

Personality, Identity, and Character

EXPLORATIONS IN MORAL PSYCHOLOGY

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Introduction

In the last decade there has been a remarkable resurgence of interest in studying moral rationality within the broad context of personality, selfhood, and identity. Although a concern with the moral self was never entirely absent from the cognitive developmental approach to moral reasoning, it is fair to say that sustained preoccupation with the ontogenesis of justice reasoning did not leave much room for reflection on how moral cognition intersects with personological processes. Indeed, some topics, such as moral personality, moral selfhood and identity, and the study of virtues and of character were pushed to the margins for paradigmatic or strategic reasons, because, for example, such notions could not be reconciled to moral judgment stage-typing, or could not provide what was wanted most, which was a way to defeat ethical relativism on psychological grounds.

Yet the neglect of the moral dimensions of selfhood and personality could not endure for long, mostly because moral notions go to the very heart of what it means to be a person. Moral notions penetrate our conceptions of what it means to live well the life that is good for one to live. These are foundational questions that have commanded deep reflection since antiquity, reflection that psychological science cannot evade, not the least because the moral formation of children is the central concern of parents, schools, and communities who are charged with educating the next generation. It matters to us that we raise children to be persons of a certain kind. It matters to us that we become such persons. In this respect there are few domains of study more crucial than moral psychology, and few topics of greater importance than the development of moral self-identity, moral character, and moral personality.

Yet moral psychology is not a cohesive field of study, and, indeed, psychology is not a unified discipline. As a result, research that is relevant

to moral psychology can be found in diverse literatures and fields of study that invariably invoke different theoretical traditions, methodologies, and terms of reference. Some of the best writings on moral psychology are not written by psychologists at all, in fact, but by philosophers, two of whom are contributors to this volume. Oftentimes researchers who study dispositions do so without the moral domain in mind. Or, those who study the dispositional aspects of moral functioning – under the headings, say, of moral self-identity, character, or personality – propose powerful and interesting models, albeit without developmental grounding, bypassing entirely relevant developmental literatures that might serve integrative purposes. In turn developmental research on moral self-identity would profit from the well-attested literatures of social and personality psychology that flesh out adult forms of moral psychological functioning. As it stands now, “moral personality” is like an orphan who wanders about developmental, personality, and social psychological neighborhoods, recognizing some common-places but getting lost all the same.

We would like to bring the study of moral personality home to an integrative field of study. The purpose of this edited volume is to provide a seedbed for the study of the moral self and the nature of moral identity, personality, and character. The impetus for this volume was the 2006 *Notre Dame Symposium on Personality and Moral Character*, which brought together renowned scholars from diverse perspectives to wrestle with how best to understand the moral dimensions of personality, and what this might require by way of theory and methodology. To our knowledge this was the first time that nationally visible scholars representing developmental, social, personality, and cognitive psychology were assembled to address theoretical and empirical questions regarding moral selfhood, personality, and identity. A second *Notre Dame Symposium* in 2008, held under the auspices of Notre Dame’s College of Arts and Letters Henkels Lecture Series, resulted in more voices being added to the ongoing conversation.

The aim of the two Notre Dame symposia, and now of this volume, is to carve out space for a new field of study on the moral self that is deeply integrative across the domains of psychology, philosophy, and neuroscience. Heretofore, the fragmented research on moral personality has been mostly a study of cognition without desires, rationality without brains, agents without contexts, selves without culture, traits without persons, persons without attachments, dispositions without development. We hope the present volume starts to change all that. One will find here diverse points of view and genuine disagreement about the meaning of foundational constructs,

to be sure, but we are confident that the volume points the way to promising integrative futures.

OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTERS

The volume includes contributions from philosophy, personality, neuroscience, and from social and developmental psychology. We were tempted to group this overview by discipline, but such an organizing scheme would only reinforce disciplinary boundaries and undermine the volume's thematic intention, which is that such boundaries are likely to get in the way of strong integrative theory building and research.

The first two chapters set the pace for the volume by presenting options for moral personality from the perspective of extant theory and research in personality science. In the first chapter, Dan McAdams explores the implications of his "new Big Five" perspective for the moral personality, while Daniel Cervone and Ritu Tripathi take up the social cognitive option in the second.

For McAdams, personality is (1) an individual's unique variation on general evolutionary design for human nature, which is (2) experienced as a pattern of dispositional traits, (3) characteristic adaptations, and (4) self-defining life narratives, which are (5) situated complexly in social contexts and culture. If one wants to ask about moral personality, one must first specify at what level the question is directed. Moral personality is a plural concept. Moral considerations are embedded at each level, although perhaps morality is of prime importance in the construction of self-defining life stories – the internalized and evolving narratives that people construct to make meaning and find purpose in life. In summarizing 15 years of research on life stories of generative adults, McAdams contends that life stories of personal redemption are particularly valued as a powerful narrative of virtue and goodness in American adult life, one that provides a script that motivates, sustains, and provides meaning for moral projects.

In Cervone and Tripathi's view, a more flexible approach to personality theory is available in the social-cognitive perspective. They emphasize a model that includes cognitive appraisal and the limits of working memory that can move us down the road in explaining the shifting behavior people exhibit. They show how the Knowledge-and-Appraisal Architecture (KAPA) model of personality best captures the distinction between affective and cognitive processes, and contextual variation, in disposition. KAPA provides a way to characterize the consistency in personality across situations

by combining “enduring knowledge about the self” and “dynamic processes of meaning construction that occur within a given encounter,” factors that vary idiosyncratically and are constrained by working memory limitations. In each situation, the individual appraises affordances based on self-efficacy (knowledge of self) in the context (beliefs about the situation). Appraisals operate continually as dynamic functions within situations, allowing the individual to select an appropriate course of action.

Owen Flanagan ([Chapter 3](#)) and David Wong ([Chapter 4](#)) each provide powerful philosophical perspectives on personality and identity. Flanagan defends the notion of personality against recent claims that character traits do not exist or, if they do exist, are trumped easily by the demand characteristics of situations. He also unpacks problematic metaphysical assumptions that underlie self-narratives, including the notion of “free will,” and certain master-narratives (“hard work and effort pay”) that function like heuristics, but are larded with descriptive and normative claims that do not bear analysis. His point here is that proper moral education requires the examination and critique of the metaphysical assumptions underlying moral precepts, especially in regards to master-narratives about the self or the good life.

In [Chapter 4](#), Wong explores the interplay among culture, morality, and identity. In his naturalistic theory, moralities are part of culture. After sorting out various philosophical difficulties with respect to culture, Wong proposes that we think of culture as a kind of conversation that necessarily involves plural voices, and he works out the implications of this metaphor for understanding moral identity. For example, he points out the differences between a conversationalist view of culture – one that fluctuates, exhibits tensions, diversity, and contradictions – and an essentialist view that considers culture fixed and static. The conversationalist view allows the individual to select which aspects of a culture to adopt, to adapt, or reject. Within this conversation, one’s moral identity may also fluctuate. Wong urges us to consider that such culturally flexible behavior may also apply to morality. Individuals may be not only linguistically bilingual but also morally bilingual.

The first four chapters, then, provide overviews and critiques of moral personality from psychological and philosophical perspectives. The next two chapters take up neuroscience and evolutionary perspectives on moral functioning. In [Chapter 5](#), Jorge Moll, Ricardo de Oliveira-Souza, and Roland Zahn review the research on moral cognitive neuroscience. They stress that human emotion and cognition functionally are not separate but intertwined, which is most evident in the experience of a moral dilemma

when motivational significance is linked to abstract symbols and ideas. They note that the neurophysiology of attachment often underlies moral motivation. The brain systems that promote attachment enable humans to imbue other things with motivational abstract meaning, or what the authors' call "sophisticated moral sentiments." These allow an individual to embrace broader notions of "other" as understood by his culture, which Moll et al. term "extended attachment," at the same time "promoting altruistic behaviors within sociocultural groups" and "facilitating outgroup moralistic aggression."

The next chapter by Darcia Narvaez also builds on evolutionary neuroscience to suggest a dynamic view of moral personality, expressed as three ethics rooted in evolved strata of the brain. The three basic moral orientations – Security, Engagement, and Imagination – can be dispositional or situationally activated, influencing perceptual processing and goal salience. The most primitive and related to survival, Security, becomes the default ethic, if early experience is too far from the environment of evolutionary adaptedness. To develop sophistication, the other ethics require nurturing experience during sensitive periods. Narvaez challenges moral psychology to pay more attention to early development, sensitive periods, and their relation to moral functioning.

In [Chapter 7](#), Ross Thompson reviews developmental literatures that speak to the development of moral character in early childhood. After reviewing classic moral developmental theories, he explores current research findings on the development achievements of infants and young children, including the ability to understand others' needs, awareness of intentionality and of normative behavioral standards. Although these literatures are not traditionally considered a contribution to moral development, they are clearly foundational to the emergence of the moral self. Thompson also reviews evidence regarding moral affect and on the development of conscience, which he regards as the foundation of the moral personality. Conscience can be defined as the cognitive, affective, and relational processes that influence how young children construct and act consistently with generalizable, internal standards of conduct. The burgeoning research on early conscience development shows that young children are developing moral orientations that are simpler, but fundamentally similar, to those of older children and adolescents, and that the moral capacities of youngsters have been underestimated. Thompson argues that the conceptual foundations of moral reasoning are well-established in early childhood; and that the development of cooperation and compliance and other features of the moral self are bound up with the dynamics of early relationships with caregivers.

Daniel Lapsley and Patrick Hill ([Chapter 8](#)) also take up developmental issues, but their starting point is modern personality theory. Lapsley and Hill begin by considering some broad issues concerning the basic units of personality, and recent advances in understanding the trait-structure and types of personality. They then extract five themes from the extant empirical literature on personality development – including temperament, persons, and contexts, continuity and consequence, the special status of early adulthood – and explore their implications for theory and research in the moral character development literature. After noting the two traditions of social cognitive development, Lapsley and Hill attempt to explicate a possible developmental course for the social cognitive mechanisms that seem to underlie moral self-identity, as well as prospects for future integrative research.

In [Chapter 9](#), Daniel Hart and Kyle Matsuba present a distinctive model which claims that the contours of moral identity are constrained not only by stable aspects of personality but also by characteristics of family and neighborhood, a view that aligns with the best insights of developmental contextualism. By invoking two constituent layers to moral personality – enduring “dispositional traits” and “characteristic adaptations” – the model shares some affinity with the “new Big Five” framework of McAdams, “but it emphasizes the importance of broader contextual influences as well.” Whereas moral identity includes self-awareness, a sense of self-integration, and continuity over time, a commitment to plans of action and an attachment to one’s moral goals, moral identity is also a joint product of personal and contextual factors. They review evidence of factors that lead to moral commitment, including relationships that draw adolescents into moral activities and protect against “moral collapse.” Community service is one such activity that promotes moral identity and civic engagement.

The new Big Five framework is also put to good use by Lawrence Walker and Jeremy Frimer ([Chapter 10](#)) who examined adult brave and caring exemplars. Walker and Frimer assessed moral personality at the levels of dispositional traits, characteristic adaptations, and integrative self-narratives, along with moral reasoning. Overall, caring and brave exemplars were distinguished in their personality profiles, with strong differences (favoring caring exemplars) evident in nurturance, generativity, and optimistic affective tone. Moreover, the caring exemplars’ communal, generative, and affiliation/intimacy orientations were evident both at the levels of characteristic adaptations and in the life-story narratives. Differences between moral exemplars and non-exemplars were also examined and were best revealed, not so much at the level of dispositions and adaptations, but at the level of life-story narratives. Walker and Frimer identified a foundational core to the moral personality,

which is characterized by (1) an orientation to agency and communion; (2) the tendency to reframe critical life events redemptively, that is, as leading to positive results; (3) the presence of mentors and helpers in early life; and (4) the quality of childhood attachments.

Robert Emmons (Chapter 11) describes the rich yield that result from explicating the features of a particular virtue – gratitude – and the role it plays in motivating moral action. For Emmons, gratitude serves as a moral barometer that provides one with an affective readout, which accompanies the perception that another has treated one prosocially, as well as with a moral motive. Reviewing evidence of the “moral motive hypothesis,” Emmons shows that gratitude shapes prosocial responding, and that gratitude is a psychologically substantive experience, relevant to how people negotiate their moral and interpersonal lives.

From gratitude we move on to the dispositional basis of altruism. Is there such a thing as the “altruistic personality”? Gustavo Carlo, Lisa PytlikZillig, Scott Roesch, and Richard Dienstbier (Chapter 12) think there is. After reviewing the empirical basis of their claim, they describe a study on those who volunteer others to help victims, reporting that those with greater altruism were more likely to volunteer themselves, especially when trait distress was high. Moreover, sex differences were found for those volunteering others. Men with high distress and high prosocial traits were *more* likely to send others to help whereas women with these traits were *less* likely to do so. Carlo and his colleagues conclude with some fertile suggestions for future research.

In Chapter 13, Michal Pratt, Mary Louise Arnold, and Heather Lawford take up the relationship between prosocial moral identity and a sense of generativity in adulthood, using narrative strategies that build on McAdams’s life-narratives approach. They articulate a refreshing theoretical perspective that cuts across traditional developmental psychology, personality theory, and family studies, integrating life-course and systems perspectives. Following Erikson, they consider identity and morality to be mutually sustaining, and identity to be a central motivation throughout the life span. Pratt, Arnold, and Lawford present evidence for the early construction of generative moral themes during adolescence and emergent adulthood. These themes are revealed in the stories that adolescents tell about their lives and, in particular, in their account of their commitment to moral ideals. Hence the authors show the usefulness of tracing themes of identity through the lifespan, but also that of generativity.

After considering the nature of gratitude (Chapter 11), altruism (Chapter 12), and generativity (Chapter 13), the volume next examines the problem of

integrity, personal responsibility, and moral identity. Barry Schlenker, Marisa Miller, and Ryan Johnson ([Chapter 14](#)) argue that what determines the strength of the relationship between moral beliefs and moral behavior is a person's commitment to ethical ideologies. These ideologies function as a dominant schema that influences the appraisal of the social landscape and guides behavior. Some individuals have steadfast commitment to ethical ideologies ("integrity"), while others view the commitment as expedient and adaptable. The authors view the principled-expedient continuum because of its implications for moral identity, self-regulation, and moral behavior, and because it captures some of the great tensions in human affairs. Schlenker designed the Integrity Scale to measure steadfast commitment to ethical principles. Research using the scale indicates that integrity is accurately perceived by friends, is reflected in self-beliefs, affects social judgment, and predicts pro-social and anti-social activities. The authors conclude with an account of the "triangle model of responsibility," which explains when and why the self-system becomes engaged in moral action (or disengages from undesirable behavior).

[Chapter 15](#), by Benoit Monin and Alex Jordan, takes up a social psychological account of the moral self. After challenging a self-consistency view of moral identity, the authors draw a distinction among three other possible meanings: moral identity as a normative ideal (a type of identity that has deeply integrated moral values and leads to an exemplary life); moral identity as a stable personality variable (how much one sees the self as a moral person); and moral identity as a dynamic and reflective self-image (a fluctuating sense of one's morality at any given moment). As social psychologists, they focused on the third meaning. They argue that everyday situations and behaviors affect our moral self-regard from moment to moment, and that this fluctuating self-regard in turn affects later behavior. They review empirical evidence to show that that when people are made secure about their morality – in the sense that they have already demonstrated their "moral credentials" – they sometimes act less morally. They also find that people sometimes boost their moral self-image to compensate for failure in other domains. When the behavior of moral exemplars is seen as an indictment of other people's choices, they are disliked rather than admired.

Linda Skitka and Scott Morgan argue in [Chapter 16](#) that a moral frame of mind can cut both ways as a "double-edged sword." That is, the way that people's moral concerns play out in everyday social interaction may not always have normatively virtuous implications. For example, stronger moral conviction about specific issues is associated with more intolerance of attitudinally dissimilar others in both intimate (e.g., that of a friend)

and distant (e.g., with the owner of a store one frequents) relationships; lower levels of goodwill and cooperativeness in attitudinally heterogeneous groups; and decreased ability to compromise on procedural solutions for conflict. People are also more likely to perceive vigilantism and other sacrifices of due process as fair when they achieve “moral” ends. This “double-edged sword” of moral perception shows that what can be described from the mindset of the actor as moral is nonetheless condemned as immoral from the mindset of the observer. Although primarily associated with prosocial and positive consequences, people’s moral convictions, motives, and sentiments are sometimes associated with negative and antisocial consequences as well. As a result, the authors warn that efforts to increase the centrality of moral identity or of moral concerns could have paradoxical effects – and double-edged swords – that lead as much to negative as to positive consequences.

A social cognitive theory of moral identity is endorsed in [Chapter 17](#) by Karl Aquino and Dan Freeman. What is prized about this line of research is its application to a specific context, which is the ecology of business settings. For the authors, moral identity is a self-regulatory mechanism that motivates choices, behaviors, and responsiveness to others, to the extent that identification with morality is judged as highly self-important. Indeed, whether moral identity influences moral behavior hinges on its salience, that is to say, its self-importance. Moral identity is motivational to the extent that one desires to maintain self-consistency. However, the authors point out that the salience of moral identity can be influenced by situational factors, including financial incentives, group norms, and role models. These factors may increase or decrease the salience of moral identity within one’s working self-concept. Moral identity exerts greater regulatory control and motivational potency when situational factors elevate its salience. The authors review empirical evidence for the social-cognitive view of moral identity, along with certain moderators of moral identity, particularly as these apply to business settings.

The volume’s final chapter ([Chapter 18](#)) is by Augusto Blasi, whose writings on moral self, identity, and personality are considered classic and foundational to the emerging discipline. In his chapter, Blasi seems to take a sharp turn from his usual emphasis on the moral self to an emphasis on the importance of reflective reasoning of the mature moral agent. He offers a masterful critique of the intuitionist shift in some areas of moral psychology, taking on in turn, Haidt (2001), Hauser (2006), and Gigerenzer (2008). Calling on evolutionary explanations, these theorists present rather fuzzy and unfalsifiable theories about the primacy of evolved heuristics

and intuitions in moral judgment, despite the fact that they admit intuitions often lead us astray. Blasi is critical of their dismissal of the reality and importance of reasoned reflection in the way we live our moral lives. In emphasizing the dominance of intuition and heuristics in moral judgment, not only do they ignore everyday moral functioning, they ignore the great number of studies conducted showing how reasoning and reflection are normal parts of adult lives. Blasi presents sample types of skills adults need for optimal functioning, and advocates a shift in emphasis in the field toward understanding mature adult functioning.

The volume concludes with a brief reflection by the editors on some of the recurring themes and tensions that resonate throughout the volume, and with some ideas for an interdisciplinary field of moral personality studies.

We thank the University of Notre Dame for its generous support for hosting the two symposia around which this volume was developed. We thank everyone who attended the symposia, and the volume contributors for their inestimable scholarship. We thank Eric Schwartz for his efforts in getting the project off the ground and Simina Calin for seeing it through to completion. The first editor thanks the Spencer Foundation for its support during the completion of this project. We hope this volume has a galvanizing impact on a new, integrative field of study.

The Moral Personality

DAN P. MCADAMS

Going back to the ancient Hebrews and Greeks, Western writers have struggled to characterize morality and to define a moral life. Poets and storytellers have told moving tales of human virtue and evil, of how people have led moral lives or failed to live up to moral standards. Philosophers, theologians, and lawmakers have codified morality in terms of legal systems, moral imperatives, ethical standards, commandments, norms, rules, principles, and a vast array of codes and constructs designed to regulate, sanction, and affirm certain forms of human conduct. In the last 100 years, psychologists have gotten into the act. From William James to Lawrence Kohlberg, psychological theorists and researchers have proposed their own conceptions of moral life, typically couching their pronouncements in the language of science and backing up their claims with empirical data. Psychologists have invoked such terms as moral development, moral character, moral identity, moral schemas and values, altruism, cooperation, prosocial behavior, conscience, and the like. Until recently, however, few writers have explicitly discussed the prospects of a *moral personality*. Picking up the central theme in the current volume, this chapter makes a case for the viability of this new term and for the psychological and social complexity it brings to the fore.

What is a moral personality? The question implicitly assumes an answer to a more general question: What is *personality*? The author of the first authoritative textbook on personality psychology – Gordon Allport (1937) – proposed 49 different definitions of personality before he settled on his own. Personality has been defined as a set of traits that assure individual continuity, as the motivated core of human behavior, as a self-regulating system designed to maximize adaptation to life’s challenges, and on and on. Shorn of its sexist language, Allport’s (1937) definition is still one of the best: Personality is “the dynamic organization within the individual of those psychophysical systems that determine his [the individual’s] unique

adjustments to his environment” (p. 48). Like Allport’s, most definitions envision personality as a broad and integrative thing that accounts for continuity in human behavior over time and across situations, and that captures some of the uniqueness of an individual life (McAdams, 1997). In the early and middle decades of the twentieth century, personality psychologists proposed and formulated a large number of grand theories aimed at capturing the breadth of the concept. Spelled out in exhaustive detail in textbooks on personality theory (Hall & Lindzey, 1957), these diverse and more or less irreconcilable systems were grouped into those espousing psychoanalysis (e.g., Freud, Jung, Adler, Horney, Fromm, Sullivan), humanism (Rogers, Maslow, May), behaviorism and social learning (Rotter, Bandura), personology (Murray, McClelland, White), traits and types (Eysenck, Guilford, Cattell), developmental stages (Erikson, Loewinger), and cognitive schemas (Kelly, Mischel).

Today the grand theories of personality are viewed mainly as historical set pieces. Contemporary perspectives on personality are typically much more limited, and more empirically grounded, than the grand theories ever were, as different researchers today carve out their own pieces of what Allport believed to be the “dynamic organization.” Nonetheless, the urge to synthesize disparate findings remains strong in personality psychology. To that end, a growing number of personality psychologists today are coming around to an integrative framework for the field of personality studies that conceives of personality itself in terms of five basic concepts (Hooker, 2002; McAdams, 1995, 2009; McAdams & Adler, 2006; McAdams & Pals, 2006; Roberts & Wood, 2006; Sheldon, 2004; Singer, 2005). In a broad synthesis drawn selectively from traditional theories and contemporary research trends, McAdams and Pals (2006) recently articulated this five-point framework for an integrative science of personality. They described personality as (1) an individual’s unique variation on the general evolutionary design for human nature, expressed as a developing pattern of (2) *dispositional traits*, (3) *characteristic adaptations*, and (4) *self-defining life narratives*, complexly and differentially situated in (5) culture and social context.

From the standpoint of McAdams and Pals (2006), each human life is an individual variation on a general design whose functional significance makes primary sense in terms of the human environment of evolutionary adaptedness (EEA). Variations on a small set of broad dispositional traits implicated in social life (both today and in the EEA) constitute the most stable and recognizable aspect of psychological individuality (McCrae & Costa, 1997). Beyond dispositional traits, however, human lives vary with respect to a wide range of motivational (Emmons, 1986; Little, 1999), social-cognitive

(Mischel & Shoda, 1995), and developmental (Elder, 1995; Erikson, 1963) adaptations, complexly contextualized in time, place, and/or social role. Beyond dispositional traits and characteristic adaptations, furthermore, human lives vary with respect to the integrative life stories, or personal narratives, that individuals construct to make meaning and identity in the modern world (McAdams, 1985, 2006, 2008; McLean, Pasupathi, & Pals, 2007; Sarbin, 1986; Tomkins, 1987). Culture exerts differential effects on different levels of personality: It exerts modest effects on the phenotypic expression of dispositional traits; it shows a stronger impact on the content and timing of characteristic adaptations; and it reveals its deepest and most profound influences on life stories, essentially providing a menu of themes, images, and plots for the psychosocial construction of narrative identity.

What then is a *moral* personality? It depends on what aspect of personality you are talking about – be it dispositional traits, characteristic adaptations, or life stories.

MORAL PERSONALITY AT THE LEVEL OF DISPOSITIONAL TRAITS

Personality begins with traits. From birth onward, psychological individuality may be observed with respect to broad dimensions of behavioral and emotional style that cut across situations and contexts and readily distinguish one individual from another (Caspi, Roberts, & Shiner, 2005). Through repeated and complex transactions between genes and environments over developmental time, early temperament differences morph into the broad traits of personality that may be observed in adulthood, and that go by such names as “extraversion,” “dominance,” and the tendency toward “depressiveness.” Typically assessed via self-report scales, dispositional traits account for broad consistencies in behavior across situations and over time. A considerable body of research speaks to the longitudinal continuity of dispositional traits, their substantial heritability, and their ability to predict important life outcomes, such as psychological well-being, job success, and mortality (McAdams, 2009; Ozer & Benet-Martinez, 2006; Roberts & Pomerantz, 2004). Decades of factor-analytic studies conducted around the world suggest, furthermore, that the broad universe of trait dimensions may be organized into about five regions or clusters, now routinely called the Big Five (Goldberg, 1993; McCrae & Costa, 1997). The most well-known conception of the Big Five divides traits into the categories of extraversion (vs. introversion), neuroticism (vs. emotional stability), conscientiousness, agreeableness, and openness to experience.

The Big Five traits capture broad variations in human social behavior that human beings have evolved to take note of and to care about. It is not so much, then, that evolutionary forces have shaped levels of the Big Five traits (although this, in principle, could be true as well), as it is the fact that *humans have evolved to note variations in these kinds of traits*, for these variations have important bearing on adaptation to group life. As cognitively gifted and exquisitely social animals, living in groups and striving to get along and get ahead in the environment of evolutionary adaptedness, human beings have been designed by natural selection to detect differences in others with respect to such qualities as how sociable and dominant a person is (extraversion), the extent to which a person is caring and cooperative (agreeableness), a person's characteristic level of dependability and industriousness (conscientiousness), levels of emotional stability and dysfunction in other people (neuroticism), and the extent to which a person may be cognitively flexible or rigid in facing a range of adaptive problems (openness to experience) (Buss, 1996; Hogan, 1982). For human beings, relative success in meeting a wide range of adaptive problems – from raising viable progeny to building effective coalitions – may depend, in part, on the accurate perception and judicious assessment of such qualities of mind as dominance, friendliness, honesty, stability, and openness. Factor-analytic studies of trait ratings in societies the world over suggest that the Big Five structure, or something very close to it, emerges in many different cultures and language traditions (Church, 2000). The reason is clear: The Big Five implicitly encodes those broad and pervasive individual differences in personality that have tended to make a big difference in adaptation to group life over the course of human evolution, as they continue to make a difference today.

For human beings (and for certain other primates, too), group life is moral life (de Waal, 1996). Human beings have evolved to be moral animals, to detect cheating and other breaches of moral standards, to uphold codes of moral conduct, and to react with righteous indignation, and even murderous intent, when those codes are violated (Tooby & Cosmides, 1992; Wright, 1994). Considerations of morality infuse social life. Human beings have evolved to express strong moral feelings, to hold deep moral intuitions, and to develop elaborate moral codes with respect to at least five domains of social life, argues Haidt (2007): (1) harm and suffering, (2) reciprocity and fair exchange, (3) authority and the hierarchical structure of groups, (4) loyalty and commitment to others, and (5) sacredness/purity. It should not be surprising to learn, therefore, that the five basic traits identified by personality psychologists carry considerable moral meaning.

For example, agreeableness speaks to caring and altruistic tendencies, and the opposite qualities of mean-spiritedness, callousness, and cruelty. People high in agreeableness may be more sensitive to the suffering of others, may be more positively disposed toward fairness and reciprocity, and may prove more loyal to others with whom they feel close bonds (Matsuba & Walker, 2004).

Conscientiousness encompasses qualities such as honesty and dependability in interpersonal relationships. A recent meta-analysis shows that adults who are high on the trait of conscientiousness tend to invest more heavily in family and work roles, tend to be more religiously observant, and tend to be more involved in prosocial volunteer activities, compared to individuals low in conscientiousness (Lodi-Smith & Roberts, 2007). Low levels of conscientiousness predict a wide range of outcomes that carry negative moral meaning – from substance abuse to dishonesty in the workplace (Bogg & Roberts, 2004; Roberts & Hogan, 2001). Adult conscientiousness may be the end result of a long and complex developmental course through which early-childhood temperament dimensions, such as conscience (Kochanska & Aksan, 2006) and effortful control (Li-Grinning, 2007), combine with propitious environmental experiences to produce a well-socialized, rule-abiding, hardworking, and civically minded adult.

The personality trait that may be most closely associated with moral reasoning and thought is openness to experience. People who are dispositionally high on openness tend to be highly imaginative, reflective, intellectual, and broadminded. They welcome change and complexity in life, and they show high levels of tolerance for ambiguity. By contrast, individuals lower in openness tend to be more concrete, dogmatic, and traditional. Openness tends to be positively associated with both education level and intelligence. Individuals high in openness to experience tend to score higher on Loevinger's (1976) ego development (McCrae & Costa, 1980), which itself is closely associated with Kohlberg's (1969) stages of moral reasoning. Therefore, high openness tends to predict postconventional moral reasoning in adults; low openness is associated with conventional and pre-conventional moral reasoning. Extremely low scores on openness, furthermore, tend to predict right-wing authoritarianism (Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003). A large empirical literature links authoritarianism to rigidity and intolerance in the moral and political realms, and to racism, sexism, and prejudice against outgroups (Altemeyer, 1996).

In sum, a number of broad dispositional traits appear to have implications for the moral personality. Certain dispositional profiles – high conscientiousness and agreeableness, and at least moderately high openness to

experience – tend to be associated with patterns of behavior and thought indicative of high moral functioning. Most generally, conscientiousness and agreeableness tend to predict pro-social behavior whereas openness to experience tends to predict principled moral reasoning. These general tendencies begin to sketch a dispositional outline of the moral personality. But a more detailed portrait requires the move to more subtle and contextualized aspects of personality. Dispositional traits can take us only so far in understanding how personality relates to morality. To articulate a more nuanced understanding, one must move from the dispositional sketch provided by personality traits to a second level of personality.

CHARACTERISTIC ADAPTATIONS: MORAL GOALS AND SCHEMAS

From middle childhood onward, human beings build a second layer of personality upon the dispositional base, even as that base continues to develop thereafter. Residing at the second level are characteristic adaptations – a wide assortment of motivational, social-cognitive, and developmental constructs that are more specific than dispositional traits and that are contextualized in time, place, and/or social role (McAdams, 2009; McAdams & Pals, 2006). Included in this list are motives, goals, strivings, personal projects, values, interests, defense mechanisms, coping strategies, relational schemata, possible selves, developmental concerns, and other variables of psychological individuality that speak directly to what people *want and do not want* (e.g., fear) in life and how they think about and go about getting what they want and avoiding what they do not want in particular situations, during particular times in their lives, and with respect to particular social roles. Characteristic adaptations have typically been the constructs of choice for classic motivational (Deci & Ryan, 1991; Murray, 1938/2008), social-cognitive (Cervone & Shoda, 1999; Mischel & Shoda, 1995), and developmental (Erikson, 1963; Loevinger, 1976) theories of personality. Whereas broad personality traits provide a dispositional sketch for psychological individuality, characteristic adaptations fill in many of the details.

Among those characteristic adaptations that are most instrumental in shaping morality are personal goals and projects (Freund & Riediger, 2006; Little, 1999). Goals and projects are always about the future – the imagined ends for tomorrow that guide behavior today. Research has shown that personal goals focused on caring for others and making positive contributions to society in the future are often associated with greater psychological well-being and reports of higher life meaning (Bauer & McAdams,

2004; Emmons, 1999; Kasser & Ryan, 1996). Findings like these suggest that certain features of a moral personality benefit not only others, but also the self.

As situations change, as people grow older, as individuals move from one social role to the next, goals and projects change to meet new demands and constraints. For example, as people move into their thirties, forties and beyond, their goals may reflect the greater developmental urgency of what Erikson (1963) called *generativity*. Generativity is an adult's concern for, or commitment to, promoting the well-being of future generations, as evidenced in parenting, teaching, mentoring, leadership, and engaging in a wide range of activities aimed at leaving a positive legacy of the self for the future (McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992). Erikson viewed generativity in highly moral terms (Browning, 2004; Wakefield, 1998). In their midlife years, adults face the moral challenge of providing care for the next generation and of contributing to the social good in ways that are congruent with and supportive of culture. Their efforts to do so may be bolstered or undermined by economic and psychological exigencies, by religious and political factors, and by the extent to which an adult is able to summon forth what Erikson (1963, p. 267) felicitously described as a "belief in the species" – a fundamental faith in the goodness and *worthwhileness* of the human enterprise.

Generative goals and inclinations wax and wane over the adult life course, as the social ecology of life changes to meet new developmental demands and the unpredictable contingencies of everyday life. At any given time, however, personalities can be compared and contrasted in terms of the extent to which generative goals and generative concerns predominate. A growing body of research shows that individual differences in generative goals and concerns predict a wide range of behaviors that have moral significance. For midlife adults, high scores on measures of generativity are positively associated with greater levels of involvement in children's education, patterns of parenting emphasizing both warmth and discipline, sustained efforts to pass on wisdom to the next generation, involvement in religious organizations, political participation, and volunteer work aimed at helping the poor (for reviews, see de St. Aubin, McAdams, & Kim, 2004; McAdams, 2001).

Another set of characteristic adaptations that bear directly on moral personality are value-laden cognitive schemas and personal ideologies. What are people's most cherished beliefs and values about what is good and true? How do they think through issues of morality in everyday life? Research in this domain ranges widely, from examinations of normative and humanistic ideological scripts (de St. Aubin, 1996, 1999) to the classic

studies of moral reasoning pioneered by Kohlberg (1969) and his associates. Examples of the former prioritize the content of people's moral beliefs and values, whereas the latter examine the structure of moral reasoning itself. A related line of research examines the extent to which moral schemas are activated in daily life. Individuals for whom knowledge structures linked to morality are quickly and consistently activated show high levels of *moral chronicity* (Narvaez, Lapsley, Hagele, & Lasky, 2006). Compared to low moral chronics, these individuals may have greater access to moral schemas and may use those schemas more frequently as guides for processing social information.

Representing different approaches to conceptualizing cognitive schemas about morality, personal ideologies, stages of moral reasoning, and levels of moral chronicity are integral components of the moral personality – as important to personality itself as are the fundamental Big Five traits. What makes them different from traits is their circumscribed and contextual nature. Whereas dispositional traits of conscientiousness and agreeableness describe cross-situational and longitudinal continuities in broad patterns of behavior, thought, and feeling, the more circumscribed constructs at Level 2 in personality – moral goals, moral schemas – speak to the contextualized details of personal morality. Whereas dispositional traits may show impressive continuity over time, the contextualized details of personal morality are likely to show much greater variability and sensitivity to developmental and social contingencies. Generative goals, for example, may prove to be important features of the moral personality during certain periods of life (e.g., midlife) but not during others; stages of moral reasoning may shape how people think about certain issues in life (e.g., fairness, justice) but not others; moral chronics have greater access to knowledge structures about morality but not to other kinds of knowledge structures. A broad accounting of moral personality requires, at minimum, the dispositional sketch and the contextualized details. But even that is not quite enough.

THE LIFE NARRATIVE AS A MORAL CONSTRUCTION

Late adolescence and young adulthood bring to the fore of personality the psychological problem of establishing an *identity* (Erikson, 1963; McAdams, 1985). In his theory of psychosocial development, Erikson viewed identity to be a special arrangement of the self. The arrangement functions to integrate disparate roles, goals, needs, fears, skills, and inclinations into a coherent pattern, a pattern that specifies how the emerging adult will live, love, work, and believe in a complex and changing world. The virtue of the identity

stage is *fidelity*, Erikson maintained. One must show fidelity to a particular arrangement of selfhood. One must commit oneself to a particular kind of meaningful life. At the very heart of identity, then, is the problem of meaning and purpose in life (McAdams, 1985). What does my life mean *in full*? Who am I today? How am I different today from what I was in my past? Who will I be in the future? These large questions regarding the meaning of one's life in full developmental time – past, present, and future – cannot be fully answered through dispositional traits and characteristic adaptations. Instead, they require a *story* of who I am, was, and will be. One way to read Erikson's idea of identity is to see it as an internalized and evolving story of the self that people begin to construct in the emerging adult years (Habermas & Bluck, 2000; McAdams, 1985). Beyond dispositional traits and characteristic adaptations, then, lies the realm of narrative identity.

Layered over the Big Five traits and the panoply of goals, motives, projects, fears, strategies, values, beliefs, and schemas that comprise the first two levels of personality is an emerging narrative identity – an internalized and evolving story of the reconstructed past and imagined future that aims to provide life with unity, coherence, and purpose. For both the self and others, the life story explains how I came to be, who I am today, where I am going in the future, and what I believe my life means within the psychosocial niche provided by family, friends, work, society, and the cultural and ideological resources of my environment. It is a story that distinguishes me from all others, and yet shows how I am connected to others as well. It is a story that narrates the evolution of a particular self, but it is a self in cultural context. Every life story says as much about the culture within which a person lives as it does about the person living it. In constructing a life story, people choose from the menu of images, themes, plots, and characters provided by the particular environments to which they are exposed (McAdams, 2006; Rosenwald & Ochberg, 1992). They make meaning within the milieu of meanings provided by culture.

What prompts the emergence of narrative identity in late adolescence and young adulthood? Cognitive factors are surely important. With the advent of what Piaget called formal operational thought, adolescents are now able to take their own lives as objects of systematic reflection (Breger, 1974; McAdams, 1985). Whereas young children can dream about what might someday be, adolescents can think through the possibilities in a hypothetico-deductive manner. They can now ask themselves questions such as: What is my life really about? Who might I be in the future? What if I decide to reject my parents' religion? What would it mean to live a *good life*? This newfound philosophical inclination requires a narrative frame for

self-construction. The earliest drafts of narrative identity may take the form of what Elkind (1981) called the *personal fable* – fantastical stories of the self's greatness. But later drafts become more realistic and tempered, as reality testing improves and narrative skills become further refined. Habermas and Bluck (2000) have shown how adolescents gradually master the cognitive skills required for constructing a coherent narrative of the self. By the end of their teenaged years, they regularly engage in sophisticated forms of *autobiographical reasoning*. They can link together multiple autobiographical scenes in causal sequences to explain what they believe to be their own development in a given area of life. And they can extract underlying themes that they believe characterize unique aspects of their lives in full.

Social and cultural factors also help to bring narrative identity to the developmental fore at this time. Their peers and their parents expect adolescents to begin sorting out what their lives mean, both for the future and the past. Given what I have done up to this point in my life, where do I go now? What kind of life should I make for myself? Paralleling the cognitive and emotional changes taking place within the individual are shifts in society's expectations about what the individual, who was a child but who is now almost an adult, should be doing, thinking, and feeling. Erikson (1959) wrote, "It is of great relevance to the young individual's identity formation that he be responded to, and be given function and status as a person whose gradual growth and transformation make sense to those who begin to make sense to him" (p. 111). In general, modern societies expect their adolescents and young adults to examine occupational, ideological, and interpersonal opportunities around them and to begin to make some decisions about what their lives as adults are to be about. This is to say that both society and the emerging adult are ready for his or her explorations in narrative identity by the time he or she has, in fact, become an emerging adult. As Erikson described it:

The period can be viewed as a psychosocial moratorium during which the individual through free role experimentation may find a niche in some section of his society, a niche which is firmly defined and yet seems to be uniquely made for him. In finding it the young adult gains an assured sense of inner continuity and social sameness which will bridge what he was as a child and what he is about to become, and will reconcile his conception of himself and his community's recognition of him. (Erikson, 1959, p. 111)

Moral meanings run through life narratives. MacIntyre (1981) has argued that all life stories speak from a moral perspective. Either explicitly or implicitly, the narrator takes a moral stand vis-à-vis the self and society,

draws on moral understandings which frame the narrative, and justifies or condemns his or her own identity tale in moral terms. Furthermore, in any given culture some stories exhibit greater moral cachet than do others. For example, Coby and Damon (1992) describe how men and women nominated as moral exemplars construct their own lives as tales of steadfast commitment to ideals and the progressive enlargement of one's moral mission over time. Walker and Frimer (2007) compared life-narrative accounts of Canadian adults awarded honors for either bravery or a lifetime of caring commitment, and they contrasted the accounts with the life stories of a matched control sample. Among their many informative findings, Walker and Frimer showed that the stories of brave and caring exemplars tended to underscore secure attachment experiences and the transformation of negative events into positive outcomes, to a greater degree than did the stories told by the matched controls.

Finding positive meanings in negative events is the central theme that runs through McAdams's (2006) conception of *the redemptive self*. In a series of nomothetic and idiographic studies conducted over the past 15 years, McAdams and colleagues have consistently found that midlife American adults who score especially high on self-report measures of generativity – suggesting a strong commitment to promoting the well-being of future generations and improving the world in which they live (Erikson, 1963) – tend to see their own lives as narratives of redemption (Mansfield & McAdams, 1996; McAdams & Bowman, 2001; McAdams, Diamond, de St. Aubin, & Mansfield, 1997; McAdams, Reynolds, Lewis, Patten, & Bowman, 2001). Compared to their less generative American counterparts, highly generative adults tend to construct life stories that feature redemption sequences, in which the protagonist is delivered from suffering to an enhanced status or state. In addition, highly generative American adults are more likely than their less generative peers to construct life stories in which the protagonist (a) enjoys a special advantage or blessing early in life; (b) expresses sensitivity to the suffering of others or societal injustice as a child; (c) establishes a clear and strong moral value system in adolescence that remains a source of unwavering conviction through the adult years; (d) experiences significant conflicts between desires for agency/power and desires for communion/love; and (e) looks to achieve goals to benefit society in the future. Taken together, these themes articulate a general script or narrative prototype that many highly generative American adults employ to make sense of their own lives. For highly productive and caring midlife American adults, the redemptive self is a narrative model of an especially good and morally enhanced life.

The redemptive self is a life-story prototype that serves to support the efforts of midlife men and women to make a positive contribution to society. Their redemptive life narratives tell how generative adults seek to give back to society in gratitude for the early advantages and blessings they feel they have received. In every life, generativity is tough and frustrating work, as every parent or community volunteer knows. But if an adult constructs a narrative identity in which the protagonist's suffering in the short run often gives way to reward later on, he or she may be better able to sustain the conviction that seemingly thankless investments today will pay off for future generations. Redemptive life stories support the kind of life strivings that a highly caring man or woman, deeply committed to moral principles, is likely to set forth.

At the same time, the redemptive self may say as much about American culture and tradition as it does about the highly generative American adults who tend to tell this kind of story about their lives. McAdams (2006) argued that the life-story themes expressed by highly generative American adults recapture and couch in a psychological language especially cherished, as well as hotly contested, ideas in American cultural history – ideas that appear prominently in spiritual accounts of the seventeenth-century Puritans, Benjamin Franklin's eighteenth-century autobiography, slave narratives and Horatio Alger stories from the nineteenth century, and the literature of self-help and American entrepreneurship from more recent times. Evolving from the Puritans to Emerson to Oprah, the redemptive self has morphed into many different storied forms in the past 300 years, as Americans have sought to narrate their lives as redemptive tales of atonement, emancipation, recovery, self-fulfillment, and upward social mobility. The stories speak of heroic individual protagonists – the *chosen people* – whose *manifest destiny* is to make a positive difference in a dangerous world, even when the world does not wish to be redeemed. The stories translate a deep and abiding script of American exceptionalism into the many contemporary narratives of success, recovery, development, liberation, and self-actualization that so pervade American talk, talk shows, therapy sessions, sermons, and commencement speeches. It is as if especially generative American adults, whose lives are dedicated to making the world a better place for future generations, are, for better and sometimes for worse, the most ardent narrators of a general life-story script as American as apple pie and the Super Bowl.

In their most recent studies, McAdams and colleagues have noted moral and political variations on the redemptive self as constructed by highly generative American Christians in their midlife years (McAdams, Albaugh, Farber, Daniels, Logan, & Olson, 2008). Most of the 128 men and women

in this study believed they were leading exemplary moral lives. As a whole, the participants showed remarkably high engagement in pro-social behavior, charitable donations, volunteer work, and the like. Almost all of the participants, furthermore, were politically informed and regularly voted in municipal and state elections. Important variations in narrative identity appeared, however, with respect to political affiliation. In their self-narrations, Christian conservatives tended to underscore the moral values of respect for authority, commitment and loyalty, and the sacredness of the self (Haidt, 2007) to a much greater extent than did liberals. They also constructed self-defining scenes in their life stories that highlighted what Lakoff (2002) described as a *strict-father morality* – emphasizing societal rules and self-discipline. By contrast, Christian liberals tended to underscore the moral values of preventing harm and promoting fairness or reciprocity, and their salient life-story scenes tended to emphasize what Lakoff (2002) called a *nurturant caregiver morality*, highlighting autobiographical episodes in which characters showed care toward others and expressed openness and empathy. Both the Christian conservatives and Christian liberals narrated their moral lives in redemptive terms. Their redemptive life stories served to buttress their moral commitments and sustain their efforts to make positive contributions to their families, neighborhoods, churches, and society. But their stories reflected somewhat different moral agendas and different plots and guiding metaphors for what ultimately constitutes a good life.

CONCLUSION

Personality is an individual's unique variation on the general evolutionary design for human nature, expressed as a complex pattern of dispositional traits, characteristic adaptations, and self-defining life stories, situated in culture. By extension, a moral personality would consist of those traits, adaptations, and stories that best support and sustain a moral life in culture. What constitutes a moral life itself surely varies from one culture to the next, but certain common features – such as commitment to alleviating suffering, assuring fairness and reciprocity, respecting legitimate authority, manifesting loyalty and commitment to the common good, and valuing sacredness and purity (Haidt, 2007) – may be discerned across a wide range of cultures.

Personality research suggests that, at Level 1 of personality, dispositional traits linked to conscientiousness, agreeableness, and openness to experience have strong moral implications. High scores on conscientiousness and agreeableness have been linked to pro-social behavior, commitment

to societal institutions, honesty, integrity, and fewer instances of violating moral norms. At least moderately high levels of openness to experience appear to be a prerequisite for valuing tolerance and diversity in society, for understanding multiple perspectives, and for principled moral reasoning. Of course, high scores on these traits do not guarantee these behavioral correlates for every case; empirical findings in psychology are almost always probabilistic. But all other things being equal, high levels of conscientiousness, agreeableness, and openness to experience lay the foundation for a moral personality.

At Level 2, the moral personality may be expressed through the characteristic adaptations that situate psychological individuality in time, place, and social role. Moral goals and schemas flesh out the details of the moral life. They spell out what moral aims people are trying to accomplish in their lives, how they take on moral roles in families and societies, what values they emphasize in pursuing moral ends, and how they think about moral dilemmas and choices in life. Unlike dispositional traits, moral goals and schemas show substantial change over time and across contexts, and they are often closely connected to developmental concerns. Among midlife adults, for example, goals and concerns linked to generativity have been shown to predict a wide range of morally significant behaviors, from conscientious parenting to civic engagement. Moral schemas are expressed in a wide range of forms, from personal ideologies (content) to stages of moral reasoning (structure).

Layered on top of traits and adaptations are the internalized and evolving stories people live by. At Level 3 of personality, people construct integrative life narratives to provide their lives with some measure of unity, purpose, and meaning. Narrative identities are profoundly shaped by culture. Culture provides a menu of images, metaphors, plots, characters, and envisioned endings for the narrative construction of the self. In late adolescence and early adulthood, people living in modern societies begin to put their lives together into self-defining stories, reconstructing the past and imagining the future in terms of a sensible and culturally valued narrative with beginning, middle, and end. Different kinds of life stories reflect different moral agendas. In American society, especially generative adults – those committed to promoting the well-being of future generations – tend to construct redemptive stories for their lives. Appropriating culturally cherished (and contested) narratives of atonement, upward mobility, recovery, and liberation in American culture and heritage, highly generative American adults repeatedly narrate the movement from suffering to enhancement in their life stories. Their narratives conceive of the moral life as a personal

quest in which a gifted protagonist, equipped with moral steadfastness, journeys forth into a dangerous world, overcomes adversity, and ultimately gives back to society in gratitude for the blessings he or she has received. Constructing a redemptive narrative identity may support and reinforce a moral life for many American adults committed to making a positive difference in the world. The redemptive self, then, is a particular kind of narrative identity that provides the psychological resources that many Americans who aspire to live a morally exemplary life feel they need in order to live such a life.

But there are many ways to live a moral life, and many stories that might be told about it. Redemptive life narratives of the sort documented by McAdams (2006) illustrate one particularly powerful narrative form for living a good life in American society. But many Americans who believe they are living morally exemplary lives may reject this story as not true to their own lived experience – there are always exceptions to the narrative norms a culture provides. And it is quite likely that the life stories of moral exemplars in other societies do not resemble the redemptive self. At the end of the day, Level 3 in personality owes its very existence and constituents to the cultural menu for life narratives available to people living in a particular time and place. Culture provides a range of possibilities for life-story construction, and each culture provides its own characteristic range. It is, therefore, at the level of life narrative where the moral personality may show its greatest variation and cultural nuance. Certain basic traits – agreeableness and conscientiousness, for example – may provide a dispositional foundation for the moral personality. But what gets built upon that foundation may follow the architectural guidelines specified within a given moral community and culture.

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