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### The Biocognition of Personal Ethics

Although the fight or flight consequences of stress have been widely accepted as contributors to many illnesses due to sustained cortisol release and its effects on immune regulation, there is mounting evidence that emotions triggered by moral violations and cultural admonishments can be as damaging, through other immunological processes.

In my theory of Biocognition (how cultural and spiritual beliefs affect health and longevity), I argue that "bioethics" should encompass more than the tenets for moral and humanistic behavior in the life sciences. It is also the psychoneuroimmunological responses to behavior that violate the ethics assimilated from cultural and spiritual beliefs.

Violations of personal ethics cause imbalances that can lead to illness without necessarily having increases in cortisol. For example, there is a differential immunological response to shame versus guilt as measured by proinflammatory products. Moreover, one of the more powerful immune enhancers is triggered by observing or experiencing acts of compassion as measured by increased protective immune function. In this paper, I present a Biocognitive model that takes bioethics beyond its philosophical domain to address how biology is affected by moral violations (e.g. guilt), by cultural admonishments (e.g. shame), and by exalted emotions (e.g. compassion).

Thus, while the fight or flight model elegantly demonstrates how threats to physical or emotional safety trigger stress hormones, the Biocognitive model addresses how violations of moral tenets affect other immune functions that appear to be more sensitive to ethical consciousness than to survival behavior. Consequently, while stress hormones and proinflammatory products can contribute to illness, the more exalted emotions that support humanistic consciousness can enhance immune function to promote healing. Research literature will be presented to suggest how the immune system functions within a bioethical model.