

## BIAS, SAFEGUARDS, AND THE LIMITS OF INDIVIDUALS

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A COMMENTARY ON Hasko von Kriegstein (2022), “The Radical Behavioral Challenge and Wide-Scope Obligations in Business,” *J Bus Ethics* 177(3): 507–517,

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-020-04716-w>

### ABSTRACT

The *Radical Behavioral Challenge* (RBC) contends that due to normal human cognitive biases, many standard prescriptions of business ethics run afoul of the principle that ‘ought implies can.’ Von Kriegstein responds to this challenge by arguing that those prescriptions are wide-scope obligations that can be fulfilled by recusing oneself or by establishing appropriate safeguards. I argue that this solution falls short of fully resolving the RBC because individuals will often be incapable of recognizing when they are biased and incapable of establishing appropriate safeguards.

**RESEARCH IN BEHAVIORAL** ethics suggests that it is “psychologically impossible” for accountants to remain objective while auditing their clients’ books (Bazerman and Tenbrunsel 2002: 137). Even honest accountants will tend to produce audits that are systematically skewed in their clients’ favor because of an array of normal human cognitive biases. This is an example of bounded ethicality: people who consciously aim to abide by ethical principles often fail to do so because unconscious biases lead them astray in ways that are difficult, if not impossible, to consciously notice and avoid.

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