

RUNNING HEAD: PERSON-CENTERED MORALITY

Morality is Personal

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**Abstract**

What purpose does moral judgment serve? We argue that the basic goal of moral cognition is often not to praise or condemn specific actions, but rather to try to understand other people's moral character via their actions. Inferences about moral character are a fundamental, automatic form of social evaluation that serves an important functional purpose. Moreover, character information can outweigh information about objective harm in social judgments, and judgments of the immorality of acts and character can often deviate from each other, suggesting that neither type of judgment can fully explain the other. Results predicted by the person-centered account of morality are robust and replicable. Acknowledging the role of character in moral cognition leads to the insight that moral judgment can be both rational and intuitive in meaningful senses.

In 2007, the Atlanta Falcons' star quarterback Michael Vick was exposed for bankrolling a dog-fighting ring. Details about the dog fights were grim; dogs that proved insufficiently violent in test fights, for example, were brutally hanged or drowned. Vick was criminally prosecuted and sentenced to 23 months in prison, even though prosecutors had recommended a maximum sentence of only 18 months (McCann, 2007). He also lost his \$130 million contract with the Falcons, who ruled out his ever returning to the team as their quarterback, and team owner Arthur Blank told reporters he felt personally betrayed (King, 2007). In the U.S. Senate, Senator Robert Byrd denounced Vick's acts as "Barbaric! Let that word resound from hill to hill, and from mountain to mountain, from valley to valley, across this broad land. Barbaric! Barbaric!... I am confident the hottest places in hell are reserved for the souls of sick and brutal people who hold God's creatures in such brutal and cruel contempt" (cited in Martin, 2007).

What underlies the public outrage over Michael Vick's actions, as well as the Atlanta Falcons' finality in cutting their ties to him? Although few observers would argue that killing a pit bull is more morally blameworthy than killing a human being, Vick's behavior suggests a callous and sadistic personal character that even premeditated murder might not. Although gratuitous animal cruelty may not rise to the level of murder in American jurisprudence, in everyday moral psychology it points to severe deficits in empathy and moral character.

In the present chapter, we argue that the goal of moral cognition is often not to praise or condemn specific actions, but rather to try to understand other people's moral character *via* their actions (Pizarro & Tannenbaum, 2011; Uhlmann, Pizarro, & Diermeier, 2015). Human beings often act as intuitive virtue theorists who view behaviors as signals of underlying moral traits such as trustworthiness and compassion for others. As a result, actions high in information value

regarding character can be weighed more heavily in moral judgment than acts that cause more concrete harm (Pizarro, Tannenbaum, & Uhlmann, 2012).

In the present chapter, we first briefly review historical approaches to the philosophy and psychology of ethics, before introducing the concept of person-centered morality. We then explore two lines of empirical evidence supporting our argument that moral judgment is often about evaluating people, not acts: first, character assessments are automatic, yet nuanced, and serve an important functional purpose. Second, character information can outweigh information about objective harm, and judgments of character often diverge from evaluations of acts. Next, we present evidence that results supporting the person-centered view of morality are highly replicable. To close, we argue that recognizing that human beings have a preoccupation with moral virtues leads to the insight that our moral judgments can be both rational and intuitive, in meaningful senses.

### **Historical Perspectives on Morality**

Since the Enlightenment, moral philosophy has been dominated by two opposing perspectives on ethics. On one side stand consequentialist philosophers, who view the outcomes resulting from an action as the only meaningful criterion for evaluating its morality or immorality. The most prominent consequentialist theory by far is utilitarianism, which judges as morally right the action that maximizes the total utility (or total “good”) across all morally relevant beings (Bentham, 1823/1970; Mill, 1861/1998; Smart & Williams, 1973). Standing in opposition to consequentialist theories of ethics are deontological theories, which evaluate the rightness or wrongness of an action according to whether it adheres to a moral rule or duty (Kant, 1785). There are several forms of deontology, some of which view the consequences of an act as one morally important feature among many, and some of which emphasize strict adherence to

moral rules, regardless of the consequences (see Bartels, 2008; Kagan, 1998; Royzman, Landy, & Leeman, 2015). All forms of deontology, however, dispute the claim that maximizing good outcomes, by any means necessary, is the only meaningful ethical principle.

Moral psychologists have inherited this preoccupation with deontological and utilitarian approaches to ethics from their philosophically-minded counterparts. Decision researchers have commonly treated utilitarian theory as normatively correct and proceeded to document systematic departures from this ethical standard (Baron, 1998; 2008, Sunstein, 2005). Similarly, Green and colleagues (Greene, Sommerville, Nystrom, Darley, & Cohen, 2001; Greene, J.D., Morelli, S.A., Lowenberg, K., Nystrom, L.E., & Cohen, J.D. 2008) have advanced a dual-process model of moral judgment, in which automatic System 1 processes are said to produce deontological moral judgments, and deliberate System 2 processes can sometimes override these System 1 “errors” and produce utilitarian judgments. In response to this line of work, some researchers have argued that deliberate reasoning is associated with *neither* deontological nor utilitarian judgment (Royzman, Landy et al., 2015), and others have suggested that, rather than resulting from System 2 overruling System 1, utilitarian judgments are a product of dispositional thinking styles (Baron, Scott, Fincher, & Metz, in press). Still others have empirically disputed the presumed optimality of utilitarian judgments (Bartels & Pizarro, 2011).

Despite the myriad theoretical and empirical disputes, scholarship on deontology and consequentialism is united by one commonality: it takes discrete actions to be the “focal evaluative point” of moral judgment (Kagan, 1998). That is, both deontological and consequentialist ethical theories are focused on what makes particular actions right or wrong, and empirical studies of deontological and utilitarian judgment are focused on when and why people judge particular actions to be permissible or impermissible. There is, however, a “third voice” in

ethical philosophy that takes a quite different approach: *virtue ethics* places the focus on the character of moral actors, rather than the nature of discrete actions. In other words, the driving question in virtue ethics is not “how do I decide what to do?”, but rather “how can I be a good person?” Virtue ethics may actually be the oldest philosophical approach to normative ethics (Aristotle, 4<sup>th</sup> Century B.C.E./1998), though it has only reemerged as a major competitor to deontology and utilitarianism comparatively recently (Anscombe, 1958). In the same way that psychologists studying act-centered moral judgment trace their intellectual heritage to deontological and utilitarian theories of ethics, theories of virtue ethics constitute the intellectual roots of the person-centered approach to moral judgment that we advocate in this chapter.

### **Person-Centered Morality**

Just as normative theories of virtue ethics contend that people’s chief moral concern ought to be with cultivating moral virtues, we argue that, descriptively, moral cognition is often more concerned with evaluating others’ character than the rightness or wrongness of their actions. Rather than a stand-alone model in its own right, a person centered approach to moral judgment is more of a needed corrective to theories that have conceptually and empirically focused on judgments of acts. We believe that a complete theory of moral cognition cannot neglect characterological evaluations of people; this is the core idea of Person-Centered Morality (PCM; Pizarro & Tannenbaum, 2011; Uhlmann et al., 2015).

Why would moral judgment be oriented toward character assessments, rather than praise and condemnation for particular actions? We see a functionalist reason why moral judgment so often focuses on the person (Gintis, Henrich, Bowles, Boyd, & Fehr, 2008). Many researchers have argued that it is vitally important to be able to predict one’s likely intentions toward us – will this person be benevolent or malevolent, trustworthy or treacherous? (e.g., Abele &

Wojciszke, 2007; Cottrell, Neuberg, & Li, 2007; Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2008; Fiske, Cuddy, & Glick, 2007; Pizarro & Tannenbaum, 2011; Wojciszke, Bazinska, & Jaworski, 1998; Wojciszke, Dowhyluk, & Jaworski, 1998). We agree; indeed, this seems to us to be the most important piece of information we can know about another person with whom we may interact (see Goodwin, Piazza, & Rozin, 2014), and it is a person's moral character that should be predictive of their good or bad intentions (Landy, Piazza, & Goodwin, 2015). In fact, good moral character may be one of the only unambiguously positive attributes a person can possess; other typically positive attributes such as intelligence and friendliness are seen as negative and undesirable in the wicked, because they make it more likely that such people can successfully carry out their ill intentions toward us (Landy & Goodwin, 2015; Peeters, 1992; Wojciszke, Bazinska et al., 1998).

From this functionalist perspective, discrete moral and immoral acts are informative of another's likely future intentions insofar as they provide information about that person's underlying character. Or, as Helzer and Critcher (2015) phrase it, discrete acts are "outputs" that respond to situational "inputs" and provide information about the "moral cognitive machinery" a person possesses. To possess sound moral cognitive machinery is precisely to possess good moral character, which they define as those personality traits most necessary for cooperative social relationships, particularly traits relating to how one treats other people. The functionalist account of PCM that we are presenting is compatible with the social functionalist account of morality offered by Haidt and Kesebir (2010), who argue that morality functions to suppress selfish behavior within groups, thus allowing cooperative social living. When our (self-interested) search for moral others uncovers a group member with deficient moral cognitive machinery, the group will shun or punish that person, thus enforcing good conduct and allowing the group to continue to thrive.

Given their functional importance, we would expect assessments of character to come quite naturally to people. Indeed, this is the case. Incredibly, infants as young as six months old show a preference for a “helper” character who aided another character in reaching a goal over a “hinderer” character, who prevented them from reaching the goal (Hamlin, Wynn, & Bloom, 2007). The foundations of person-centered morality emerge very early. Moreover, judgments of trustworthiness and aggression (among other aspects of personality) can be made by adults after as little as 100 milliseconds of exposure to a human face, and these judgments are highly correlated with analogous judgments made with no time constraints (Willis & Todorov, 2006). This result is also supported by neurological evidence: amygdala activation in response to faces correlates with the presence of features that are thought to indicate dishonesty, even when the task being completed does not require one to assess the target’s character (Engell, Haxby, & Todorov, 2007). This suggests that we automatically assess trustworthiness in others, even with only minimal information, and even when we are not consciously motivated to do so.

Of course, we do not evaluate a person’s character solely on the basis of their facial features; we often rely on actual behavior to inform our judgments, and in such cases, assessments of character can be quite nuanced, responding to a variety of behavioral features. One widely studied feature has been called “diagnosticity” (Skowronski & Carlston, 1989). Immoral behaviors are seen as more diagnostic of character than moral behaviors, because, by definition, moral people rarely engage in immoral behaviors, but immoral people sometimes strategically engage in moral behaviors. Thus, moral behaviors are often not particularly informative as to underlying character, whereas immoral behaviors are highly diagnostic (see also Reeder & Brewer, 1979). Further, even the *same* action can seem like a better or worse indicator of moral character, depending on how it is performed. For instance, when faced with



an opportunity to do something immoral, an actor who immediately gives in to temptation is seen as having worse character than an actor who does so only after deliberation. Conversely, an actor who immediately decides to do the right thing is seen as having better character than actor who does so after deliberation. Faster decisions indicate less internal conflict about what to do, and therefore more extreme (good or bad) character (Critcher, Inbar, & Pizarro, 2013).

It should be obvious by now that inferences about moral character are a frequent part of social and moral cognition. But what exactly do these inferences consist of? That is, what trait attributes do people see as relevant to assessments of character, or, phrased differently, what are the characteristics of laypeople's conception of "good character?" Several attempts have been made to answer this question, with somewhat disparate results, but aggregating across them, trustworthiness and compassion seem to be viable candidates for "core" elements of moral character.<sup>1</sup> Walker and Hennig (2004) identified three types of moral exemplar: just, caring, and brave, and found that traits ascribed to each varied considerably. However, those traits that did overlap between all three were largely related to honesty and integrity (e.g., truthful, honest, trustworthy) and to compassion toward others (e.g., helpful, loving, empathic). Similarly, Walker and Pitts (1998) used hierarchical cluster analysis to organize traits ascribed to a "moral"

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<sup>1</sup> Insofar as trustworthiness can be seen as the likelihood that one will keep one's promises and will not cheat others, these two core elements of character bear resemblances to Kohlberg's (1969) ethics of justice and Gilligan's (1982) ethics of care, as well as Turiel's (1983) definition of the moral domain, which he argues involves "welfare, fairness, and obligation" (p. 68). All of these theories of morality are fundamentally act-focused, not person-focused, but the convergence between them and the study of character speaks to our point that PCM must be a part of any integrated theory of human moral cognition. Haidt and Graham (2007; Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009) argue for additional, widely important virtues or "moral foundations," including respect for and deference to authority, loyalty to one's ingroup, and bodily and sexual purity. However, across cultures and political subcultures, only virtues relating to fairness (which includes honesty and integrity) and caring for others are endorsed universally. Therefore, we see our assertion that trustworthiness and compassion are core elements of moral character as largely consistent with their work.

person. They found that traits related to being caring and honest clustered together, and that other elements of trustworthiness (integrity, dependability) formed their own clusters. Other clusters related to being principled, loyal, fair, and confident. Lapsley and Lasky (2001) elicited traits that participants thought were aspects of “good character”, then had a separate sample rate how characteristic each trait was of a person with good character. The majority of the traits that were rated as most characteristic related to trustworthiness (e.g., sincere, honest) or compassion (e.g., understanding, kind), though some were not closely related to these virtues (e.g., loyal, fair). Using a similar procedure, Aquino and Reed (2002) had participants generate traits that are characteristic of a moral person. Most of the traits produced related to trustworthiness or compassion. Lastly, Piazza, Goodwin, Rozin, and Royzman (2014) introduced a conceptual distinction between “core goodness traits” that should be desirable in anyone, and “value commitment traits” (e.g., committed, hardworking) that contribute to good character in good or neutral people, but make bad people’s character even worse. Half of the core goodness traits related to trustworthiness (e.g., honest, trustworthy) or compassion (e.g., kind, charitable), though others did not (e.g., just, humble).<sup>2</sup> Across all of these studies, trustworthiness and compassion emerge as central elements of good character. Other traits appear as well, but none so often and so consistently. We take this as evidence that when people imagine the “good person,” they are imagining someone who can be trusted and who will treat others kindly.

Evaluations of character are a fundamental part of social cognition. They are functionally important and automatic, though they can also respond to subtle aspects of behaviors in quite

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<sup>2</sup> It is worth noting that the purpose of this study was to point out the distinction between core goodness and value commitment traits and to explore the importance of this distinction in impression formation, rather than to produce a complete taxonomy of all traits of each type. We suspect that a complete list of core goodness virtues would be dominated by trustworthiness and compassion traits.

nuanced ways. Although the notion that character is central to moral cognition has longstanding roots in philosophy (Aristotle, 4th Century B.C.E./1998; Hume, 1739/1888) and is affirmed by recent empirical work (Goodwin et al., 2014; Helzer, Furr, Hawkins, Barranti, Blackie, & Fleeson, 2014; Strohminger & Nichols, 2014), the person-centered approach to moral judgment contributes some unique and testable predictions (Pizarro & Tannenbaum, 2011; Uhlmann et al., 2015). For instance, acts that provide clear signals of poor moral character elicit moral condemnation completely out of proportion to the objective harm caused. The perceived informational value of social behaviors regarding underlying traits (Nelson, 2005; Nelson et al., 2010) plays a direct, measurable role in such outraged reactions. Furthermore, striking dissociations can emerge between moral evaluations of an act and the person who performs the act. Such *act-person dissociations* suggest that *neither type of judgment can be subsumed into the other*. That is, judgments of character cannot just be aggregations of act judgments, and judgments of acts cannot just be inputs into character judgments. These findings provide some of the strongest available evidence that moral virtues are necessary to account for the full scope of human moral cognition.

### **Some Anecdotes, and Some Evidence**

A perfect example of person-centered morality at work is public outrage over frivolous executive perks. Why do executive perks elicit widespread anger and publicity, notwithstanding the fact that they may waste relatively few organizational resources and do little concrete harm? Merrill Lynch CEO John Thain, for instance, provoked outrage when – in the midst of laying off thousands of employees – he spent lavishly redecorating his personal office. Extravagances included \$28,000 curtains, an \$87,000 rug, a \$35,000 toilet, and a \$1,400 waste paper basket. After he lost his position as CEO due to the negative publicity, national newspapers ran a cartoon

in which Thain was thrown out of the window of his high rise office, with the caption “Merrill Lynch gives Mr. Thain ultimate addition to luxury office – a private elevator.” Interestingly, Thain’s compensation of over \$80 million a year elicited no such vitriol (Gasparino, 2009).

There are numerous similar cases in which leaders have seen their careers damaged or derailed when their minor expenses hit the headlines. The Presidential campaign of Democrat John Edwards was significantly impacted by reports that the self-styled champion of the poor spent campaign donations on \$400 haircuts (Dowd, 2007). Consider also the incident in which Labour Home Secretary Jacqui Smith charged taxpayers £10 for two pornographic movies. Smith lost her seat in parliament after an election campaign in which many former supporters refused to open their front door for her (Coates, 2009). In these cases, it seems the issue was less the objective degree of waste, but what these frivolous expenses said about the leaders as people.

Empirical support for this idea comes from Tannenbaum, Uhlmann, and Diermeier, (2011, Study 2), who asked their participants which of two candidates they would hire as CEO of a manufacturing company. The candidates were comparable in their qualifications (which were also counterbalanced between-subjects), and differed only in their requested compensation. One candidate requested a salary of \$2 million, while the other requested a salary of \$1 million, plus an additional benefit that would cost the company \$40,000. The key manipulation was the nature of this benefit. In one condition, it was a \$40,000 cash signing bonus. In this condition, participants preferred the low-salary candidate, which is eminently sensible from an act-centered perspective – this candidate will drain less money out of the company, thereby doing less harm (in the broad sense). However, in another condition, the requested benefit was a \$40,000 marble table for the CEO’s office – and in yet another, it was a \$40,000 marble table with the candidate’s portrait carved into it. In both of these conditions, participants reversed their

preferences – they preferred to hire the candidate who requested \$2 million in salary over the candidate who requested \$1 million and the table. From a purely act-centered perspective, this seems ludicrous. But participants in this study took a person-centered approach to their decision, and indicated that the request for the table spoke to poor character (specifically, low integrity), and that the table-requesting candidate would make less sound business decisions than the high-salary-requesting candidate. Thus, when a job candidate requested a frivolous, self-indulgent perk, participants inferred poor moral character, and this inference led to their rejecting the candidate, paralleling the public outrage directed at John Thain and his \$35,000 toilet.

Interestingly, this result seems to stem from the perceived informational value of the frivolous request. Participants did not just see the table-requester as having worse character than the high-salary-requester, they felt that they *knew more* about his underlying moral character. An even more direct demonstration that objectively less harmful acts can be seen as more informative of poor character comes from a study about two unfriendly managers (Uhlmann, Tannenbaum, Zhu, & Diermeier, 2009). This research compared perceptions of a “misanthropic” manager who was rude to all of his employees to a “bigoted” manager who was rude only to his Black employees. Though he harmed objectively fewer people, participants saw the bigot’s behavior as more informative about his character than the misanthrope’s, and strongly preferred the misanthropic manager to the bigoted manager. Another study on this topic examined the informational value regarding character provided by tipping behavior (Uhlmann, Tannenbaum, & Diermeier, 2010). Participants read about Jack, a restaurant patron who either tipped for his meal using \$14 in bills or \$15 in pennies. Even though Jack’s tipping behavior was materially more generous in the pennies condition, he was perceived as a worse person. Moreover, judgments of Jack as a person were mediated by the perceived informational value of his act,

rather than the extent to which the act was seen as immoral in-and-of itself. All of this research converges on the conclusion that an act that does objectively less harm (or more good) can nonetheless signal worse moral character.

Let us now return to the sordid tale of Michael Vick recounted earlier. We argued that the cruelty he enacted upon animals led to inferences of severe character deficits, more so than some harmful actions directed at humans may have. Evidence for this assertion comes from studies involving two jilted lovers (Tannenbaum et al., 2011, Studies 1a and 1b). Participants were presented with information about two men who had learned that their girlfriends were cheating on them. Both men flew into a rage, and one beat up his unfaithful girlfriend, while the other beat up her cat. Participants judged the former action as more immoral, but judged the cat-beater as having worse character (specifically, as being more lacking in empathy) than the girlfriend-beater. This is an example of an act-person dissociation.

A similar study compared act-centered and person-centered judgments of another pair unlikable managers. One expressed his displeasure at a coworker by punching him in the face (the “violent” manager), whereas the other did so by muttering a racial slur about the coworker to himself (the “racist” manager; Uhlmann, Zhu, & Diermeier, 2014). The violent manager’s action was seen as more immoral, probably due to the obvious physical harm it caused. Yet, the racist manager was seen as having worse moral character, again showing a dissociation between judgments of the immorality of acts and the character of actors. This is also another instance of the phenomenon discussed above in which an act that does less harm (in this case, no harm, since the epithet was uttered privately) can still be indicative of worse moral character than an objectively more harmful action.

Both of these studies focused on inferences of character from actions that, while relatively less immoral than focal comparisons, are still clearly morally negative (i.e., animal cruelty and racial slurs). However, there may be some circumstances in which even a morally *praiseworthy* act can be more indicative of bad moral character than a less praiseworthy act. In an initial test of this idea, participants read about two target persons: a medical research assistant, whose duties involved inducing tumors in mice and then administering painful injections of experimental cancer drugs, and a pet store assistant, whose job involved giving gerbils a grooming shampoo and then tying bows on them. Even though the medical research assistant's acts were seen as more praiseworthy than those of the pet store assistant, she was simultaneously perceived as more coldhearted and aggressive (Uhlmann, Tannenbaum, & Diermeier, 2009). Strikingly, these results even held for participants who strongly supported animal testing. This subset of participants viewed the actions of the medical research assistant as dramatically more praiseworthy than those of the pet store assistant, yet also viewed the medical research assistant as lacking in positive moral traits relative to the pet store assistant. This demonstrates a pattern of dissociation complementary to that of the cat-beater and racial slur studies: an act can be objectively praiseworthy, yet still signal poor character.

This finding has since been replicated in the context of utilitarian dilemmas, situations in which a greater good can be attained by engaging in an action to which there might be moral objections. In one study, participants read about a group of people who were stranded on a life raft that was sinking (Uhlmann, Zhu, & Tannenbaum, 2013). They could stop it from sinking by throwing one injured passenger overboard. When the characters did elect to throw the passenger overboard, thus saving everyone else onboard, their action was rated as more morally right than when they elected not to throw the passenger overboard. Yet, the passengers who sacrificed one

life to save many were seen as having worse moral character than the passengers who did not. In two follow-up studies, participants read about a hospital administrator who had to choose between funding an expensive surgical procedure to save one sick boy, or purchasing a new piece of hospital equipment that would save 500 lives in the future. As in the “life raft” study, the administrator who chose save more people by sacrificing one was seen as having done the morally right thing, but as having worse moral character. In fact, participants believed that the utilitarian administrator was more of a “bad person” than the non-utilitarian administrator, not just less of a good person. As in the “frivolous perk” study discussed above, these results were attributable to the informational value ascribed to the person’s action. The utilitarian administrator’s choice to buy the new equipment was seen as diagnostic of a lack of empathy, which mediated the effect of his decision on overall assessments of his character. Interestingly, though, he was also seen as a better leader, for having made the more pragmatic choice. In some cases, it seems, doing the right thing requires a bad person.

We have reviewed evidence supporting two novel hypotheses derived from PCM. First, information about an actor’s character can outweigh information about objective harm in social judgments. Furthermore, judgments of the morality of acts can diverge from judgments of an actor’s character, suggesting that neither type of judgment can fully explain the other, and both are important aspects of moral cognition. Character matters.

### **Person-Centered Morality is Robust and Replicable**

The field of psychology currently finds itself in the midst of a crisis of confidence in not only our findings, but also the effectiveness of the tools we use to uncover knowledge (Pashler & Wagenmakers, 2012; Nosek, Spies, & Motyl, 2012). Efforts to repeat influential psychology studies in independent laboratories have resulted in a number of high-profile failures of



replication (e.g., Doyen, Klein, Pichon, & Cleeremans, 2012; Johnson, Cheung, & Donnellan, 2014; Nieuwenstein et al., 2015) Systematic crowdsourced replication initiatives across dozens of laboratories find replication rates of between 25% and 77% for social-psychological research published in top peer-reviewed journals (Klein et al., 2014; Ebersole, 2015; Open Science Collaboration, in press). Difficulties reproducing findings are far from unique to psychology, and if anything, appear to be an even greater challenge in areas such as biomedicine, where replication rates range from just 11% to 25% (Begley & Ellis, 2012; Prinz, Schlange & Asadullah, 2011). However, psychologists are among those most actively engaged in discussions regarding how to improve our science (Asendorpf et al., 2013; Nosek et al., 2012).

One approach is to replicate research findings in independent laboratories *before*, rather than after, they are published. In a large scale Pre-Publication Independent Replication (PPIR) project, Schweinsberg et al. (2015) attempted to replicate 10 unpublished moral judgment effects across 25 partner universities. The 10 studies targeted for replication all found statistical support for their main theoretical prediction in the original data collections by Uhlmann and his collaborators. Schweinsberg et al. (2015) examined whether the original effects would replicate in new subject populations and with new investigators at the helm. In a PPIR, replication laboratories are selected by the original authors for their expertise and access to subject populations theoretically expected to show the hypothesized effect. This leads to particularly informative replications, since common alternative explanations for failures to replicate, such as a lack of replicator expertise and non-comparable subject populations, are ruled out.

The first PPIR initiative, which we are calling the “Pipeline Project,” included six effects that explicitly tested predictions derived from a person-centered approach to moral judgment. Three original studies examined cases in which inferences about character played a more

important role in moral judgment than the objective harm caused (*belief-act inconsistency effect*, *moral inversion effect*, and *moral cliff effect*), two directly assessed perceived informational value regarding moral character and compared its effects to harmful consequences (*bigot-misanthrope effect* and *bad tipper effect*, both described earlier in this chapter), and one study tested for an act-person dissociation in the context of medical testing on animals (*coldhearted pro-sociality effect*, also described earlier). The ten unpublished moral judgment effects from the pre-publication independent replication project are summarized in more detail in the Appendix to this chapter.

The combined sample size across the 25 universities was over 10,000 observations, leading to far more accurate effect size estimates than the typical research study in psychology. The replication effect sizes for all six person centered morality effects were statistically significant and in the expected direction. An interesting case was the bad tipper effect, whose overall effect size was significant but at the same time replicated consistently only in U.S. samples, potentially due to cultural differences in tipping norms. Perhaps the most theoretically crucial effect was the act-person dissociation such that carrying out medical tests on animals was seen as a praiseworthy act but also led to negative character inferences. This *cold hearted pro-sociality effect* had a replication effect size (standardized mean difference, or Cohen's *d*) of close to two, the largest out of all ten studies. In contrast, two out of four unpublished original effects examined by Schweinsberg and colleagues (2015) that involved topics *other than* person-centered moral judgments entirely failed to replicate. The overall results of the pre-publication independent replication initiative suggest that PCM is a reliable and replicable phenomenon. Given this, we now consider how the psychological importance of moral virtues can best be integrated into prevailing models of moral judgment.

### **Moral Judgment Can Be Both Intuitive and Rational**

Modern moral psychology is divided over the root of moral judgments. Some researchers (Royzman, Landy, & Goodwin, 2014; Royzman, Landy et al., 2015) support traditional rationalist models (e.g., Turiel, 1983) that emphasize the role of careful reasoning and cognitive deliberation in producing moral judgments. Many others claim instead that moral judgments are the result of rapid, automatic evaluations, often called intuitions (Haidt, 2001; 2007). We argue that moral judgment can be both rational and intuitive<sup>3</sup> in important senses, and that PCM can provide the bridge to unite these approaches.

As we argued above, character judgments serve an important functional purpose. We think that this makes them, in an important sense, rational, to the extent that they meet the need to resolve fundamental social dilemmas such as deciding who is likely to help and to harm us. Importantly, participants themselves do not appear to view person centered judgments as irrational. Research shows that when targets are judged simultaneously (joint evaluation), participants think more carefully and are less likely to make judgments they themselves consider unjustified (Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986; Hsee, Loewenstein, Blount, & Bazerman, 1999; Pizarro & Uhlmann, 2005). In our empirical investigations, perceived informational value regarding character can outweigh objective harm in eliciting condemnation regardless of whether targets are evaluated jointly or separately (Tannenbaum et al., 2011; Uhlmann, Tannenbaum, Zhu, & Diermeier, 2009; Zhu, Uhlmann, & Diermeier, 2014). In addition, act-person dissociations

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<sup>3</sup> The precise nature of these automatic, intuitive processes is not relevant here, and PCM does not speak to this issue. They could be affective evaluations (Haidt, 2001; Haidt & Joseph, 2004), cognitive computations that have been automatized and can be run without conscious involvement under normal circumstances (Aarts & Custers, 2009), or some combination of both.

readily emerge under conditions of either joint or separate evaluation (e.g., Tannenbaum et al., 2011; Uhlmann & Zhu, 2014; Uhlmann, Tannenbaum, & Diermeier, 2009; Uhlmann et al., 2013). Thus, a person-centered account appears compatible with a subjective sense of making adaptive and rational moral judgments.

We noted earlier that in addition to being functional, character judgments are often automatic – that is, they are intuitive. Haidt and colleagues have demonstrated the role of automatic intuitions in moral judgment in their widely-cited studies of “moral dumbfounding.” They show that people have automatic negative reactions to harmless transgressions such as eating a dead dog that had been hit by a car and masturbating into a chicken carcass, but cannot justify their condemnation of these acts using logical explanations (Haidt, Bjorklund, & Murphy, 2011; Haidt, 2001; Haidt et al., 1993; though see Royzman, Kim, & Leeman, 2015). These studies all examined evaluations of acts (Haidt et al., 1993, 2011; Haidt & Hersh, 2001), but at a conceptual level intuitionist models are highly compatible with a virtue-based approach to morality. Indeed, Haidt (2001, p. 817) defined moral judgments as “evaluations (good versus bad) of the actions or character of a person that are made with respect to a set of virtues held by a culture or subculture to be obligatory.” Notably, although moral judgments of acts and persons are both included in this definition, they are not distinguished conceptually or empirically.

Applying the act-person distinction to the moral dumbfounding paradigm demonstrates our point that moral judgment can be both rational and intuitive. In another example of an act-person dissociation that we have not yet discussed, participants rated harmless-but-offensive actions – copulating with a dead chicken and eating a dead dog – as less morally wrong than theft, which directly causes harm. However, the chicken-lover and the dog-eater were seen as having worse moral character than the thief (Uhlmann & Zhu, 2014). Importantly, this

characterological assessment seems rationally defensible – acts like masturbating into poultry have high informational value for judging character (Nelson, 2005; Nelson et al., 2010) because they are extremely statistically rare (Ditto & Jemmott, 1989; Fiske, 1980), they represent extreme deviations from normative behavior (Chakroff & Young, 2015), and there is almost no conceivable reason to commit them that is external to the person, making them low in attributional ambiguity (Snyder et al., 1979). Therefore, it is quite reasonable to draw strong character inferences from them. Indeed, when participants made character judgments, they were *less* morally dumbfounded when they were asked about offenses that are rare, deviant, and unambiguous, yet harmless, than when they were asked about prototypically harmful offenses (Uhlmann & Zhu, 2014, Study 3). This suggests that the original moral dumbfounding results may have stemmed from participants' automatic character assessments influencing their judgments of moral wrongness. Haidt and colleagues' participants were not able to articulate why a harmless act is wrong, but they probably could have articulated why it indicates bad character.

Integrating these theoretical perspectives and relevant bodies of empirical evidence, we propose that moral judgments typically occur rapidly (Haidt, 2001, 2007) and are ultimately driven by the rational and adaptive goals of discerning the moral character of those around us. Thus, as the field moves toward an integrated model of moral judgment, we suggest that it is the person-centered nature of moral cognition that unites and binds rationalist and intuitionist perspectives on human morality. Moral judgment is inherently rational and adaptive because social perceivers effectively exploit the informational value of social behaviors to draw reasonable inferences about the underlying vices and virtues of other agents. Moral judgment is intuitive because inferences about other people must be made quickly and efficiently for reasons

of basic survival. The ancient notion that morality is fundamentally concerned with human virtues (Aristotle, 4th Century B.C.E./1998; Hume, 1739/1888) is supported by a growing body of empirical evidence, and has much to add to contemporary models of moral judgment.

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**Appendix:**  
**Effects Replicated in the Pipeline Project**

Here are descriptions of the ten original effects targeted for Pre-Publication Independent Replication (PPIR) in the Pipeline Project. These study descriptions are taken verbatim from Schweinsberg et al. (2015).

**Person centered morality effects:**

*Cold-Hearted Prosociality Effect.* A medical researcher who does experiments on animals is seen as engaging in more morally praiseworthy acts than a pet groomer, but also as a worse person.

*Bigot-Misanthrope Effect.* Participants judge a manager who selectively mistreats racial minorities as more blameworthy than a manager who mistreats everyone. The bigoted manager's behavior is further seen as higher in informational value regarding his moral character.

*Bad Tipper Effect.* A person who leaves the full tip entirely in pennies is judged more negatively than a person who leaves less money in bills, and tipping in pennies is seen as higher in informational value regarding character.

*Belief-Act Inconsistency Effect.* An animal rights activist who is caught hunting is seen as an untrustworthy and bad person, even by participants who think hunting is morally acceptable.

*Moral Inversion Effect.* A company that contributes to charity but then spends even more money promoting the contribution in advertisements not only nullifies its charitable contribution, but is perceived even more negatively than a company that makes no donation at all.

*Moral Cliff Effect.* A company that airbrushes the model in their skin cream advertisement to make her skin look perfect is seen as more dishonest, ill-intentioned, and deserving of punishment than a company that hires a model whose skin already looks perfect.

**Further effects:**

*Intuitive Economics Effect.* Economic variables that are perceived as unfair (high taxes) are perceived as especially bad for the economy.

*Burn-in-Hell Effect.* Participants perceive corporate executives as more likely to burn in hell than members of social categories defined by antisocial behavior, such as vandals.

*Presumption of Guilt Effect.* For a company, failing to respond to accusations of misconduct leads to similar judgments to being investigated and found guilty.

*Higher Standard Effect.* It is perceived as acceptable for a private company to give small (but not large) perks to its top executive. But for the leader of a charitable organization, even a small perk is seen as moral transgression. Thus, under some conditions a praiseworthy reputation and

laudable goals can actually hurt an organization, by leading it to be held to a higher moral standard.