Prosocial Development
A MULTIDIMENSIONAL APPROACH

Edited by Laura M. Padilla-Walker
and
Gustavo Carlo
How can we explain the behavior of people who dedicate decades of their lives in volunteer service to those who are disadvantaged? What about those who tirelessly support social justice, humanitarian, or environmental causes? And then there are those who risk their lives in rescuing others in dire emergency situations. What motivates them? These extraordinary actions, committed by otherwise ordinary people, intrigue and inspire us precisely because they don’t make any good sense—they are clearly intended to promote others’ welfare but seemingly have no benefit for oneself; indeed, they inevitably entail considerable cost, risk, and trouble. So, why be prosocial? Why do good? Wherein is the motivation to be moral?

Such questions have been a persistent conundrum for thinkers across the centuries (Richter, 2007) and are particularly salient in the shadow of the Enlightenment because of its influence on our understanding of human nature and our definition of morality. Its dualistic conception of human nature bifurcated reason and personality; its formalist conception of morality emphasized duties and rights in regard to justice and welfare concerns. Together, these notions imparted the received wisdom—now reflected in many contemporary psychological theories—that individuals should (and could be motivated to) set aside personal interests and instead follow the dictates of reason or higher values to engage in the varied prosocial actions that are essential for social living in a civil society.

Note that implicit in such arguments is the contention that morality should not be self-regarding, that there is no moral credit in advancing one’s own interests; rather, moral credit accrues when one manages to suppress one’s own wants, desires, and projects in order to do the right thing. Morality, in that conception, entails acting out of drear duty, onerous obligation, and selfless sacrifice—and against one’s natural inclinations and personal interests. Thus, others’ interests are held to be ethically prior to one’s own. So wherein is the motivation to act morally.
to behave prosocially? Such a conception of moral motivation is inert and, quite frankly, psychologically unrealistic.

The contention that I advance in this chapter is that prosocial morality can and should be self-regarding, advancing one's own interests. As moral agents, we can "have our cake and eat it too," reflecting in many regards Hillel's aphorism, "if I am not for myself, who will be for me? Yet, if I am for myself only, what am I? And if not now, when?" (Pirkei Avot 1:14). Similarly, in contemporary psychology, Petrol (1987) and Staub (2005) contend that self-interest can be enlightened in inducing altruism-like behaviors and Hawley (chapter 3, this volume) explicates aspects of prosociality that can be instrumental to the self.

The argument that morality can be self-regarding is informed by Flanagan's (1991, 2009) insights on the issue. He acknowledges—and holds that our theories of morality and moral functioning must do the same—that people are rightly partial to their personal interests, projects, and commitments that fundamentally give meaning to life and that such meaning is constitutive of morality (obviously reflecting a more eudaimonic view of the moral domain). And he contends that our theories, to be taken as credible and viable, must specify the motivational mechanism for the actualization of their posited ideals and that such a mechanism must be psychologically feasible "for creatures like us." (Flanagan, 1991, p. 48). My aim is to do just that. The aspect of morality that is my focus here is the prosocial or the supererogatory—behavior that goes beyond what is strictly required.

The mechanism for prosocial morality explored in this chapter is the developing appropriation of morality as core to individuals' identity and personality. Notions of motivation and personality have frequently been disparaged as explanatory concepts in moral psychology, as evidenced by Kohlberg's (1981) denigration of notions of character (the so-called bag of virtues) and elevation of notions of moral rationality and by Turiel's (1983) segregation of the personal from the moral domain. However, the mechanism advanced here transforms the duality between self-interest and morality by explaining how one's (self-enhancing) personal interests can be accomplished through the enactment of (self-transcending) prosocial behaviors that promote the needs and interests of others.

**Dual Foci**

**FOCUS ON ADOLESCENCE AND ADULTHOOD**

This chapter focuses on prosocial morality in adolescence and adulthood—and not just because other authors in this volume have staked out the earlier part of the life span. Obviously, the foundations set for moral development in infancy, toddlerhood, and childhood are hugely significant, but there are good reasons for my focus on adolescence and adulthood, especially in light of the purported mechanism of the appropriation of morality to the self.

**FOCUS ON EXEMPLARITY**

As the chapter title harkens, my focus is not only on adolescence and adulthood but additionally through the perspective of exemplarity—behavior that is regarded as commendable and worthy of imitation. Much (but not all) of the research to be featured here has examined aspects of the psychological functioning of people who have demonstrated inordinate prosocial behavior—as exemplars of morality. This perspective of exemplarity has considerable heuristic value (see Walker, 2002, for a further discussion).

One advantage of this approach is that it allows an empirical comparison between prosocial exemplars and ordinary folk (or some other similar contrast group). The use of such "extreme" groups has the potential to magnify differences on the variables of interest. This strategy thus allows for the analysis of psychological functioning to be more readily discerned.

Of course, prosocial exemplars are identified precisely because they have engaged in meaningful real-world behaviors that have had considerable impact. These behaviors have true significance and ecological validity. Contrast such behaviors (e.g., caring for the homeless, saving a stranger from a car fire) with what often passes for a proxy of prosocial behavior in the lab (e.g., contrived donations, transitory expressions of empathy, self-reports). Of course, laboratory studies of prosocial behavior do have their empirical value, particularly in facilitating the testing of causal mechanisms in the context of a highly controlled experimental situation, but often that level of control forces compromises in the real-world significance of the prosocial behaviors assessed.

In many instances, research with exemplars has entailed a rather broad assessment of their psychological functioning (the rarity of such exemplars seems to evoke extensive data collection by researchers). This facilitates within-person analyses of the often complex relationships among various aspects of exemplars' functioning, which would not be possible with the traditional vantage point of cross-sectional samples.
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analytic approach. Person-level analyses have greater potential to yield holistic understandings of these phenomenologically real behaviors.

Finally, research on exemplars can inform the viability of the ethical ideals that mark the assumed endpoint of our models of prosociality. For example, is there evidence that people can actually attain and sustain the type of motivation and prosocial behavior that our theories demand? Is there one such endpoint or might we need to accommodate multiple ideals of moral excellence?

Appropriation of Morality to the Self

An emerging theme in thinking about moral motivation over the last couple of decades has been the alignment of morality with the self, such that moral concerns and commitments become endemic to identity and personality. Blasi (1983, 1984) and Damon (1984) both can be credited with introducing the notion of the moral self as a core explanatory concept in moral functioning. Note that this selfhood notion ran counter to the then-prevailing view that rationality was the defining feature of the moral domain and its fundamental psychological manifestation.

A variety of motivational mechanisms related to the moral self were proposed (Blasi, 1983; 1984; 2005; Damon, 1984), including the need for psychological self-consistency or coherence, a sense of personal responsibility (viz., that what was morally good was also obligatory for the self), integrity of identity, willpower, and moral desires. Unfortunately, these notions were never adequately operationalized and so have not yet gained much traction.

However, one concept pertaining to the moral self has had staying power—moral centrality. This motivational mechanism refers to the extent to which morality is central to one’s identity or sense of self, which, of course, may vary considerably across individuals (both in the content of the moral concerns and in their salience). Erikson (1968) had largely framed identity formation in terms of occupational choice and political ideology; what Blasi and Damon did was to explicitly add morality to the identity mix, arguing that self-identity could also be framed by morality, which would explain, to a considerable extent, moral motivation and subsequent behavior. Thus, once morality has been appropriated to the self, then acting in that regard would obviously be self-enhancing whereas failing to do so would be self-defeating.

Despite the appeal of a moral self model, there are a couple of cautions to note. One is that moral centrality as a motivational mechanism is apparently not activated until identity formation begins in adolescence, leaving moral motivation in the earlier part of the life span and the patterns and processes of its development largely unexplained. As Blasi (1993) acknowledged, genuine morality is clearly evident in childhood, in children’s evaluations (Hamlin, Wynn, & Bloom, 2007), conversations (Wright & Bartsch, 2008), and self-referential emotions and other aspects of conscience (Kochanska & Thompson, 1997). The other caution is that until recently, the supportive empirical evidence for this mechanism of moral motivation has been thin on the ground.

The first suggestive evidence for this notion of moral centrality came from the monumental study of Holocaust rescuers conducted by Oliner and Oliner (1988). Although they explored a wide range of factors presumed to contribute to altruistic action, their focus was more on situational and demographic variables than personological ones. However, their surveys did indicate stronger internalization of the values of prosociality and personal integrity among rescuers than non-rescuers, suggesting the moral centrality of these motives.

Colby and Damon’s (1992) qualitative study of moral exemplars more explicitly focused on aspects of moral self-understanding. To identify these moral exemplars they assembled a diverse panel of ethical experts who derived a set of criteria for moral exemplarity and then nominated people who met those criteria. Colby and Damon proceeded to do a case-study analysis of a small sample of these identified exemplars (who were largely social activists pursing prosocial causes) and, in so doing, ascertained several features of mature moral development.

Perhaps the feature that most impressed Colby and Damon was that these moral exemplars had an identity that meaningfully fused the personal and moral aspects of their lives (see their chapter 11, this volume). Various aspects of their lives were not compartmentalized and uncoordinated, as is more typical in adult development (Damon & Hart, 1988). Morality occupied a central place in the exemplars’ sense of self; and moral action was not regarded as an exercise in self-sacrifice nor the result of heady deliberative adjudication of competing options. Indeed, their appropriation of morality to the self instead meant that these exemplars derived considerable personal fulfillment from pursuing their prosocial projects. This is the psychological mechanism that holds promise for explaining prosocial motivation.

By definition, exemplars are uncommon and their rarity means that they are often studied using qualitative methodology. Interestingly, with other groups of exemplars such as Holocaust rescuers, Carnegie medalists, philanthropists, emergency response personnel, military heroes, hospice volunteers, and L’Arche assistants (Monroe, 2002; Oliner, 2003; Reimer, 2009), similar impressions were drawn by researchers along the lines that, frequently, personal and moral concerns were integrated in the psychological functioning of prosocial exemplars. Despite the many virtues of qualitative research designs, their lack of objective methodology and appropriate comparison groups pose challenges for drawing valid and reliable inferences about psychological mechanisms. We now turn our attention to research using the quantitative methods of psychological science to address these issues.

The research enterprise examining the appropriation of morality to the self has proceeded along two largely parallel but complementary tracks representing different levels of personality description (McAdams, 1995). One track has focused on the appropriation of moral traits to identity, the other on their role in identity expression.
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integration of moral and personal concerns in broader aspects of personality (such as goal motivation, developmental achievements, and integrative life narratives). First up in our discussion is the line of research on the possession of moral traits.

Moral Identity

Trait-based models have come to be the dominant perspective in the field of personality research, based on the assumption that behavioral dispositions are meaningfully tapped by trait terms. This implies that the possession of moral traits in identity should be predictive of prosocial behavior. But which personality traits are particularly morally relevant and thus constitutive of a moral identity? McCrae and John (1992) suggested that agreeableness and conscientiousness (two of the Big Five personality factors) are "the classic dimensions of character, describing 'good' versus 'evil' and 'strong-willed' versus 'weak-willed' individuals" (p. 197), and McAdams (2009) suggested the addition of the openness-to-experience factor to the mix, but such global personality dimensions are not sufficiently informative for our purposes.

To empirically address the question of which traits are morally relevant, one fruitful approach has been to examine notions of moral excellence that are extant in common, everyday understandings. This approach, of course, differs from those that are philosophically driven, but perhaps better represents what is actually operative in everyday life. Once traits descriptive of a mature moral identity have been derived, then the process of exploring developmental patterns can be undertaken.

CONCEPTIONS OF MORAL TRAITS

A taxonomy of moral character traits in people’s implicit conceptions was derived by Walker and Pitts (1998). This was accomplished in a series of studies wherein samples of adults were first asked to generate the traits of a highly moral person, then to rate the prototypicality of a distilled list of these traits, and finally to organize these traits into meaningful groups. Analyses of these data revealed six clusters of moral traits in ordinary individuals’ conceptions of moral excellence (what is regarded as highly moral), embodying themes of: principles/ideals, dependability/loyalty, integrity, care/trustworthiness, fairness, and confidence. These are the sort of traits that should be characteristic of a moral identity. In a follow-up study, Smith, Türk Smith, and Christopher (2007) found similar conceptions of moral traits across various cross-cultural samples.

Walker and Pitts (1998) further derived the underlying dimensions characterizing people’s conceptions of moral excellence: a self/other dimension was the primary one and reflects the tension in moral functioning between personal agency at one pole and more interpersonal concerns at the other: the secondary dimension was external/internal and reflects the tension between adherence to external norms and internal aspects of conscience. Reassuringly, in a later study of conceptions of moral traits characteristic of different types of moral excellence (just, brave, and caring), Walker and Hennig (2004) found that these disparate types all exemplify the same tension between agentic and communal traits in moral functioning. These findings, based on naturalistic conceptions of moral excellence, reinforce the framing of this chapter in that they reference the significance of the fundamental motivational duality of self and other, of agency and communion.

Walker’s studies examined conceptions of moral traits among adults only and did not assess developmental patterns. This limitation was addressed in a series of studies by Hardy, Walker, Olsen, Skalski, and Basinger (2011) that derived, using similar procedures, adolescents’ taxonomy of moral traits. Although analyses revealed that similar clusters and dimensions of moral traits were found in adolescents’ conceptions here as were found in adults’ conceptions, some developmental patterns were evident. For example, older adolescents in Hardy et al.’s free-listing procedure generated more moral trait terms than did younger adolescents, indicating the increased accessibility of the concept with age. Further, the relationship between the accessibility of these traits and their perceived importance was stronger for older than for younger adolescents, suggesting a more coherent conceptual framing with development. And more clusters were derived from older adolescents’ organization of these traits than from the younger adolescents, indicating greater differentiation in their understandings. Research has yet to examine moral-trait conceptions earlier in childhood, but more concrete and less nuanced patterns might be anticipated.

So we now have some sense of the moral-trait conceptions of adolescents and adults. The question naturally arises as to whether the self-attribution of such moral traits is predictive of actual prosocial behavior.

SELF-ATTRIBUTION OF MORAL TRAITS

Initial indications that possession of moral traits was associated with meaningful behavior came from Hart and Fegley’s (1995) study of adolescent moral exemplars, from a disadvantaged context, who were identified because of their extraordinary care for, and service to, others. Along with a matched comparison group of adolescents, they completed various personality measures including an open-ended description of the self. Analyses of these self-ascribed attributes revealed that the adolescent care exemplars included more moral traits and goals than did the comparison adolescents, indicating that self-understanding, framed by moral traits, may be in some sense implicated in moral action.

Our discussion so far has focused on conceptions of moral traits because they inform the content of a moral identity. So we now shift to the assessment of moral identity and its validity. Reimer, DeWitt Goudelock, and Walker (2009) used the moral traits derived in Walker and Pitts’ (1998) study to assess how adolescents'...
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to develop a measure of moral identity. A subset of these traits was formulated into a 44-item self-attribution scale, which was then administered to a large sample of high school students. Responses were subjected to factor analysis, which yielded five factors, largely aligning with the clusters derived from Walker and Pitts's data. Then Reimer et al. assessed the predictive validity of their moral identity scale and found that the principled-idealistic and caring-dependable moral-trait self-attribution factors were predictive of volunteer involvement and service motivation.

Reimer et al.'s (2009) moral identity scale relied on moral-trait terms generated by adults in Walker and Pitts's (1998) study, but those trait terms may not well represent the aspects of moral functioning that are most relevant and salient for adolescents. This limitation prompted Hardy, Walker, Olsen, Woodbury, and Hickman (in press) to develop another measure of moral identity, based on adolescents' conceptions of moral traits and tapping the moral ideal self. With this measure, attributions of moral traits are not for the actual self, rather attributions are for the ideal self, the person one aspires to be. The moral ideal self can serve as a motivational guide for behavior by focusing on terminal values and goals and by triggering affect (e.g., when there is a disparity between the actual and ideal self).

So in the Hardy et al. (in press) study, adolescents themselves generated the moral-trait terms (adapting the procedures discussed earlier in studies of naturalistic conceptions), which were then formulated into a 20-item measure of moral identity. A sample of adolescents then rated these moral traits for the ideal self. It was found that the moral ideal self was positively associated with parent-reported adolescent altruism and moral traits and was negatively associated with parent-reported adolescent aggression and adolescent-reported cheating, providing rather convincing evidence of the predictive validity of this measure of moral identity wherein moral traits are appropriated to the self.

What has become the most widely used measure of moral identity was earlier developed by Aquino and Reed (2002). Their measure taps the centrality or self-relevant importance of moral traits for identity. The measure first presents a set of nine traits that are considered to be characteristic of a moral person (essentially activating the concept) and then respondents are asked to rate, on a 10-item scale, the extent to which they identify with those characteristics. The measure has two subscales: the internalization subscale taps the personal importance of possessing these traits, whereas the symbolization subscale taps the public aspects of moral identity in communicating one's morality to others (which seems to focus more on impression management). Thus, in general, this measure of moral identity assesses the self-perceived importance (or centrality) of moral traits.

Some evidence has been reported indicating that moral centrality in identity is predictive of prosocial behavior. For example, Aquino and Reed (2002) found that the internalization subscale of their measure predicted actual food-drive donations among high school students. Reed and Aquino (2003) examined the relationship between the self-importance of moral identity and expressions of out-group hostility, based on the presumption that lower levels of hostility reflected an expanded perspective of moral concern. In a series of studies with university students, they found that the internalization subscale predicted a sense of moral obligations toward out-groups, the worthiness of humanitarian aid to out-groups, donation of money for humanitarian aid to an out-group, and less willingness to accept civilian deaths as "collateral damage" of a retaliatory military action against an out-group. Thus, the internalization of moral traits seems to be a significant predictor of prosocial attitudes and behavior.

One of the conceptual issues that characterizes the study of moral identity is the interaction between dispositional versus situational perspectives (see Walker, 2014, for an extended discussion). A trait-based dispositional perspective assumes considerable situational consistency and temporal stability in behavioral dispositions (Penner & Orom, 2010) and focuses on the "possession" of moral traits. Research reviewed in this chapter so far has fallen within the purview of the dispositional perspective. In contrast, a state-based situational perspective recognizes the role of contextual factors in both moral identity and behavior and so focuses on the cognitive and affective mechanisms in the activation (or deactivation) of aspects of moral identity.

The relevance of the situational perspective has often involved experimentally manipulating moral identity by priming its salience in some way, often implicitly. This can be accomplished, for example, by having participants compose a story using moral trait terms or doing a crossword puzzle for moral terms. The effect of priming moral identity was examined by Reed, Aquino, and Levy (2007). University students and adults were assigned to either a moral-identity or a neutral priming condition. They found that priming moral identity increased participants' professed willingness to donate time to a charitable organization (relative to a business marketing association), in comparison to the neutral priming.

In a subsequent study with undergraduate business students, Aquino, Freeman, Reed, Lim, and Phelps (2009) examined the joint influence of a dispositional factor (moral centrality) and a situational factor (moral priming) on moral behavior. They assessed the trait-based extent of moral centrality using Aquino and Reed's (2002) measure of moral identity and then manipulated the salience of moral identity (using either a moral or a neutral prime). In a lab session, students were then involved in a virtual task making investment decisions wherein individual interests competed with the collective good. Aquino et al. (2009) found that sustained cooperative behavior in the face of the apparent self-interested behaviors of others was only evidenced by participants who had a highly central moral identity that had also been primed, indicating the joint influence of both dispositional and situational factors.

It should be realized that the dispositional and situational perspectives are not fundamentally antithetical (Hardy & Carlo, 2011) and instead should be regarded as complementary. One would be hard pressed to find a researcher who did not acknowledge that moral identity is an individual-differences variable that reflects
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at least some element of intrapersonal consistency across contexts and over time. But, it also seems widely recognized that the exercise of virtues should be appropriate to the situation; that is, traits should have some contextual specificity. And, of course, it is assumed that the development of moral traits is, at least in part, an outcome of socialization influences. So the pitting of character versus context seems to be a false dichotomy (Penner & Orom, 2010).

The moral motivational mechanism that frames this chapter is the appropriation of morality to the self. I noted earlier that research in this regard has proceeded along two tracks. One track—and the one that has been my focus so far—has dealt with the self-attrition of moral traits to identity. The other track—to which I will turn shortly—has explored the integration of personal and moral concerns in other aspects of personality. The limitation of the trait-based focus is that it reflects but a single level of personality description (behavioral traits). This level entails description that is somewhat broad, nonspecific, and superficial. To get a more adequate handle on moral motivation, we need to explore other morally relevant aspects of personality that have the potential to explain how morality gets appropriated to the self. Such will be my focus for the remainder of the chapter.

Moral Personality

Levels of Personality Description

Although behavioral traits have more recently been at the forefront of the study of personality, other aspects of functioning should be considered if one is to really know the person. McAdams (1995, 2009) has advanced a typology that references three levels of personality description and that has garnered increased acceptance as a framing for the field.

The first level is that of dispositional traits—broad, unconditional, decontextualized, and implicitly comparative dimensions—of the sort that have been the focus so far in this chapter.

The second level entails characteristic adaptations—the motivational, strategic, and developmental features of personality that are typically more contextualized in role, place, and time. These characteristically adaptive strategies may be particularly revelatory of individuals’ goal motivation, more so than are generic traits.

The third level references integrative life narratives—the psychosocial construction of an identity that confers a sense of purpose, meaning, continuity, and coherence in life. In providing such accounts of their lives, people either explicitly or implicitly assume a moral stance regarding both self and society and thereby impart to their identity some moral valence.

McAdams and Cox (2010) helpfully illustrate the three levels of personality description (dispositional traits, characteristic adaptations, and integrative life narratives) in terms of three roles that people commonly adopt in life: actor, agent, and author, respectively. The enhanced value in going beyond the (mere) consideration of dispositional traits in understanding moral motivation has been examined in a couple of studies of moral exemplars in which personality has been tapped at all three levels of description. In both Matsuba and Walker’s (2004, 2005) and Walker and Frimer’s (2007) studies minimal differences were found between moral exemplars and matched comparison participants in terms of dispositional traits, but marked differences between these groups were evident in terms of personality variables reflecting the levels of characteristic adaptations and integrative life narratives.

Among the myriad personality variables that fall under the scope of characteristic adaptations and integrative life narratives, a basic issue involves identifying which ones are especially relevant to the issue of moral motivation. It is to that challenging question that we now turn.

Core Variables of Moral Personality

In attempting to identify the core variables of the moral personality, the research strategy necessitates the casting of a wide net, with a comprehensive and broadband assessment, ideally across all levels of personality description and involving multiple types of measures. We have conducted a series of studies of this type which, I will argue, yield a coherent pattern of findings that lay the groundwork for a better understanding of prosocial motivation.

Among the first studies to undertake a broadband assessment of morally relevant aspects of personality across the three levels was a study conducted with a local sample of young adults who had been identified for their extraordinary involvement with a range of social service agencies (Matsuba & Walker, 2004, 2005). These prosocial exemplars, along with a group of matched comparison participants, responded to several personality inventories and measures and participated in a life-review interview, which was then analyzed for various features of personality. In total, this personality assessment tapped traits, adaptations, and narratives.

As intimated earlier, at the level of dispositional traits, the young adult exemplars were not particularly distinguished from their comparisons, with no significant differences on four of the Big-Five personality factors. They did, however, evidence stronger traits of agreeableness (which is certainly consistent with their prosociality). At the level of characteristic adaptations, differences were more robust. For example, exemplars evidenced an accentuated other-model of adult attachment (an obvious communal theme), advanced ego-identity status, more developed moral reasoning, and a higher level of epistemic (or faith) development reflecting a broader and more inclusive worldview. The latter finding resonates with Colby and Damon’s (1992) observation that most of their exemplars evidenced a religiosity, spirituality, or faith that transcended the self (see Walker & Frimer, 2008, for an extended discussion of this).
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And, finally, at the level of integrative life narratives, Matsuba and Walker (2005) found that exemplars expressed more prosocial goals for their future, had greater ideological depth in the expression of their values and beliefs, had more recollections from their childhood of others’ suffering, and expressed stronger themes of agency in their life stories. Noteworthy, at this point, are the indications that elements of both agency and communion are strongly operative in exemplars’ motivation.

In Matsuba and Walker’s (2004, 2005) study, the prosocial exemplars were young adults who were just embarking on a “moral career.” In a subsequent study, Walker and Frimer (2007) examined older and perhaps more notable exemplars who had received Canadian national recognition for their actions. Here two different types of exemplars (caring and brave) were included: some had received the Caring Canadian Award for years of extraordinary volunteer service to groups, communities, or humanitarian causes; others had received the Medal of Bravery for risking their lives to save another. Despite the dramatically different nature of the actions that garnered these awards, both types are unequivocally prosocial.

Along with these exemplars, a group of individually matched comparison participants responded to a comprehensive set of measures assessing all three levels of personality description. Interestingly, no differences between exemplars and comparisons were found at the level of dispositional traits, whereas differences were extensive and robust at the level of integrative life narratives. For example, in their life stories, exemplars more frequently spontaneously recalled forms of prosocial relationships in childhood than did comparisons, including secure attachments, the benefit of “helpers” who fostered development, and exposure to the needs of others. Exemplars’ accounts also more frequently entailed instances of what McAdams (2006) calls “redemption,” wherein negative life events were construed positively so that some benefit or meaning was derived from them. Exemplars’ life stories were more coded as reflecting a more positive affective tone, indicating the pervasive optimism that was also noted by Colby and Damon (1992). Such optimism and the tendency to redeem critical life events are adaptive in sustaining prosocial action in the face of obstacles and disappointments.

Walker and Frimer (2007) also found that exemplars, more so than comparison participants, had stronger themes of both agency and communion in their life stories. This finding is especially important to highlight because these two fundamental motives are often conceptualized as competing: “getting ahead” versus “getting along” (Hogan, 1982). I will shortly return to this finding and its significance for understanding moral motivation.

Implicit so far in our discussion of both moral identity and moral personality has been the assumption that moral motivation takes but a singular form. Flanagan’s (1991) philosophical analysis has challenged that assumption, suggesting that there legitimately may be different varieties of moral personality. He contends that moral excellence can take different manifestations, implicating the multidimensional nature of moral motivation. Is there any evidence for moral modularity?

Walker, Primmer, and Dunlop (2010) examined that question by conducting a cluster analysis of the Canadian moral exemplars in Walker and Frimer’s (2007) study, based on a large collection of personality variables. Three distinct clusters of moral exemplars were revealed, suggesting that, indeed, different modes of moral motivation may be operative in prosocial action.

One cluster was pervasively communal, across the various levels of personality description, with behavioral traits of nurturance, goal motivation expressed in terms of interpersonal relationships and generativity, and evident themes of communion running through their life stories. These exemplars were clearly characterized by prosocial emotionality and social interdependence. The attributes of this cluster of exemplars resonate with the prosocial personality orientation described by Penner in his program of research, particularly the factor of other-oriented empathy (Penner & Orom, 2010). Although agency was not a particularly defining feature of this cluster, these exemplars were not only more communal than their comparisons but were also more agentic.

The second cluster of exemplars was characterized by variables somewhat more “in the head,” to use colloquial parlance. These included behavioral traits of openness to experience, goal motivation in terms of self-understanding and personal growth, and advanced epistemic and moral reasoning. This was labeled the deliberative cluster because it entailed the prosocial motivation imparted by a reflective and perhaps principled approach to meaning-making, an enhanced social awareness, and an openness to divergent perspectives. The expanded worldview characterizing these exemplars illustrates Staub’s (2005) notion of the development of inclusive caring—the humanizing of all people—that can motivate altruistic action. This cluster of exemplars also provides some solace to the cognitive-developmental perspective of the auto-motivating power of moral rationality (Kohlberg, 1984).

The third cluster was unequivocally ordinary in terms of moral motivation, characterized by banal personality functioning in comparison to other exemplars and indistinguishable from their comparisons. By default (given the absence of distinguishing aspects of personality), the existence of this ordinary cluster lends support to the situational perspective (Doris, 2002; Zimbardo, 2007), which contends that contextual forces are primary in instigating moral behavior. This cluster of personologically ordinary people, who have engaged in extraordinary action, challenges the framing of this chapter, which has assumed the causally operative mechanism of moral motivation, and so this bids some further reflection.

What sense can we make of these findings? As it turns out, this ordinary cluster was composed primarily of bravery award recipients, whereas the other two clusters were composed primarily of caring exemplars or were more balanced in their membership. This pattern suggests that one-off heroic action may often be instigated by powerful situational factors operative in such emergency.
(or strong) situations, whereas a prosocial career more likely is sustained by dispositional factors of moral motivation. Fleeson (2004) offers a resolution of the competing person × situation perspectives, claiming that both have applicability: The situational perspective seems to better explain the enactment of single, momentary behaviors, whereas the dispositional perspective better accounts for longer-term behavioral patterns. Regardless, these findings illustrate the multidimensional character of prosocial exemplarity and strongly suggest a multifaceted search for the processes underlying moral functioning and development.

**INTEGRATION OF AGENCY AND COMMUNION IN MOTIVATION**

This chapter is framed by the notion that the appropriation of morality to the self is critical to understanding prosocial motivation. In the first half of the chapter, the discussion focused on the possession and significance of moral traits in identity. In the second half, the focus has been the integration of personal and moral aspects of life in aspects of personality functioning beyond traits. All of this suggests the psychological mechanism of aligning and reconciling the interests of self and others.

As was noted earlier, the fundamental dimension underlying naturalistic conceptions of morality (Hardy et al., 2011; Walker & Hennig, 2004; Walker & Pitts, 1998) references the tension between self- and other-focused traits, between agency and communion. Likewise, in the field of motivation, the fundamental themes are agency and communion (Bakan, 1966; Horgan, 1982; McAdams, 1988). Agency captures the self-enhancing aspects of motivation, the disposition to individuate and to advance the self ("getting ahead"). Communion reflects the other-enhancing aspects, the disposition to promote social cohesion and the welfare of others ("getting along"). These motives are typically conceptualized as conflicting and antithetical (e.g., Schwartz, 1992; locates them on opposite sides of his values circumplex; also see Schwartz et al., 2012).

In contrast, Frimer and Walker’s (2009) reconciliation model proposes that, in moral maturity, these two motivations can become effectively integrated; and there is some theorizing that speaks to the adaptive aspects of such integration (Blasi, 2004; Colby & Damon, 1992; Damon, 1984; McAdams, 1993; Wiggins, 1991). But Frimer and Walker add a developmental framing, arguing that the two motives develop mostly in segregation in childhood and adolescence until beginning to butt into each other as they strengthen, provoking some resolution in late adolescence or early adulthood. The typical resolution entails the dominance of one motive and the diminution of the other as in unmitigated agency (the unfettered pursuit of wealth and power for its own sake). However, the model predicts that moral exemplars resolve the motivational tension differently by appropriating prosocial communal concerns to the self. The motives are transformed from being independent and competing to being interdependent and synergistic. In other words, moral exemplars largely fulfill their personal interests by investing in prosocial action advancing the cause of others.

Recall the consistent pattern of findings of accentuated levels of both agentic and communal motivation in the personality functioning of exemplars across a range of manifestations (Matsuba & Walker, 2004, 2005; Walker & Frimer, 2007). Note that these exemplars were not just prosocially communal, but were also strongly agentic, striving for influence, power, competence, and achievement. They were highly motivated in general. But the crux question is whether or not there is any evidence of a synergistic interaction between them—a total effect that is more than the mere sum of its parts.

Walker and Frimer (2007) addressed this issue by subsequently conducting a logistic regression analysis, predicting group classification (as exemplar or comparison). In the first step, agency and communion were entered as baseline control variables, both making strong independent contributions. In the second step, the statistical interaction term was entered; however, it did not significantly add to the predictive power of the regression equation. There was no evidence of synergy between these two motives.

Intrigued by this null finding, Frimer, Walker, Dunlop Lee, and Riches (2011) returned to the issue, conducting a reanalysis that involved two notable refinements, one conceptual and the other analytical. The conceptual refinement was to more precisely define agency and communion as promoting the interests of self and others, respectively; a conceptualization that is more germane to the motivational reconciliation envisaged by the model. In Walker and Frimer’s (2007) prior analysis, agency and communion had been coded by a collection of themes extant in the literature (including constructs such as empowerment and self-mastery to tap agency, dialogue and unity/togetherness to tap communion), and that admixture may have been obscuring the synergistic effect.

The analytical refinement was to replace the traditional variable-level approach to assessing interactions (statistically) with a person-level approach (Magnusson, 1999) which assesses them with greater phenomenological validity. In the variable approach, interactions are merely assessed on the basis of the overall strength of the variables when there may actually be minimal integration (as when individuals vacillate between two strong motives that are compartmentalized). In contrast, in the within-person approach, the interaction between agency and communion is tapped by the observable extent of meaningful co-occurrence of these motives within the same thought structure.

When Frimer et al. (2011) implemented both refinements (conceptual and analytical), they found the first evidence of a synergistic interaction between agency and communion. Exemplars had both motivational themes frequently coordinated in their narratives, whereas comparison participants did not deviate from chance co-occurrence. This finding reinforces the contention that promoting the interests of others is also psychologically self-enhancing in moral maturity.
However, there is an ambiguity in Frimer et al.’s (2011) evidence of the integration of agency and communion in moral maturity: Their coding of the interaction of these motives was merely assessed by their co-occurrence within the same thought structure, but that does not differentiate the directionality between them. The co-occurrence could be of the type of agency promoting communion (e.g., “I'm using my influence to help the poor”) or of the type of communion promoting agency (e.g., “I'm helping the poor to increase my status”). These types obviously warrant different moral evaluations. To address this ambiguity, Frimer, Walker, Lee, Riches, and Dunlop (2012) revised their coding procedures to tap the directionality between motives, adapting Rokeach’s (1973) notion of instrumental and terminal values. An instrumental value serves, or is a means to, something else; a terminal value is an end in itself.

In Frimer et al. (2012) study, subjects were widely known, influential figures of the past century, as identified by Time magazine. These are people of both positive and negative renown who have had, regardless, incredible impact. A large sample of social-science experts rated these figures on various dimensions of moral exemplarity. The top-ranking target figures (e.g., Nelson Mandela, Aung San Suu Kyi, Mother Teresa) were classified as moral exemplars, and the bottom-ranking (e.g., Vladimir Putin, Kim Jong Il, George W. Bush) were classified as comparison figures of comparable influence.

Since these figures were not available for direct participation in research, their personality functioning could only be studied “at a distance” through the content analysis of archival materials such as speeches and interviews. These archival materials were first coded for agency and communion and then subsequently coded for the hierarchical directionality between these two modes of motivation.

Comparison figures clearly displayed a pattern of unmitigated agency—considerably more agency than communion at both the instrumental and terminal levels of motivation—agency as instrumental to more agency. Moral exemplars also displayed considerably more agency than communion at the instrumental level; they were influential people, after all. But at the terminal level, they were unequivocally communal. Both groups were similarly equipped (with instrumental agency), but were engaged in vastly different projects. Exemplars displayed instrumental agency for the cause of terminal communion, the embodiment of enlightened self-interest. For the morally mature, personal influence, achievement, and fulfillment are actualized in an integrated mode of motivation by promoting others’ welfare. This is fundamentally what it means to appropriate morality to the self.

Some Concluding Challenges

This chapter has faced the challenge of explaining prosocial behavior, behavior that is ostensibly intended to benefit others but that entails considerable cost and risk to the self. So why do good? Many existing theories disregard or denigrate the role of the self in moral motivation, arguing explicitly or implicitly that the moral agent’s task is to somehow overcome self-interest to do the right thing (Haidt, 2008). Those perspectives lack motivational oomph and are psychologically unrealistic.

My contention is that prosocial morality can and should be self-regarding. The psychological maneuver is to capitalize on self-interest by refocusing it so that morality is integral to one’s identity and that agency and personal fulfillment are accomplished through prosocial objectives. This simply means appropriating prosocial moral concerns to the self, which can be keenly motivating “for creatures like us” (Planagan, 1991, p. 32).

In this chapter I reviewed two tracks of research in that regard. One track where there has been productive research over the last decade has focused on the possession of moral traits as central to identity. The other track has focused on broader aspects of moral personality, particularly the integration of agency and communion in moral motivation in such a way that self-interested agentic concerns are channeled into prosocial communal action. The findings of these different programs of research provide different but converging lenses for understanding the appropriation of morality to different aspects of the self’s functioning.

The investigative process adopted here was largely one of reverse engineering, with a focus on the relatively mature manifestations of moral motivation in adolescence and in emerging and later adulthood. This process is one of studying the end product or, in this case, the developmental endpoint, and then engaging in deconstruction to figure out the functional mechanisms.

Now having some sense what exemplary prosociality consists of, developmental questions rise to the fore as directions for future research. For example, what are the early socialization experiences that lay the groundwork for later development of a prosocial moral identity and integrated motivation? What about the requisite sociocognitive understandings? What are the various trajectories of moral identity and motivation through adolescence and adulthood, and how can these various paths in life be explained? How can the adaptive aspects of moral traits and motivation be fostered in personality while inoculating against their shadow-side that sometimes surfaces, at cost to both self and others?

The complexity in understanding prosocial behavior also lies in the many varied forms it can take and, presumably, the differing pathways that lead to their development. While there may be some core and widely shared features of prosocial morality—as I have argued is the case for agency and communion—its manifestation can arise from different personality profiles (as has been shown by Dunlop & Walker, 2013, for brave exemplars, and by Dunlop, Walker, & Matsuba, 2012, for care exemplars). Future research should more systematically explore the core and the distinctive aspects of different forms of prosocial morality, reflecting its multidimensional nature.
Specific Targets and Types of Prosocial Behavior

References


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