MORAL SELVES, EVIL SELVES

THE SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY OF CONSCIENCE

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Introduction

Those are my principles. If you don't like them I have others.

Groucho Marx

Few things capture public attention more than serial killers. We are fascinated by individuals who apparently have no conscience and describe these seemingly emotionless killers as "cold-blooded." People who commit murder out of anger, self-defense, or raw, impulsive emotion are at least minimally understandable. We can all imagine threats to loved ones or fear leading people to lose control. The seemingly dispassionate ones are the objects of fascination, both in fiction and nonfiction. The cycle is familiar: a murder, saturating media attention, then a series of "why did he (normally a 'he') do it?" pieces (in print or on TV) mixing pop psychology with pop sociology.

Our collective imagination is also captured when we hear about people selflessly helping others, especially in situations where they face personal danger. Witness the outpouring of appreciation for firefighters everywhere after September 11, 2001. Or when, on January 2, 2007, Wesley Autrey, who was in a subway station with his two young daughters, saw a man stumble off the edge of the platform. Although the headlights of the train were visible, Autrey jumped onto the tracks, covered the stranger (who was having a seizure), and kept him safe while the train screeched to a halt. This story made front page news across the nation, and Autrey was honored at that year's State of the Union address.[1]

Both kinds of action—calculated harm and impulsive selflessness—get attention precisely because they do not fit into the conventional thinking about how people act. People's emotions, the popular thinking goes, are selfish, and only a rare person has impulses that lead to helping others; some scholars argue that such selfless behavior is, in fact, selfish at its core. Similarly, adults in society are expected to behave rationally; we at least partly excuse violence committed "in the heat of the moment," but treat premeditated violence quite harshly since we expect people who

act after having the time to reflect on the consequences of their actions to "know better."

The debate over human nature is an old one, with dueling positions suggesting we are naturally good or naturally selfish. Classic political theory starts out by viewing society as either reigning in our evil impulses or corrupting our naturally selfless tendencies. Debates over whether we are good or bad have motivated much social research in addition to perhaps the majority of literature, drama, and religious debates since people first started telling stories.

Conventional wisdom, I think, holds that there is a spectrum with good at one end and evil at the other. Gandhi, Martin Luther King, and Mother Theresa are hanging out together at one end, while Stalin, Hitler, and Bin Laden are at the opposite end. We can look at a person's actions, life, or intentions and thereby judge some people as good and others as bad. Evil people act out of selfish tendencies and harm others, while good people either have only selfless tendencies or overcome temptations toward selfishness. We impute a moral essence to others, both at the extremes and in the middle. From a social-scientific perspective, this at first seems to lead to asking questions about what kinds of people live lives helping others and what kinds try to gain power and use it to their advantage to oppress others cause harm.

Perhaps because we live in an individualistic, Western society, these discussions often begin and end at the level of a person's character. The conventional idea is that we can understand what makes somebody act by appealing to an internal notion of what makes them tick, something that renders them good or evil. Psychologists have largely replaced "character" with "personality,"[2] but the idea is the same. We can, the thinking goes, reduce a person's essence to some unified core on which we can pass moral judgment. This often means judging a person based on the best or worst acts of a lifetime and ignoring those actions that do not fit neatly into these compartments and that might muddy the waters of such an essentialist judgment.

The belief that we can know a person's essence extends to American politics. In the aftermath of the closely contested 2004 presidential election (following 2000 election that was a statistical coin flip), the media was abuzz with the importance of "values voters." As writers coalesced around this narrative to explain the results, they described how voters chose their candidate based on who best shared their moral view and used the sizable percentage of voters that rated "values" as their most important issue as their evidence. This resonated with the conventional wisdom that religious voters were key to the eventual Republican victory and underscored the popular conflation of "values" with "religious," and thus the meme was spread. In

the past, descriptions of "soccer moms" and "angry white males" have dominated public consciousness; in 2004, "values voters" became etched in the public consciousness as the decisive voting block.

Occasionally, however, the facts get in the way. The percentage of people who selected "values" as their most pressing concern in 2004 actually *declined* from the 2000 election, suggesting that this powerful voting block was not, in fact, as powerful as we were told it was. Regardless of this fact, the notion of values as motivating voters (some people have them, and apparently some do not) caught on. Having values is vaguely associated with being religious; religion is somehow associated with morality; and, according to this acceptable-sounding narrative, being religious led to voting Republican. This narrative has seeped into the collective consciousness.

Of course, this narrative works because it captures an essential notion that forms the basis for this book. Namely, people intuit the importance of morality in life and easily extend that to understanding voting behavior. People believe in the reality of values voters because people do try to judge others' moral essences, whether political candidates or friends or business competitors. We morally judge others based on what they eat (eating a cow is moral to us, but not to all cultures) and where they shop (spending money at Wal-Mart is a moral violation to some, a great bargain to others). We almost always take moral concerns into account and ubiquitously locate ourselves (and people like us) on the good–evil spectrum, typically more toward the good. This demonstrates what appears to be a human concern with drawing lines around what is right and wrong, proper and improper. Ideally, we want leaders who represent our values and will do the "right" thing. Tucked into this belief is a core sense of how the world should be. The idea of "should" suggests a moral outlook, a position on what should and should not occur. This book focuses on the social-psychological processes involved in developing and maintaining perspectives about what people "should" and "shouldn't" do.

It is too simplistic, I will argue, to judge a candidate, a potential employee, or an ex-lover simply as good or evil. We cannot ever know a person's character as if it were a unified, unchanging thing. Trying to determine a person's moral essence is, to a social psychologist, an act of oversimplification. Most people are neither Hitler nor Gandhi. They live their lives without performing epic, morally noteworthy deeds, at least as far as history is concerned. The majority of people do not kill others or risk their lives to save others. And, importantly, most people are not judged by their best or worst action across a lifetime. Unless people perform an act of selflessness so great that it becomes the first line of their obituary or commit an act that lands them in jail, "character" studies of saints and sinners do not realistically capture the essence of a human life.

A social psychologist approaches these questions as concerned less about character and more about the situations in which character is enacted. Individuals' characteristics, while important, only partly explain behavior. Certainly, some of us are shy, some are neurotic, and some are gregarious. But a careful self-examination would provide you with examples of times you were shy and times you were outgoing; situations in which you were calm and collected and times when you were nervous and fumbling. People are not the same in every situation In fact, we look down on people who cannot adapt to the differences between, say, a romantic date and a date in court. We try to teach children to respond appropriately to different situations, and we do not consider people as adults until they have learned to behave themselves according to their situated expectations. I tell my students that among 150 of them there are likely a variety of different personalities, yet they all *behave* in exactly the same way, at least in that classroom. They all sit quietly, and those who stay awake try to take notes and pay attention. Their personality is not as important for predicting their behavior as knowing what their role is in that situation. This is not to say that all situations lead people to behave identically. Individual predispositions can matter, just less than Americans tend to think. It is important for those of us passing judgment on somebody's good or evil nature to keep in mind that situations are powerful influences on behavior. Many things can promote good behavior, such as having a mirror in front of you or being the only person witnessing an emergency. On the other hand, as heroic as we might believe we will be, certain situations will likely hinder us from helping others. A social psychology of morality begins with this understanding.

But this book makes a deeper claim about good and evil people. Those individual characteristics that do exist *across* situations—"character" or "personality"—also are largely influenced by the social world. The overwhelming majority of people are not naturally evil or good; they do not kill others or leap onto train tracks to save strangers. People who perform such actions represent rare and isolated cases. While we know some rudimentary things about why people act at these extremes, focusing too much on the extremes obscures how most people behave. A social psychology of morality needs to explore both the situations people act within and the sense of self they develop across those situations. Both situations and selves are inextricably social, shaped in patterned ways by forces most of us rarely consider. It would be an oversimplification to attribute morality to a person's essence.

This book develops an argument for two categories of audiences: people interested in people and people interested in studying people. People in the first category are often busier living their lives than analyzing social patterns. The second category comprises those rare few of us who get paid to study and analyze how the first group lives their lives. Much of

what I've said so far about the power of society and situations is likely unobjectionable to this second category. To most social scientists the fact that people and events are socially shaped and channeled is a banal observation. However, people in the first category typically spend little time thinking about the social influence of things such as race, gender, and culture, outside of the stereotypes they all learn as they grow up. So for the regular-people audience, I intend this book to be an outline of the sheer volume of ways in which our very essences—good and bad—are shaped by society and situation.

This book also has a message for the second category, academics like me who enjoy spending our professional lives exploring the practice of social life. Ironically, it is a message that the first category already understands. We are moral beings. We strive to live up to some minimal standard of what society considers right and wrong, and we judge other people and groups by their ability to do the same. We are not just rational actors, nor the followers of role-expectations or any of the other simplifications that we use when constructing statistical models for human behavior. While knowing more about people's moral dimensions may add only a small percentage of additional information to these empirical models, it adds volumes to our understanding of the human condition. Others have made this same point, both philosophers and empirical researchers. In this book I attempt to synthesize these perspectives into a conception of the human actor that is more human than that typically developed in the social sciences. This means placing the moral dimension at the center of social-scientific analysis.

I develop the construct of conscience as the pivot for this discussion of how aspects of society get internalized into individuals and how individuals' interactions are influenced by their senses of self. Humans are distinctive in judging their own actions in terms of right and wrong, good and bad, and moral and evil,[3] though primates display traces of this process. And while there are many people who volunteer and give to charity (i.e., they act morally) as well as those who break laws (i.e., they act immorally), most people act in ways that cannot be so easily coded as moral or immoral, especially within the purview of judging an ongoing human life. Take, for example, a businesswoman who works long hours to provide for her family; she is industrious (moral) but spends little time with her children (immoral). Or the CEO who employs thousands of workers (moral) but pays them less than she could (immoral), gives some of her profits to charity (moral) but also contributes to political parties that undermine the rights of her workers (immoral). Are these people good or evil? The complexity of real lives dilutes our ability to make essentialist claims.

What is interesting is that an overwhelming majority of people—even those convicted of crimes—consider themselves as at least minimally moral. Rarely do people feel that their entire character is shot through with immorality and rarely are they overcome with such abject shame that they cannot face their fellow humans. The place of shame differs culturally, but the fact is we are very good at compartmentalizing those actions that put us in a less favorable light. This is another theme of this book; precisely because situations shape behavior we have the psychological tools to morally exculpate ourselves.

I will dig into the complexity of the term "conscience" in Chapter 1, but for now, think of conscience as that part of a person that judges the moral worth of actions, intentions, thoughts, and desires. We judge ourselves and we judge others. We evaluate the morality of groups we belong to and of groups we attempt to stay away from. We draw boundaries as social actors, and these boundaries carry with them a moral dimension. This brings us to the third theme of this book: we are biased judgers. We have a strong motivation to see ourselves and our groups as morally decent. We are perhaps not the most moral creatures on the planet, but we consider ourselves "good enough" morally so as to feel we are acceptable members of our important groups.

America is made up of many different reference groups, based on criteria ranging from gender and race to occupation and hometown, and we easily slide between reference groups based on the situation we are in. I cheer for my local basketball team one moment, savoring the enjoyment of being in a crowd of like-minded fans, then a few moments later despise those same people for crowding the parking lot and making it hard for me to leave. Cheering for the team, I feel the subtle moral superiority of cheering for the home team, even in a city that is far away from where I grew up. Thinking of how different my upbringing was compared with most of those around me, I can also concentrate on the moral ways in which my faraway hometown prepared me for the real world; at the same time, my neighbors can claim moral superiority by virtue of being raised in a smaller community. The issue is not who is right; this book discusses the self-justifying aspect of the judgments we make about these affiliations. We may objectively evaluate our group's standing compared to that of others, but that is rare. Typically, when judging the morality of a group, we favor our own.

This book will be convincing insofar as the ideas presented fit together into an understanding of the moral actor that fits with what we know about human behavior. Ideally, I will identify unanswered questions and future directions for social scientists to explore. But for two categories of audiences, I have two goals. For regular people, there is an overview of the ways that social life (ranging from evolution to culture to situation)

affects who they are, what they do, and how they morally evaluate themselves and others.

For social scientists, I want to defend claims that social life has a fundamentally moral dimension that needs to be included in our notions of people and society. This position is not original; in fact, sociology's forebearers criticized the nascent disciplines of economics and psychology precisely for omitting this crucial dimension. But modern experimental and statistical approaches have contributed to atomized theories of human behavior that obscure the moral dimension of the self, a force that leads to perceived coherence within individuals across a variety of situations and stages of the life course. Through this book, I will build toward a perspective on the self that places morality, in its many dimensions, at the center.

Overview

I like to have a road map of where the author will be taking me when I start a book so I offer a brief outline of the journey.

I will begin by explaining what conscience is, drawing on a variety of research traditions but cobbling together my own explanation. Oddly enough, one almost never comes across this term in modern social sciences. I will define morality—another term that does not get enough focus in today's Academy—and explain how societal notions relate to individual ones.

Chapter 2 defines some other key terms and vital ideas for understanding conscience, such as "self" and "values." Chapter 3 discusses the large-scale macrocontexts that shape moral constructs. Our moral outlooks do not simply appear out of nowhere or as a result of our genes; they develop through social interaction. Chapter 4 extends this macroprocess into our minds, drawing on psychological understandings of how the moral mind works. This involves issues of moral emotion, moral judgment, and moral intuition.

Chapters 5 and 6 discuss the different aspects of the power of situations to shape behavior and the ways expectations and pressures from others subvert conscience. Both revolve around different understandings of the notion of "identity." We both develop expectations for behavior in any given situation (Chapter 5) and identify with and against various social groups and categories (Chapter 6). Considering these two ways of orientating to situations leads to a preliminary understanding of *what* moral codes get applied in particular situations and *how far* those codes extend. Following that, Chapter 7 addresses the obvious problem of why we think of ourselves as moral if situations so often get in the way of acting in line with our conscience. We have a variety of cognitive, self-serving biases, but their moral dimension is largely underplayed in the research literature. One way

in which we deal with inevitable shortcomings involves a different motivation than often gets stressed, what I call "moral satisficing," the desire to convince ourselves that we are morally good enough, not as moral as we might possibly be.

These three chapters, dealing roughly with "what we do" and "how we justify it," lead to Chapter 8, a theory of conscience as forming the moral core of the self. This ties together how our ideals and moral prohibitions, what I introduce as Bright Lights and Bright Lines in Chapter 1, are based on our locations in groups and society, yet are experienced as constitutive of who we are. This involves thinking of people not just within situations, but across their lives. This means bringing in a notion of time that is omitted from much social-psychological work on the self. We often aim toward valued moral ideals as we figure out what we should do and be. I will borrow the metaphor of moral "horizons" from the philosopher Charles Taylor but employ it in a more sociologically sensitive manner. We see the world through these horizons, cognitive and emotional filters that shape what we observe and how we react.

In Chapter 9, I situate the idea of the moral self in a world of potential ambiguity. Thinking about people in real life means conceptualizing multiple identities, situations, and even change and development over time. This involves merging some research literatures that do not typically speak to each other, those on the self, life course, and moral psychology. This aims at extending work on the self to include issues of personhood, a notion of the person that tries to capture the complexity of a human life but allows the specification needed for empirical study. Finally, Chapter 10 focuses on the possibility for moral behavior and development in this complicated, potentially ambiguous world. This means engaging some popular tropes (that people are selfish, that American society is engaged in a culture war) and showing that real life and real people are more complicated than conventional wisdom may suggest. While I try to stay close to the research literature throughout this book, not attempting to advocate any particular moral system, this last chapter will explore what we know about those rare moral exemplars that show the rest of us how we might try a little harder to do—and be—good.

Building a Social Psychology of Conscience

> Three psychological truths … First, the world is filled with both good and evil—was, is, will always be. Second, the barrier between good and evil is permeable and nebulous. And third, it is possible for angels to become devils and, perhaps more difficult to conceive, for devils to become angels.
>
> Phillip Zimbardo[1]

We are each the hero of our own story.[2] This saying captures two often-overlooked aspects of human lives in the world of social psychology. First, a great deal of research about people focuses on a single point in time, omitting the multiple situations we live in and the fact that our lives grow, develop, and change over time. Second, in our self-understanding, we are not neutral judges of our goodness or badness; rather, we tend to validate ourselves, our actions, and our choices. Social psychologists classically study the influence of the actual or imagined presence of others on people's thoughts, feelings, and behavior.[3] Human behavior involves inter-action, either directly, in a situation, or indirectly, by planning for the future or thinking about the past. Within the panoply of motives, drives, and factors that shape our behavior is one aspect that social psychologists and sociologists have vastly underplayed in modern times, namely, that we are moral creatures. The word "moral" was used more or less inter-changeably with "social" in the 1700s and 1800s by thinkers such as Adam Smith and David Hume,[4] suggesting that these concepts were not treated as distinctly as they are today. This historical usage, I will argue, represents a more accurate conception of the importance of morality to human beings than one typically finds in current social science models.

Social psychology, the social science most concerned with linking individuals to social circumstances, focuses most clearly on what people do in particular situations. These situations are not always of our own choosing, a key sociological insight, but the fact that we are a social species is at the root of social psychological research and helps us understand our beliefs, emotions, and actions. These situations occur within broader contexts, both an individual's life experiences and certain historical eras, and actions we take today only make sense when put in sequence with actions taken yesterday or intended tomorrow. As we construct these visions of ourselves and try to make a coherent story out of what really is a bunch of disparate situations and actions, with rare exceptions, we place ourselves at the center of the story. As its hero we add a moral valence to the enterprise, the idea that we are properly, at least minimally, a "good person," struggling against the pressures of society and people to behave well, or at least well enough.

Human beings act and reflect on those actions, contemplate future behavior, and think back on the past. This makes us quite an odd species, but enables the human capacity for developing a moral sense. This capacity, once paramount in thinking about human behavior, should become more central to social science. Scholars, particularly empirical researchers, have not focused enough on moral issues. Those who have engaged this core human dimension largely concentrate on isolated intuitions and dilemmas, abstracted from real people making meaningful choices within their lives. This book attempts to synthesize the various perspectives that allow for a study of human lives, placing research on moral judgment and emotion within a fuller, longitudinal framework for understanding how society and culture shape individual moral selves.

If you are looking for it, you can see a surge of interest in components of this understanding of the moral self across the social sciences. It is far from a central concern, but psychologists, sociologists, political scientists, and social theorists publish pockets of work that touch on various aspects of morality ranging from how people react and behave to broader societal patterns in defining morals. Economists have long focused on how people decide to reach their goals; the nature of the goals themselves has largely been outside of their concern.[5] But moral ideals and moral prohibitions are not just some goals among others; they constitute the very boundaries of the human self.

This book aims at synthesizing a variety of literatures around the notion of conscience, a durable but flexible aspect of the self that channels the perception and evaluation of moral issues, ideals, and behaviors. I will discuss the mechanics of both the development and enactment of individual senses of morality and the broader social contexts that shape those

senses and explore why we do not always act in concert with our deeply held moral ideals. This insight necessarily draws on a comprehension of human beings as extended across time and situation. We develop an understanding of who we are that influences what we do and where we do it. Situational pressures, however, strongly influence whether or not these understandings shape our actual behavior. This means that circumstances consistently present challenges to our living up to our better angels. Yet, in the final analysis, we tend to feel we are, if not morally perfect, at least minimally decent human beings. We arrive at this perception through aligning ourselves, symbolically but meaningfully, with others, both in the roles we play and in the groups with which we identify. All of this, ranging from societal influences to individual biases, helps us build toward a more accurate understanding of the human self. The self is, at its root, a moral entity, though with its biases and self-justifications.

Philosophical arguments about the nature of morality have been going on for millennia, and it is not my intention to claim special insight into what people should do or believe. As a social scientist, my focus is on the universal human *capacity* for drawing moral boundaries around certain actions as impermissible while holding other options up as moral ideals. Different cultures fill that capacity with different content, though there is not an unlimited range of what is considered morally acceptable. In this discussion, I stress the social influences on this moral capacity, its development, maintenance, and consequences. In a world fixated on the latest genetic or DNA discovery, it is worth pointing out that social influences are much deeper than non-social scientists might think.

The lower priority of the study of morality impoverishes academic understanding of social life and hinders our ability to speak to a wider, interested audience. This is a shame, as we have a great deal to add to a public discourse infused with discussions of right and wrong. We know a good deal about how and where people's beliefs come from and how those beliefs structure our lives. Doing what is right and being a good person are paramount concerns in real people's lives, but too little of our research directly addresses these issues. In our personal lives, we look suspiciously at somebody who does not appear at least minimally concerned with morality; the term "sociopath" refers to such people, and it is not a compliment.[6]

Social psychology has done a good deal of research on extreme situations, on who helps in life-threatening emergencies or who becomes physically aggressive and when. There is less research about the prosaic aspects of social life; everyday moral decisions that may not affect people's impulses during an emergency, but rather determine how they live their lives. Cheating is increasing, for example, in spheres ranging from

taxes to academic exams.[7] These choices are often made in private and involve internal issues of right and wrong more than legal ones. Even if morality is discussed, it tends to be limited to issues of harm or fairness.[8] A social psychology of morality should broaden to include a consideration of these sorts of choices—how they are shaped and how they influence the ways people see themselves and live their lives. This book aims at contributing to an understanding that encompasses human beings' noble, ignoble, and conflicting actions and impulses.

"Conscience," a term that has largely disappeared from social science, is the umbrella I will use to bring a disparate set of literatures and understandings into a theory of the moral self. Conscience is an inherently social phenomenon that involves different levels of cognitive processing that interact in a biased way to self-justify a particular moral image.[9] People have strong stakes in both the systems in which they believe[10] and the vision of self they construct and tend to overrate how selfless they are as compared with others.[11] We have strong needs to see ourselves, our groups, and our societies as moral; perhaps not as the most moral person or group possible, but at least minimally so. We shape behaviors to fit within moral boundaries, and our self-judgments are biased in our favor, much like a lawyer's judgment is biased toward presenting their client in the best possible light. When strongly motivated to reach a certain conclusion, we reason in ways to reach that conclusion as long as the reasons seem to be reasonably justifiable.[12]

Conscience is not a single entity, but a constant interplay between the dimensions of cognition and emotion. Conscience represents individuals' sense of themselves as moral creatures and defines the boundaries and ideals for acceptable behavior and judgment. Part of being a human being involves developing the capacity for conscience, self-reflective judgments, and intuitions about right and wrong. The particular ways in which we draw boundaries around right and wrong are determined by culture or subgroup as well as by other social factors. However, focusing on conscience allows us to incorporate the human self into models of moral intuition and reasoning. By making a moral choice today, I am saying something about who I hope to be in the future and either confirming or breaking with an older version of myself. Social psychologists have developed important models of what we do and how we feel as we engage moral concerns and everyday events that confirm or challenge our core values, but their work rarely situates these issues within the notion of an ongoing—sometimes contradictory—sense of self. The umbrella of conscience offers the possibility of bringing together a variety of theories and literatures that touch on the self's moral dimension in the service of a more accurate social psychological understanding of human behavior and identity. This book develops the *social* architecture of conscience.

Why Study Conscience?

Knowing the mechanisms of conscience is an incomplete guide for understanding actual behavior. Is it necessary to bring conscience more fully into our understanding of the self? After all, we can predict a lot of what people do by focusing on patterns in behavior across gender, ethnicity, or status groups. Knowing personality attributes tells us even a little more. Is there really something to be added by knowing somebody's moral orientations? Especially since much of our daily life involves its maintenance, eating and running errands, not engaging with deeply personal aspects of the self.[13] As a social psychologist, I begin with the idea that knowing about situations allows us to predict behavior more accurately than knowing about the individual in that situation. However, people's reactions to the same situation vary. We filter the world differently, but these differences are not simply idiosyncratic: people's filters develop along predictable patterns.

Building a model of conscience is inherently difficult since it is a concept that, as I define it, allows for potential self-contradiction. But building this model is important to social science for at least four reasons. First, to categorize somebody as an American, female, a social work major, or a fan of hip-hop music means, in part, to identify where members of such groups draw the important moral boundaries in their lives.[14] Being a member of an ethnic group does not mean anything in and of itself,[15] but is shorthand for explaining commonalities among certain people that presumably influence what they do and how they perceive the world. Part of these commonalities involve shared moral boundaries for defining self and for judging others.

Second, it is an empirical question as to how much the inclusion of information about moral orientations helps explain outcomes of interest to social scientists. My own work has attempted to demonstrate the utility of incorporating values into statistical models to better explain how the self develops and what we do.[16] I'll discuss more such work throughout the book, but there are reasons to believe that a better empirical understanding of morality, moral cultures, and related concepts can improve social science research.[17]

Third, social scientists, and sociologists in particular, develop complicated statistical (and sometimes theoretical) models about people that do not look particularly human.[18] Similarly, psychologists' research has become so domain-specific that, again, recognizing what real people look like is difficult.[19] Morality was once central to social science, especially my discipline of sociology. Weber, Durkheim, Mead, and other forefathers were centrally concerned with how individuals developed moral codes and how those codes contributed to harmony and conflict in groups and society. The general topic has become marginalized, however, as the social sciences get increasingly specialized. We know a good deal about the formation of family, links between society and mental health,

or building of occupational careers by people. But what is less stressed is that these processes take shape and operate within moral boundaries, individual and social, and that the human capacity to reflect on one's desires, actions, and goals means we make moral judgments about what people do, about ourselves and others. As the discipline has become more and more focused on structural forces that shape individuals, less and less attention has been paid to the possibility that individuals make choices. But if we are to hold people accountable for their actions, as the law presupposes, some capacity for individual choice is necessary.[20] As sociologists have focused on fancier measures of social structure and less on individual volition, the less focus they may feel necessary to give morality. Sociology is, as Craig Calhoun puts it, "unmusical" in discussing such issues.[21]

Even those scholars concerned with the self have largely omitted moral concerns. If part of what we want to do as social scientists is speak to the regular people who engage our work, to develop an understanding of what is pretentiously referred to as the human condition, we must include a moral dimension. Regular people, whether in their personal lives, public discourse, or political concerns, implicitly and explicitly focus on moral boundaries and ideals. Social scientists, who are regular people at least some of the time, should be more vigorous about exploring the components of how, when, and why they (we) do this. The models of people that get developed necessarily involve simplistic assumptions, but largely these serve to build a model containing artificially one-dimensional persons.

Finally, a preliminary model of conscience would help to synthesize a variety of sociological and psychological insights, including many not directly concerned with morality, into a plausible model of the person. Much of social science involves domain-specific hypotheses, leading to a field of poorly integrated theories and findings that do not aid the development of a cumulative science.[22] By incorporating mechanisms and insights from various domains into the single umbrella term "conscience," I hope to set out the contours, at least, of a more encompassing view of the person. While there is merit in focused, narrowly defined empirical studies that explain a phenomenon in detail, so too is there value in assembling such studies in the service of a larger project. It may be complex, incomplete, messy, and even occasionally paradoxical, but then again, so are human beings.

Defining Morality

The capacity to distinguish oneself and others as good and bad is distinctively human.[23] We are an inherently social species[24] and can only develop understandings of ourselves through interacting within social groups. We evolve in social contexts, learn language within social environments, and

develop a sense of self through social relationships. We are biological crea-
tures, but evolutionary contexts that were social shaped even that biology.[25]
Morality involves a system of rules useful for keeping social groups intact.[26]

Getting along with others, then, is a fundamental concern for human
beings. At the same time, social environments inevitably contain conflict,
as different beings with different (socialized) goals do not find perfect
harmony between the interests of various individuals and groups.[27] Indi-
viduals are not fully consistent in their goals; some days we want to diet,
during others we want to buy the jumbo dessert. Put somebody with
shifting short- and long-term goals in a group, surround this group with
other groups that have different ideals and goals, place those groups in a
larger society that offers many different authorities with messages about
what we should or should not do, and you have a situation with multi-
ple sources of knowledge that creates a "complex moral landscape."[28]
Individuals in the modern world are subject to a variety of moral mes-
sages and need some guides for judging them and their potential action:
"People abhor an ethical vacuum, one in which all choices have the same
standing and are equally legitimate, when all they face are directions
among which they may choose but [have] no compass to guide them."[29]

To this point, I have used "moral" as a vague notion of drawing lines
between good and bad in the social world. Let us get a little more specific
by drawing from the sociologist Christian Smith, who draws from the
philosopher Charles Taylor. Morality involves

> an orientation toward understandings about what is right and wrong,
> good and bad, worthy and unworthy, just and unjust, that are not estab-
> lished by our own actual desires, decisions, or preferences but instead
> believed to exist apart from them, providing standards by which our
> desires, decisions, and preferences can themselves be judged.[30]

This definition offers two key points. The first involves the sloppy use of
"moral" in popular discussions as a standard of worthiness that we employ
in everyday life. "Moral," in our social science usage, will not simply mean
"good" as the opposite of "bad." Rather, we use it in opposition to "wrong"
as defined by people, groups, or societies. A toothache is bad, not wrong.[31]

The second point involves the observation that moral standards are
experienced as external, not idiosyncratic, and carry with them a greater
weight than personal preferences. I may like a particular kind of music or
wine, but I do not consider it immoral to disagree. If those preferences are
tangled up with important self-identifications, however, I may use them
to draw moral lines of status, power, or proper taste, but the preference
itself is not felt as obligatorily binding on all. Morality implies an obligatory

aspect of behavior intertwined with important notions of rightness or wrongness, something that should or should not be done.[32]

Morality properly covers both "shoulds" and "should-nots," what Bandura usefully describes as its "proactive" and "inhibitive" elements.[33] Morality's proactive elements can be further divided into actions that we ought to perform (moral imperatives) and those actions that would be ideal (and laudable to perform) but go above the figurative line of duty.

Morality	1) Inhibitive elements → Thou Shalt-Nots
	2) Proactive elements → (a) Duties
	(b) Ideals

The positive dimension of morality involves both the duties we feel subject to (pay taxes, help drowning children) and the ideals we orient our lives around (get rich, start a large family). Both are motivational, either because we want to gain others' esteem (introjected motivations based on what others think) or because we find them intrinsically motivational (identified motivations good for their own sake).[34] Both elements guide action in line with what we feel we should do and what we want to be. The inhibitive elements of morality involve the taboos we learn early on, some of which may be evolutionarily hard-wired, such as the incest taboo. There is evidence that bad is stronger than good; our reactions to threats and unpleasant stimuli are stronger, faster, and harder to inhibit than reactions to good things.[35]

Some prohibitions appear to be universal (taboo on incest, disgust at rotting food), though others vary by subgroup (do not eat pork, do not cheer for Ohio State). The list of proactive goals is broad and ranges from concrete (try hard in school, clean up your room) to abstract (peace, justice). The sheer number of possible desirable goals means that many overlap and contradict. Much of modern life involves choosing between dueling priorities, such as home and work, and American society almost necessitates such conflicts as compared with, say, the more generous family-centered employment laws found in most of Europe. In addition to conflicting desirable moral goals, we find that too much concern with any one proactive goal can be seen as problematic; a single-minded pursuit of justice, with no regard to circumstance or people, might be considered pathological.

> The reason that we have the metaphors for morality that we have—both in our culture and in cultures around the world—is that the very notion of morality is founded on experiential well-being and human flourishing. Putting all metaphorical thought aside, what is moral is what promotes experiential well-being in others. Morality is thus correlated with the promotion in others of health, wealth, strength, wholeness, nurturance, and so on ... and immorality with promoting weakness, decay, and contagion.[36]

We do not simply have one set of moral goals, and our goals can conflict, like the long-term desire to graduate and the short-term desire to go out drinking. Both represent moral goods (success vs. pleasure and companionship). To adjudicate these different ideals we end up bargaining with ourselves, trying to figure out when to submit to a short-term desire and when to hold on to our longer-term goals. This process of "intertemporal bargaining" involves your present-self trying to make deals with a future-self who might have different goals. We draw what Ainslie calls "Bright Lines" to help clarify how we will respond to temptations when they occur.[37] Bright Lines are signposts, shortcuts that keep us from having to weigh costs and benefits each and every time a short-term temptation rubs up against a long-term goal. Bright Lines are those lines that we have established as "Do Not Cross" zones, automatic triggers for what lines not to cross when temptation hits us. A short-term reward may be more immediately gratifying than a long-term reward, but if we draw a line around those behaviors that take us away from the longer-term goal, we can refrain from giving in to temptations, even when rewards are more immediately tangible.

These lines, I suggest, often have a moral dimension. For some, the proactive goal of chastity means drawing a Bright Line around the possibility of premarital sex; the short-term desire may emerge, but if a Bright Line has been established a person will try not to give in to those urges. That we are not always successful should be obvious; a discussion of conscience must deal with how we understand ourselves if we cross these lines. For now, however, let us establish the idea that *some* moral goals involve the drawing of Bright Lines that we will not cross. In this way, the proactive aspect of morality shapes the inhibitive, insofar as being a good member of society (broad, proactive goal) rules certain behaviors (murder, stealing) out of bounds. An individual can draw a personal Bright Line (less dessert, go to bed early) in the service of goals that call for these behaviors. We do not need to decide how we will deal with each and every temptation; our Bright Lines rule certain behaviors out of bounds. Bright Lines can be automatic, as in disgust (see Chapter 4), or they can be rationally chosen to lock in a particular trajectory of behavior, say, entering college or getting married. What they do is illuminate the variety of options that we are presented with, ruling some out of bounds unless we give in to temptation or decide to redraw our lines. Sometimes these lines demarcate what might be considered evil, "behavior that deliberately deprives innocent people of their humanity, from small-scale assaults on a person's dignity to outright murder."[38] This suggests how Bright Lines can wall off behaviors ranging from taboos (having sex with siblings) to more mundane behaviors that one feels proper people should not indulge in (talk with one's mouth full). Behaviors that cross a person's Bright Lines, of any scale, will trigger a strong, negative reaction.

If Bright Lines refer to the lines we draw around those behaviors we judge as morally unworthy, we should develop a corresponding notion for the positive moral ideals that are also a part of conscience. Let me introduce an imperfect-but-alliterative notion of Bright Lights to capture morality's desirable aspects. Duties and ideals serve as signposts that we travel toward in the complicated, often murky daily environments that we live in. Bright Lines are clearly drawn and relatively easy to identify. Bright Lights are attractive, if distant, markers in the fog of daily travel. They stand out in the environment, even if the route toward reaching them is sometimes unclear. Bright Lights involve answers to a central moral question: What is the good life?[39] After a long day of travel or being lost on the highway, Bright Lights can orient and motivate a person to keep going, just as the horizon does for those who are flying or sailing. A different metaphor involves devices that kill bugs, literal Bright Lights that attract insects toward them. For humans, Bright Lights are useful representations of a distant destination that we never quite reach but continually view as worth striving toward.

Bright Lights and Bright Lines are metaphors for the proactive and inhibitive aspects of morality. They are inherently social and frame expectations for proper or improper behavior, thought, or belief. They are matters of perspective; one person's Bright Light may be another's Bright Line. Take the case of a person considering suicide. For some, it might represent an ideal end to the pain they feel; to another, it is a moral violation to even consider the act. Such divergent definitions stem from a person's (or group's) belief about what behaviors are allowable in a society and what behaviors are acceptable for a person that might harm the wider group or society. The balance between living for others and living for oneself is ubiquitous in human societies,[40] and different cultures arrange the "proper" balance differently. Even within cultures, different groups place more or less emphasis on the importance of the individual and the group. American society is as rife with this tension as any other, with powerful messages toward maximizing one's own life experience mixing with messages about the importance of family, community, and caring for others.[41] This suggests that talking about one moral code is to impose order on a process that is inherently conflicted in modern society. A social psychology of morality explores the processes behind drawing Bright Lines and Bright Lights and their consequences for individuals, situations, and society.

A quick note about religion: morality is sometimes conflated with religion, but this is a mistake. People who are moral may not be religious,[42] and as recurring scandals remind us, not all religious people are moral. Religious symbolic systems are certainly a prevalent source for many individuals' ethical precepts,[43] including in America.[44] But Americans, when pressed, understand the difference between morality and religion.[45] Individuals

develop culturally shaped Bright Lines and Bright Lights that have cross-religious affiliation,[46] and as I will discuss in Chapter 3, they are influenced by a variety of social factors.

Bright Lights and Bright Lines: Capacity Versus Content

Broadly speaking, social scientists approach the study of the human organism in two ways. Sociologists, political scientists, and some anthropologists tend to focus on variation among humans based on their social groups, while many psychologists focus on universal elements of how the organism works. This is an oversimplification, of course, but a useful one for orienting us toward a central problem in understanding human beings. Two anthropologists classically summed up this issue with an aphorism:

Every man [*sic*] is in certain respects

   (A) like all other men
   (B) like some other men
   (C) like no other men[47]

This is a rather obvious contention; yet, it is obscured in some of the more social constructionist or biologically determinist corners of academia. Human beings share some features as members of a species and share some things with others in similar groups or social locations, but are partially unique. An adequate discussion of morality needs to address the ways in which (A) and (B) interact, with the caveat that a moral code feels uniquely binding (C). People do not consider their moral codes as arbitrary; we use the term "moral" precisely because it connotes a sense of obligation, of rightness and wrongness. We internalize moral codes as binding on our behavior. If we draw a Bright Line, we do not need police or parents to monitor us; we will only cross Bright Lines under extraordinary circumstances.

All beliefs or behaviors are, in theory, subject to moral evaluation. Distinctions people make based on social class or levels of education often involve Bright Lights and carry an implicit "our way is the right way" message. Going to the opera, for example, draws quasi-moral boundaries between social groups. Those who attend the opera may look askance at those who do not, and the reverse is also true. Not going to the opera may connote proud membership in a different social group. Bright Lines connote messages of what behaviors proper people engage in or make sure to avoid. Americans seem to be particularly reticent to overtly pass judgment on the lifestyle choices of others,[48] but that does not mean boundaries are morally neutral.

The drawing of Bright Lines appears to be a universal capacity, as is the fact that human actions are oriented toward desired ends (Bright Lights). Vast portions of the content, however, of our Bright Lights and Bright Lines are patterned for members of various social groups, shaped by social forces such as culture, ethnicity, and social class. Individuals may experience moral codes as unique, but more often their power stems from a sense of being anchored in a wider group. Before filling in some of the content of (B), however, we need to begin with (A), what I will argue in Chapter 3 involves the universal capacity for developing Bright Lines and Bright Lights. As Charles Taylor has pointed out, it makes no sense to talk about a person without taking into account his or her ultimate goals and identifications (Bright Lights).[49] I add Bright Lines as important indicators of morally abhorred actions that, if crossed, would violate a person's core sense of self. This core sense, which I will refer to as personal identity, involves experiences of (C), but as we will see, even the feeling of being unique is immensely influenced by social factors.

Chapter 3 will go into some detail as to influences on the basis of drawing Bright Lines and Bright Lights, and Chapter 4 will delve into their operation. Individual codes are linked to wider social structures, but the ultimate authority behind these boundaries may get perceived as being more or less anchored in society as opposed to being a personal responsibility. A popular theme tracing back to Émile Durkheim echoed in more recent psychological theorizing[50] is that modernity represents shifts in the authority to determine right and wrong from society to individual selves.[51] Whereas we once appealed to a greater authority to decide right from wrong, many scholars argue that today we look to individual notions of morality. These individual notions are social as well, but they offer more wiggle-room, the thinking goes, for less absolutist worldviews.

The Dual Processing Model of Personhood

The drawing of Bright Lines and the attraction of Bright Lights occur at two different levels, captured in an influential distinction set forth by the philosopher Harry Frankfurt, a distinction that emerges in different forms across various philosophical and psychological writings. Frankfurt argues that human beings are unique because of the interplay between (a) their desires and (b) their desires about those desires.

> Besides wanting and choosing and being moved to do this or that, men may also want to have (or not to have) certain desires and motives. They are capable of wanting to be different, in their preferences and purposes, from what they are. Many animals appear to have the capacity for what I shall

call "first-order desires" … which are simply desires to do or not to do one thing or another. No animal other than man, however, appears to have the capacity for reflective self-evaluation that is manifested in the formation of second-order desires.[52]

I borrow this influential distinction to anchor an understanding of conscience and do not claim to be the first to discover its utility for social science.

This philosophical distinction is found in the more empirically based psychological literature under the rubric of a dual-processing model. The dual processes are termed differently by different scholars. For example, Baumeister concludes that the human mind works on two levels that he terms "automatic" and "conscious."[53] Both levels observe the world around us and process incoming information, but these two systems handle that information differently. Our automatic systems do many things at once, observing the world, making links between what we see/hear and what we already know, and triggering emotions when warning signals need to be sent to the conscious mind. The sheer horsepower of our automatic system frees cognitive resources so that we can consciously focus on whatever problem is at hand.[54] This automatic system, or what has been termed the "adaptive unconscious," is an early-warning system that simultaneously does a lot of sophisticated mental processing.[55] The automatic system captures Frankfurt's notion of first-order desires, thoughts and feelings that emerge seemingly unbidden from our minds. The second-order desires Frankfurt highlights emerge through the engagement of our conscious minds, self-reflectively evaluating the products of the automatic mind.

These two systems have also been referred to as "hot" and "cold" cognitive processing systems, with the hot system acting quickly and tied more directly to our emotional system and the cold system being under our direct control.[56] Zajonc famously discussed the "affective" and "cognitive" systems, arguing early on that affective processes were more independent and primary than psychologists of the era believed.[57] We should be careful not to fully interchange the automatic system with emotionality; Epstein suggests that "experiential cognitions" operate at a preconscious level and overlap with emotional systems.[58] Such fast-processing cognitions come from experience and shape how we see the world before we are aware of their influences. For stylistic reasons, I will use these various terms to capture the same distinction: first-order and second-order, conscious and automatic, and hot and cold processes. They share the same premise: our minds operate on two key levels, with different strengths and weaknesses at each level.

Incidentally, our automatic, unconscious processing system is not unified. Evidence suggests that a variety of modules have developed to handle

the various concerns of the human organism. Wilson suggests five defining features of the automatic system: it is nonconscious, fast, unintentional, uncontrollable, and effortless.[59] It is poor at responding to novel information and ends up bending that new information to fit our preconceptions. Because it biases incoming information to fit with its way of seeing the world, the automatic information processing system really anchors—unknowingly—our sense of who we are and what we believe. It has evolved to quickly make sense of environmental stimuli and is a primary influence on our emotions. Automatic responses trigger alerts to tell our conscious mind what it should attend to. Because feelings are so fundamental for understanding our responses to the world, people anchor self-understandings in the reactions shaped by these automatic patterns.[60] Bright Lines and Bright Lights become, I will argue, core intuitions that we draw on to understand ourselves as moral beings. By intuitions, we refer to gut feelings or hunches, instant judgments that emerge from our unconscious mind.[61]

Our conscious mind, the controlled system, is much slower, primarily able to attend to one thing at a time. While our automatic system is efficient, it is rather inflexible. Our conscious mind is incredibly flexible, capable of handling complex situations and rather useful for handling difficult or new information or novel situations. Our minds have evolved such that these two processes operate at different speeds: "By the time the rational brain receives incoming sensory stimuli about an event or object in the real world, the emotional brain has already swung into action and showered the neocortex with emotional messages that condition its perception."[62] Survival would have been more difficult if we had to rationally analyze each and every threat that we faced as a species. However, our brains' older aspects share elements with other nonrational vertebrates that react instantly and nonconsciously to important stimuli. These older aspects might be referred to as our lizard-brains. Our reasoning faculties evolved later, on top of our lizard-brains, and while we like to believe that our conscious, more highly involved processes run our lives, evidence suggests we are more lizard-like than we might care to admit.

Jonathan Haidt offers an accessible metaphor to explain how these dual processes relate to each other. He suggests that we think of our automatic processing system as an elephant and our conscious mind as the rider.[63] Put simply, the rider may have a variety of intentions about where they will be traveling, but in reality, if the elephant decides to go in a particular direction, the rider would along with it. And, as Haidt and others[64] point out, the rider will go to great lengths to convince himself that, in fact, he made the decision all along. Since the automatic aspects of our brain are faster (a problem with the elephant-aspect of the metaphor) and more directly trigger our emotions, they exert great influence on what we

decide to do and how we judge the world. By the time those judgments reach the conscious mind, the rider may be catching up to where the elephant has already decided the pair will go. The lizard-brain reacts, and the conscious mind pretends that it was in control all along.

These two aspects of the self—the automatic and controlled systems, the first- and second-order desires, the hot and cold systems, the rider and the elephant—operate largely independently.[65] What we think about ourselves at a conscious level may or may not reflect the automatic systems we have developed. Our gut reactions tend to implicate the automatic system; the second-order desires we have reflect the controlled system. The rider, in fact, has very little access to the automatic processes of the elephant, but becomes remarkably adept at inventing stories that fit with what the elephant has decided. Both systems, as I argue in this book, are indelibly shaped by social forces, both direct (family upbringing) and distal (national culture, ethnic group). A social psychology of conscience would study where these first- and second-order desires come from, how they interact, why we so often disregard them when acting within concrete situations, and how we maintain a positive, moral sense of ourselves even after we act in ways that violate the standards that each level imposes on us.

There is a convergence between the psychologically oriented argument just presented and pragmatism, an influential perspective within social theory.[66] In brief, a core motivating idea of the work of John Dewey, George Herbert Mead, and the other forerunners of what is known as symbolic interactionism is that humans have the capacity to treat themselves as social objects, and as such we can modify our behavior in ways that other animals cannot. Language and symbols are vital for this process, as language allows us to imagine the future responses of significant others in our lives and shape our behavior accordingly. A major tenet of this tradition is that, the more we adapt to our social situations, the less we need to consciously think about our actions (the second-order capacity that Frankfurt highlighted) and operate more out of a sense of habit.[67] It is only in situations in which problems emerge and habitual areas of action (automatic processing, in our terms) no longer suffice that conscious deliberation is necessary.[68] Our automatic processing handles much of the routine of our daily lives. We get consciously involved when these habits fail us or are insufficient.

We set goals both consciously, as the result of deliberation, and unconsciously, as our automatic processes winnow and sift through potential options to concentrate on those that feel right. Given a goal, be it short term (make lunch) or long term (get a degree), our automatic processes are adept at steering our actions in line with those goals.[69] Less attention

has been paid, however, to the ways in which goals are patterned in a society and among its groups. People do not select their goals out of a vacuum; rather, as we identify with various groups, we internalize their goals as our own. The way we see the world, the Bright Lights that we are attracted to and the Bright Lines that we steer away from, are presented to us part and parcel with the various identifications that we take as our own. Part of what it means to see oneself as black or Protestant or Midwestern is to draw the same moral boundaries and be attracted to the same moral ideals that you think others in that group find important.

These Bright Lights and Bright Lines become internalized as fundamental parts of the automatic system as we align ourselves with various groups and relationships. This can happen through a conscious decision, though often we draw Bright Lines unconsciously as we identify with others in valued groups or roles before we are able to articulate them. Many adults, it turns out, are unable to articulate coherent justifications for their moral boundaries,[70] but their powerful, moral intuitions circumscribe their actions and senses of self.[71] Bright Lines operate at both the conscious and automatic levels. We are often aware of the goals we are seeking, though emotional feedback from the automatic system will alert us to how close or far we are from those moral ideals. These two systems may not always be on the same page, and each has biases.

How the Dual Systems Interact: Lawyer Logic and Scientist Logic

We have evolved dual-processing systems that operate within the same mind. Both processes send messages but we are really only aware of messages from the conscious system. That might make it seem like conscious-processing information takes priority, but as we have seen, its processing is often steered by the unconscious system. People do not necessarily interpret their automatic impulses in the same way when balancing automatic messages with conscious decisions. Ralph Turner classically suggested that people relate differently to their inner experiences, with some interpreting impulses as important pieces of information, while others view those impulses as things to be resisted. He was not speaking of the dual-processing system per se, but his analysis addresses variation in the ways people listen to their head and their gut.[72]

Turner suggested that cultures differed on how they interpreted inner impulses. Some cultures were more likely to interpret these feelings as important guides for how they should act, while others learned to interpret the same feelings as threats to the social order. Some people felt real, he argued, when they were following norms and expectations, what we

might think of as cold-system, second-order desires. Others felt real when they were ignoring those dictates and following their inner impulses, first-order desires. Turner argued that the United States was in a period of shifting from an institutional (cold system) form of finding one's real self to an impulsive (hot system) one. In the first half of the twentieth century and before, people felt authentic when living up to social roles and expectations; in contrast, in the 1960s, more and more people felt authentic precisely when violating these expectations. Neither approach is more right than the other. They represent different ways in which people might interpret their gut feelings, as either threats to the social order or as their real selves breaking through.

For example, the passionate feelings of lust that Americans spend their lives searching for are seen as threatening in many Asian cultures.[73] Americans are rare in human history for the extent to which we privilege impulses of love when seeking a mate; most cultures in human history do not base marriage on something as flimsy as emotion.[74] Many Americans find grounds for divorce when passions cool. Elsewhere, passions are seen as a threat to a stable marital arrangement and the wider social system. Americans privilege these automatic feelings, while other cultures interpret the same feelings differently. This is, of course, an oversimplification of both American and Asian cultures, each of which contains a great deal of variation,[75] but it demonstrates how inner impulses can be interpreted through different cultural lenses. The take-home message is that neither the automatic nor controlled system *necessarily* takes precedence over the other. Some people will feel that their impulses reflect their true desires, while others view those impulses as temptations that must be overcome. The same person might treat one system with priority only in certain situations. Many factors, ranging from national culture to religious orientation, shape how we treat this dual-processing system.

Dual processing suggests that we can be of at least "two minds" about everything we encounter in our daily lives. The popular notion is that if we see a person, hear a song, or get exposed to a new idea, we form an attitude about that object. But we do not just form a single attitude about the objects or people in our lives; we have dual attitudes.[76] We have our rapid response, an instant emotional reaction that comes from our automatic, faster-processing mental system, and a more deliberative reaction that takes into account the situation, the context, and our personal ideas of what we *should* be feeling. The second, controlled attitude only comes into play when we have time to ponder the object and get past our initial, automatic reaction.[77]

Thus, our attitudes (and, I argue, moral judgments) are not hard-wired in the sense they are unchangeable; they are deeply rooted in automatic,

hot-system processes. Those influences are shaped—and potentially altered—by our interactions, groups, and social positions. Bright Lines represent the negative, automatic moral boundaries that get attached to certain objects or actions. Bright Lights implicate more of the second-order construction of what kind of person we want to be, but such goals trigger first-order responses. I may want to live a life of generosity, and when I act in line with that Bright Light I will feel satisfied, proud, and more authentic. Odds are, however, if my automatic brain really craves the pleasure that comes from hoarding money, I will interpret various actions in line with those desires and try to frame my actions in ways that allow me to keep a self-view of having a Bright Light of generosity.

Drawing these boundaries is not a permanent process. Haidt suggests that changes in automatic moral intuitions can occur through interaction.[78] His social intuitionist model demonstrates how moral intuitions can be automatic and instantaneous but also potentially flexible. Using Frankfurt's terminology, our second-order capacity to reflect means that, over time, we can analyze those first-order reactions and decide if they line up with how we see ourselves and how we want to see ourselves. The content of these Bright Lights and Bright Lines comes from a variety of sources discussed in Chapter 3. A highly valued, consciously chosen Bright Light can, over time, become part of the automatic processing system and trigger the automatic impulses that our conscious mind hopes we would have. I may have selfish impulses, but by practicing charity, I might consciously reshape my unconscious system. Typically, however, our automatic processing is difficult to change. Change is effortful and slow. Once an attitude has become rooted in that automatic system, we are no longer objective with our conscious evaluation of objects that trigger that automatic reaction. In fact, saying we are no longer objective is a polite way to put it; we are in fact terribly biased animals with a strong tendency to filter incoming information in ways that support our original automatic reactions. Rather than being objective, rational, and fair-minded, we go to great lengths to consciously build a case that reaffirms our automatic reaction. Haidt points out that we reason like lawyers, not like scientists.[79]

Lawyer Logic, as I will refer to it, means that we think about our lives, moral issues, and social objects like a hired attorney with a bias toward supporting a preordained conclusion. A defense attorney is not expected to decide for herself if her client is innocent or guilty; she is obligated by her job to act as if the client is innocent. Finding out the truth is not her goal. Her goal is to present a case to the judge or jury that presents a pre-viously decided conclusion—the innocence of the client. Lawyer Logic, then, suggests a type of biased reasoning. In the service of the judicial sys-tem, it is appropriate that one party's job is to build the best possible case

for one verdict, since it is the responsibility of the prosecutor to build the opposite case. Ideally, between the two cases, truth is discovered.

Contrast this with the best examples of the scientific method. Ideally, the scientist offers a hypothesis about how some part of the world works and tests it to see if she is, in fact, correct. While a lawyer already knows the conclusion she is working toward, the scientist knows the conclusion she is aiming for, but is *willing to challenge that conclusion if it is not supported by the data*. Scientific claims are intended to be falsifiable. In the legal realm, the lawyer's job is to build the best logical case to support a preordained conclusion; in contrast, in the scientific realm, the scientist's conclusions are (or should be) always under potential revision. If the scientist is wrong, she goes back to the drawing board. The lawyer (as well as public relations agents and political spokespeople) does not weigh the pros and cons supporting her conclusion; she knows the conclusion in advance and does her best to present a coherent, logical-enough case that supports it.

We are lawyers when it comes to employing the moral dimension of our dual-processing systems. Our automatic systems offer instant judgments about an issue; in Haidt's metaphor, the elephant picks a direction. After that instantaneous intuition, the conscious system (Haidt's rider) jumps in to figure out the best way to articulate a logical-sounding explanation for a conclusion that was already reached by the automatic system.[80] The conscious part of our minds *can* weigh the pros and cons, but it rarely does for strongly held moral beliefs and intuitions. People may have a host of reasons for supporting the president, but the truth is, their automatic mind made its choice a long time ago and since then they have selectively chosen reasons that support the initial conclusion. Over time, if the president acts in such a way that the people can no longer consciously support the conclusion that an automatic process dictated long ago, their first-order intuitions are subject to revision. It is sociologically interesting, however, how our daily situations and regular interaction partners support our retaining our opinions rather than subjecting them to rigorous analysis. We rarely make the effort to change these first-order intuitions and will go to great lengths to protect them from confronting disconfirming evidence.

We see this process demonstrated every month with the latest media scandal. Famous persons are accused of lying, cheating, drinking, or taking bribes, and their lawyers come out to loudly protest their client's innocence. The lawyers are not, rather obviously, an unbiased source. They are there to support a biased conclusion, regardless of the facts of the case. We all have, I am arguing, our own internal lawyer (or public relations flack) that works overtime to present cases to ourselves and others. The conclusion of these cases, I am arguing, was not arrived at using Scientist Logic. Rather, we employed Lawyer Logic to ultimately support

a first-order conclusion that we are moral, upstanding people. As I discuss in Chapters 4 and 7, this process is strongest in the moral domain; we are quite biased toward seeing ourselves in the best possible moral light just like lawyers are biased toward presenting the best possible case on behalf of their client. That does not mean we try to be as moral as possible. Far from it. We try to build the best possible moral case to portray ourselves to others and to ourselves. Our judgments about ourselves are biased in our favor. We employ Lawyer Logic in service of the preordained conclusion that we are morally sufficient, and use this logic as much as possible in order to maintain a "clean conscience."

CONSCIENCE

At this point, we can begin to specify what conscience is. Freud's classic notion of the superego has served the purpose of explaining what conscience might be, at least in popular understanding. In Freud's model, we have natural drives to love and destroy, to procreate or be aggressive, and only society's influence in the form of an internalized superego can hold those drives in check. Freud deserves credit for introducing the unconscious as a meaningful concept. He was one of the first modern thinkers to meaningfully attempt to link the individual with society in a systematic way. That said, we can move beyond conscience as a unified internal notion of externally imposed constraints. Conscience refers to an *ongoing process* whereby our dual-processing aspects of mind code, analyze, and emotionally respond to incoming stimuli through the lenses of our Bright Lights and Bright Lines. We do not have a single conscience; rather, we have ongoing processes of interaction between first-order Bright Lights and Bright Lines and second-order, self-reflective notions that affirm or deny those first-order intuitions. Conscience is inherently dynamic, though we develop largely stable Bright Lights and Bright Lines as we age. Change is possible, but rare. Both the processes and contents of change are overwhelmingly social.

I have introduced Bright Lights and Bright Lines as metaphors for building a social psychology of conscience and suggested they are socially shaped and reinforced, develop on two cognitive levels, and interact through biased Lawyer Logic aimed at justifying a certain moral self-image. The term "conscience" is slippery, especially if we understand it as a process, not just as a stable mental construct.

1. The inner sense of what is right or wrong in one's conduct or motives, impelling one toward right action: to follow the dictates of conscience.
2. The complex of ethical and moral principles that controls or inhibits the actions or thoughts of an individual.
3. An inhibiting sense of what is prudent.[81]

Conscience refers to the individual process whereby we engage moral issues, actions, and judgments. The social psychology of conscience engages these processes along with their social influences and consequences. I refrain from talking about "a" conscience given the focus on our dual-processing systems, each level of which has its own contribution to our moral thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. If first-order intuitions and impulses match up with second-order constructions of one's self-image, we achieve a sense of harmony or authenticity.

Developing conscience involves more than simply not wanting to do a certain action; children are taught not to want many things, but they have not developed conscience until such time as they develop socially reasons for not wanting these things. Children are not treated as fully moral beings until they appropriately internalize the standards we lay out for them. Only when an act violates a principle that has been internalized as binding, not simply due to the power of authority, is it considered a moral transgression.[82] Socializing children involves developing unconscious, automatic processes that ideally mirror how we want them to behave, bringing those unconscious feelings and thoughts in line with external standards.[83]

The socialization of a new member of any institution or social group occurs along the same lines; we learn what the expectations are and internalize them (if they fit with our own broader life goals). Sometimes this involves changing our larger goals, misleading ourselves, or feeling conflicted about how the morality of our new peers compares with what our parents taught us. Additionally, we live in a variety of different social systems; we grow older, we experience cultural changes. All of these types of changes and the different reference groups or ideals we find important influence conscience.

Since it is at root a moral phenomenon, conscience implicates Bandura's proactive and inhibitive aspects, what I am referring to as Bright Lines and Bright Lights. Conscience is motivating in certain circumstances, inhibiting in others. The core principles that orient our senses of conscience can sometimes be articulated, but are often simply represented as preconscious, automatic processes.[84] We are biased toward protecting our current sense of right and wrong, using Lawyer Logic to defend our personal sense of self and our attitudes from disconfirming information. We respond intuitively to moral claims and feel that they hold a deeper sway on our actions than mere conventional norms. We profess great allegiance to moral ideals, such as justice and freedom, even if our concrete actions do not always live up to those ideals. Political parties, social movements, nations, schools, and gangs all orient themselves around certain principles that, in theory at least, represent the members and carry with them a moral force for those in the group. Sociologists and psychologists have discussed

many of these processes in various guises. Developing a social psychology of conscience offers an umbrella to help us organize this disparate work, ideally helps us better understand social behavior, and lets us speak to issues of social life with models of the person that more accurately reflect real flesh-and-blood individuals.

Alternatively, conscience involves more than simply accepting societal notions of moral transgressions as one's own. It involves the Bright Lights we are attracted toward in our lives, the goals and principles we adopt as our own and are motivated to fulfill. At the most abstract, the notion of values captures these signposts. Values are important in signaling what is acceptable and unacceptable conduct for moral people to concern themselves with.[85] There are multiple values, and if I find achievement to be the most important value, then I judge myself and others through this lens. I might see people who are more concerned with helping others than with their own achievement as quaint or laudable, but in the end, I will think their value system is misguided. Perhaps their behavior does not cross a Bright Line I have drawn (do not murder); different Bright Lights suggest their moral views are different from mine in important ways.

Conscience allows us to capture the complexity of moral life, rather than assume there is a single, proper development of an internal moral barometer. Different cultures privilege different Bright Lights and draw different Bright Lines, and even within one person automatic and conscious processing systems can conflict. Much psychological research obscures these inner conflicts and the myriad potential interpersonal and intergroup conflicts that exist in a diverse society. What is moral for somebody working at a big corporation is not necessarily moral when dealing with a spouse. A politician advocates a particular moral scheme in public and lives by a different one in private. People are biased toward perceiving their groups as more moral than others, however they define morality. A social psychology of conscience attempts to locate patterns in these conflicts and does not assume a unitary moral code, at either the individual or social level. Not to mention the fact that, as many psychologists point out, we do not always consciously know that our automatic systems even influence our conscious, second-order evaluations. We do not know our own minds to the extent we believe we do.

Bright Lights imply motivation—reasons people get up in the morning, join groups, or otherwise contribute to the public sphere. The literature on motivation is sprawling, multifaceted, and far from agreement. Sociologists, in particular, tend to be simplistic when discussing motivation.[86] It is beyond the scope of this book to advocate any unified motivational scheme. Among other things, however, we are intrinsically social and thus motivated to interact with others. Morality is an atypical motivation,

I will argue. We do not typically try to maximize our morality, but are motivated to see ourselves at least as minimally moral based on the standards of important reference groups.[87] We may not all try to be Martin Luther King, but we strive to at least keep from being seen as morally deviant in our social worlds. We accept that we cannot all be saints, but we identify people who are morally transgressive and attempt not to act like them, or if we stumble, try our best Lawyer Logic to explain the transgressions away, if only to ourselves. Duties, part of morality's proactive aspect, are motivational, both because they are intrinsically so and because we seek approval (or seek to avoid others' disapproval).[88] The social psychological question involves how and when duty becomes implicated within one's own moral, motivational apparatus. Why do certain duties and obligations to certain significant others motivate one person to follow the law and another to go along with friends and violate it?

Conscience involves a person's particular constellation of first- and second-order desires, their moral intuitions, and their judgments of those intuitions, which may not always be in agreement. For example, Patricia Devine has found that many Americans harbor racial stereotypes (first-order, automatic reactions) but differ on how much they try to dampen these reactions (second-order, conscious judgments of those automatic reactions).[89] This process, and why people differ on both levels of reactions, falls within the purview of a social psychology of conscience. Both levels are influenced by a variety of social factors and—though I have not stressed it much to this point—can be overridden by situational pressures. We may abstractly judge something as a Bright Line we would not cross, but circumstances lead most of us to cross all sorts of Bright Lines that our second-order selves never expect.

Our first-order, automatic reactions happen so suddenly and forcefully that it is easy to lose sight of the fact that they were developed in social contexts and are not just "naturally" there. Some negative moral evaluations seem to have universality—the incest taboo, for example. But hatred of homosexuality, disgust at the idea of eating a dog, and the idea that one's left hand is an unclean appendage are culturally determined first-order reactions. They are no less severe or binding on action for being shaped over time in individuals who are socialized within particular moral orders, but they are not "givens," though people can experience them as such.

Chapter Summary and Transition

Humans are moral creatures with the capacity for developing conscience. Second-order reflection, as I will discuss in Chapter 3, evolved to help

regulate interpersonal behavior. Yet, the society an individual develops within dramatically influences this biological capacity. We are an instinctive species that has evolved the capacity to pass moral judgment. Our capacity for self-appraisal allows the possibility of moral behavior since it offers the possibility of overriding an instinct. How moral standards are shaped by communities, activated, and influence our sense of self are all questions for a social psychology of morality.

Conscience involves the drawing of Bright Lines and attraction to Bright Lights, morality's positive and negative aspects shaped by social forces. These Lights and Lines get routinized into our automatic processing systems but are subject to potential conscious reappraisal. These two levels can conflict, though more often the automatic system operates without our conscious mind being aware of its influence, sparking intuitions that we use Lawyer Logic to defend. After our unconscious mind delivers an intuition, our conscious mind often produces after-the-fact logic to build the best case possible for a preordained, automatically derived first-order reaction.

Rather than studying a single moral system or how closely people develop to some unified moral ideal, we will engage multifaceted people across situations and over time. All of the possible questions cannot be answered—or even asked—by a single author in a single book. But I will try to contribute to the ongoing enterprise of social science by advocating for a broader engagement with morality within the social sciences and setting out a broad theoretical understanding of what moral actors look like. This involves understanding the mechanics of the Bright Lights and Bright Lines and how society shapes them. It involves looking at how they play out in concrete situations or whether situational pressures lead people to act contrary to these ideals. It means focusing on how people retrospectively make sense of their actions in the context of their overall lives, either accepting responsibility or deflecting blame (where possible) for less-than-moral actions. And it means conceptualizing morality as part of an ongoing human life, including the development and maintenance of a core sense of self. There is a lot of ground to cover, and a model of the moral self involves a lot of moving, interrelated parts. Chapter 2 clarifies a few more of the vital concepts important for the journey, including some potentially slippery terms, to build toward a model of the moral actor that can encompass conscience's stable, changing, and sometimes contradictory aspects.