

Turns out 'dirty money' does bother people

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People tend to view money through a moral lens and are more likely to turn down or donate stolen bills and coins than "clean" cash, a new study has found.

Classic economics suggests that the only thing that matters about [money](#) is its amount, not what it looks like or where it has been. However, researchers from Yale and the University of Michigan show that people

evaluate money based on its moral history.

"People seem to believe that money inherits moral valence from its past," said Arber Tasimi, a graduate student in the Yale Department of Psychology and lead author of the study appearing Dec. 19 in the journal *Cognitive Science*.

Across eight experiments with more than 1,000 [participants](#), Tasimi and co-author Susan Gelman of the University of Michigan asked [people](#) how much they wanted money described in five different scenarios. Two of these scenarios established the participants' baseline attitudes towards money.

The remaining three scenarios served as the researchers' key measures. In two of these scenarios, participants were offered stolen money, either by the person who stole it or by a person who found it. In the final scenario, a thief stole money and stored it in his pocket but offered participants an equivalent sum of non-stolen money stored in his desk.

People were much less likely to want money that was stolen, whether the amount was big or small, likely to get them into trouble or not, or offered to them actually or hypothetically. And, when asked what they would do with tainted money, participants expressed a desire to donate it to charity, to counteract its negative [moral](#) status.

"A dollar isn't just a dollar. Moral history guides our behavior and understanding of the material world," Tasimi said.

Provided by Yale University

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