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## A Social-Cognitive Approach to the Moral Personality

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In the last decade there has been a remarkable resurgence of interest in studying moral rationality within the broad context of personality, selfhood, and identity. Although a concern with the moral self was never entirely absent from the cognitive developmental approach to moral reasoning (e.g., Blasi, 1983, 1984), it is fair to say that sustained preoccupation with the ontogenesis of justice reasoning did not leave much room for reflection on how moral cognition intersects with personological processes. There were both paradigmatic and strategic reasons for this.

The paradigmatic reason can be traced to the Piagetian roots of moral developmental theory. Piaget's understanding of intelligence was profoundly influenced by his training as a biologist, his work as a naturalist, and his interest in the differential classification of species (especially mollusks) on the basis of morphological variation. Just as the classification of various biological species into zoological categories is based on formal structural characteristics, so too are certain structural characteristics critical to the differential classification of

children's thinking. The young Piaget who had, as a naturalist, collected and classified specimens of mollusks is continuous with the older Piaget who, as a genetic epistemologist, collected and classified specimens of children's thinking (Chapman, 1988; Lapsley, 1996). From this perspective, Piagetian stages are best considered descriptive taxonomic categories that classify formal "morphological" properties of children's thinking on an epistemic level. Stages describe species of knowledge, varieties, and kinds of mental operations, not different kinds of persons.

When Kohlberg appropriated the Piagetian paradigm to frame moral development he well understood the taxonomic implications of the stage concept. He understood that moral stages described kinds of sociomoral operations or different "species" of moral reasoning. The moral stage sequence was a taxonomy identified by a "morphological" analysis of formal structural characteristics of sociomoral reflection. Moral stages classify variations of sociomoral structures, not individual differences among persons. As a result, Colby, Kohlberg, Gibbs, and Liebermann (1983) wrote that moral "stages are not boxes for classifying and evaluating persons" (p. 11). Consequently moral stages cannot be the basis for aretaic judgments about the moral worthiness of persons. The stage sequence cannot be used as a yardstick to grade one's moral competence. It makes no evaluative claims about character, says nothing about virtues, and is silent about the moral features of personality and selfhood. Indeed, as Kohlberg (1971) put it, "We ... do not think a stage 6 normative ethic can justifiably generate a theory of the good or of virtue, or rules for praise, blame and punishment" and hence principles of justice "do not directly obligate us to blame and to punish" (p. 217). Instead, the moral developmental stages, like Piaget's stages, describe forms of thought organization of an ideal rational moral agent, an epistemic subject, and therefore cannot be "reflections upon the self" (Kohlberg, Levine, & Hewer, 1983, p. 36). There can be no reason to wonder, given these paradigm commitments, just how personological issues or notions of selfhood and identity could matter to an epistemic subject or to a rational moral agent.

Yet, the moral development tradition had strategic reasons, too, for its minimalist account of selfhood, character, and personality. For example, Kohlberg was specifically interested in charting the development of justice reasoning, as opposed to other possible topics of investigation, just because this aspect of morality seemed most amenable to stage typing. Moreover, the possibility of stage typing gave Kohlberg what he most desired of a moral theory—a way to defeat ethical relativism on psychological grounds. Kohlberg saw that justice reasoning at the highest stages made possible a set of procedures that could generate consensus about a hard case moral quandary. This was the heart of his project. Consequently, those aspects of moral psychology that could not be

stage typed or that could not be used in the struggle against ethical relativism were not the object of study in the cognitive developmental tradition. This included, of course, the Aristotelian concern with virtues and moral character.

Kohlberg's objection to a virtue-centered approach to moral character was based on at least two additional considerations. The first was that there was no sensible way to talk about virtues if they are conceptualized as personality traits. The Hartshorne and May (1928–1932) studies, for example, along with Mischel's (1968, 1990, 1999) theoretical analysis, seemed to cast doubt on a widely assumed fundamental requirement that personality traits show dispositional consistency across even widely disparate situations. This cross-situational consistency of traits was surprisingly hard to document. Consequently, the ostensible failure of traits in the study of personality made recourse to virtues an unappealing option in moral psychology. But Kohlberg's second objection to virtues was perhaps more to the point. For Kohlberg any compilation of desirable traits is a completely arbitrary affair. It entails sampling from a bag of virtues until a suitable list is produced that has something for everyone. In addition, and even worse, given Kohlberg's project, the meaning of virtue trait words is relative to particular communities. As Kohlberg and Mayer (1972) famously put it:

Labeling a set of behaviors displayed by a child with positive or negative trait terms does not signify that they are of adaptive significance or ethical importance. It represents an appeal to particular community conventions, since one person's "integrity" is another person's "stubbornness," [one person's] "honesty in expressing your true feelings" is another person's "insensitivity to the feelings of others." (p. 479)

Clearly, the language of virtue and moral character does not work if the point of moral development theory is to provide the psychological resources to defeat ethical relativism.

Although the cognitive developmental approach to moral reasoning is of singular importance, and it continues to generate productive lines of research, it is also true that an adequate moral psychology could not neglect issues of selfhood, identity, and personality for very long. Indeed, Augusto Blasi (1983; Walker, this volume—chap. 1) recognized many years ago that any credible account of moral action requires a robust model of the self. Moreover, its neglect of virtues and its silence on questions of character meant that the cognitive developmental tradition has had little to say to parents who are fundamentally concerned to raise children of a particular kind. Raising children of good moral character is an important goal of most parents. When one asks parents about the moral formation of their children we doubt very many

will mention the need to resolve hard case dilemmas in a way that secures consensus. We doubt that many are vexed by ethical relativism and want to defeat it. Instead, many parents want their children to grow up to be in possession of certain virtues. Most parents would be pleased if their children exhibited certain traits of character, and are honest, kind, respectful, and more. As one of us (Lapsley, 1996) put it, "Although the cognitive developmental approach may be reluctant to make aretaic judgments about the moral status of persons, the language of moral evaluation comes more easily to most everyone else" (p. 196). Fortunately, there are several promising research programs that are exploring the connection between personological variables and moral functioning.

One approach is to define the role of moral commitments in the construction of identity. According to Blasi (1984; also see Bergman, this volume—chap. 2) one has a moral identity to the extent that moral notions, such as being fair, just, and good, are central, important, and essential to one's self-understanding. Moral identity is possible, according to Blasi, when the self is constructed or defined by reference to moral categories. One has a moral identity when one is committed to living out the implications of whole-hearted moral commitment. Recently Blasi (in press) attempted to provide a psychological account of moral character that builds on his understanding of moral identity. Moral character, in his view, has three components: willpower, moral desires, and integrity. "All three sets of virtues," he wrote, "are necessary for moral character, but in different ways; willpower is necessary to deal with internal and external obstacles in pursuing one's long-term objectives; integrity relates one's commitments to the sense of self; moral desires guide willpower and integrity and provide them with their moral significance" (p. 5).

Recent studies of individuals who display extraordinary moral commitment seem to vindicate Blasi's understanding of moral identity and the importance of identifying the self with moral desires. For example, in their seminal analysis of moral exemplars Colby and Damon (1992, 1995) found that exemplars integrate personal and moral goals, and they identify the self with moral commitments. Similarly Daniel Hart and his colleagues (Atkins & Hart, this volume—chap. 4; Hart & Fegley, 1995; Hart, Yates, Fegley, & Wilson, 1995) report that adolescents who display uncommon caring and altruism often identify the ideal self with moral commitments and otherwise align the self with moral goals.

Blasi's work on moral identity and the moral exemplar studies clearly are important and productive contributions to moral psychology. Other lines of research, such as neo-Kohlbergian accounts of postconventional reasoning (Rest, Narvaez, Bebeau, & Thoma, 1999), the four-component model of moral functioning (Narvaez & Rest, 1995; Rest, 1983), and naturalistic studies of

moral character (Walker & Pitts, 1998), are additional evidence that personological variables, including selfhood, identity, and character, will continue to figure prominently in contemporary moral psychological research. Indeed, we have argued that the next phase of research in the "post-Kohlbergian" era would profit from a broader consideration of psychological theory, constructs, and methods if our aim is to develop powerful models of moral personality, selfhood, and identity (Lapsley & Narvaez, in press; Narvaez & Lapsley, in press).

In this chapter we explore the resources of social-cognitive theory to conceptualize moral personality. In our view social-cognitive theory is an important source of insights for understanding moral functioning, although it is rarely invoked for this purpose. Indeed, the introduction of social-cognitive theory to the moral domain has at least three integrative possibilities (Lapsley & Narvaez, in press). First, it opens moral psychology to the theories, constructs, and methodological tactics of social-personality research, with its potential for yielding powerful accounts of character, identity, and personality. Second, it opens a broader array of options for conceptualizing moral rationality, including the possibility that much of our moral functioning is tact, implicit, and automatic (Narvaez & Lapsley, in press). Third, it locates the study of moral functioning within a mainstream of psychological research on cognition, memory, social cognition, and modern information-processing.

In the next section we outline the features of a social-cognitive approach to personality with two aims in mind. First, we show that social-cognition theory has considerable advantages over trait models in our understanding of personality; second, we present the resources that social-cognitive approaches have for purposes of understanding moral personality in particular. We then consider the cognitive expertise and schema accessibility literatures for insights about individual differences in moral personality functioning. We review promising empirical evidence for this perspective and conclude with a reflection on the developmental sources of the social-cognitive bases of moral functioning.

### SOCIAL-COGNITIVE APPROACHES: HAVING AND DOING

We noted that a virtues approach to moral character has not had much traction in moral psychology largely because of its apparent affinity with trait models of personality. If there are doubts about traits, then virtues as traits is not an attractive option. Hence, if we are to talk sensibly about moral personality then we require an alternative way of conceptualizing the dispositional features of human behavior. In recent years a social-cognitive approach to personality has

emerged to challenge the more traditional trait approach that emphasizes the structural basis of individual differences. According to Cantor (1990), the trait approach illustrates the *having* side of personality theory (as opposed to the *doing* side, which is represented by social-cognitive models of personality). That is, personality is understood to be the sum of traits that one has, and there are individual differences in the distribution of these traits. Presumably, a person of good moral character is one who is in possession of certain traits that are deemed virtues, whereas a person of poor moral character is in possession of other kinds of traits that are not considered virtues. Moreover, the traits that one has are assumed to be adhesive in the sense that they are constitutional aspects of one's personality, on display across disparate contextual settings.

The nomothetic trait approach has not, however, fared well in contemporary personality research for at least two reasons. First, it is now commonplace to note that personality dispositions do not display the cross-situational consistency desired by trait models (Mischel, 1990). Indeed, trait models generally have little to say about how dispositions are affected by situational variability. Instead, trait models assume that dispositions adhere to individuals across settings and across time, quite irrespective of environmental demands. Dispositional traits, in other words, are assumed to trump the contextual hand one is dealt. Yet, this is rarely the case. As Mischel (1968) put it, "individuals show far less cross-situational consistency in their behavior than has been assumed by trait-state theories. The more dissimilar the evoking situations, the less likely they are to produce similar or consistent responses from the same individual" (p. 177).

But the reality of situational variability in personality functioning and the apparent lack of cross-situational stability or consistency does not mean that personality fails to cohere in lawful ways. Personality is coherent, but coherence should not be reduced to mere stability of behavior across time and setting (Cervone & Shoda, 1999). Coherence is evident in the dynamic, reciprocal interaction among the dispositions, interests, capacities, and potentialities of the agent and the changing contexts of learning, socialization and development. Persons and contexts are not static, orthogonal effects, but they are instead dynamically interacting. Changes on one side of the interaction invariably induce a cascade of consequences on the other side. Both are mutually implicative in accounting for behavior. This inextricable union of person and context is the lesson of developmental contextualism (Lerner, 1991, 1995; Lerner & Busch-Rossnagel, 1981), and it is here, at the point of transaction between person and context, that one looks for intraindividual stability and personality coherence.

Hence, the second drawback of trait models is that it overlooks this complex pattern of coherence that individuals do display in response to changing con-

textual circumstances (Cervone & Shoda, 1999). It overlooks lawful patterns of situational variability. Mischel (1990) argued, for example, that behavioral consistency is more likely to be found in localized, contextually specified conditions. A coherent behavioral signature is evident when the display of dispositional tendencies is conceptualized in terms of if-then situation-behavior contingencies (Mischel, 1999; Shoda, 1999). Moreover, the reality of cross-situational variability is not a failure of a dispositional approach to personality. Rather, it is a failure to sufficiently analyze local features of situations. It is a failure to notice how these features dynamically interact with social-cognitive person variables, the social-cognitive units of analysis (schemas, scripts, prototypes, episodes, competencies, etc.) that give us the discriminative facility to alter our behavioral responses given the particularity of changing social contexts. Consequently, dispositional consistency is conditional on evoking contextual factors and the ability of our social-cognitive processes to discriminate them. But again it is here, at the intersection of person and context, where personality coherence is revealed.

If the trait approach illustrates the *having* side of personality, the introduction of social-cognitive person variables into the discussion of personality coherence illustrates the *doing* side of personality (Cantor, 1990). The cognitive approach to personality emphasizes what people do when they construe their social landscape and how they transform and interpret it in accordance with social-cognitive mechanisms. According to Cantor (1990), the cognitive substrate of personality consists of three elements: schemas, tasks, and strategies. Schemas are organized knowledge structures that channel and filter social perceptions and memory. They are the "cognitive carriers of dispositions" (p. 737) that guide our appraisal of social situations, our memory for events, and our affective reactions. They are organized around particular aspects of our life experience. Tasks are the culturally prescribed demands of social life that we transform or construe as personal goals. "Life tasks, like schemas, not only provide a cognitive representation for dispositional strivings but also serve to selectively maintain and foster dispositionally relevant behavior" (Cantor, 1990, p. 740). Strategies, in turn, are utilized to bring life tasks to fruition. As such they are "an intricate organization of feelings, thoughts, effort-arousal and actions" forming a "collection of goal-directed behavior unfolding over time in relation to a self-construed task" (p. 743).

#### PERSONALITY COHERENCE

These elements are also implicated in a recent social-cognitive account of personality coherence advocated by Cervone and Shoda (1999). They argued that

a model of personality coherence must address three interrelated phenomena. First, it must account for the fact that there is an organization to personality functioning. That is, personality processes do not function independently but are instead organized into coherent, integrated systems that impose constraints on the range of possible configurations. This implies that personality is a unified cognitive-affective system and that it is illegitimate, therefore, to segregate cognition and affect into separate domains of influence. Second, it must account for the coherence evident between behavior and social-contextual expectations. What we do across different settings and over time is often interconnected and consistent. As Cervone and Shoda (1999) put it, individuals "create stable patterns of personal experience by selecting and shaping the circumstances that make up their day-to-day lives. This phenotypic coherence is key to both psychologists' and layperson's inferences about personality" (p. 17). Third, it must account for the phenomenological sense of self-coherence that orders our goals, preferences, and values, and it gives meaning to personal striving and motivated behavior.

The dynamic interaction among these features of personality coherence is grounded by social information processing. That is, the cross-situational coherence and variability of personality, the dynamic interaction among organized knowledge structures, affect, and social context, is understood not by appealing to broadband traits but to the analysis of the causal mechanisms, structures, and processes of social information processing (Cervone, 1997). Moreover, the model assumes that the activation of mental representations is a critical feature of coherent personality functioning. These representations "include knowledge of social situations, representations of self, others and prospective events, personal goals, beliefs and expectations, and knowledge of behavioral alternatives and task strategies" (Cervone & Shoda, 1999, p. 18), and they are variously conceptualized as schemas, scripts, prototypes, episodes, competencies, and similar constructs (Hastie, 1983; Mischel, 1990). It is the distinctive organization of these social-cognitive units and their mutual influence and dynamic interaction that give rise to various configurations of personality, although the range of possible configurations is not infinite, given the "system of mutual constraint" that one part of the system imposes on other parts (Cervone & Shoda, 1999, p. 19). Still, patterns of individual differences arise because people have stable goal systems (e.g., Cantor's, 1990, life tasks) that structure the organization of the cognitive-affective system and influence the perception, selection, and interpretation of various contextual settings. Moreover, people have different interpersonal and social expectations that foster "distinctive, contextualized patterns of response" (Cervone & Shoda, 1999, p. 20) and different recurring experiences that provide the "affordances" that

give rise to stable configurations of the cognitive-affective system (Brandtstadter, 1999). More generally, the interrelationship among these elements of the social-cognitive personality system "yield cognitive-affective configurations that 'make sense,' cohere and thus are more stable. These stable configurations form the basis of an individual's unique personality. They contribute to the individual's recurrent style of planning, interpreting and responding to events" (Cervone & Shoda, 1999, p. 20).

### SIX CRITICAL RESOURCES

There are a number of resources on the social-cognitive approach to personality that are critical for new models of moral personality. First, the social-cognitive approach retains the central importance of cognition, but cognition is viewed as a broader set of mental representations, processes, and mechanisms than was postulated by the moral development tradition. Schemas and the conditions of schema activation underwrite our discriminative facility in noticing key features of our moral environment. Schemas are fundamental to our very ability to notice dilemmas as we appraise the moral landscape (Narvaez & Bock, 2002). Moreover, as noted later, the social-cognitive approach does not assume that all relevant cognitive processing is controlled, deliberate, and explicit. There is now mounting evidence that much of our lives is governed by cognitive processes that are tacit, implicit, and automatic, but this is an issue that is new to the moral domain (Narvaez & Lapsley, in press). Still, the intersection of the morality of everyday life and the automaticity of everyday life must be large and extensive, and social-cognitive theory provides resources for coming to grips with it in ways that the cognitive developmental tradition cannot (Lapsley & Narvaez, in press).

Second, the social-cognitive approach emphasizes the central importance of self-processes, personal goals, and life tasks that give meaning to one's motivated behavior and purposive striving. Hence, it is compatible with the apparent consensus within the Kohlberg tradition that an adequate theory of moral reasoning and moral behavior requires greater attention to the motivational properties of selfhood and identity.

Third, the social-cognitive approach emphasizes the affective elements of personality. Personality is considered a cognitive-affective system that is organized, integrated, coherent, and stable. Emotional states are a regulatory factor within the information-processing system. As Bugental and Goodnow (1998) put it, "emotional states influence what is perceived and how it is processed, and the interpretations made of ongoing events subsequently influence emotional reactions and perceptual biases. Affect and cognition are appropri-

ately conceptualized as interwoven processes" (p. 416). Affect guides selective memory retrieval, influences perceptual vigilance, and constrains the attentional resources available for rational or reflective appraisal and response selection (Bugental & Goodnow, 1998). Understanding personality as a cognitive-affective system is in contrast to some approaches in moral psychology that tend to segregate moral cognition and moral emotions.

Fourth, the social-cognitive approach is compatible with the best insights of developmental science in its insistence that the cognitive-affective system is in reciprocal interaction with changing social contexts. There is no implication that these processes operate in a passive, linear way, or as a crude input-output mechanism, which has been a traditional source of resistance by Kohlbergian researchers to information-processing models of cognition.

Fifth, the social-cognitive approach provides a way to deal with the coherence of personality in a way that acknowledges lawful situational variability. A dispositional signature can be found at the intersection of person and context, as a result of the available and accessible social cognitive schemas, the discriminative facility that it provides, and the eliciting and activating aspects of situations and contexts. This addresses one of the traditional objections of Kohlbergian researchers to the study of character or of virtue traits, namely, that the observance of moral traits (honesty) seem to hinge on numerous situational factors or that traits fail to demonstrate the cross-situational consistency one ordinarily expects of dispositions.

Sixth, the units of analysis are conceptualized in a way that is open to integration with other literatures. Indeed, the organizational features of personality and the mutual constraint evident among elements of the social cognitive-affective system make the study of other domains of psychological functioning (e.g., memory, motivation, self-regulative processes) completely relevant to the study of moral personality.

In the next section we attempt to illustrate the social-cognitive bases of the moral personality. We argue that the chronic accessibility of social-cognitive schemas is the source of individual differences in moral functioning and that this model accounts for a range of phenomena that has resisted explanation by the structural-developmental tradition. We also review preliminary data that speak to the promise of the model and reflect on its developmental and educational implications.

#### EXPERTISE AND SCHEMA ACCESSIBILITY

In Cantor's (1990; Cantor & Kihlstrom, 1987) model self-schemas, prototypes, scripts, and episodes are the basic cognitive units of personality—the

"cognitive carriers of dispositions." Schemas "demarcate regions of social life and domains of personal experience to which the person is especially tuned, and about which he or she is likely to become a virtual 'expert'" (Cantor, 1990, p. 738). Indeed, Cantor (1990) appealed to the notion of expertise to illustrate how schemas can maintain patterns of individual differences. She pointed to three critical functions of schemas. First, if schemas are chronically accessible, then they direct our attention to certain features of our experience at the expense of others. The schematic nature of information processing disposes experts to notice key features of domain-relevant activity that novices miss. Hence, environmental scanning is more richly informative for experts than it is for novices. Chess, dinosaur, and teaching experts "see" more of an event than do novices in these domains (Chi, Glaser, & Farr, 1988). In the social domain a shy schematic or an aggressive person is more likely to notice (or remember) instances that require social reticence or aggressive conduct, respectively, than are individuals who are "social novices" in these domains (i.e., not shy or not aggressive).

Second, if schemas are chronically salient in memory, then compatible or schema-relevant life tasks, goals, or settings are more likely to be selected or sought, which, in turn, also serve to canalize and maintain dispositional tendencies. A shy schematic is likely to choose, over time, a risk-avoidance strategy when it comes to social goals, thereby reinforcing a particular pattern of social interactions. Experts in other domains similarly choose settings, set goals, or engage in activities that support or reinforce schema-relevant interests. This also illustrates the reciprocal relationship between person and context. Third, we tend to develop highly practiced behavioral routines in those areas of our experience demarcated by chronically accessible schemas, which provide "a ready, sometimes automatically available plan of action in such life contexts" (Cantor, 1990, p. 738). Experts, then, possess procedural knowledge that has a high degree of automaticity.

Schema accessibility and conditions of activation are critical for understanding how patterns of individual differences are channeled and maintained. In some ways the "shy person" or the "aggressive person" and, by extension, the "moral person" possess social cognitive mechanisms whose functioning is similar to that afforded by high levels of expertise. In the moral domain these notions have been implicated in an "expertise model" of moral character (Narvaez, in press; Narvaez & Lapsley, in press) and a social-cognitive approach to the moral personality (Lapsley, 1999; Lapsley & Narvaez, in press). Both approaches trade on the notion of knowledge activation and knowledge accessibility, and these concepts must be considered central to any account of moral character, personality, or identity.

### CHRONIC ACCESSIBILITY AND INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES

According to Higgins (1999), one of the general principles of knowledge activation is *accessibility*. Accessibility can be defined as the activation potential of available knowledge. The more frequently a construct is activated or the more recently it is primed, the more accessible it should be for processing social information. In addition, frequently activated constructs should be, over time, chronically accessible for purposes of social information processing. And, because the social experiences of individuals vary widely, it is likely that there should also be differences in the accessibility, even in the availability of cognitive constructs.

Thus, accessibility is a person variable and a dimension of individual differences. That is, there are individual differences in the availability and accessibility of these knowledge structures (Higgins, 1996), and they are properly regarded as personality variables (Higgins, 1999). Three additional points are relevant. First, chronically accessible constructs are at a higher state of activation than are inaccessible constructs (Bargh & Pratto, 1986), and they are produced so efficiently as to approach automaticity (Bargh, 1989). Indeed, as Zelli and Dodge (1999) put it, "salient social experiences foster knowledge structures that may become so highly accessible as to pervasively influence one's social thinking" (p. 119). Second, constructs can be made accessible by contextual (situational) priming as well as by chronicity, and these two sources of influence combine in an additive fashion to influence social information processing (Bargh, Bond, Lombardi, & Tota, 1986). Third, the accessibility of a construct is assumed to emerge from a developmental history of frequent and consistent experience with a specific domain of social behavior; thus, it becomes more likely than other constructs to be evoked for the interpretation of interpersonal experience. Consequently, individual differences in construct accessibility emerge because of each person's unique social developmental history (Bargh, Lombardi, & Higgins, 1988).

### CHRONIC ACCESSIBILITY AND THE MORAL PERSONALITY

We appeal to this theoretical approach to conceptualize the moral personality. We argue that the moral personality is better understood in terms of the chronic accessibility of moral schemas for construing social events. Therefore, a moral person, or a person who has a moral identity or character, would be one for whom moral constructs are chronically accessible and easily activated for so-

cial information processing. In addition, we claim that moral chronicity is a dimension of individual differences. Blasi (1984) argued that one has a moral identity just when moral categories are essential, central, and important to one's self-understanding. One has a moral personality when the self is constructed around moral commitments. But here we add that moral categories (schemas, episodes, scripts, prototypes) that are essential, central, and important for one's self-identity would also be ones that are chronically accessible for interpreting the social landscape. Such categories would be constantly on line, or at least readily primed and easily activated, for discerning the meaning of events. And, once activated, these constructs would dispose the individual to interpret these events in light of his or her moral commitments.

Indeed, moral character or what it means to be virtuous (or vicious) is better conceptualized not in terms of the *having* side of personality, not in terms of trait possession, but in terms of the *doing* side—that is, in terms of the social-cognitive schemas, the knowledge structures, and cognitive-affective mechanisms that are chronically accessible for social information processing, which underwrite the discriminative facility in our selection of situationally appropriate behavior.

### INITIAL EMPIRICAL WORK

The general claim is that chronically accessible moral schemas greatly influence social information processing. Recent studies by Narvaez and her colleagues (Narvaez, 1998, 2001, 2002; Narvaez, Bentley, Gleason, & Samuels, 1998; Narvaez, Mitchell, Gleason & Bentley, 1999) attest to the plausibility of this hypothesis. She showed, for example, that individuals' prior moral knowledge greatly influences their comprehension of moral narratives, a finding that should undermine the confidence of "virtuecrats," such as William Bennett (1998), who argued that merely reading the treasury of moral stories is somehow self-instructing in the virtues. Similarly, Lapsley and Lasky (1999) showed that conceptions of good character are organized as a cognitive prototype and that the activation of a "good character" prototype biases information processing. For example, their study participants showed considerable false recognition of novel prototype-consistent ("virtue-central") trait attributes than they did of nonprototypic ("virtue-peripheral") traits. Both findings support the general claim that accessible moral knowledge structures influence what we see in our interpersonal landscape and that at least some morally relevant information processing is implicit, tacit, and automatic.

This was tested more directly by Lapsley and Lasky (2001) using the spontaneous trait inference (STI) paradigm. The STI paradigm assumes that the

meaning of social events is constructed routinely, habitually, and unintentionally (Newman & Uleman, 1989). Moreover, an STI is said to occur when attending to another's behavior produces a trait inference without an explicit intention to infer traits or to form an impression (Uleman, Hon, Roman, & Moskowitz, 1996; Uleman, Newman, & Moskowitz, 1996). This is typically demonstrated using a cued-recall procedure that includes both a spontaneous and deliberate processing condition. In the spontaneous processing condition participants are instructed to memorize a list of sentences (e.g., "The lawyer strongly disagrees with the economist"). Note that this memory instruction does not ask participants to form an impression of the actors or to draw any inference about their character, motivation, or reasons for acting. Hence, it is assumed that any inference drawn about the dispositional qualities of the actors is spontaneous. In contrast, participants in a deliberate processing condition are asked to memorize the sentences after first focusing on the reasons for the actor's behavior. Consequently, inferences drawn about actors are said to be deliberate given the explicit instruction to form an impression. Two types of cues are then used at recall. Some cues are dispositional ("argumentative"), whereas others are semantic ("courtroom"). If STIs were formed at encoding, then trait-dispositional cues should elicit more recall of target sentences.

Research has shown that people not only make STIs without explicit intention of doing so but also without awareness that they have made them (Uleman et al., 1996). Is the production of STIs influenced by personality? There is indeed evidence that STIs vary along common dimensions of individual differences. For example, Zelli, Huesmann, and Cervone (1995) showed that individuals who differed in levels of aggressiveness performed quite differently on a cued-recall spontaneous trait inference task. In this study aggressive and nonaggressive participants read sentences (e.g., "The policeman pushes Dave out of the way") that included actors whose behavior could be interpreted as hostile or nonhostile. Spontaneous and deliberate processing conditions were used. During recall participants were given both semantic and dispositional cues. The dispositional cues were terms that represented hostile inferences that could be made about the behavior of the sentence actors. The results of the spontaneous processing condition showed that hostile dispositional cues prompted significantly more recall than did semantic cues for aggressive participants, whereas semantic cues prompted twice as much recall among nonaggressive participants. These differences were not apparent in the deliberate processing condition.

Similarly, Uleman, Winborne, Winter, and Schechter (1986) also demonstrated the influence of a personality variable on the production of STIs. They presented sentences that had different trait implications for individuals who

were high and low on authoritarianism. For example, the sentence "The architect loved the excitement of military parades" implied the trait attribution—patriotic—for authoritarian participants, but nonauthoritarian participants were unable to reach consensus about what trait the sentence implied.

Lapsley and Lasky (2001) attempted to show that moral chronicity, much like aggressiveness and authoritarianism, is an individual differences variable that influences the production of STIs. A primacy-of-output procedure was used to determine participants' chronically accessible constructs (Higgins, King, & Mavin, 1982). Participants were asked to record the traits of someone they like, someone they dislike, someone they seek out, and someone they avoid. They were also asked to record the traits of someone they frequently encounter. Individuals were considered "moral chronics" if three of the six traits rated first for each question were traits that are highly prototypic of good moral character, as determined by Lapsley and Lasky (1999). Participants who did not name any trait adjective prototypic of good moral character were considered to be "nonchronic." The moral chronic and nonchronic groups then participated in the standard cued-recall STI manipulations. Participants were instructed either to memorize the target sentences (spontaneous processing) or to both memorize and infer motives for action (deliberate processing). Sentence recall was cued either by dispositional or semantic cues. The results showed, as expected, that moral chronics made more STIs with dispositional cues than with semantic cues, whereas nonchronics showed more recall with semantic cues. Recall that those in the deliberate processing condition were unaffected by moral chronicity.

Moral chronics, then, when instructed to memorize target sentences, appeared to form STIs of characters featured in the sentences. Hence, when participants are given no instruction about how to encode information and are simply left to their own devices, they tend to make dispositional inferences congruent with their most accessible schemas. This suggests that moral chronicity (along with authoritarianism and aggressiveness) is an individual differences dimension that influences social information processing. Moreover, this study contributes to the growing evidence regarding the tacit, implicit, and automatic nature of higher mental processes (Bargh & Ferguson, 2000). Automatic activation has been demonstrated for attitudes (Bargh, 1989), self-concepts (Bargh, 1982; Higgins, 1987), stereotypes (Pratto & Bargh, 1991), and social behaviors (Bargh, Chen, & Burrows, 1996). Indeed, quite strong claims are made for "the automaticity of everyday life" (Bargh, 1997). For example, there is evidence that nonconscious mental systems direct self-regulation (Bargh & Chartrand, 1999) and that evaluations, social perceptions, judgment, social interactions, and internal goal structures are similarly



operative without conscious intention or acts of will (Bargh & Ferguson, 2000). Indeed, Bargh and Chartrand (1999) argued that we are not normally engaged in active planning, selecting, choosing, or interpreting when processing information. Moreover, "the ability to exercise such conscious, intentional control is actually quite limited" (p. 462). It is a mistake, therefore, to equate cognition with conscious cognition. As Bargh (1997) put it, "conscious processing can no longer be viewed as necessary for behavior and judgments and evaluations to be made in a given situation," and that the "black box of 'conscious choice' will grow ever smaller" (p. 52) with advances in social-cognitive research.

The notion that there is a certain automaticity in our cognitive functioning is a commonplace in the social-cognitive and intellectual development literatures—yet, curiously, it is a notion that is likely to be resisted in the moral development literature, for two reasons. The notion of automaticity is resisted because, as noted earlier, it is contrary to the "assumption of phenomenalism" (Lapsley & Narvaez, in press). It is alien to our usual working model of moral rationality, which involves deliberation, decision making, appealing to principles, balancing of perspectives, conscious weighing of factors, and imaginative thought experiments. Moral rationality is considered to be controlled processing. It is the making of explicit choices for considered reasons. It is declarative knowledge. It is knowing why. The notion of automaticity is resisted, too, because it is alien to our working model of moral education, which is something that takes place in schools as a formalized curriculum or intervention.

Yet, if the social-cognitive literature is any guide, many of our moral performances take place without explicit awareness. Many of our responses are unreflective, highly automatized, and not the result of deliberate decision-making procedures. If this is true, then the present model also suggests that moral functioning has a procedural component as well as a declarative one. There is a kind of moral knowledge that is implicit, procedural, scripted, and automatic. There is a kind of moral knowledge that is knowing how. There is a kind of moral behavior that is coherent, organized, and rule-governed without being based on explicit rules (Emde, Biringen, Clyman, & Oppenheim, 1991) or without being the result of an agonizing, deliberate decision-making calculus.

To say that moral rationality has both a procedural and a declarative component helps clarify the ongoing debate between proponents of character and virtue on the one hand and cognitive developmentalism on the other. Effective habits, scripted behavioral sequences, self-regulation, chronic accessibility of knowledge structures, and moral perception might constitute the procedural aspect of moral functioning, and they fall under the heading of character—of

knowing how. It is this aspect of moral functioning that is routinized, automatic, spontaneous, and unreflective. But being conscious of moral rule systems and being able to articulate and reason about them are declarative aspects of moral reasoning. These aspects of moral functioning are more at home in the cognitive-developmental tradition.

## DEVELOPMENTAL SOURCES

We argued that the dispositional features of moral character are better conceptualized in terms of the social-cognitive approach to personality. But a social-cognitive approach to moral character will share a deficiency that plagues all social-cognitive theories. These theories invariably address the mechanisms and consequences of social cognition from the perspective of adult functioning, but they rarely attempt to plot the developmental trajectory that makes adult forms of social cognition possible (Lapsley & Quintana, 1985). Yet, charting developmental features is crucial to our understanding of moral character. If, for example, the moral personality is defined in terms of chronic accessibility of moral schemas, how is chronicity made possible during the course of development? What sort of developmental experiences lead to chronically accessible cognitive-affective moral schemas? What socialization practices encourage this kind of moral expertise? What is the developmental mechanism that underlies automatic, tacit, and implicit social information-processing?

These are novel questions for developmental psychologists, which we addressed elsewhere (Narvaez, in press). Here we make suggestions about how a social-cognitive approach to moral personality development might look. There are important clues to possible developmental sources of moral chronicity. Ross Thompson (1998), for example, drew attention to the emergence and elaboration of prototypical knowledge structures in the early toddler years in his account of early sociopersonality development. These scripted knowledge structures take the form of generalized event representations that initially encode the prosaic routines and rituals of family life but become progressively elaborated into broader knowledge structures as the child develops. These representations serve as working models of what to expect of early social experience, and they allow the child to both anticipate and recall events. Indeed, event representations also support the emergence of early episodic memory, and they have been called the "basic building blocks of cognitive development" (Nelson & Gruendel, 1981, p. 131).

Nelson (1989, 1993a, 1993b) argued that event representations become more elaborated and better organized as a result of shared dialogue with care-

givers. In these early conversations parents help children review, structure, and consolidate memories in script-like fashion (Fivush, Kuebli, & Chubb, 1992). Parents who do this in an elaborative way, that is, those who embed events in a rich contextual background rather than simply asking direct questions, tend to have children who have more sophisticated representations of their past (Reese & Fivush, 1993; Reese, Halden, & Fivush, 1993). It is our view that the capacity for event representation is not only the building blocks of cognitive development, as Nelson and Gruendel (1981) put it, but also the building blocks of the moral personality. It is the social-cognitive foundation of character. The foundation of the moral personality is laid down in the early construction of generalized event representations, prototypic knowledge structures, behavioral scripts, and episodic memory.

But the key characterological turn of significance for moral psychology is how these early social-cognitive units are transformed into autobiographical memory. In other words, at some point specific episodic memories must become integrated into a narrative form that references a self whose story it is. Autobiographical memories, too, like event representations, are constructed with the aid of social dialogue. Autobiographical memory is a social construction. It is coached within the web of interlocution. Parents teach children how to construct narratives by the questions that they ask of past events ("Where did we go yesterday?" "What did we see?" "Was Uncle Leon there?" "What did we do next?"). In this way parents help children identify the key features that are to be remembered, their sequence, causal significance, and timing (Schneider & Bjorklund, 1998).

It is true the extant research on early event representation, episodic, and autobiographical memory has tended to focus on relatively simple events (mealtime), routines (bedtime rituals), and scripts (going to McDonalds). As Thompson (1998) noted, "little is known about children's representation of prototypical experiences of greater emotional and relational complexity" (p. 68). Yet, there is little reason to doubt, in our view, that the representation of morally relevant events should be consolidated in young children's autobiographical memory in a directly analogous way. Parental interrogatories ("What happened when you pushed your brother?" "Why did he cry?" "What should you do next?") help children organize events into personally relevant autobiographical memories, which provide, in the process, part of the self-narrative, action-guiding scripts ("I share with him" and "I say I'm sorry") that become over-learned, frequently practiced, routine, habitual, and automatic. In these shared dialogues the child learns important lessons about "emotions, relationships and morality" (Thompson, 1998, p.70). Indeed, as Thompson (1998) put it, "the child's earliest self-representations are likely to

incorporate the parent's moral evaluations, emotional inferences, dispositional attributions to the child (e.g., rambunctious, emotionally labile, cautious or impulsive, etc.), and other features of the adult's interpretation of the situations being recounted" (p. 70). We add that such interrogatories might also include moral character attributions as well, so that the ideal or ought self becomes part of one's self-understanding and part of one's autobiographical narrative. In this way parents help children identify morally relevant features of their experience and encourage the formation of social-cognitive schemas (scripts, prototypes) that are easily primed, easily activated, and chronically accessible.

## CONCLUSION

In this chapter we illustrated the virtues of psychologizing the study of moral functioning by invoking such notions as schema theory and principles of knowledge activation. We showed that meaningful integrations are possible between moral psychology and the rich empirical content, research tactics, and theoretical frameworks of social-cognitive science. Indeed, social-cognitive theory provides at least six critical resources when pressed into the service of moral psychology. Moreover, the application of social-cognitive theory to moral psychology makes it possible to anticipate novel facts about moral personological and moral cognitive functioning. It touts schema accessibility as a general principle of moral knowledge activation. It draws our attention to individual differences in moral chronicity and insists that the tacit, implicit, and automatic features of social cognition find a place in the explanation of moral functioning. Finally, we made a case for a possible developmental grounding of the moral personality by invoking the literatures of early generalized event representation and autobiographical memory, among others.

We are, of course, aware of the challenges that face a social-cognitive account of moral personality (Blasi, this volume, chap. 14). But we are making a strategic bet that a moral psychology richly informed by the theoretical and empirical literatures of allied, but heretofore ignored, domains of psychology will yield a robust, productive, and progressive research program. And we take no small comfort in an assertion by Imre Lakatos (1978), that "*all theories are born refuted and die refuted*" (p. 5). Research programs, much like character itself, are often riddled with blindspots, anomaly, contradiction, and error. Yet, the true measure of a research program, in Lakatos' view, is not so much the blindspots, the contradictions, or the errors, it is not the "ocean of anomalies" that one must contend with, but rather its capacity for growth, extension, and progress. This is much like the true measure of the moral personality itself.

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# 10

## Many Are Called, But Few Are Chosen: Moving Beyond the Modal Levels in Normal Development

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A troublesome and unresolved paradox has long beset developmental theories of the cognitive structural type: The claim for universality of the processes and sequences of development contradicts the failure of most developing individuals to reach the topmost levels or stages of developmental progress. Thus, only about one third of adolescents or young adults reach the stage of full formal operations (Neimark, 1985; Piaget, 1970, 1972; Shayer, Demetriou, & Pervez, 1988). Only a small number of Kohlberg's respondents reached the postconventional stages (Colby, Kohlberg, Gibbs, & Lieberman, 1983; Snarey & Keljo, 1991), and only a minority achieved Loevinger's (1979) integrated level of ego functioning.

How can this paradox be resolved? The question is of considerable interest for developmental theorizing. If complete developmental progression is to

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