

# No, Mornings Don't Make You Moral

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## *The New Yorker:*

The idea of the virtuous early bird goes back at least to Aristotle, who wrote, in his *Economics*, that “Rising before daylight is ... to be commended; it is a healthy habit.” Benjamin Franklin, of course, framed the same sentiment in catchier terms: “Early to Bed, and early to rise, makes a Man healthy, wealthy and wise.” More recently, there has been a push for ever earlier work starts, conference calls, and breakfast meetings, and a steady stream of advice to leave Twitter and Facebook to the afternoon and spend the morning getting real things done. And there may be some truth to the idea: a 1998 study in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* suggests that we become more passive as the day wears on. You should do the most important thing first, the theory goes, because, well, you won't be able to do it quite as well later on.

In last January's issue of *Psychological Science*, Maryam Kouchaki and Isaac Smith took that theory even further, proposing what they called the morning morality effect, which posits that people behave better earlier in the day. Their research caught the attention of Sunita Sah, a behavioral scientist at Georgetown University and a professed night owl. For the previous five years, Sah had been studying how different situations influence ethical behavior. “You always hear these sweeping statements: morning is saintly, evening is bad; early to bed, early to rise,” she told me recently. A former physician, she found it plausible that something with such profound health consequences as time of day might also have a moral dimension. But she wondered how strong the effect really was. Were people like her—principled late risers—the exception to the rule? To test the limits of Kouchaki and Smith's findings, Sah and her colleagues began by looking at the underlying biology.

Read the whole story: [The New Yorker](#)