately for the close, and, respectively, closest requirements. The average level of importance ascribed to the ten moral values considered by SRM-SFO was also computed (the average moral value score). Besides the global indices of the level of moral judgment, the preference for each of the four examined levels of moral judgment was computed both for the close and closest requirements, by adding the number of answers in which they were selected. Indices for the preference for the moral arguments of the two mature levels (level 3 and level 4) were also computed (separately and for both of them) as a percentage from the total number of possible answers both for the close and closest requirements. Finally, three impartiality scores were computed. One impartiality score indicated the difference between the value attributed to honoring a promise made to a stranger and the value attributed to honoring a promise made to a friend. Another impartiality score was computed as a difference between the value attributed to saving the life of a stranger and the value attributed to saving the life of a friend. The general impartiality score of SRM-SFO was the sum of the previous two impartiality scores.

Results

As the distribution of the majority of the impartiality scores and of some of the remaining scores was significantly departed from the normal distribution, the nonparametric Spearman rank correlation was used.

A statistical significance threshold of $p = .05$ was considered. The same comments regarding the Bonferroni correction that were made for the first study are also valid for this study.

In this study, too, some participants had positive impartiality scores, indicating a bias in the favor of the strangers. As their number was too small to allow a separate analysis, as it was done in the previous study, they were excluded from analyses: a total of four participants for SRM-SFO, two with a positive impartiality score for promise keeping, and two with a positive impartiality score for saving lives, and, for C5, eight participants with a positive impartiality score regarding maintenance of a social relationship, three with a positive impartiality score regarding avoiding someone else's suffering, and three with a positive impartiality score regarding the advantage brought to someone else.

The results for the relationship of the impartiality scores of C5 with the global indices regarding the level of moral judgment, and, respectively, the preference for the four types of moral arguments of SRM-SFO are presented in Table 3, and Table 4.

The results regarding the relationship between the impartiality scores computed based on the answers from C5 and the impartiality scores computed based on the answers from SRM-SFO are presented in Table 5.

Tables 7, 8, and 9 present the results regarding the relationship between the impartiality scores of SRM-SFO and the global indices regarding the level of moral judgment and the preference for the four types moral arguments of SRM-SFO.

As in the previous study, from the same reasons, nonparametric partial correlations (one-tailed) were computed for the considered cases, controlling for the corresponding variables that indicate the tendency of the respondents to hide the truth for the sake of close persons, or for the sake of the relationship with them (*i.e.*, item 10, item 12, or item 14), for each type of impartiality. The following statistically significant or marginally significant nonparametric partial correlations (one-tailed) were obtained between:

- *the impartiality score for maintaining social relationships* and:
 - the SRMS score: $r = .437, p = .019, df = 21$;
 - the average moral level for closest requirement: $r = .359, p = .039, df = 23$;
 - the preference for moral arguments of level 3 (close requirement): $r = -.353, p = .036, df = 25$;
 - the preference for moral arguments of level 2 (closest requirement): $r = -.305, p = .074, df = 22$;
 - the preference for moral arguments of level 3 (closest requirement): $r = -.542, p = .003, df = 22$;
 - the preference for moral arguments of level 4 (closest requirement): $r = .495, p = .007, df = 22$;
 - the percentage of answers at the mature levels 3 and 4 (close requirement): $r = -.439, p = .011, df = 25$
- *the impartiality score for avoiding someone else's suffering* and:
 - the SRMS score: $r = .389, p = .016, df = 27$;

- the average moral level for closest requirement: $r = .344, p = .029, df = 29$;
 - the average moral value score: $r = .294, p = .041, df = 34$;
 - the preference for the moral arguments of level 2 (closest requirement): $r = -.441, p = .008, df = 28$;
 - the preference for the moral arguments of level 3 (closest requirement): $r = -.484, p = .0035, df = 28$;
 - the preference for the moral arguments of level 4 (closest requirement): $r = .499, p = .0025, df = 28$;
 - the percentage of answers at the mature levels 3 and 4 (closest requirement): $r = .32, p = .049, df = 26$
- *the impartiality for bringing an advantage to someone else and:*
 - the average moral level for close requirement: $r = -.256, p = .075, df = 31$;
 - the average moral value score: $r = .334, p = .025, df = 33$;
 - the preference for moral arguments of level 1 (close requirement): $r = .281, p = .036, df = 31$;
 - the preference for moral arguments of level 3 (close requirement): $r = .327, p = .032, df = 31$;
 - the preference for moral arguments of level 2 (closest requirement): $r = -.342, p = .032, df = 28$;

Similarly, nonparametric partial correlations were computed also to investigate if the relationship of the impartiality scores of SRM-SFO with SRM-SFO scores that indicate the global level of moral judgment or the preference for the four assessed levels of moral arguments is influenced by the level of importance attributed to keeping promises to a friend or, respectively, to saving a friend's life, which were the controlled variables (each of them was used for the correspondent impartiality score). The following statistically significant or marginally significant nonparametric partial correlations (one-tailed) were obtained between:

- *the impartiality score for saving someone else's life and:*
 - the SRMS score: $r = .419, p = .012, df = 27$;
 - the average moral judgement level for closest requirement: $r = .368, p = .021, df = 29$;
 - the average moral value score: $r = .271, p = .055, df = 34$;
 - the preference for level 2 of moral judgment (close requirement): $r = -.294, p = .046, df = 31$;

Table 3

Spearman rank correlations, one-tailed, between the impartiality scores of C5 and SRM-SFO global scores for the level of moral judgment

SRM-SFO global scores for the level of moral judgment	Spearman rank correlations (one-tail)	General impartiality of C5	Maintaining relationship impartiality	Impartiality for avoiding someone else's suffering	Impartiality for bringing an advantage to someone else
SRMS	Coefficient	.405*	.280	.300	.250
	Significance	.034	.092	.054	.092
	N	21	24	30	30
SRMP	Coefficient	.199	-.105	.016	.287
	Significance	.214	.325	.468	.073
	N	18	21	27	27
Average moral level for close requirement	Coefficient	.020	-.130	-.085	-.082
	Significance	.464	.255	.316	.323
	N	24	28	34	34
Average moral level for closest requirement	Coefficient	.390*	.297	.285	.292
	Significance	.033	.070	.057	.053
	N	23	26	32	32
Average moral value	Coefficient	.207	.242	.311*	.240
	Significance	.151	.095	.030	.079
	N	27	31	37	36
Percentage of answers at level 3 and 4 (close)	Coefficient	-.236	-.378*	-.230	.141
	Significance	.134	.024	.095	.213
	N	24	28	34	34
Percentage of answers at level 3 and 4 (closest)	Coefficient	.460*	.194	.243	.366*
	Significance	.021	.188	.102	.035
	N	20	23	29	29

Table 4

Spearman rank correlations, one-tailed, between the impartiality scores of C5 and the preference for the four levels of moral judgment from SRM-SFO

SRM-SFO scores for the preference for the four levels of moral judgment	Spearman rank correlations (one-tail)	General impartiality of C5	Maintaining relationship impartiality	Impartiality for avoiding someone else's suffering	Impartiality for bringing an advantage to someone else
Preference for level 1 (close)	Coefficient	.070	.035	.122	.180
	Significance	.372	.430	.246	.154
	N	24	28	34	34
Preference for level 2 (close)	Coefficient	-.171	-.070	-.168	-.007
	Significance	.212	.361	.172	.485
	N	24	28	34	34
Preference for level 3 (close)	Coefficient	-.253	-.322*	-.186	.081
	Significance	.117	.047	.146	.325
	N	24	28	34	34
Preference for level 4 (close)	Coefficient	.003	-.169	-.089	.178
	Significance	.494	.195	.308	.157
	N	24	28	34	34
Preference for level 1 (closest)	Coefficient	.176	.150	.143	.049
	Significance	.217	.237	.221	.398
	N	22	25	31	31
Preference for level 2 (closest)	Coefficient	-.603**	-.295	-.409*	-.446**
	Significance	.001	.076	.011	.006
	N	22	25	31	31
Preference for level 3 (closest)	Coefficient	-.393*	-.526**	-.527**	-.170
	Significance	.035	.003	.001	.181
	N	22	25	31	31
Preference for level 4 (closest)	Coefficient	.621**	.435*	.470**	.379*
	Significance	.001	.015	.004	.018
	N	22	25	31	31

Table 5

Spearman rank correlations, one-tailed, between the impartiality scores of C5 and the impartiality scores of SRM-SFO

Impartiality scores of SRM-SFO	Spearman rank correlations (one-tail)	General impartiality (C5)	Maintaining relationship impartiality (C5)	Impartiality for avoiding someone else's suffering (C5)	Impartiality for bringing an advantage to someone else (C5)
Impartiality score for keeping promises	Coefficient	.129	-.277	.133	.359*
	Significance	.264	.069	.219	.016
	N	26	30	36	36
Impartiality score for saving someone else's life	Coefficient	.439*	.130	.530**	.243
	Significance	.014	.252	.001	.079
	N	25	29	35	35
General impartiality score of SRM-SFO	Coefficient	.289	.162	.377*	.402*
	Significance	.091	.236	.015	.010
	N	23	22	33	33

- the preference for level 2 of moral judgment (closest requirement): $r = -.465, p = .005, df = 28$;
- the preference for level 3 of moral judgment (closest requirement): $r = -.299, p = .054, df = 28$;
- the preference for level 4 of moral judgment (closest requirement): $r = .495, p = .0025, df = 28$;
- the percentage of answers at the mature levels 3 and 4 (closest requirement): $r = .454, p = .0075, df = 26$;
- the *impartiality score for keeping promises* and:
 - the average moral value score: $r = .488, p = .0015, df = 34$;

- the preference for level 2 of moral judgment (closest requirement): $r = -.465, p = .005, df = 28$;
- the percentage of answers at the mature levels 3 and 4 (closest requirement): $r = .454, p = .038, df = 26$

Discussion

For the interpretation of the results of this second study, the data obtained by Faiciuc (2015) regarding the link between MCT and SRM-SFO should be taken into consideration. In that research, the Spearman rank correlation between global C index of the MJT and SRMS was $\rho = .393, p = .001 (N = 56)$. C index correlated negatively significantly with the preference for the moral arguments of level 1, 2, and 3 of SRM-SFO in the close requirement, and correlated positively significantly with the preference for the moral arguments of level 4 of SRM-SFO in the closest requirement. SRMS score correlated negatively significantly with the relative preference for the two lowest stages of moral orientation of MCT, and correlated positively significantly with the two highest stages of MCT (5 and 6). The relative preference for the first stage of moral orientation of MCT correlated positively significantly with the preference for the first level of moral arguments in the closest requirement of SRM-SFO. The relative preference for the second stage of moral orientation of MCT correlated significantly positively with the preference for the first and second levels of moral arguments in the closest requirement of SRM-SFO, and negatively with the preference for the fourth level of moral arguments of SRM-SFO (closest requirement). The relative preference for the third stage of moral orientation of MCT correlated negatively with the preference for the first level of moral arguments in the closest requirement of SRM-SFO, and positively with the preference for the third level of moral arguments of SRM-SFO (closest requirement). The relative preference for the fourth stage of moral orientation of MCT correlated significantly negatively with the preference for the third level of moral arguments in the closest requirement of SRM-SFO. The relative preference for the fifth stage of moral orientation of MCT correlated significantly negatively with the preference for the second level of moral arguments in the closest requirement of SRM-SFO, and significantly positively with the preference for the fourth level of moral arguments of SRM-SFO (closest requirement). The relative preference for the sixth stage of moral orientation of MCT did not correlate significantly with the preference for any of the levels of moral arguments of SRM-SFO (closest requirement), having only a slight tendency to correlate positively with the preference for the third level of SRM-SFO (closest requirement).

Table 6

Spearman rank correlations, one-tailed, between the impartiality scores of SRM-SFO and SRM-SFO global scores for the level of moral judgment

SRM-SFO global scores for the level of moral judgment	Spearman rank correlations (one-tail)	General impartiality score of SRM-SFO	Impartiality score for keeping promises	Impartiality score for saving someone else's life
SRMS	Coefficient	.262	.222	.286
	Significance	.085	.115	.063
	N	29	31	30
SRMP	Coefficient	.226	.189	.210
	Significance	.134	.168	.146
	N	26	28	27
Average moral judgment level for close requirement	Coefficient	.193	.123	.211
	Significance	.141	.237	.115
	N	33	36	34
Average moral judgement level for closest requirement	Coefficient	.213	.202	.234
	Significance	.129	.134	.099
	N	30	32	32
Average moral value	Coefficient	.109	.119	.080
	Significance	.267	.241	.318
	N	35	37	37
Percentage of answers at level 3 and 4 (close)	Coefficient	.182	.174	.130
	Significance	.155	.155	.232
	N	33	36	34
Percentage of answers at level 3 and 4 (closest)	Coefficient	.334*	.288	.354*
	Significance	.044	.065	.030
	N	27	29	29

Table 7

Spearman rank correlations, one-tailed, between the impartiality scores of C5 and the preference for the four levels of moral judgment for SRM-SFO

SRM-SFO scores for the preference for the four levels of moral judgment	Spearman rank correlations (one-tail)	General impartiality score of SRM-SFO	Impartiality score for keeping promises	Impartiality score for saving someone else's life
Preference for level 1 (close)	Coefficient	.030	.048	-.023
	Significance	.435	.390	.449
	N	33	36	34
Preference for level 2 (close)	Coefficient	-.255	-.119	-.291*
	Significance	.076	.244	.048
	N	33	36	34
Preference for level 3 (close)	Coefficient	.019	.083	-.006
	Significance	.459	.316	.486
	N	33	36	34
Preference for level 4 (close)	Coefficient	.132	.132	.128
	Significance	.232	.221	.236
	N	33	36	34
Preference for level 1 (closest)	Coefficient	.190	.144	.138
	Significance	.161	.220	.229
	N	29	31	31
Preference for level 2 (closest)	Coefficient	-.486**	-.446**	-.413*
	Significance	.004	.006	.011
	N	29	31	31
Preference for level 3 (closest)	Coefficient	-.184	.007	-.335*
	Significance	.170	.484	.033
	N	29	31	31
Preference for level 4 (closest)	Coefficient	.416*	.300	.427**
	Significance	.012	.050	.008
	N	29	31	31

So, the cited data support only a partial overlap of the two instruments regarding their assessment of the preferred types of moral arguments, the overlap being greater for the lower levels of the moral orientation in the case of the closest requirement of SRM-SFO. In the case of the close requirement of SRM-SFO, this overlap was smaller, even for the lower levels of the moral orientation.

The second study indicated that the two general scores for impartiality of the two instruments did not correlate positively significantly, as it was expected, based on the idea of a general tendency of a person to value impartiality in moral issues. There occurred only a very slight tendency toward a positive correlation. This result may indicate that impartiality regarding the violation of a moral law for prosocial reasons may not be tightly related to impartiality regarding the importance attributed to the observance of a moral law in the relationship with another person, regardless of whether she/he is a close person or a stranger. For the interpretation of this result, it should be taken into account the very small and homogenous sample of participants on which it was obtained. This cautionary note holds also for the other correlations between the particular impartiality scores of the two considered instruments. These other correlations suggest that the tightest relationships were between the impartiality score for saving someone else's life of SRM-SFO and impartiality in breaking a moral law, as it is to hide the truth, in order to avoid someone else's suffering of C5. This high correlation could be explained based on the similarity of the semantic content of the involved items, as they all refer to the avoidance of an intense harm. The similarity of the semantic content of the items used to compute the impartiality score for bringing an advantage to someone else of C5 and the impartiality score for keeping promises of SRM-SFO may explain also their significant positive correlation. The impartiality score of MCT for maintaining social relationships was the only one that had no significant relationship with any of the impartiality scores of SRM-SFO, but only a tendency to correlate negatively, not positively as expected, with the impartiality score of SRM-SFO for keeping promises. This result may reflect once again the ambiguity in the formulation of the two items used to compute this score: item 11 may be interpreted as referring not to a moral issue linked to maintaining social relationships with strangers, but only to a social convention regarding politeness, and item 10 may imply an egocentric interest in the maintenance of a social relationship that may be closer than the one with a usual friend, as it is a relationship with a close family member or with a romantic partner. Besides, both items may be related with a general tendency to break the involved moral law, no matter the reason, in which case the considered difference may reflect not impartiality, but a lack of regard for the respective moral law. This interpretation suggests also the reason for which this impartiality score did not have the expected relationship with the scores regarding the preferred level of moral judgment of MCT. However, in this study, this kind of impartiality was associated positively, as expected, with the preference for the highest level of moral reasoning of SRM-SFO

for the closest requirement, and not negatively, as it was the case in the first study for the relative preference for the highest stages of moral judgments of MCT. The score for this kind of impartiality correlated, instead, significantly negatively with the preference for the moral arguments of level 3 of the SRM-SFO (both for the close and closest requirement), which in Faiciuc (2015) correlated positively with the preference for the stages 3, 5 and 6 of the moral orientation in MCT, and negatively with the relative preference for the stage 4 of the moral orientation in MCT. The results obtained in this study suggests that this kind of impartiality might be linked with a more impersonal kind of morality, detached from the personal affective aspects of the interpersonal close relationships or of the links with a community, which might be better captured by SRM-SFO through the moral arguments of level 4 in the case of the closest requirement. The highest stages of moral orientation from MCT, instead, may involve a kind of morality closer to the one related to the level 3 of moral arguments from SRM-SFO, *i.e.*, closer to micromorality (Rest *et al.*, 1999), as it was also suggested above. It may also be that the SRM-SFO, because it involves forced choices and has moral arguments that do not support contradictory positions related to moral dilemmas, reveals better the tendencies of the respondents regarding their moral orientation.

In this second study, the correlations of the three impartiality scores of C5 with the variables regarding moral judgment of the SRM-SFO were more similar, in comparison with their correlations with the variables of the MCT from the first study. The expected positive correlations of all them with the preference for the moral arguments of level 4 (closest requirement) from SRM-SFO stands out in this respect. This result suggests that this score of SRM-SFO may be the best indicator of a tendency toward a moral thinking based on a principled impartiality. Additionally, two of the impartiality scores of C5 (impartiality for avoiding someone else's suffering, and impartiality for bringing an advantage to someone else) correlated negatively significantly, as expected, with the preference for the moral arguments of level 2 (closest requirement) from SRM-SFO, and the third one (impartiality regarding the social relations maintenance) tended to correlate negatively with it. It is a result that indicates that the immature exchange morality may be the most incompatible with a principled impartiality in moral thinking. The same kind of incompatibility is suggested in the case of the negative correlations of the impartiality scores regarding the social relations maintenance and for avoiding someone else's suffering with the preference for the moral arguments of level 3 (closest requirement) from SRM-SFO, which reflects more a communitarian kind of morality. In this regard, the impartiality score of C5 for bringing an advantage to someone else has an unclear relationship with the preference for the moral arguments of level 3 of SRM-SFO, as in the case of closest requirement the association tends to be negative, but, after controlling for the level of the tendency to hide the truth to bring an advantage to a close person, the association becomes significantly positive in the case of close requirement. The same is true regarding

the relationship of this impartiality score with the preference for the moral arguments of level 1 (close requirement) from SRM-SFO, which becomes significantly positive in the case of close requirement after controlling for the level of the tendency to hide the truth to bring advantage to a close person. In the first study, this kind of impartiality also tended to correlate positively with the preference for the lowest level of moral orientation after controlling for the level of the tendency to hide the truth to bring advantage to a close person.

Of the global indices of SRM-SFO regarding the level of moral judgment, the ones that were the most associated with the kind of impartiality assessed with C5 were the SRMS score and the average moral level for closest requirement, which correlated significantly positively with the general impartiality score of C5 and tended to correlate positively with all its three particular impartiality scores (two of them correlated positively significantly after controlling for the tendency to hide the truth for the sake of maintaining the relationship with a close person and, respectively, for the sake of avoiding the suffering of a close person). Although the percentage of the answers at the mature levels of SRM-SFO (level 3 and 4) for the closest requirement correlated positively the most with the general impartiality score of C5, only two of its three particular impartiality scores correlated or tended to correlate positively with it (impartiality for avoiding someone else's suffering, and impartiality for bringing an advantage to someone else, the same ones that correlated significantly negatively with the preference for the moral arguments of level 2). Paradoxically, the percentage of the answers at the mature levels of SRM-SFO (level 3 and 4) for the close requirement tended to have a pattern of correlations with the impartiality scores of C5 in the opposite direction in comparison with the case of the closest requirement. It is a result more similar with the one encountered in the first study for the impartiality score regarding the social relationship maintenance. It indicates that when moral judgment is assessed without forced choices (as in MCT, or the close requirement of SRM-SFO), the answers regarding the preference for the moral arguments of a mature type may include an uncontrolled component that is linked with immature morality, such as, for example, a response bias or social desirability that was not completely controlled, in the case of MCT, through ipsatization.

Finally, all particular impartiality scores of C5 correlated or tended to correlate positively (two of them significantly, one after controlling for the tendency to hide the truth for the sake of a close person) with the average moral value or importance attributed to all the moral values assessed with SRM-SFO, which suggest a positive association between the general moral orientation of one's values with her/his impartiality in the particular situations considered in C5.

The pattern of correlations of the impartiality scores of SRM-SFO with the variables regarding moral judgment of the SRM-SFO was similar to the one obtained for the correlations of the three impartiality scores of C5 with the variables regarding moral judgment of the SRM-SFO, especially in its part

regarding the preference for the different levels of moral arguments from SRM-SFO. In this case, too, both impartiality scores correlated positively with the preference for the moral arguments of level 4 (closest requirement) from SRM-SFO, and negatively with the preference for the moral arguments of level 2 (closest requirement) from SRM-SFO. For the impartiality score regarding saving someone else's life, the same negative relationship with the preference for the moral arguments of level 3 (closest requirement) from SRM-SFO occurred, as in the case of two of the impartiality scores of C5. Of the global scores of SRM-SFO, the percentage of the answers at the mature levels (3 and 4) in the closest requirement was the only one that correlated significantly or tended to correlate positively with the two impartiality scores of SRM-SFO and with its general impartiality score (impartiality score for keeping promises correlated also significantly after controlling for the importance attributed to keeping a promise to a friend). This index was a better indicator than SRMS score for the impartiality assessed with SRM-SFO than for the impartiality assessed with C5. SRMS score was associated positively with the impartiality scores of SRMS-SFO to a lesser extent than with the impartiality scores of C5. It only tended to correlate positively with the impartiality score for saving someone else's life and with the general impartiality score of SRM-SFO. Surprisingly, the average moral value score of SRM-SFO did not correlate positively with the impartiality scores of SRM-SFO, as it correlated with impartiality scores of C5, but correlated or tended to correlate so after controlling for the importance of keeping a promise to a friend, and, respectively for the importance of saving the life of a friend. The results from the second study indicate also that, in the case of the impartiality scores of SRM-SFO, the one for saving someone else's life was tighter related to the scores regarding the level of moral judgment of SRM-SFO than the one for keeping promises.

In this second study, data show a clearer relationship between moral judgment as assessed with SRM-SFO and the impartiality scores of SRM-SFO and C5 than the relationship between moral judgment and impartiality investigated in the first study. The two patterns of results overlap only in their part regarding the negative relationship between some impartiality scores and the kind of morality linked with the lower levels of mature morality, as moral arguments of level 3 of SRM-SFO and of stage 5 of moral orientation of MCT are. In the second study, the obtained data suggest that the preference for the highest level of moral arguments was associated positively with the two kinds of impartiality indices used in this research, as it was hypothesized initially. These two kinds of impartiality scores were associated instead negatively with the preference for the lower levels of moral arguments: both with the second immature level (as it was hypothesized), and with the lower mature one (even though, in this case, in a less clear manner). The relationship of the preference for the lowest level of immature moral arguments with the impartiality scores is less conclusive, as sometimes it tends to be a positive

relationship, and not the expected negative one, as the relationship of the impartiality scores with the second immature level of moral arguments is. Of the global indices for the level of moral judgment, SRMS and the percentage of answers at the level of the mature level of moral arguments in the closest requirement of SRM-SFO were the ones that were the most positively associated with the investigated impartiality indices, but, nevertheless, they were related with them to a lesser extent than the preference for the moral arguments of level 4 in the closest requirement of SRM-SFO.

The data pattern from the second study is similar to the results cited in the introductory part, obtained with more indirect measures of impartiality, mainly the ones of Pohling *et al.* (2016), regarding the positive relationship between Schwartz's value of universalism and moral competence of MCT, Myyrya *et al.* (2010), regarding the positive link between the same value of universalism and postconventional score of DIT, and its negative relationship with the score for personal interest schema, Wilhelm *et al.* (2021), about the negative link between N2 score of DIT and anti-immigrant attitude, Wendorf *et al.* (2002), related with the positive correlation between postconventional score of DIT and justice criteria, especially neutrality, Baril and Wright (2012), on the sample without cognitive distraction, regarding the positive correlation between Fairness moral foundation and postconventional score of DIT, Gay *et al.* (2018), with respect of the positive relationship of Fairness moral foundation with moral competence of MCT, and with the last four stages of the moral orientation assessed with MCT, and Popoveniuc (2021), regarding the positive link between Fairness moral foundation and moral competence of MCT, for the respondents with a C index higher than 20. In the current study, in which the impartiality was assessed more directly and moral judgment was assessed based on forced choices for moral arguments that were not linked with moral dilemmas, the results were clearer, and the expected correlations had higher values.

Future studies, with more large and heterogenous samples should investigate if the discussed results can be replicated.

As a supplementary check, in this paper, the relationship between MCT variables and the impartiality scores of SRM-SFO will be investigated in the third study, on the same sample that was used in Faiciuc (2015).

STUDY 3

As noted above, the objective of the third study was to investigate the relationship between MCT variables used also in the first study and the impartiality scores of SRM-SFO used in the second study. Its hypotheses are the same with the general hypotheses that were formulated in the introductory theoretical part. In other words, positive correlations are expected

for C index, as a possible indicator of impartiality in the assessment of moral arguments, and for the preference for the higher stages of moral orientation with the impartiality scores computed based on the items of SRM-SFO. A negative correlation is expected also between the preference for the lower stages of moral orientation of MCT and the impartiality scores computed based on the items of SRM-SFO.

Method

Participants

At the study participated 78 first year students at a university of fine arts, with an average age of 20 years (34 females, 16 males, 28 who did not indicate their gender). As not all participants completed validly all the items of the two instruments, a different number of participants was taken into account for each of the computed correlations, indicated in each particular case. Participants received credit points for completing the instruments.

Instruments

- **Moral Competence Test: MCT** (formerly Moral Judgment Test, MJT), elaborated by Lind in 1978, in its Romanian version (Lupu, 2009), presented in the first study and in Faiciuc (2015);
- **Sociomoral Reflection Measure – Short Form Objective (SRM-SFO)**, elaborated by Brugman, Basinger, and Gibbs (2007), as presented in the second study.

Procedure

The two paper-and-pencil instruments were administered collectively, in the same session, and in the same order for all participants. The same scores were computed as in the first and second studies.

Results

Given the fact that almost all the variables involved in computations had a distribution significantly departed from the normal distribution, the nonparametric Spearman rank correlation coefficient was used, unilaterally.

Table 8

Spearman rank correlations, one-tailed, between the impartiality scores of SRM-SFO and MCT variables (ipsatized preference for the six moral judgment stages and moral competence index)

MCT scores	Spearman rank correlations (one-tail)	General impartiality score of SRM-SFO	Impartiality score for keeping promises (SRM-SFO)	Impartiality score for saving someone else's life (SRM-SFO)
Preference for stage 1	Coefficient	-.063	-.070	-.049
	Significance	.306	.285	.348
	N	66	69	67
Preference for stage 2	Coefficient	-.240*	-.198	-.239*
	Significance	.026	.051	.026
	N	66	69	67
Preference for stage 3	Coefficient	-.006	-.011	-.083
	Significance	.480	.464	.253
	N	66	69	67
Preference for stage 4	Coefficient	-.148	-.129	-.057
	Significance	.118	.146	.325
	N	66	69	67
Preference for stage 5	Coefficient	.181	.195	.123
	Significance	.073	.054	.161
	N	66	69	67
Preference for stage 6	Coefficient	.204*	.189	.216*
	Significance	.050	.060	.039
	N	66	69	67
Moral competence Index (C index)	Coefficient	.131	.042	.192
	Significance	.147	.365	.060
	N	66	69	67

As in the second study, some participants had positive impartiality SRM-SFO scores, indicating a bias in the favor of the strangers. As their number was too small to allow a separate analysis (four), they were excluded from analyses. The obtained results are presented in Table 8.

As in the previous studies, from the same reasons, nonparametric partial correlations were computed for the considered cases, controlling for the corresponding variables that indicate the level of importance attributed to keeping promises or, respectively, to saving someone else's life. The following statistically significant or marginally significant nonparametric partial correlations (one-tailed) were obtained between:

- *the impartiality score for saving someone else's life* and:
 - the relative preference for moral arguments of stage 2: $r = -.256$, $p = .019$, $df = 64$;
 - the relative preference for moral arguments of stage 5: $r = .190$, $p = .064$, $df = 64$;
 - the relative preference for moral arguments of stage 6: $r = .192$, $p = .062$, $df = 64$;
 - C index: $r = .215$, $p = .042$, $df = 64$;

- *the impartiality score for keeping promises* and:
 - the relative preference for moral arguments of stage 2: $r = -.203$, $p = .049$, $df = 66$;
 - the relative preference for moral arguments of stage 6: $r = .238$, $p = .026$, $df = 66$;

Discussion

The results of the third study indicated that the pattern of correlations between the MCT variables and the impartiality scores of SRM-SFO is similar to the one obtained in the second study for the correlations of the SRM-SFO scores for the moral judgment with the impartiality scores of SRM-SFO and of C5, and not with the one obtained in the first study. The main overlap with the second study was the expected negative correlations of the impartiality scores (two of them significant and one marginally significant) with the preference for moral arguments linked with exchange morality (in this study, the moral arguments of the second stage of moral orientation of MCT). This seems to be the most constant result. It suggests an incompatibility between exchange morality and impartial benevolence. In this study, too, the impartiality scores of SRM-SFO correlated significantly or

tended to correlate positively with the preference for the highest stages of moral judgment, although in a less clear manner than in the second study. These results indicate the ambiguous content of the moral arguments included in the moral orientation stages 2, 5 and 6 of MCT, as the preference for them correlate differently with the impartial benevolence scores when this benevolence involves breaking a moral law than in the situation in which implies observance of a moral law. In the case of the theoretical correspondent SRM-SFO score for the moral arguments of the highest level, instead, it correlated positively with impartial benevolence, regardless if it implies breaking a moral law or the observance of a moral law.

In comparison with the first study, in this study, for the first time, an impartiality score, the one for saving someone else's life, tended to correlate positively with the C index of MCT, as it was predicted. This correlation was statistically significant after controlling for the level of importance attributed to saving the life of a friend. It is a result that suggest once again the particular status of this kind of impartiality, as having the tightest relationship with the moral judgment status.

These data, too, should be replicated on larger and more heterogeneous samples.

GENERAL DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The results of the three studies indicate that SRM-SFO instrument may reflect better than the MCT instrument the impartial benevolence aspect of moral thinking in both of its investigated types (the situation that requires breaking a moral law and the one requiring the observance of a moral law). The scores of MCT linked with moral competence, which presumably should reflect impartiality in the assessment of the moral arguments, and linked with moral orientation correlated partially in the expected manner, *i.e.*, only with the impartiality indices of SRM-SFO, regarding the impartial benevolence that requires the observance of a moral law. C-index had a weak positive relationship only with the impartiality in saving someone else's life of all investigated impartiality scores. This result may mean that impartiality in the assessment of the quality of moral arguments may be only weakly linked with the impartial benevolence or that C index is, in fact, not linked with the impartiality in the assessment of the quality of moral arguments, as it was assumed based on a theoretic point of view.

Of all the investigated impartiality indices, the impartiality score for saving someone else's life computed based on the SRM-SFO items was the most tightly linked with the moral judgment status assessed both with SRM-SFO and with

MCT. It was also the most related with the C5 impartiality score for hiding the truth to avoid someone else's suffering. Both indices have a meaning centered on avoiding an intense harm, which seems to be the most important aspect of the investigated ones for considering impartiality as an important moral principle. This result should be put in relationship with a result obtained by Graziano *et al.* (2007), whose data show that in "life-or-death helping situations, strangers seem to be drawn closer inside, not pushed further outside, the inclusion class of people worthy of help, at least for persons high in Agreeableness." (p. 596). The cited authors note that "in life-or-death helping situations, the difference between friends and strangers is less sharp than in everyday helping situations." (p. 587). So, the extension of the moral circle might be relevant mainly for life-or-death situations.

The preference for the SRM-SFO moral arguments of level 4 (the highest one) was the index that was the most positively related with all the investigated indices for the impartial benevolence. It is a result that may indicate that SRM-SFO may be a better, clearer, measure for the highest levels of moral judgment conceived as linked with impartial benevolence than the correspondent moral orientation scores of the MCT, and, maybe, even of DIT. In comparing the above-mentioned instruments, it should be taken into account that the sample in the second study was much smaller than the one in the first one, and that, in the case of MCT, ipsatized scores were used, whereas in the case of SRM-SFO, the ipsatization procedure is meaningless for the following reason. The SRM-SFO scores are more directly linked with the relative importance of the different types of moral arguments, as the respondents are forced to choose the preferred types in various different situations, covering an important part of the moral domain. Even though ipsatization was used in order to eliminate the possible influence of social desirability or of other response tendencies for the answers at MCT, better means to control such response tendencies would be required in future studies that would aim to replicate or explore further the obtained results. From another point of view, high social desirability tends to be associated positively with sympathy, emotion regulation, and perspective taking (see, for example, Eisenberg *et al.*, 1994), factors that might be important in the investigation of the relationship between impartiality and moral judgment level. That is why, its partial exclusion from data analysis by ipsatization might have been an analytic strategy too conservative, neglecting important information and reducing relevant variability. Future studies should also take into consideration also better and more direct means to assess the impartiality aspect of moral thinking, which would allow a more fine-grained analysis, and should be conducted on more heterogeneous samples of participants. Finally, more complex analyzes of the data would be desirable in the future, as in the current research they were not possible, given the non-normal distribution of most of the involved variables.

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