Psychopaths tend to break rules either for personal gain or for gaining pleasure from others’ suffering, moral rules in the way others do. Additionally, research has shown that psychopaths do have basic this ability to observe and abide by the moral rules has been observed in psychopaths both within and outside the moral community, possibly increasing in severity.

Psychopaths are not morally blind because “morally blind” suggests that a person is unable to notice moral rules in the same way that a physically blind person cannot see. I disagree; it is possible for psychopaths to notice the moral rules that surround them, but they do not feel the emotional weight. This ability to observe and abide by the moral rules has been observed in psychopaths both within and outside of the prison system.

The debate over whether psychopaths are morally blind reflects a larger controversy surrounding the checklist, the basic personality traits include:

- Glib and superficial charm
- Grandiose (exaggerately high) estimation of self
- Need for stimulation
- Pathological lying
- Cynicism and manipulativeness
- Lack of remorse or guilt
- Shallow affect (superficial emotional responsiveness)
- Callousness and lack of empathy
- Parasitic lifestyle
- Poor behavioral controls
- Sexually promiscuous
- Early behavior problems
- Lack of realistic long-term goals
- Impulsivity
- Irresponsibility
- Failure to accept responsibility for own actions
- Many short-term, muddled relationships
- Juvenile delinquency
- Revocation of conditional release
- Criminal versatility

I would like to clarify that psychopathy is not a set of traits that come and go (e.g. a person who has experienced a pronounced lack of remorse and empathy, and by a persistent tendency to disregard the effects of one’s actions on others). If a person is able to choose whether to adhere to moral rules, then it seems evident he knows when he is breaking them.

If a person is able to choose whether to adhere to moral rules, then it seems evident he knows when he is breaking them. Psychopaths tend to break rules either for personal gain or for gaining pleasure from others’ suffering, a situation which serves as further evidence that psychopaths know when they are breaking the rules. As such, they should definitely be held accountable for their willful non-adherence to the rules.

References:
5. Blameworthiness

In addition to culpability, psychopaths are worthy of blame. Blame can also be a useful tool in keeping psychopaths compliant within society. Psychopaths may be unable to truly feel remorse, however, the sole purpose of blame is not merely punitive, but pedagogical. While a psychopath may never feel or display true remorse, it may be useful to express blame as an expression of distaste.

This blame and resulting punishment may teach the psychopath how his actions affect others and show the responses those actions elicit, which may stop him repeating the same actions in the future out of concern for the practical repercussions.

Limitations

Blameworthiness

Dr. Gary Watson, in his essay “Responsibility and the Limits of Evil: Variations on a Strawsonian theme,” argues that if a person is outside the moral community—which one may claim about a psychopath—then there is no way that he is blameworthy. However, most psychopaths are not entirely apart from the moral community. Psychopaths predominately live and function within the community, following the moral and social rules to the extent necessary to lead the life they choose. The fact that they tend to follow these rules (and usually expect others to do the same) suggests that they are choosing to be a part of the moral community in some way.

The fact that a psychopath expects to be treated within the rules of the community necessitates that he be fully treated as a member of that community.

Discussion

Psychopaths have the capacity to play a very important role in neuroscience, neuroethics, and moral philosophy in general. One is able to examine various questions about morality and how to treat immoral behavior by observing the behavior of psychopaths and through the studies that have been carried out on these individuals. Psychopaths are both culpable and blameworthy, since they are able to recognize the social and moral rules and in general choose to exist within the moral community. Blame may not only have some learning benefit to the psychopath, but it may also allow the person who was wronged to feel a little better (although whether this is an appropriate use of blame is a different question). This conclusion can be useful in our lives both personally and within the legal system. However, it leads to further important questions:

1. Should we forgive psychopaths?
2. What does it mean to forgive a person who would never be sincerely repentant?

Answering these questions should be the next step for philosophical discussions about psychopaths and how to treat them if they are to live as a part of the moral community.