PHILOSOPHY

GOOD SCIENTISTS DOING WRONG

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There is an interesting study "When Good People Break Bad: Moral Impression Violations in Everyday Life" by the Canadian PhD student Kate Guan and her advisor Steven Heine. It is a phenomenon that is annoying many people if we look at the reactions to Twitter posts und PubPeer entries accusing scientists of wrong doing. The paper provides some explanations

> Across three studies, moral character violations predicted broad disruptions to participants' sense of meaning, confidence judging moral character, and expectations of others' moral characters. Participants who were in real life closer to perpetrators, directly victimized, and higher in preferences for closure and behavioral stability reported more negative outcomes. Moreover, experimental manipulations showed that character violations lead to worse outcomes than the comparable experience of encountering consistently immoral others.

The interesting point here is not that occasionally good people do something wrong, but about the much more intense reaction of people that seem to be closer to perpetrators, directly victimized, and higher in preferences for closure and behavioral stability. While I can largely exclude being closer to perpetrators, I was of course directly victimized by unfair actions in the past. Not being a psychologist, I had to look up the meaning of closure first. It seems to be a term in psychology that

> describes an individual's desire for a clear, firm answer to a question and an aversion toward ambiguity

And yes, if you look at the headline of the blog, that's a crucial issue in science although we know that psychologists correlate that with authoritarianism, intolerance of ambiguity and dogmatism (unfortunately that's how most scientific laws are working. Mathematics does not change if you have a different opinion about a solution although I admit that most of our current biomedical research is ambiguous either by missing facts, wrong observa-

tions or poor interpretation. Biology is not ruled by laws of classical mechanic)