Indirect Reciprocity and the Evolution of "Moral Signals"

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Abstract:
Indirect reciprocity is an important feature of human moral systems as is our use of "moral signals" which both carry information about others and recommend action toward them. It has ben suggested that language may plan an important role in the reputation tracking that allows indirect reciprocity to evolve. I examine a simple model of indirect reciprocity that allows individuals to send signals to each other about previous interactions, enabling them to classify others as "good" or "bad." The aim is to investigate the coevolution of indirect reciprocity and a signaling system that can maintain it. In this setting, I find that without some external benefit for the "appropriate" use of signals, such a coevolution of cooperation and "moral signals" is implausible.