Article

Corruption in the Context of Moral Trade-offs

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James Dungan
Adam Waytz
Liane Young

Abstract

Moral psychology has begun to characterize the circumstances that lead people to commit moral violations. However, the decision to engage in corrupt behaviour may not always reflect a choice between right and wrong. Rather, the decision may represent a trade-off between competing moral concerns (for example, being fair and impartial to all versus loyal to one's own group). Taking the tension between fairness and loyalty as a case study, we demonstrate that the way people make trade-offs between competing moral norms predicts morally relevant behaviour, such as decisions to blow the whistle on unethical acts. We then suggest that this tension reflects a deeper distinction within our moral psychology, namely, a distinction between group-based norms (for example, loyalty) and norms that apply universally, independent of group membership (for example, fairness). Finally, we discuss what factors may influence the adoption of group-based versus group-independent norms and therefore, how these factors might deter or promote corruption.

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James Dungan (corresponding author), Department of Psychology, Boston College, Chestnut Hill, MA. E-mail: james.dungan@bc.edu
Adam Waytz, Northwestern University, Evanston, IL.
E-mail: a-waytz@kellogg.northwestern.edu
Liane Young, Boston College, Chestnut Hill, MA. E-mail: liane.young@bc.edu

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With each passing year, the mounting number of prominent corruption scandals reveals a sobering fact about society—corrupt acts are often committed by otherwise virtuous people. Bernie Madoff, Richard Nixon and Kenneth Lay, for example, are not psychopaths who lack a moral sense. Researchers thus face the question of why at times ordinary people appear to disregard their moral convictions.

Answering this question has proven to be a challenge given the diversity of corrupt behaviour. Examples of corruption commonly include bribery, nepotism, fraud, theft, embezzlement and blackmail. However, at the broadest level, corruption occurs whenever people in positions of power or authority abuse their influence to violate moral norms.

Researchers have pinpointed numerous cultural, organizational and situational factors that promote diverse forms of corruption. For example, workers who perceive their company's climate as promoting responsibility for the customer and the community are less likely to engage in unethical business practices (Barnett & Vaicys, 2000). Furthermore, adopting an honour code, or other code of conduct, curbs corrupt behaviour (Kish-Gephart, Harrison & Treviño, 2010; Mazar, Amir & Ariely, 2008; Treviño, Butterfield & McCabe, 1998). Even seemingly incidental and inconsequential factors such as the brightness of a room can promote ethical behaviour (Zhong, Bohns & Gino, 2010).

In lieu of external environmental factors, this review focuses on the internal psychological mechanisms that drive corruption. One popular view suggests that despite possessing innate moral intuitions (Haidt, 2007) that support evaluations of others' transgressions (Cushman, 2008; Greene, Sommerville, Nystrom, Darley & Cohen, 2001; Mikhail, 2007), people are also equipped with a host of psychological mechanisms that allow them to justify and rationalize their own immoral and unethical behaviour (Bandura, 1999; Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara & Pastorelli, 1996; Valdesolo & DeSteno, 2007). In other words, people are moral hypocrites—espousing moral values when judging others, while actively ignoring when self-interest is at stake (Monin & Merritt, 2012; Monin, Sawyer & Marquez, 2008; Valdesolo & DeSteno, 2007).

Yet, corrupt behaviour is not necessarily solely selfish; it can be other-serving towards the members of one's own group. Although investigations of the source of corruption have focused on the role of groups in shaping an individual's behaviour, rarely has *loyalty* to one's group been emphasized as a moral value that can motivate unfair and unjust actions. Take, for example, a politician who is offered a bribe that will guarantee the success of his political party or a businessman who can embezzle money for his struggling family (cf. Gino & Pierce, 2009a, 2010; Wiltermuth, 2011). Indeed, people are often faced with a choice between being loyal to one's own group and being fair and impartial to all.

Here, we suggest that a powerful source of corruption arises not from a conflict between being good so to speak and being selfish, but instead a tension between conflicting moral norms. Using the tension between fairness and loyalty as a case study, we illustrate how this tension can impact decisions to refrain from or engage in unethical behaviour. Furthermore, we provide evidence suggesting that moral conflicts are the consequence of a deeper divide within our moral psychology between group-based norms (for example, loyalty) and norms that operate universally, independent of group membership (for example, fairness). Finally, we discuss how the distinction between group-based and group-independent norms informs our understanding of corruption as well as possible interventions aimed at promoting ethical behaviour.

Moral Hypocrites

Unfortunately, not everyone in this world seems terribly conflicted about behaving immorally. In a survey of a large community sample, 0.2 per cent of people scored above the common research threshold for psychopathy, and the scores of an additional 1 per cent indicated the potential for psychopathy (Neumann & Hare, 2008). Individuals with clinical or subclinical levels of psychopathy exhibit impulsivity and callousness, often leading to aggressive, antisocial and even criminal behaviour (Hare & Neumann, 2005; Skeem, Polaschek, Patrick & Lilienfeld, 2011). Similarly, some individuals readily manipulate and deceive others in order to achieve power, dominance and success—characterized as Machiavellianism (Dahling, Whitaker & Levy, 2009).

In addition to exploiting others for their own selfish gain, people with Machiavellianism, or relatedly social dominance orientation (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth & Malle, 1994), are also less likely to endorse fairness and caring for others as important moral values (Niemi & Young, 2013). Finally, people who tend to believe events are beyond their control (Eisenberg, 2000), people who view moral codes as relative (as opposed to absolute; Kish-Gephart et al., 2010) and those with poor self-regulation capacities (Treviño, Weaver & Reynolds, 2006) are particularly likely to engage in corrupt behaviour.

By contrast, research has also uncovered individual differences that account for morally good behaviour. Kohlberg (1969) classically posited that people showing more advanced stages of moral reasoning are also more likely to engage in ethical versus unethical behaviour (Treviño & Youngblood, 1990). More recent research suggests that people who internalize moral traits as important to their personal identity and self-concept are also more likely to behave morally (Aquino & Reed II, 2002; Reed II & Aquino, 2003). In addition, proneness to experiencing guilt motivates prosocial behaviour and relates to a host of positive outcomes such as fewer unethical business decisions, less criminal behaviour and more honesty (Bandura et al., 1996; Cohen, Panter & Turan, 2012; Tangney & Dearing, 2003).

While there are clear exemplars at each moral extreme, good and bad, researchers disagree over the moral standing of average individuals. One popular view posits that while we outwardly endorse moral norms, we do so primarily for show—we are motivated instead by self-interest, but we wish to reap the benefits of appearing moral (Batson, 2011; Shaw et al., 2013). In one demonstration of this moral veneer, participants were recruited to assign tasks to themselves and a future participant. One of the tasks involved a chance to win money, while other task was described as dull and boring. Participants could either assign the tasks upfront, or they could assign the tasks through privately flipping a coin and reporting the result of the coin flip to the experimenter. Of participants who chose to flip the coin, an extraordinary 90 per cent reported that the result of the coin flip was such that they got the favourable task and the future participant the boring task—a statistically improbable percentage (Batson, Kobrynowicz, Dinnerstein, Kampf & Wilson, 1997). Thus, at least some participants chose to flip a coin to appear fair but then lied about the outcome of the coin flip. Elegant studies such

as this one using the coin flip task have been used to suggest that ethical, prosocial behaviour is a product of individuals' effortful exertion of self-control to overcome prepotent, selfish desires (DeWall, Baumeister, Gailliot & Maner, 2008; Kahneman, 2011).

New work though has left open the possibility that people do possess altruistic intuitions, untainted by selfishness (Zaki & Mitchell, 2013). First, the quicker people are to make decisions to act prosocially, the less selfish their decisions are, suggesting an automatic tendency for cooperation and ethicality (Rand, Greene & Nowak, 2012). Second, instructing people to focus on their feelings or, conversely, hindering their ability to think rationally and deliberately (by distracting or pressuring them) also increases cooperation (Cappelletti, Goth & Ploner, 2011; Cornelissen, Dewitte & Warlop, 2011; Rand et al., 2012). Finally, brain regions involved in processing reward are more active when people act equitably versus inequitably, even when doing so does not benefit them directly, suggesting that cooperation is intrinsically rewarding (Zaki & Mitchell, 2011). Together, these results suggest that ethical actions may indeed be automatic and intuitive.

While this body of research paints a less pessimistic view of human nature, the fact remains that moral people often act immorally (Ariely, 2013). Why does moral hypocrisy run so rampant? Psychologists have identified many psychological mechanisms that may enable people to deceive themselves when it comes to their ethicality (cf. Tenbrunsel & Messick, 2004). For example, people may justify their own immoral behaviour by comparing it to others' worse behaviours (Bandura, 1999); people may divert the blame or responsibility to others (Tsang, 2002); and people may derogate and dehumanize the victims of their behaviour (Waytz & Epley, 2012; cf. Ashforth & Anand, 2003). Importantly, people who deploy these rationalization techniques more effectively are more likely to show aggression and delinquency and less likely to engage in helpful, cooperative behaviour (Bandura et al., 1996; Bandura, Caprara, Barbaranelli, Pastorelli & Regalia, 2001). Instead of rationalizing immoral behaviour, people can also separate or decouple some specific immoral behaviour from the rest of their moral character (Bhattacharjee, Berman & Reed II, 2012). For example, people may view their unethical business practices as entirely separate from their moral life outside of the office, thereby protecting their self-concept (Bhattacharjee et al., 2013). Finally, unethical behaviour may arise from more general cognitive

biases such as the tendency to ignore or reduce the consequences of our actions (Messick & Bazerman, 1996) and the failure to notice the gradual decline of our ethical behaviour over time (Banaji, Bazerman & Chugh, 2003; Moore, Tetlock, Tanlu & Bazerman, 2006). Together these aspects of our psychology help people indulge in their selfish desires by disengaging from moral standards, contributing to hypocrisy and corruption.

Another Source of Corruption

Corruption and selfishness are commonly conceptualized as synonymous. This schema implies that people who engage in unethical behaviour simply choose to do what is best for them rather than what is best for others. In fact, the experimental methods used to study hypocrisy often involve zero-sum designs, pitting self-interest against the interests of others (Batson, Thompson, Seuferling, Whitney & Strongman, 1999; Valdesolo & DeSteno, 2007). But is corruption necessarily selfish?

Imagine that a new drug is one woman's only chance of overcoming an aggressive cancer. The doctor who invented the drug has made it available to the public but at ten times the cost of production. Desperate to save his wife and unable to secure enough money for the drug, Mr Heinz breaks into the doctor's office and steals the drug to treat his cancer-stricken wife.

The classic Heinz Dilemma (Kohlberg, 1981) depicts a situation in which competing moral values are pitted against each other. On the one hand, most people would agree that stealing is wrong—even in this particular case, the doctor has a right to sell his intellectual property. On the other hand, Mr Heinz's behaviour seems morally justified insofar as he has a moral duty to care for his wife if at all possible. Critically, this scenario illustrates that unethical actions (for example, stealing the drug) are not always motivated by selfishness—instead, ostensibly moral concerns (for example, caring for a loved one) can sometimes lead to immoral behaviour.

Although hypothetical dilemmas may seem unrepresentative of the types of conflicts people regularly encounter, recent research supports the notion that unethical behaviour can be motivated by moral concerns. For example, people are more likely to lie, cheat and steal when someone

else benefits from their behaviour (Wiltermuth, 2011). Furthermore, this 'benevolent dishonesty' is especially likely to occur when the people who benefit from it evoke empathy, as in the case where a health insurance administrator approves necessary treatments for a patient not covered by the patient's insurance policy (Gino & Pierce, 2009a). In these cases, people perceive their unethical actions as more permissible when motivated by the desire to help others, and are therefore more willing to engage in these behaviours (Gino & Pierce, 2010; Wiltermuth, 2011).

Notably, in many real-world examples, people who have been caught engaging in corruption do not actually view themselves as corrupt (Ashforth & Anand, 2003; Benson, 1985). While denying guilt may seem characteristic of moral hypocrisy and post hoc rationalization, perhaps this assumption isn't entirely accurate. In many cases, people may be caught between competing moral norms and are therefore forced to prioritize one moral norm over another. Unethical behaviour, then, may not necessarily be the result of selfish or immoral motives.

Loyalty versus Fairness (or the Whistle-blower's Dilemma)

As a society, Americans place a premium on fairness as a moral value. Equality and rights are fundamental to the government's foundation, legal system and the millions of everyday social and business interactions (Haidt & Graham, 2007). Concurrently, researchers have suggested that concerns for justice and fairness are at the core of all morally relevant judgements and behaviours (Baumard, Andre & Sperber, 2013; Kohlberg, 1969, 1981).

Norms of fairness appear surprisingly early in human development. Five month old infants show a positivity bias, preferring agents who always help others; however, by eight months, infants prefer agents who act negatively towards antisocial others (Hamlin, Wynn, Bloom & Mahajen, 2011). In other words, at 8 months, infants already show evidence of endorsing third-party punishment—justice being served. Similarly, toddlers report violations of fairness (such as refusing to share or stealing another child's toy) to their caregivers more frequently than conventional violations (for example, not hanging their bag up)—suggesting that

fairness is an important norm worth enforcing (Ingram & Bering, 2010). Other research suggests that by the age of 2 years, children endorse distributive justice as well (Sloane, Baillargeon & Premack, 2012). In general, children expect resources to be divided equally among two people; however, when two people work together on a task, infants expect rewards to be divided in proportion to each individual's contribution (Sloane et al., 2012)—the person who worked harder should earn more. Moral norms of fairness may have deep-seated evolutionary origins as even monkeys and apes show preferences for fairness (Brosnan, Schiff & de Waal, 2005; cf. Hamann, Warneken, Greenberg & Tomasello, 2011).

The early emergence of fairness values may be surprising given the importance of in-groups—and even in-group favouritism—in social life. From birth, we are dependent on the kindness of our family and friends. It seems natural then that many of our moral inclinations developed specifically to motivate preferential protection and care for the people closest to us (Bloom, 2011). Indeed, evolutionary theory suggests that prosocial and altruistic behaviour arose because showing favouritism to the people who benefited us, especially our relatives, accrued success and reproductive benefits (Trivers, 1971).

The importance of favouring close others manifests in the moral valuation of loyalty. Loyalty is endorsed by people across cultures (Shweder, Much, Mahaptra & Park, 1997) and may be an innate building block of our moral psychology (Haidt, 2007). Consequently, loyalty concerns can potentially overcome fairness concerns. Young children choose to disproportionately share resources with their family and friends over strangers (Olson & Spelke, 2008). In contrast to toddlers, adolescents who assign greater value to group membership often ostracize peers who report violations of fairness (Friman et al., 2004). This preference for loyalty versus fairness is especially strong in competitive contexts (Shaw, DeScioli & Olson, 2012) or when expectations for friendship are made especially salient (Smetana, Killen & Turiel, 1991). Notably, tendencies to view one's own group more positively than out-groups are present in non-human primates as well, suggesting that, like fairness, loyalty has strong evolutionary origins (Mahajan et al., 2011).

People are thus faced with a dilemma: while both fairness and loyalty are fundamental moral values (Haidt, 2007; cf. Walker & Hennig, 2004), they are also at odds. Fairness demands that people across all groups be treated equally, whereas loyalty demands that one's own group is given

special treatment. Importantly, past research has attempted to determine which moral norms in isolation are predictive of moral behaviour. However, given the complexity of everyday moral dilemmas, moral behaviour may be best predicted by investigating how individuals make trade-offs between conflicting moral norms.

We investigated this possibility in the context of whistle-blowing (Waytz, Dungan & Young, 2013). Whistle-blowing can be defined as reporting unethical behaviour within one's own group to a third party, often an outside authority (cf. Near & Miceli, 1985). Although whistle-blowers are often celebrated and viewed as moral exemplars by third-party observers in the larger community, the vast majority face negative, often violent, backlash from their own group: reassignment, firing and ostracism (Dyck et al., 2010; Minson & Monin, 2012; Parks & Stone, 2010). Thus, potential whistle-blowers are faced with the difficult choice between: (a) exposing their own group's unethical behaviour in the name of fairness and justice; and (b) not reporting the violation, thereby protecting their group's interests in the name of loyalty. We expected that decisions to engage in whistle-blowing would be predicted by how individuals made trade-offs between fairness and loyalty.

To test this prediction, we first confirmed that concerns about fairness and loyalty drive whistle-blowing decisions. We asked participants to recall a time they witnessed unethical behaviour and decided either to report the crime or to keep quiet. When describing the reasons behind their decision, participants who decided to blow the whistle used ten times as many words related to fairness and justice, whereas participants who decided not to report the crime used twice as many words related to loyalty (Waytz et al., 2013).

Having established the importance of fairness and loyalty in explaining whistle-blowing decisions, we next determined how explicit endorsements of fairness and loyalty as important moral values predicted willingness to blow the whistle. Participants responded to two brief questionnaires. The first asked a series of questions gauging concern for each moral value, allowing us to compute a fairness score and a loyalty score for each participant. The second questionnaire asked participants to report the likelihood of their reporting a series of hypothetical crimes varying in severity (from spraying graffiti to murder). We found that neither fairness scores nor loyalty scores alone predicted willingness to blow the whistle. Critically, predictive power was linked to the

difference between fairness and loyalty scores. Participants who valued fairness more than loyalty were more willing to blow the whistle, compared to participants who valued loyalty more than fairness. In other words, the way participants made moral trade-offs predicted their whistle-blowing behaviour (Waytz et al., 2013).

To extend this finding, we tested whether directly manipulating the trade-off between fairness and loyalty would alter participants' decisions to blow the whistle. Before responding to the same questionnaire items concerning whistle-blowing decisions in the case of hypothetical crimes, participants wrote a series of three short essays. One group of participants wrote essays about the importance of fairness over loyalty, while the other group wrote essays about the importance of loyalty over fairness. As expected, when comparing the two groups, we found that participants who wrote in favour of fairness over loyalty were more willing to blow the whistle (Waytz et al., 2013).

A final study revealed this same manipulation to influence participants' decisions to blow the whistle in a non-hypothetical situation. In an online community where people participate in small online jobs for money, participants witnessed another worker taking money for a job inadequately done. Participants who wrote about the importance of fairness versus loyalty were more likely to report this person and recommend that the person be banned from the community (Waytz et al., 2013). Taken together, these studies demonstrate that understanding the way people make trade-offs between competing moral norms will inform a psychological account of how and why people engage in ethical or unethical behaviour.

Group-independent versus Group-based Morality

The tension between fairness and loyalty observed in the case of whistle-blowing decisions may represent a much deeper distinction within human moral psychology. Consistent with this hypothesis are recent pilot data from our lab. We conducted a study in which participants read descriptions of two different people: one person who is loyal and faithful to his family and friends, regardless of the impact on outsiders; and a second person who is fair and impartial, regardless of the impact on those close to him. When we asked participants which person is

morally better, a majority of participants identified the fair and impartial person. However, when we asked participants which person they would rather be friends with, the opposite pattern emerged—a majority of participants indicated they would rather be friends with the loyal person. Importantly, this choice reversal occurred regardless of the order in which participants answered the questions. Participants appeared perfectly willing to say that ideal friends possess different moral qualities from generally moral individuals. We suggest this reversal occurs because two distinct sets of moral concerns have evolved to facilitate two distinct motivations.

Group-independent morals enable the *formation* of collaborative groups. Moral concerns such as caring and fairness dictate how individuals should treat others (Haidt & Graham, 2007). Endorsing these morals help individuals identify who will be cooperative, and who threatens to take advantage of them (cf. André & Baumard, 2011). People can readily detect the cooperative impulses of others (Brosig, 2002; Verplaetse, Vanneste & Braeckman, 2007), which leads to future association with cooperative others and the exclusion of uncooperative others (Barclay & Willer, 2007; Chiang, 2010; Sylwester & Roberts, 2010). Importantly, since group-independent morals condemn differential treatment across individuals, they may motivate cooperative behaviour across group boundaries (Niemi & Young, 2013). Indeed, the endorsement of caring and fairness values is positively associated with empathy and the fair treatment of out-groups, thereby incorporating new people into one's group (Graham et al., 2011; Niemi & Young, 2013).

By contrast, *group-based* morals may enable the *protection* of pre-established groups. People are fundamentally motivated by the need to maintain strong social bonds and social connectedness (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Group-based morals such as loyalty and respect for authority foster social connection by binding individuals into cohesive groups (Haidt, 2007). Importantly, these morals emphasize group membership, motivating positive judgements of people within the group and negative judgements of people who upset the group dynamic.

Recent findings support the distinction between group-independent and group-based morals. In one study, participants evaluated hypothetical political mavericks who vote according to their personal moral beliefs regardless of their political party's opinions (Ditto & Mastronarde, 2009). Participants judged political mavericks more positively when

imagining them in the abstract than when they imagined them as belonging to their own political party (Ditto & Mastronarde, 2009). Similarly, adopting an abstract mindset (as opposed to a concrete mindset) decreased prejudice towards people perceived as deviating from the in-group's moral values, and this effect was mediated by an increase in the valuation of fairness (Luguri, Napier & Dovidio, 2012). Even simply priming participants to think abstractly increased their valuation of fairness and caring for others, while decreasing their valuation of binding foundations (Napier & Luguri, 2013). Children have also been shown to endorse fairness over favouritism in third-party contexts, but children are more conflicted when they are personally involved (Shaw et al., 2012). Finally, children's preference for those who favour them becomes even stronger when they are placed in a competitive context (Shaw et al., 2012).

Thus, human moral psychology may be divided between identifying moral individuals and concerns for protecting one's own group. By understanding the motivation to satisfy both these concerns, psychologists may be more successful in predicting behaviour in complex ethical dilemmas. How people emphasize these competing concerns will have powerful implications for how corruption is deterred or promoted.

Implications for Corruption

Organizational leaders are at a disadvantage when trying to manage a successful business while maintaining a moral work environment. First, people consider morality as sacred and are highly averse to equating moral concerns with business and market concerns (Fiske & Tetlock, 1997). Accordingly, people use a lower stage of moral reasoning (Kohlberg, 1969) when reasoning about work-related versus non-work-related problems (Weber & Wasieleski, 2001). Furthermore, the competitive and hierarchical nature of businesses generates feelings of inequity and envy which can lead to unethical acts for the sake of monetary pay-offs (Gino & Pierce, 2009b). Indeed, even briefly presenting pictures of money increases self-interested and self-serving behaviour (Vohs, Mead & Goode, 2006, 2008). Businesses are thus prone to evoking corruption.

One typical way of combating competitive and unethical behaviour amongst employees is to emphasize group-based concerns such as loyalty. By instilling incentives for group performance as opposed to individual performance (cf. Anik, Aknin, Norton, Dunn & Quoidbach, 2013), managers encourage cooperation and strengthen the relational bonds among group members (Cohen & Bailey, 1997; Grant, 2007; Hamman, Rick & Weber, 2007). Strengthening group cohesion in turn has many positive benefits for individuals within the group, such as increasing group commitment (Bishop & Scott, 2000), job satisfaction (Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008; Morrison, 2004) and overall happiness and health (Cacioppo & Partick, 2008; Diener & Seligman, 2002).

However, as noted, emphasizing group-based morals could come at a cost to the group's ethical behaviour towards those outside the group. For instance, group loyalty is positively related to intergroup conflict—as in-group loyalty increases, endorsement of violence towards out-groups also increases (Cohen, Montoya & Insko, 2006). Similarly, intergroup interactions often become more competitive and aggressive than interactions between individuals (Meier & Hinsz, 2004; Wildschut, Pinter, Vevea, Insko & Schopler, 2003). Unethical business practices (for example, bribery) have also been found to occur more often in collectivist versus individualist cultures where individuals identify as an interdependent part of the group (Mazar & Aggarwal, 2011). Finally, feelings of social connectedness can also increase the tendency for individuals to denigrate and dehumanize out-groups (Waytz & Epley, 2012). Group-based morals may therefore benefit the group, while being detrimental to intergroup relations (cf. Waytz & Epley, 2012).

In addition to impairing intergroup relations, group-based morals may also encourage individuals to condone corrupt behaviour. When group concerns are made salient, people align their personal views with group consensus (Asch, 1956; Ledgerwood, Trope & Chaiken, 2010). Moral hypocrisy has also been shown to extend to an individual's in-group—people rationalize and justify immoral deeds committed by people in their group (Valdesolo & DeSteno, 2007). This effect emerges even for arbitrary groups (such as people randomly assigned red shirts versus blue shirts), showing the power impact of group-based concerns on an individual's moral judgement.

If the goal is to decrease corruption, business owners may do well to endorse group-independent morals. For example, companies that

de-emphasize the duties employees have to their own business, and instead focus on their responsibility to the larger community, are less susceptible to misconduct (cf. Garriga & Melé, 2004). Furthermore, the perception of fairness in an organization's practices and structure increases public support (Barry & Oliver, 1996) and satisfaction (Hegtvedt & Killian, 1999; Ordonez, Connolly & Coughlan, 2000). Also, decreasing the inequality between individuals within and between businesses will alleviate feelings of envy and schadenfreude (Cikara, Bruneau & Saxe, 2011; Cikara & Fiske, 2012) that often lead to negative actions among groups. Finally, as interactions between individuals from different groups become increasingly frequent in a global economy, endorsing group-independent morals may reflect a larger moral responsibility to all people (cf. Rorty, 1997).

Endorsing group-independent norms such as fairness may have practical benefits, in addition to their ethical benefits. Fairness is universally endorsed to a great extent, whereas people within and across cultures tend to show greater disagreement over the moral importance of loyalty (Graham, Haidt & Nosek, 2007). Furthermore, research suggests that endorsing norms of caring and fairness may be less cognitively demanding than endorsing loyalty (Wright & Baril, 2011). Thus, when resolving the conflict between fairness and loyalty, there are multiple reasons for pushing the trade-off in favour of fairness.

Conclusion

The problem of corruption is intensifying. In the 2013 Corruption Perceptions Index, 60 per cent of people sampled in the United States (US) reported thinking that the prevalence of corruption has increased in the past 2 years (only 10 per cent reported thinking it has decreased). This is not peculiar to the US—of all 114,000 people surveyed from 107 countries, only 18 per cent of people thought corruption decreased at all. Naturally, addressing a problem of this magnitude will take combined efforts from many different lines of research.

In this article, we have focused on the psychological mechanisms that may influence corruption. In particular, we have suggested that the popular and perhaps intuitive depiction of unethical action as the

triumph of selfish desires over moral concerns is incomplete—distinct moral concerns often come into conflict, leading to immoral actions and bad outcomes. While we certainly do not mean to suggest that corrupt behaviour is justified, we do suggest that corruption may be driven by powerful group-based moral concerns. A complete characterization of the complex tensions within human moral psychology should lead to better accounts of when and why corruption occurs as well as how to promote ethical practices in the workplace and beyond.

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