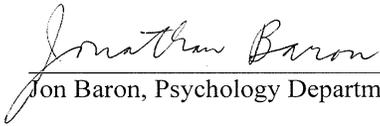


Application for 2009 Russell Ackoff Doctoral Student Fellowships
for Research on Human Decision Processes and Risk Management

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Project Title: Revenge and third-party punishment: Analysis of the features

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On the surface, a personal urge for vengeance and a generalized desire to punish violators of moral norms look alike – both represent a punitive response to a transgression. In case of revenge, the punishers are themselves the victim of a perceived violation (a second-party punishment, 2PP); in situations of moralistic aggression, those who punish are interfering in a dispute that would be of no concern to them had it not involved a breach of some moral principle (a third-party punishment, 3PP). Despite the similarities, it is possible that the intuitions characteristic of second- and third-party punitive responses are not governed by the same rules. If these intuitions are not the same, and differences in the cognitive mechanisms that underlie these intuitions can be identified, then progress could be made in understanding why – and predicting when – punishment will be desired across a variety social contexts.

The aim of the proposed research is to investigate differences between the punitive judgments in second- and third-party punishment contexts. Previous work has not carefully distinguished between second part and third-party punishment. For example, research on third-party punishment used both the public goods game (e.g., Fehr & Gächter, 2002) and a dictator game (e.g., Kahneman et al., 1986; Bernhard et al., 2006) to elicit norm violation in the first stage of an experiment, followed by an opportunity to punish. It is, however, crucial to note that the two paradigms differ, and one of them (public goods game paradigm) involves a situation where there is no one single victim but the cost of defection is diffused among the group members. The first step towards a systematic study of 2PP and 3PP will involve a structural analysis of the paradigms used in studies of punishment. The proposed line of research will carefully manipulate parameters to examine whether, holding everything else constant, revenge and third party punishment differ.

Specifically, the proposed series of studies will use three experimental methods: (1) a binary version of the dictator game with an option of second-party punishment, 2PP-DG (illustrating typical revenge cases where the victims are given an opportunity to punish their offenders), (2) a binary dictator game with an option of third-party punishment, 3PP-DG (illustrating typical third-party cases where a punisher is clearly neither a victim nor a stakeholder, but an impartial spectator that acts on moral sentiments), (3) and a public goods game, PGG (illustrating the borderline cases where it is not yet clear whether a motivation to punish stems from retaliatory or moralistic concerns, or some combination of the two). Within the above experimental contexts, we will manipulate factors that we hypothesize would highlight the functional differences between the 2PP and 3PP psychologies. These will include (a) varying time horizon of an interaction (i.e., one-shot vs. repeated games), (b) presence or absence of an audience (i.e., public vs. private nature of the punitive judgment), and (c) the offender's knowledge of the source of punishment. We focus on these factors to compare and contrast deterrence goals and reputation effects in 2PP and 3PP. Our dependent variables will be (d) frequency of a decision to punish, and (e) severity of the assigned punishment

We predict that the extended time horizon will increase punishment in 2PP but not in 3PP; the presence of the audience will have a greater effect on an increase of punishment in 3PP than in 2PP; and in the presence of the audience, the offender's lack of awareness who administers punishment will decrease punishment in 2PP but not in 3PP.

We will run three versions of 2PP-DG and 3PP-DG (manipulating one of the three factor at a time, two levels each), six treatments, 240 subjects total. Our subjects will be university students. Our experiment will elaborate on the Fehr and Fischbacher's (2004) design by testing a similar structure while introducing three novel manipulations. Finally, the results will inform our choice of factors for the subsequent 3-person PGG condition, 60 subjects total.

The proposed research will generate a rich set of data relevant to the debates on the function of the third-party punishment, psychology of law, moral thinking, international conflict, and many other domains of human social activity.

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