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Control and Responsibility Role in Moral Judgment and Decision-Making

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Abstract

Based on Blame Theory and Integrative Moral Judgment and Decision-Making (MJDM), this paper examines the role of responsibility for the situation and control over the consequences of the situation in first-person, realistic and non-sacrificial dilemmas. In a 2x2 within-subjects design, 69 participants had to read and solve four dilemmas. Their choice, affect felt, perceived utility, and moral acceptability values were measured. Analyses showed that increased control led to more pro-social choices, and that responsibility increased pro-sociality only when control was low. Control and responsibility also influenced affect, utility, and moral acceptability judgments, corroborating the integrative MJDM model. These results show that control and responsibility play a key role in MJDM but differ from blame theory, where responsibility is necessary for blame and for control to matter. In contrast, in first-person MJDM, control suffices for pro-social action, and responsibility influences decisions only when control is absent.