

Is an eye truly for an eye? Magnitude differences affect moral praise more than moral blame

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Is an eye truly for an eye? Magnitude differences affect moral praise more than moral blame

Does perceived moral responsibility correspond to the magnitude of the act to the same degree for both moral and immoral acts? Two preregistered experiments found that—when evaluating two agents who performed similar acts but with different magnitude—observers judged greater differences in their moral responsibility when those acts were moral than when they were immoral. Evaluating immoral (vs. moral) acts led participants to use a more affect-based (vs. reason-based) decision mode, which, in turn, led them to be more scope insensitive to the magnitude difference of the two acts. Further, we showed that this asymmetry effect is moderated by the individual's concern with the relevant moral issue when evaluating two brands. When perceivers care less about the issue (e.g., animal welfare), the asymmetry effect attenuates. These results suggest that, when comparing the moral responsibility of different moral agents, magnitude of behavior matters more for positive than for negative acts.

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