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**When reputation matters, punishment may be reduced to the extreme cases**

**In human societies, social misconduct for personal gain is restrained by the withdrawal of social support and additional direct punishment is preferred to discipline the worst social loafers.**

How can members of society be motivated to act socially responsible? How can we encourage states to contribute to the preservation of the global climate? These questions are central to human societies and crucially depend on the cooperation of their members, in particular in social dilemma situations in which individual and social interests are at odds. Two mechanisms successfully enhancing cooperation on a sustainable level have been identified so far: economists discovered the possibility of direct peer punishment and biologists detected the possibility of the deprivation of social support for members with a bad social reputation as mechanisms for sustaining cooperation on a high level. The economist Prof. Dr. Bettina Rockenbach (University of Erfurt, Germany) and the evolutionary biologist Prof. Dr. Manfred Milinski (Max-Planck-Institute of Limnology, Plön, Germany) studied the interaction of these two mechanisms in a joint experimental study. The result is published in *Nature*, Dec. 7, 2006: Humans do not abstain from a direct punishing of social loafers, even when those were already “punished” by withholding social support and the punishment is costly for the punisher. When given a choice, humans even prefer a combination of reputation building with punishment. Reputation mechanisms generate an environment in which the execution of punishment acts targeted to the free-riders has to be less frequent, however, without taking away its deterring force. The interaction between these two mechanisms boosts cooperation almost to the full level. Upshot: Punishment and reputation are not substitutes that may easily replace one another, but omnipresent interacting forces in human cooperation. When a good reputation is an important asset in society, punishment may be reduced to cases of hardship.

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