Cultivating Virtue: The Development of the Moral Personality
Daniel Lapsley
University of Notre Dame
danlapsley@nd.edu

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Introduction

I am delighted to participate in this symposium on Cultivating Virtue in what is for me my first APA conference. In recent years there has been good reasons for empirical psychology to feel flattered by the attention paid to its literatures by philosophers. We have profited from that attention and we hope it goes both ways. In one paper Darcia and I argued for robust dialogue across the disciplinary boundary between ethics and psychology--- a boundary we likened to the "mending wall" in Robert Frost's great poem. It is a relationship that respects the relative autonomy of each discipline but requires, too, on suitable occasions, at "spring mending time," for us to meet as good neighbors to work cooperatively to build the field of moral psychology.

The topic of this symposium is one of those occasions. In my remarks I want to unpack Cultivating Virtue—the topic of the symposium--- by reference to two psychological literatures. With respect to "cultivating" I appeal to developmental psychology and new insights concerning the early socio-personality development of the moral self. In my view most of the action in developmental moral psychology will focus increasingly on the years zero-to-5; and if Darcia were here she would insist on the importance of certain epigenetic prenatal and postnatal experiences for sculpting the developing brain for the "moral mindsets" of her title. And with respect to virtue I want to share a perspective on how this is viewed increasingly in personality psychology, and in particular, I will reference our own social cognitive view of the moral personality. Let me begin right here on Virtue

Cultivating *Virtue*

There was a time when the study of moral development had little use for the language of virtues. Virtue-talk was certainly a challenge because as an ethical concept it had little traction in psychology unless it was translated into the language of traits or habits more commonly invoked by personality psychology. But even here moral stage theory –the dominant paradigm--- had a way of talking about moral development that scarcely required reference to personality. Instead it focused on the cognitive deliberative process of reaching deontic judgments about hard-case moral dilemma. It was all about moral reasoning and judgment and knowing *that.* If anything, personological considerations were regarded as sources of bias, backsliding, and special pleading that had to be surmounted in order to render judgments from the "moral point of view."

But that paradigm is now behind us and there has been a discernible movement, in both ethical theory and moral development to draw a tighter connection between moral agency and personality. At least among psychologists the desire for thicker conceptions of the moral self was motivated partly by a desire to offer a compelling account of the relationship between moral judgment and moral action. So, in recent years there is increasing reference to moral personality and cognate terms, such as moral self and moral identity. Indeed, the notion that moral rationality attaches to selves who have personalities is a commonplace, which probably explains why it has taken us so long to recognize it.

But there are at least two impediments to research on the development of the moral personality. First, although a number of conceptions of moral self-identity and personality have emerged recently, these models start from the perspective of mature adult functioning. Consequently we lack precise specification of the developmental processes or pathways that yield these models as an outcome, which in turn limits our ability to speak of the cultivation of virtue. Second, personality itself is understood in different ways, and it is not clear which of the various options for conceptualizing personality is the best candidate for developmental analysis in the moral domain. For example, if moral self-identity, or "character," points toward the moral dimension of personality, then our

accounts of these constructs must be compatible with well-attested models of personality. But *which* models?

Personality science provides at least two options for understanding the basic structural units of personality.   For example, one discipline focuses on *traits* as the basic unit of analysis. The second discipline focuses on *social cognitive* constructs such as scripts, schemas and prototypes, as the unit of analysis. The traits approach accounts for personality structure by classifying between-person variability using latent variable taxonomies identified by factor analysis, of which the Big 5 is a prominent example. This approach has been criticized for its essentialism, its Aristotelian explanatory strategy and for describing "statistical properties of populations, not individual persons" (Cervone & Shoda, 1999, p. 28) and quite irrespective of situational context.

In contrast, the social cognitive approach understands personality structure in terms of within-individual, cognitive-affective mechanisms that are "in the head," as it were. These cognitive mechanisms include *knowledge structures* that are used to encode features of situations, *self-reflective* processes through which individuals construct self-beliefs and attributions which contributes to affective and behavioral tendencies, and *self-regulatory* processes through which individuals set goals, evaluate progress and maintain a motivational focus (Bandura,1999, 1986)

Moreover, in contrast to trait taxonomic approaches, social cognitive theory assumes that personal and situational variables interpenetrate and are mutually implicative. Psychological systems are in dynamic interaction with changing situational contexts (Cervone, 2005). This reciprocal determinism highlights the role of socio-cultural contexts for shaping the contours of personality development, but also the active role of the agent who selects and moves into environments and shapes them to his or her own interests. In social cognitive theory dispositional coherence--a stable dispositional signature-- is to be found at the intersection of person x context interactions, accounting for both stability and idiosyncratic behavior.

Social Cognitive Moral Personality

Darcia and I (and others) have proposed a social cognitive account of the moral personality. Although social cognitive theory draws attention to cognitive-affective mechanisms or "schemas" that influence social perception, these mechanisms also serve to create and sustain patterns of individual differences. If schemas are easily primed and readily activated ("chronically accessible") then they direct our attention selectively to certain features of our experience. This selective framing disposes one to select schema-compatible tasks, goals and settings that canalize and maintain our dispositional tendencies (Cantor, 1990).

We choose environments, in other words, that support or reinforce our schema-relevant interests, which illustrates the reciprocal nature of person-context transaction. Moreover, we tend to develop highly practiced behavioral routines in those areas of our experience that are regulated by chronically accessible schemes. In these areas of our social experience we become "virtual experts," and in these life contexts social cognitive schemas function as "a ready, sometimes automatically available plan of action" (Cantor, 1990, p. 738). In this way chronically accessible schemas function as the cognitive carriers of dispositions.

Social cognitive theory asserts, then, that schema accessibility and conditions of activation are critical for understanding how patterns of individual differences are channeled and maintained.

From this perspective we claim that a moral person, or a person who has a moral identity or character, is one for whom moral categories are chronically accessible. If having a moral identity is just when moral notions are central, important and essential one's self-understanding, then notions that are central, important and essential are also those that are chronically accessible for appraising the social landscape. Chronically accessible moral schemas provide a dispositional readiness to discern the moral dimensions of experience, as well as to underwrite the discriminative facility in selecting situationally appropriate behavior.

Six Advantages. A social cognitive model of moral personality has at least six attractive features (Narvaez & Lapsley, in press). First, social cognitive theory accords with the paradigmatic assumptions of ecological "systems" models of development (Lerner, 2006). Both developmental systems and social cognitive theory affirm that a dispositional behavioral signature is to be found at the intersection of Person x Context interactions. This alignment increases the probability of articulating robust, integrative social cognitive developmental models of moral personality.

Second, the social cognitive approach emphasizes the affective elements of personality. Indeed, 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, influencing what is perceived and how it is processed and interpreted (Bugental and 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.

Third, it provides an explanation for the model of moral identity favored by Blasi (1984) who argues that one has a moral identity just when moral categories are essential, central and important to one's self-understanding. A social cognitive interpretation would add that moral categories that are essential, central and important for one's self-identity would also be ones that are chronically accessible for interpreting the social landscape. These categories would be on-line, vigilant, easily primed, easily activated, for discerning the meaning of events, for noticing the moral dimensions of experience and, once activated, to dispose one to interpret events in light of one's moral sensibilities.

Fourth, this model accounts for the felt necessity of moral commitments experienced by moral exemplars, their experience of moral clarity or felt conviction that their decisions are evidently appropriate, justified and true. Typically moral exemplars report that they "just knew" what was required of them, automatically as it were, without the experience of working through an elaborate decision-making calculus (Colby & Damon, 1992). Yet this is precisely the outcome of preconscious activation of chronically accessible constructs that it should induce strong feelings of certainty or conviction with respect to social judgments (Bargh, 1989; Narvaez & Lapsley, in press).

Fifth, the social cognitive framework is better able to account for the implicit, tacit and automatic features of moral functioning (Narvaez & Lapsley, 2005). There is growing recognition that much of human decision-making is under non-conscious control (Bargh, 2005) and occurs with an automaticity that belies the standard notions of rational, deliberative calculation (Bargh & Chartrand, 1999). Though this possibility offends traditional accounts of moral development, there is no reason to think that automaticity is evident in every domain of decision-making except the moral domain (Narvaez & Lapsley, in press).

However, unlike Jonathan Haidt's social intuitionist model which frontloads automaticity prior to judgment and reasoning as a result of intuitions that are constitutive of human nature (and hence prior to learning and enculturation), the social cognitive approach to moral personality locates automaticity on the backend of development as the result of repeated experience, of instruction, intentional coaching and socialization (Lapsley & Hill, in press). It is the automaticity that comes from expertise in life domains where we have vast experience and well-practiced behavioral routines (Cantor, 1990).

Finally, a social cognitive model of the moral personality can account for situational variability in the display of a virtue. The accessibility of social cognitive schemas underwrites not only the discriminative facility in the selection of situationally appropriate behavior, but also the automaticity of schema activation that contributes to the tacit, implicit qualities often associated with the "habits" of moral character (Lapsley & Narvaez, 2006).

These attractions notwithstanding, our theory shares the chief defect of all social cognitive theories, and, indeed all personality theories, in that we start with adult functioning and then have to work backwards to discern the developmental pathway that gets us there. But there are promising leads on this score, and on this note I would like to pivot to take up the "cultivating" part of Cultivating Virtue.

Cultivating Virtue

There is now concerted effort to locate the landmarks of moral formation in early childhood. By age 3 the child's self is a moral self who has internalized rules about what to do and not to do; displays moral affect, engages in prosocial sharing, regulates conflict between social needs and social obligations, and is alive to normative standards and is governed by them, at least some of the time. But self and morality develop before the onset of reflective self-awareness and we are missing important elements of the story if we neglect the moral self of infancy.

Early moral development in the first months of life is based on knowledge that is organized procedurally, and the sources of this procedural knowledge are biologically prepared motives that are consolidated gradually into an affective core (Emde et al.). These motives include basic tendencies for exploration and mastery, a propensity for self-regulation and a social fittedness that pre-adapts infants for initiating, maintaining and terminating interactions in the service of establishing behavioral synchrony with caregivers. It includes affective monitoring so that exchange of emotional signals comes to guide behavior. It includes a tendency towards cognitive assimilation whereby infants seek out what is novel in order to make it familiar.

But the operation, activation and consolidation of basic motives require a sensitive, responsive infant-caregiver relationship. In other words, the affective core requires a context. And so, infant rule learning originates with inborn propensities of this affective core elaborated within the context of expectable caregiving experiences. It is within the matrix of this person x context interaction that the early moral self learns important lessons about reciprocity, normative standards and norm violations, empathic sharing and distress and prosocial behavior.

Towards the end of the second year toddlers become concerned with how things ought to be (e.g., the name of things they are learning, behavioral routines, violations of appearance). They are constructing representations of how things are done and are sensitive to violations of normative expectations. Moreover, by 3.5 years toddlers can distinguish

moral and conventional rules and have in place a working conscience that guides behavior, regulates affect and contributes to adaptive social competence.

Conscience

I want to drill down on the early development of conscience as reflected in the amazing longitudinal work of Grazyna Kochanska at the University of Iowa, for it will eventually bring us round full circle to social cognitive themes and clarify what "cultivation" might look like.

Conscience, for Kochanska, is an inner guidance system responsible for gradual emergence and maintenance of self-regulation. There are wide individual differences in children's conscience and multiple pathways to achieve it, and the source of individual differences are the biologically-prepared temperament---the affective core, if you will---and socialization experiences with caregivers. A strong, mutually responsive relationship with caregivers orients the child to be receptive to parental influence (Kochanska, 1997a, 2002b).

This "mutually responsive orientation" (MRO) is characterized by shared positive affect, mutually coordinated enjoyable routines ("good times") and a "cooperative interpersonal set" that describes the joint willingness of parent and child to initiate and reciprocate relational overtures. It is from within the context of the MRO, and the secure attachment that it denotes, that the child is eager to comply with parental expectations and standards. There is "committed compliance" on the part of the child to the norms and values of caregivers which, in turn, motivates moral internalization and the work of "conscience." To put this colloquially: the child orients to adult norms and complies with them…*because she loves her parents!*

Kochanska's model moves, then, from security of attachment (MRO) to committed compliance to moral internalization. This movement is also expected to influence the child's emerging internal representation of the self. As Kochanska et al. (2002a) put it:

"Children with a strong history of committed compliance with the parent are likely gradually to come to view themselves as embracing the parent's values and rules. Such a moral self, in turn, comes to serve as the regulator of future moral conduct and, more generally, of early morality" (p. 340).

But children bring something to the interaction, too, namely, their temperament. Indeed, Kochanska (1991, 1993) argues that there are multiple pathways to conscience and that one parenting style is not uniformly more effective irrespective of the temperamental dispositions of the child. She suggests, for example, that children who are highly prone to fearful reactions would profit from gentle, low power-assertive discipline. This "silken glove" approach capitalizes on the child's own discomfort to produce the optimal level of anxiety that facilitates the processing and retention of parents' socialization messages. But for "fearless" children another approach is called for, not the "iron hand", which would only make the fearless child angry, highly reactive and resistant to socialization messages (Kochanska, Aksan & Joy, 2007), but rather one that capitalizes on positive emotions (rather than on anxiety).

Here, then, are two pathways to the internalization of conscience. For fearful children, it leads through the soft touch of gentle discipline; for fearless children, it leads through the reciprocal positive parent-child relationship. This has now been documented in a number of studies (Kochanska, 1997b; Kochanska, Forman, Aksan & Dunbar, 2005). Children who comply with rules, even without surveillance, who feel empathic concern towards others' distress, who feel discomfort when they commit transgressions, display more psychosocial competence and positive development. In addition children who experience a highly responsive relationship with mothers over the first 24 months strongly embraced maternal prohibitions and gave evidence of strong self-regulation at pre-school.

In a study published in 2010, Kochanska and colleagues reported on an extensive longitudinal study of children's conscience during toddler and preschool years on the basis of extensive home parents me and laboratory visits. Children's internalization of each parent's rules and empathy toward parents' distress observed in scripted paradigms at 25 mos., 38 mos., and 52 mos. The "moral self"---a new construct introduced in this line of work---was assessed at 67 months by means of a "puppet interview," and adaptive, competent, pro-social and antisocial behavior were rated by parents and teachers.

The results showed that children who as toddlers and preschoolers had a strong history of internalized "out of sight" compliance with parents' rules were competent, engaged and pro-social with few antisocial behavioral patterns at early school age. In addition a strong history of empathic responding at toddler/preschool predicted psychosocial competencies at early school age. What mechanism accounted for this beneficial effect? It was the moral self. Children's moral self, measured at 67 months, strongly predicted future competent behavior at 80 months.

The mechanism by which the moral self exercises this function is not clear but in their speculations, Kochanska et al. refer to Darcia and my work on the social cognitive approach to moral personality---and suggests that the moral self, engages in automatic regulation due to the high accessibility of moral schemes.

Early Development of Social Cognitive Moral Self

This brings me round back to the social cognitive approach to moral personality. As I noted earlier one challenge for a social cognitive theory of moral self-identity is to specify the developmental sources of moral chronicity. Lapsley & Narvaez (2004) suggest that moral chronicity is built on the foundation of generalized event representations that characterize early socio-personality development (Thompson, 1998). Event representations have been called the "basic building blocks of cognitive development" (Nelson & Gruendel, 1981, p. 131). They are working models of how social routines unfold and of what one can expect of social experience. These prototypic knowledge structures are progressively elaborated in the early dialogues with caregivers who help children review, structure and consolidate memories in script-like fashion (Fivush, Kuebli & Chubb, 1992).

But the key characterological turn of significance for moral psychology is how these early social-cognitive units are transformed from episodic into autobiographical memory. In other words, at some point specific autobiographical memories must be integrated into a narrative form that references a self whose story it is. Autobiographical memory is also asocial construction elaborated by means of dialogue within a web of interlocution. Parental interrogatives help children organize events into personally relevant autobiographical memories that provide, as part of the self-narrative, action-guiding scripts that become frequently practiced, over-learned, routine, habitual and automatic. Some of events are surely of moral or prosocial significance. Hence parental interrogatives might also include reference to norms, standards and values so that the moral ideal-self becomes part of the child's autobiographical narrative. In this way parents help children identify morally relevant features of their experience and encourage the formation of social cognitive schemas that are chronically accessible (Lapsley & Narvaez, 2004).

Concluding Questions

It is about time for me to stop, not the least this account of cultivating virtue raises a number of tough questions: How stable is a moral identity? Does it shift, as some find, based on priming or other conditions? Must an identity be conscious? How many identities does a person have? Or, does moral identity involve a broader swath of what a good life entails, incorporating notions of purity or self and in-group security? Does everyone have a moral identity, or only one that varies based by context?

Related to the question of defining features is the question of whether moral identity invariably cashes out in ways that "pay off", that is, are adaptive, salutary, morally praiseworthy, and the like. Most researchers agree that a committed moral identity provides one a schematic way of appraising the interpersonal landscape. Yet morally committed ways of viewing the world can harden into ideology, be a double-edged sword or be trumped by situational variables. That the work of moral identity interacts with situational variables is not itself a theoretical embarrassment of any kind. Indeed, it is expected, given the orienting frameworks noted earlier. Yet it does invite reflection as to when one should be credited with having a moral identity, in what areas of one's life, and under what conditions. These and other questions I hope to take up at the mending wall of psychology and ethics.