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Editorial overview: Morality and ethics: New directions in the study of morality and ethics

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Introduction

What leads people to sometimes break rules and sometimes follow them? Do some environments encourage people to be honest and others tempt them to cheat? Alternatively, are some people simply born honest? Can sanctioning systems enforce moral norms? Which institutions would best uphold norms that foster ethical behavior? These questions about moral and ethical behavior have occupied thinkers, both within and outside academia, for centuries. In recent years, we have witnessed many theoretical and methodological developments in moral psychology and behavioral ethics [1–3]. Contributions to these fields come from a wide range of disciplines. To name just a few, neuroscientists, biologists, and cognitive psychologists have generated insights about the genetic and physiological aspects underlying moral behavior; social and developmental psychologists have identified situational and personality factors; management and business scholars have examined the business settings in which unethical behavior may emerge; economists have studied the organizational incentives to behave morally; and communication scholars have explored interpersonal communication processes.

This issue of *Current Opinion in Psychology* represents what some of the main contributors to these fields consider to be the state of the art and highlights directions for future research across various domains in the study of morality. Each article surveys the current state of affairs on a specific topic in one of six main themes:

(1) Behavioral ethics: from theory building to policy informing?
(2) Cognitive aspects: do people intend to be unethical?
(3) Moral self-regulation: can self-control shape ethical behavior?
(4) Individual differences: born (un)ethical?
(5) Social and cultural norms: is morality parochial or universal? and
(6) Situational factors: what are the antecedents and consequences of unethical behavior?

Here, we provide an overview of these contributions and suggest that the richness of insights in each of these themes contributes to the field's ability to build theory, robustly test it, and provide valuable recommendations to policymakers.

We note that throughout the issue, as in much of the literature on moral psychology and behavioral ethics, the terms 'ethics' and 'morality' are used interchangeably. To be precise, the words have different derivations. Ethics derive from Greek (ethos, ethikos) and morality from Latin (mores, moralis);

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the two can be differentiated in a way that may be theoretically or practically helpful. According to their different roots, 'ethics' leans toward decisions based on individual character and on individuals' more subjective understanding of right and wrong, whereas 'morals' focuses more on widely shared communal or societal norms about right and wrong. Put another way, ethics is a more individual assessment of values as relatively good or bad, while morality is a community assessment of what is good, right, or just for all. Such distinction may be helpful to future theorizing.

Behavioral ethics: from theory building to policy informing

In the first section of this issue, Tenbrunsel and Chugh provide an overview of the behavioral ethics field, assessing its breadth and depth. They highlight the field's current focus on two themes: Firstly, the extent to which people act intentionally versus unintentionally in unethical ways and second, the role of the self in shaping ethical behavior. The second and third sections of this issue delve into these two lines of work by providing inquiries based on current opinion to questions such as: Do people notice when they behave unethically? If so, do they care? The answers are far from trivial. As Irlenbusch and Villeval emphasize, whereas the long-held benchmark for understanding moral behavior in economics focuses on the costs and benefits associated with (un)ethical behavior [6], accumulating evidence suggests that there is more to morality than incentives.

Reviewing field research in their article, Pierce and Balasubramanian show just how diverse the real-life settings are in which moral and ethical considerations shape people's behavior. Their review also highlights the importance of triangulating and considering multiple research methods and settings to study phenomena that are of theoretical both practical value. Take, for example, the important and rather paradoxical real-life problem Dana and Cain raise in this issue: the fact that advisors tend to give more conservative advice to others than they themselves follow. Since advice giving and receiving is fundamental to human interactions, this gap is worthy of attention. Dana and Cain discuss several possibilities in an attempt to explain why advisers take greater (ethical) risks themselves than they advise others to take. For example, Dana and Cain suggest that 'advisers feel your pain, but not your gain'; that is, the desire to avoid harming others may drive the paradoxical effect of advising versus choosing.

Cognitive aspects: do people intend to be unethical?

A prerequisite to providing advice on an ethical issue or acting upon it is the realization that the issue at hand is of ethical nature. The second section in the current issue showcases contributions suggesting such recognition is far from trivial.

When we punish those who did wrong, whether in court or at home with our kids, a key assumption is that the 'offender' can tell right from wrong. A line of recent work challenges the extent to which people intend to act unethically and identifies ways to make people more aware of how they are behaving. In the second section of this issue, Banaji *et al.* suggest that multiple biases, such as workplace discrimination, can be attributed to people's failure to notice they are treating people with similar abilities differently. Indeed, as proposed in this issue by Cushman, intent plays a key role in constructing what people consider to be (im)moral. Developing this idea further, Sezer *et al.* describe how the selective attention people pay to their surroundings creates ethical blind spots that prevent them from noticing ethical misconducts they may commit, an idea that fits squarely with the work surveyed by Reynolds and Miller. Fiedler and Glöckner