



# MORAL SELVES, EVIL SELVES

THE SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY OF CONSCIENCE

STEVEN HITLIN



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Steven Hitlin

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For,  
Yetta and Gus,  
Martha and Max, and  
RayEva

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# CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	ix
Introduction	3
1 Building a Social Psychology of Conscience	11
2 Moving Parts	35
3 Evolution, Society, and Conscience: Social Influences on Morality	53
4 Processes of Conscience: How the Moral Mind Works	75
5 How Situations Subvert Conscience	93
6 Us and Them: Shifting Moral Provinces	113
7 Conscience in Individual Functioning: Self-Deception and Moral Self-Biases	129
8 Conscience and Moral Horizons	147
9 The Moral Ambiguity of Personhood	167
10 The Possibility of Morality	185
Notes	203
Bibliography	227
Index	265



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This book discusses the moral dimension of how we act and reflect on the consequences of those actions. Though we typically try to be good,

we are only partly successful. One slice of my Jewish heritage that I find inspiring is the annual rite of admitting that you have harmed others and, though you will try not to, are likely to do so again. I find this ritual to be incredibly human, recognizing both that our actions have consequences and that we are inherently fallible. Writing a book on morality brings these issues to the forefront, and my heart goes out to anyone I love and who has (or will) suffered the consequences of my actions, who in Yiddish would be referred to as my *schlamazel*.

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The moral sense, or conscience, is as much a part of man as his leg or arm.  
Thomas Jefferson, writing to his nephew,  
Peter Carr, August 10, 1787.

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## INTRODUCTION

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

Groucho Marx

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## OVERVIEW

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## CHAPTER 1

# BUILDING A SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY OF CONSCIENCE

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

Phillip Zimbardo<sup>1</sup>

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### WHY STUDY CONSCIENCE?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### DEFINING MORALITY

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

develop a sense of self through social relationships. We are biological creatures, but evolutionary contexts that were social shaped even that biology.<sup>25</sup> Morality involves a system of rules useful for keeping social groups intact.<sup>26</sup>

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

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

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

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

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

aspect of behavior intertwined with important notions of rightness or wrongness, something that should or should not be done.<sup>32</sup>

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

Morality	1) Inhibitive elements → Thou Shalt-Not's
	2) Proactive elements → (a) Duties (b) Ideals

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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



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

### **BRIGHT LIGHTS AND BRIGHT LINES: CAPACITY VERSUS CONTENT**

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

Every man [*sic*] is in certain respects

- (A) like all other men
- (B) like some other men
- (C) like no other men<sup>47</sup>

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

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

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

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

### THE DUAL PROCESSING MODEL OF PERSONHOOD

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

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

call “first-order desires” ... which are simply desires to do or not to do one thing or another. No animal other than man, however, appears to have the capacity for reflective self-evaluation that is manifested in the formation of second-order desires.<sup>52</sup>

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **HOW THE DUAL SYSTEMS INTERACT: LAWYER LOGIC AND SCIENTIST LOGIC**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

### CONSCIENCE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## CHAPTER SUMMARY AND TRANSITION

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

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

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

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

## CHAPTER 2

# MOVING PARTS

The self ... is a constant process of self-interpretation, as the present self interprets the past self to the future self.

George Herbert Mead<sup>1</sup>

Human psychology is complicated. This sentence might win an award for banality, but it is an important point in the world of social science, where theories about human behavior require simplifying assumptions and domain-specific models. For the purposes of testing theories, it is helpful if one's theory involves a straightforward notion of what motivates human behavior, such as self-interest, status, a need for acceptance, or the desire to follow social roles. All of these motives have been supported empirically, though eventually we should be able to model the social actor using more than any one of these motivations. Human beings have many conscious and unconscious motivations, and to understand people we need to focus on how these motivations emerge, conflict, and get overshadowed in the situations we are in.<sup>2</sup> Abstract simplifications have their place, but any one motivation can get overshadowed and may only operate at one of our dual-processing levels.

Think about a dinner party. We have many motivations at such an event. We want to be appealing to others (gain acceptance), enjoy ourselves (be hedonistic), make contacts or trade favors (act rationally), and avoid causing a stir (fit into our roles). One party may have friends from childhood, friends from work, and spouse and family, as well as complete strangers. Do we act the same with all of them? That would seem odd. What is our motivation? And then, after the party and dozens of interactions with different people, we think back and appraise our evening. Perhaps we said something inappropriate or had too much to drink and acted rudely. Maybe we were not paying attention and missed something important. Whatever our motivation(s), we likely failed to achieve all of

our possible goals. Social interaction, regardless of one's simplifying motivational model, is complicated and partly unpredictable and, in the end, never goes exactly as one expects. As one philosopher puts it, "I'm happy to admit we're plenty smart, but I doubt our smarts show best in social interaction."<sup>3</sup> Our actions can surprise or dismay us, and likely we have had circumstance to wonder "why did I just say that?" at some point in our lives. This means we need to incorporate a range of processes rather than claim a single, unifying motivation.

Thus, I am not claiming that conscience represents our only motivation, merely that it is central to understanding humans and deserves greater prominence in the discussion of what makes us tick. Our moral sense, or senses, as I will discuss, developed evolutionarily to provide us with the *capacity* for morality. There is, however, variation in its *content*. I am not advocating a particular type of morality, rather showing how anyone's sense of morality—simple or complex—is a fundamental aspect of their view of self and others. Aspects of this capacity, a primary motivation, are common among human beings regardless of culture, but the content varies (within limits) across cultures and groups in society and across societies. A social psychology of conscience aims to systematize knowledge about the links between society, culture, situation, individual morality, and behavior. Such an enterprise attempts to provide an umbrella for thinking about the inherent complexities in social life. I should clarify that I am not claiming that ALL human action is moral, though anything humans do or say *could* be subject to moral evaluation.<sup>4</sup> Conscience is less about predicting behavior than explaining how a variety of social-psychological processes discussed throughout the book interrelate and operate within human lives.

Terms like "good" and "evil" have popular definitions; we want to be clear about how they are used in building an understanding of conscience. The same goes for the term "self," a concept that bridges psychology and sociology and allows us to think of the person as somebody who both performs actions and reflects on those actions. The self involves reflexivity, the capacity to use second-order concepts to judge first-order reactions. Reflexivity is at the root of our ability to be moral beings. The self includes elements necessary for understanding the moral actor: identities, personal identity, and time.

I will then discuss "values" at some length. This is a term thrown around in popular media, but is used imprecisely. Values certainly orient people, but in a more nuanced way than commonly understood. They do not necessarily cause us to act, but they are Bright Lights that illuminate certain courses of action as being more desirable than others. Values are, I will argue, vital for understanding personal identity—the way a person fundamentally orients to the world across situations, allegiances, and time.



The goal of this chapter is to provide definitions of common terms so that readers, who may or may not be social scientists, are clear about how I will be using those terms. This means drawing some boundaries around what social scientists mean by the terms “good” and “evil.” Most of the empirical research on these topics focuses on two extremes: acts of selflessness during an emergency or acts of extreme violence. My goal is to spend little time treading over well-discussed ground and to move away from these extremes to how conscience influences the more mundane aspects of our daily lives. Explaining the heroic bystander or a brutal murderer is a worthy goal, but they represent rather rare behavioral extremes. The study of conscience should also encompass the more prosaic ways in which we influence others in our daily lives, including friends, lovers, coworkers, and strangers. We are more kind to some people than others, and we are sometimes more or less kind even to the same person. A social psychology of conscience is aimed at understanding these behaviors and determining how they become a part of our self-understanding.

### SELF

The self is one of the most-studied concepts in social psychology, and the interested reader can follow this footnote to many thorough review articles.<sup>5</sup> My goal is simply to outline this concept as it is useful for anchoring a consideration of conscience.

Hans Joas refers to the self as “one of the greatest discoveries in the history of social science.”<sup>6</sup> The self has both cognitive and emotional aspects and is an enduring structure that tends, over time, to vary only slightly around a “moving baseline.”<sup>7</sup> The self seems paradoxical<sup>8</sup> since it demonstrates elements of stability and flexibility.<sup>9</sup> “Self” is an umbrella term that subsumes related constructs such as “identities” and “self-concept,” discussed below.<sup>10</sup> The exponentially growing volume of psychological literature comprises what has been called the “self-zoo,”<sup>11</sup> a bunch of discrete, disorganized processes that somehow make up a multidimensional self, including processes such as self-esteem, self-efficacy, and self-verification.

There are four elements that a theory of self needs to address: *continuity*, *integration*, *identification*, and *differentiation*.<sup>12</sup> Human beings feel a sense of continuity where experiences follow a perceived temporal order such that current events bear a meaningful relation to past events. Integration occurs through the experience of one’s activities, thoughts, and feelings appearing at least in some part related; people may act differently across time and space, but they do not feel like they are new beings. People identify with others as members of relationships and groups,<sup>13</sup> but at the same time they differentiate themselves from those groups. People affiliate with others,

yet carve out a space for feeling unique. The psychologist Roy Baumeister presents three human experiences that form the basis for self-hood: (1) reflexive consciousness (the ability to view one's self from others' point of view), (2) interpersonal being (self as member of groups and relationships), and (3) executive functioning agent (self as making choices).<sup>14</sup> Human beings have the biological capacity to develop selves as they can be both the subjects and the objects of their behavior. They act, and they can think about their actions before or after performing an action.

Role-taking, the ability to see ourselves through the eyes of others, is a fundamental property of the self<sup>15</sup> and is at the root of the symbolic interactionist tradition.<sup>16</sup> Symbols express cultural boundaries that we use to define ourselves.<sup>17</sup> Human beings can analyze and judge their first-order desires. Unlike animals (or children) who simply have desires, we can step back and judge our desires based on standards. I may want to yell at the driver who cut me off but I can overcome this desire, at least most of the time. This dual-processing system is facilitated by language, which allows us to abstractly imagine how others see us and to effectively internalize others' expectations for our behavior.<sup>18</sup> Thus, our sense of self is inherently social. It makes little sense to talk about people outside of the language and the feedback they derive from their society. This ability to take the role of others is at the root of morality.<sup>19</sup> We can anticipate the standards others have for our behavior and, potentially, adjust accordingly.

The self, then, has two levels: what we do and how we think about what we will do or have done. The self is both a set of beliefs and a dynamic entity shaped through interactions; it is a thing and a process. We think about acting, we act, and we think about how we acted. This pattern gets repeated and repeated, and both the acting and the thinking-about-the-acting are part of the self. Thus, the self paradoxically is both stable (in thought) and dynamic (in action). We can study the self-as-object, a mental structure accessible for empirical study like any other mental construct, and the self-as-process, focusing on the emergent and constructed nature of the self within interactions. The more psychological self-as-object focus on the self involves understanding how people's self-cognitive processes operate,<sup>20</sup> and the more interaction-based self-as-process focus examines the interpersonal construction and presentation of the self.<sup>21</sup> Like conscience, the self may or may not be explicitly part of every interaction we have, but it is certainly implicated in the most important events of our lives.<sup>22</sup>

In short, we develop a sense of who we are and present that sense of self to others. The self, the ways we understand who we are, has motivational properties.<sup>23</sup> We are motivated to increase self-esteem, verify our sense of ourselves, and feel efficacious.<sup>24</sup> In various situations we try to enhance how others see us, while in others we seek confirmation about our self-concept,

even its negative aspects.<sup>25</sup> I will argue that an often overlooked motivational aspect of the self is the desire to “morally satisfy,” to achieve a socially acceptable minimum amount of moral acceptance from others.<sup>26</sup> Rather than try to maximize our moral behavior, we construct a minimally acceptable standard for morality and either live up to it or convince ourselves that we have.

The self does not emerge fully formed in children or adults. We learn about ourselves from interacting with others and by figuring out where we fit in the various groups, families, gender expectations, and institutions we encounter. In practice, what analytically seems like an overwhelming mish-mash of reference points becomes an organized, relatively enduring individual system of self-understanding. To make sense of this, we need to introduce the notion of identities, the primary way to link the self with social relationships.

## IDENTITIES

The term “identity” is used a lot in social science, though there is little agreement over what the term precisely means. It has been attacked for being both undertheorized and overused.<sup>27</sup> Identity refers to the various meanings attached to oneself by the self and by others that situate people within social relationships.<sup>28</sup> There are two theories that usefully organize the relationship of identities to the social world: unfortunately, their overly similar names are identity theory<sup>29</sup> and social identity theory.<sup>30</sup> Combined, they help situate the self within wider social contexts. Traditionally, identity theory has focused on the self as a set of internalized social roles, while social identity theory has looked at how individuals conceptualize group boundaries.<sup>31</sup> However, more recent work in each tradition moves beyond this simple dichotomy to focus on how the enactment of roles and membership in groups combine to produce an organized sense of self.<sup>32</sup>

In identity theory, identity is primarily (but not exclusively) linked to hierarchically organized roles, such as those of “employee,” “sister,” and “volunteer,” that each individual prioritizes.<sup>33</sup> In social identity theory, identity refers to the commonalities among people who share a group membership (ethnicity, gender, club membership) and the differences between that group and other, related groups.<sup>34</sup> Thus, there are many different identities that people develop based on the roles they enact and the groups they identify with (or against). A person’s life may involve a number of identities such as student, voter, and part-time athlete. To the extent that each of these identities is important to them, the meanings associated with them serve to guide their behavior and organize their sense of who they are.<sup>35</sup> These identities help people make sense of the feedback they get and offer

guidelines for how well they are “playing their part” in specific situations. When reading a newspaper, for example, news that affects people’s gender, ethnic group, or occupation will likely draw their attention more than news concerning identities they do not claim.

The self is made up of our conglomeration of identities. When asked, people can talk about and describe many of the expectations associated with these identities. Over time, the expectations associated with each identity become internalized and thus become part of our first-order expectations for understanding behavior and become central to a notion of who we “really” are. As I develop the identity of professor, I internalize the expectations associated with that role and, to the extent that the role is important to me, attempt to act in line with it in the appropriate situations. Feedback, either from others or from simply comparing my behavior with my role-standards, can either confirm that I am performing the role adequately or require that I shift my behavior until it is in line with that role.

In Western culture, especially, we experience a part of ourselves that cuts across the various roles we play and identities we hold. I may be partly a man, partly a member of a family, and partly a member of a religious tradition, but there seems to be something that cuts across these identities and offers some sense, even if illusory, of coherence. Perhaps it is a biological accident of the same organism existing across different situations, but we develop a psychological sense of ourselves that includes knowledge of our personality, experiences, predispositions, interests, and goals. Different people privilege different identities. For some people, being Hispanic or being a scientist may overwhelm other aspects of who they are, while others with the same labels may prioritize them differently. But across these options, we develop an intuitive sense of uniqueness that combines what we do, what we like, and what we hope to be. This uniqueness is derived from social material, the feedback of others, and the ideals and symbols we find ourselves drawn toward; most people feel unique, but there are patterns in the reports of those supposedly unique feelings. A core aspect of this feeling of uniqueness, however, is the creation of a personal identity, an aspect of the self that seems to exist across our expectations for any role or allegiance.

Our sense of personal identity exists across the other identities we claim and is known as a principle-level identity. Personal identity is most relevant for a discussion of the moral elements of the self, though I will suggest later on that other identities play a large part in the situational aspects of morality. Both identity and social identity theorists discuss personal identity, but neither places it prominently in their theories.<sup>36</sup> Personal identities are not simply idiosyncratic personal beliefs, but contain socially shaped meanings.<sup>37</sup> Some scholars argue that personal and social identities imply

different cognitive structures,<sup>38</sup> but the evidence suggests that these different sorts of identities are integrated and permeable.<sup>39</sup> Ultimately, I advocate the proposition that personal identity includes a moral core that is largely omitted from social science discussions of the social actor.

Thus, talking about the self as if it is unitary is misleading. Many different identities are organized within a person, and the self encompasses them. While models of the self have organized these different identities in useful ways, there is another element that gets underplayed, namely, the way that time influences the self. Who I am today is complicated enough. But there was a “me” yesterday, and hopefully there will be a “me” many years from now. That past-self and the future-self affect my current-self at the same time that current beliefs shape the future and alter the past.<sup>40</sup>

### TIME AND THE SELF

George Herbert Mead is often cited for his articulation of how intrinsically social the self is.<sup>41</sup> But he had an additional focus that gets discussed much less—how central time is to understanding the self.<sup>42</sup> Mead’s most influential scholarship was posthumously published by his students, but unfortunately his writings on time were not well-presented.<sup>43</sup> Humans exist on what Mead terms the “knife’s edge” of the present, a ceaseless array of continuously passing moments. There is no way for us to get outside of this passing time, and even if we are thinking of the future or the past, we are doing so within a moment that, as soon as we ponder it, moves into the past. As soon as I react to a question, for example, my response becomes a part both of my history and of my present, something that I can reflect upon, think about, and analyze. The events in a situation shape how we perceive time; an exciting event seems to pass quickly, while a boring lecture seems interminable.<sup>44</sup>

Mead draws a famous distinction, taken from William James,<sup>45</sup> between the knife’s edge actor (the “I”) and the accumulated understanding of ourselves that we carry around (the “Me”). For Mead, as discussed in introductory sociology classes everywhere, the self is an interaction between the spontaneous (“I”) and ongoing aspects of the person (“Me”). If the self is a computer, “I” is the interface and “Me” is its memory. We act in the moment often without conscious planning and then assimilate those actions into our self-understanding (“Gee, I was rude: I must have been in a bad mood”). Our selves, according to this view, involve constant interaction between our role in the instant, our view of ourselves in the past, and our sense of having a future.

This sense of having a future and reinterpreting the past will be important characteristics of conscience. We act with both short- and long-term

goals in mind, and these goals imply a sense of the future and, thus, of time. In terms of the self, this means we carry around “possible selves,”<sup>46</sup> visions of who we could be or want to be. These visions are motivational in that we can try to align our current actions with these long-term goals. If I want to coach professional basketball, a possible self, I could figure out the steps to take that might get me to that goal. We choose these goals for a variety of reasons, as I’ll talk about in the next chapter, but the existence of these goals is an important part of who we are and what courses we decide to take in life. Assuming, of course, we choose obtainable goals. If I come from an impoverished background, becoming a senator is an unlikely goal and one that I will likely get little guidance about achieving. Part of becoming socialized means examining what our realistic options are, and though we share a mythology that says anybody can grow up to be anything they want, the fact is our options are limited by our origins.

In terms of future selves, we can borrow a useful distinction between “ideal” and “ought” selves<sup>47</sup> that takes us back to morality’s positive aspect, introduced in the last chapter. These concepts do not expressly relate to morality, but form useful concepts for building a model of self and conscience. “Ideal” selves are visions of possible selves that we would ideally like to achieve. They may involve moral (be a good person, give to charity) or prosaic goals (I want to be taller, I want to be rich). They are visions, however, of what we would like to be and can be motivational if they seem accessible. Alternatively, the “ought” self mirrors Freud’s superego to tell us what we should do. “Ought” selves encapsulate duties; I ought to make my bed, call my grandparents more often, and follow traffic laws. Perhaps my ideal self shares these goals, but it is easy to imagine people whose “ideal” selves are nothing like what they “ought” to do.

Possible selves, then, are among the brightest of Bright Lights that motivate behavior. If a possible self is important, I will shape my actions toward achieving that longer-term goal. A strong Bright Light may serve as a counterpoint to the situational pressures I will discuss in Chapters 5 and 6. While this concept is vague now, Chapter 3 will discuss where Bright Lights (and Bright Lines) come from. Suffice it to say that whatever one internalizes as an ideal self or an ought self will, in the right circumstances, affect what one does and how one sees oneself.

## VALUES

Personal identity, the aspect of the self that feels most accessible and vital to the individual, is anchored in our values,<sup>48</sup> a point I will develop more fully in Chapter 8. The intellectual forefathers of sociology were quite concerned with values, though in the last forty years the study of values has

gotten a bad rap<sup>49</sup> due to its association with an often-criticized social theorist, Talcott Parsons.<sup>50</sup> In popular media, the term is used in a way that implies only a small segment of the American population has values. This is plainly silly. Everybody values something, and Americans largely agree on which values are most important.<sup>51</sup>

At the most abstract level, there is a limited set of universally recognized values. Different people find one or another of these values more important, but in general all people recognize the same values.<sup>52</sup> Shalom Schwartz, who has done the most intriguing work mapping human values, emphasizes that values are cognitive representations of three universal human requirements: (1) biologically based organism needs, (2) social interactional requirements for interpersonal coordination, and (3) social institutional demands for group welfare and survival.<sup>53</sup> There is evidence for a biological blueprint forming constraints on the possible range of human values.<sup>54</sup>

Values are “desirable transsituational goals, varying in importance, that serve as guiding principles in the life of a person or other social entity.”<sup>55</sup> They represent orientations toward solving problems that social groups necessarily face, such as protecting individual autonomy, preserving the social fabric, and managing relations with the natural and social world.<sup>56</sup> A classic definition comes from Kluckhohn: “A value is a conception, explicit or implicit, distinctive of an individual or characteristic of a group, of the *desirable*, which influences the selection from available modes, means, and ends of action.”<sup>57</sup> Values have both emotional and cognitive elements<sup>58</sup> and are experienced as both goals that are desired<sup>59</sup> and properties that are binding on our behavior in certain situations.<sup>60</sup> They exist at both the cultural and individual levels.<sup>61</sup>

While we can talk about values that specifically relate to domains such as work or family,<sup>62</sup> values are best understood as highly abstract constructs.<sup>63</sup> Social psychologists differentiate values from attitudes, less abstract feelings for or against specific objects.<sup>64</sup> Values are more distant, durable, and idealized notions.<sup>65</sup> I have an attitude for or against string beans, but not a value. I might value *stimulation* and find eating string beans an exciting way to actualize that value, but note the difference between the abstract goal and the more concrete means of achieving that idealized goal. As such, values are constant goals that are never actually achieved or finished. If I value achievement, power, or security, I can constantly work toward those values, but they are never reached such that I need no longer worry about them.

Values do not directly determine behavior; they frame and direct our more concrete actions. A great deal of psychological work demonstrates that attitudes are only indirectly predictive of behavior,<sup>66</sup> and attitudes are much

less abstract than values. Our attitude about something combines with other factors (such as our sense of our ability to actually control something) to predict behavior. Think of dieting. I may have a positive attitude toward dieting, but a lot of things in situations may prevent me from enacting that attitude in a behavior. The line between values and behavior, then, is even less direct, given that values are even more abstract.<sup>67</sup> I might value *achievement* and feel that to be successful I need to maintain a certain body image. That value might lead to certain attitudes concerning concrete things such as diet and exercise, and in the right circumstances (resisting first-order temptations) I may enact the attitude in service of the more abstract value.<sup>68</sup> Values are the brightest of the Bright Lights.

Schwartz has studied values around the world and consistently finds that people in countries that have a high literacy rate recognize the following ten values, each defined in terms of its motivational goal:<sup>69</sup>

*Hedonism*: self-centered sensual gratification

*Stimulation*: risk taking and adventure

*Self-Direction*: autonomous thought and action

*Universalism*: tolerance and concern for welfare of all others

*Benevolence*: welfare for those one frequently contacts

*Conformity*: self-restraint, subordinating one's inclinations to others' expectations

*Tradition*: traditional and religious activities

*Security*: stability, safety, and harmony of society, relationships, and self

*Power*: status and prestige; control people and resources

*Achievement*: competitive personal success

One other value that he terms "spirituality" is found in some places but not enough to be a part of his basic scheme.<sup>70</sup> These values can be arrayed in a circular fashion, whereby values that are adjacent to each other (power and achievement) share aspects and reflect opposite goals compared with others in the scheme (conformity is the opposite of hedonism).<sup>71</sup>

The Schwartz scheme has been well validated empirically, though there are other ways to measure and conceptualize values.<sup>72</sup> All schemes share the idea that values are concepts that exist along an array of possible desired goals. They are a part of people's versions of who they are and who they want to be; "values are the constellations people use to guide their journey through life."<sup>73</sup> In the next chapter, I will discuss evolutionary and sociological influences on the origins of values, but simply keep in mind that there appears to be a limited array of human values.<sup>74</sup> Values articulate boundaries for what we want to be and how we perceive ourselves and others. They capture a bounded set of potential Bright Lights that guide the self's moral core.



### GOOD

Values are considered to be largely positive, though the single-minded pursuit of any one value (or Bright Line) will likely seem obsessive. This is an appropriate place to turn to what social scientists mean when they talk about good behavior. Recall that in the last chapter I defined “moral” and “morality” more broadly than simply referring to people who do good things. We hear a lot about people being moral when they act in line with the ideals of a social group or society as a whole. De Wall, for example, defines morality as that which concerns helping or hurting other people.<sup>75</sup> But this limits a discussion of morality (and conscience) to important human behaviors and does not fully capture the range of human actions that gets judged morally. Thus, let us draw a few distinctions. Morality will refer to the general category of human action whereby any action or thought is potentially up for moral judgment or analysis. Taking a nap does not come under the purview of moral behavior unless we do so when we are supposed to be watching over our child. Similarly, we make moral judgments about others for behaviors that have little to do with extremes of harm or help, such as looking askance at a bunch of noisy teenagers or rolling our eyes at how rich people expect hotel employees to unpack their suitcases. We constantly make moral judgments of the “should” or “should not” variety, even though these behaviors are not of the epic proportion of saving a life or violently attacking another.

Two terms are often treated as replacements for morality: “prosocial” and “altruistic.” Prosocial behavior refers to actions that are viewed by a society as having beneficial social consequences.<sup>76</sup> This term leaves open the possibility that a particular society or group considers things beneficial that, to others, cross a Bright Line and are thus seen as immoral. For example, enslaving blacks and reporting communist neighbors were as considered positive actions at different points in American history. From today’s standards, we judge these as immoral, but they were prosocial behaviors in one era. This suggests that historical and subcultural differences call out for a careful use of terms.

Typically, when people refer to someone or something as “moral,” what they really mean is that they are altruistic. Altruism refers to acts that, at some cost to a person or group, confer benefits on other individuals.<sup>77</sup> There is a host of altruism research, though social psychologists rarely talk about altruism in moral terms.<sup>78</sup> Researchers know a lot about how situations affect helping behavior regardless of an individual’s personality traits, and they know some about what personality traits lead to more helping across situations—typically focusing on the emotion of empathy (see Chapter 4).<sup>79</sup> Think of walking in a busy park and seeing a stranger fall down across the

walkway. Altruism research suggests that the majority of bystanders will look at other people to figure out what to do. The result will be mass uncertainty and possibly a failure of anybody in the area to intervene.<sup>80</sup> Such is the power of the situation.

However, situations constrain behavior, and not everybody responds identically to the same situation. There are a range of reasons for these differences. Some people have the motivation and skills to help in an emergency, as in the example presented above. Others may not have the skills but are more aware of other people in their environment and are more likely to notice a falling stranger. Still others feel greater empathy for people in distress. Others are more likely to risk appearing foolish to attend to a stranger. These differences, that at first seem to be about personality, are largely socially shaped. Social factors, including a person's upbringing and experiences, cause people to interpret the same situation in different ways. Those who see a situation (a) as an emergency that (b) requires prosocial action and (c) themselves as able to help are more likely to intervene. Our socially shaped interpretations filter the way in which we process the information we absorb as we walk through the world. Sometimes these filters lead to altruistic behavior, but there is variation in how people approach such situations.

Drawing distinctions between morality, prosocial behavior, and altruism allows us to touch on a bigger issue, namely, that much of what people do on a daily basis does not reach the ideal standards they are taught. Following traffic signals involves prosocial behavior, but when we talk about altruism we are talking about something greater than doing what we are expected to do. The interesting issues for a social psychology of conscience are how people decide what is above and beyond the minimum that norms call for and what motivates them to act along those lines. If you ask people who have done heroic acts, say, hiding Jews during the Holocaust, why they did such things, they often report not seeing their behavior as particularly laudable.<sup>81</sup> They felt their actions were duties, not heroic acts. They did not go above and beyond; their interpretation of the world suggested that such actions were duties. Thus, different people form different Bright Lights and feel differentially pulled toward them at different times. And while there is variation on these points, there are patterns in variation based on a variety of social factors.

Bright Lights are those distant ideals that we orient ourselves toward, and while they act as signposts for understanding who we are and who we want to be, they may have little to do with the issues we encounter in day-to-day, settled lives. Most of daily life involves immediate, concrete concerns, and we rely on identities to orient our behavior in those familiar situations. Even acts that have a moral tinge may not reflect our ideal selves,

our personal Bright Lights, but rather reflect conventional, everyday influences and expectations.<sup>82</sup> Much of what we do daily is based on routine and habit;<sup>83</sup> conscious, second-order processing of our Bright Light moral issues does not come into play on the way to the dry cleaner or while buying milk.<sup>84</sup>

Thus, there are different types of good. Remembering to buy milk might be remarkable in one relationship and unremarkable in another. A dry cleaner who returns our shirts has done something good, at a minimal level, but we would not spend much energy heaping moral praise their way. However, over time, if their service does seem remarkable compared with that of others, then these expected behaviors get positive moral feedback. Other obligations are more centrally moral, and failing to live up to them involves crossing Bright Lines that lead to feelings of shame and unworthiness, while fulfilling them leads to pride and satisfaction. Some goods are “conventional,”<sup>85</sup> expectations we share with others as part of a social community but not subject to moral pride or shame, because they do not fundamentally implicate the self. This is a common distinction, not simply an academic one. Parents punish and yell more at kids for moral violations, transgressions of strict Bright Lines, than they do for conventional violations.<sup>86</sup> Early in life, often by forty-two months, children rate moral rules as much more important than social conventions.<sup>87</sup> The conventionality of an act is not a property of the action, but of the culture; conventional actions in one culture (e.g., eating a cow) may very well be moral in another.<sup>88</sup> Americans seem remarkable for their ability to view a large majority of actions and behavior as conventional rather than moral.<sup>89</sup> There is some evidence that a subset of behaviors is labeled moral across cultures, a point I will return to in the next chapter.

While morality is defined by a society and its subgroups, individuals develop a multifaceted conscience that reflects their own understandings of these wider definitions. Some actions become internalized as moral commitments or moral boundaries (Bright Lights and Bright Lines), while others are categorized under personal discretion (how people wear their hair or who they choose as friends).<sup>90</sup> Societies differ to the extent people are allowed the freedom to exercise personal choices, and such choices may be personal for one person but moral for another. People necessarily draw lines around their own actions (or potential actions) and around those of others. Lines that circumscribe “should” or “should not” enter into moral territory.

## EVIL

Beauty may be in the eye of the beholder, but then so is evil. Many of the perpetrators of the great tragedies of our age, ranging from wars to ethnic

cleansing, justify their actions in the name of higher ideals. Genocides, bombings, and civil wars are defended by appealing to higher ideals such as racial purity, national security, or freedom. These stated ideals are Bright Lights, universally recognized values that people can understand. Bright Lights are not absolute truths, and their applicability to a particular situation depends a great deal on one's perspective. Victims and perpetrators tend to disagree on whether an act is evil or not.<sup>91</sup> Many despicable acts are committed with what are, for the perpetrator, moral intentions such as protecting one's honor or getting even for a previous slight. In fact, people with extreme moral idealism are especially dangerous with respect to self-justification. They may view a goal of perceived justice or security as being worth pursuing by any means. Criminals, people that society has decided are evil enough to require their removal, tend not to see themselves as evil. Dictators and tyrants see their actions as justified. Evil is a matter of perspective.

Moral idealism is far from an unmitigated good, and in the right circumstances contributes to what we generally consider evil. Self-esteem is another psychological property that gets idealized but turns out to contribute to what we might consider evil.<sup>92</sup> Having high self-esteem is generally considered a positive goal,<sup>93</sup> and there is evidence that people are motivated to increase their self-esteem.<sup>94</sup> However, having high self-esteem is not necessarily a good thing. People with unwarrantedly high self-esteem are especially likely to react violently if that self-image is challenged.<sup>95</sup> People who feel artificially positive about themselves have more chance of that image coming into conflict with the views of others.

In social science, abstract theoretical discussions of the individual focus less on global descriptions of our dark nature than on our heroic potential.<sup>96</sup> The more concrete the discussion, however, the more it necessarily comes into contact with evidence of humanity's poorer behaviors. One historian laments that none of the people he has encountered in history look anything like the psychological models of moral actors found in the literature.<sup>97</sup> Societies are based on power and domination, and individuals who are remembered by history tend to be full of egoism and idealism. While they may not achieve higher levels of morality according to psychologists' standards, they are the ones we remember. With the exception of Freud's universal destruction motive and the oversimplified notion that we all act for selfish reasons, we don't see as much about humanity's darker sides in models of the self.

I mentioned before that the notion of moral "good" becomes translated into "altruism" in social psychology textbooks. "Evil" is not found in those textbooks, but most have a chapter on "aggression." Altruism and aggression cover the extremes of good and evil, omitting a wider perspective on

morality. Aggression has been well researched, and we know a good deal about individual and situational factors that increase it. Frustration, for example, has long been linked to aggressive responses,<sup>98</sup> as is negative emotion in general.<sup>99</sup> Such arousal can occur in specific situations or in situations of ongoing stress.<sup>100</sup> This suggests that, while some people are more aggressive than others, the way society is structured also plays a part in how people become aggressive. Some people live under more daily stress than others, suggesting that people who have daily financial stress, for example, will walk around closer to reaching an aggressive breaking point. Aggression is certainly a central aspect of any definition of evil, though it primarily implies physical harm.

Situations are an important factor in determining our aggressive behavior, and every introductory class (and book on evil) discusses the same few classic studies to demonstrate the power of situations to produce aggressive behavior. Thus, I need to present the classic Milgram experiments and Zimbardo's prison study, but I do so quickly and encourage the reader to look elsewhere for extensive treatments.<sup>101</sup> I am certainly not the first one to discover the relevance of these studies.

In Milgram's line of research, volunteers who responded to a community advertisement arrived at Yale University and were instructed to deliver electric shocks to another participant if the latter got answers wrong on a memory task. The volunteers believed they had been randomly chosen to be in the "teacher" role and that another person (actually a confederate) was randomly placed in the "learner" role. The teacher was to ask the learner, placed in another room and communicating through a microphone, to answer word pairs. In the event of a wrong answer, the teacher delivered an increasing electric shock using an electric dial that went over 450 volts.

In the initial version of the study, Milgram's staff simply repeated the phrase "the experiment requires that you go on" if the volunteers raised any concerns about the increasing levels of shock they were to administer to the victim. The victims were not really hurt, but volunteers believed that they were hurting the victims by sending stronger and stronger shocks. They heard victims screaming (through a microphone) and eventually heard them collapse and stop responding. The take-home message of this study was that two-thirds of the volunteers ended up giving shocks all the way to the end of the experiment, long past the time they thought the victim had passed out. Teachers were anxious and uncomfortable about their actions, but nonetheless a majority inflicted the maximum possible pain simply on the word of a lab assistant. Later versions found significant compliance to authority in different situations, such as being outside the university or having the victim in the same room as the volunteer. People tend to treat

people in authority as legitimate,<sup>102</sup> even in artificial situations in which they could ostensibly leave at any time. Perceiving someone to have authority, even on a flimsy basis, can lead most people to perform actions that, in the abstract, they would find reprehensible.

Zimbardo's famous Stanford Prison experiment, while not an experiment in the technical sense, also demonstrates how situations can influence people's behavior. Zimbardo set up an artificial jail and advertised for volunteers from the community to play the roles of prisoners and guards. Subjects were screened for psychological health and then were randomly selected as either prisoners or guards, but with little instruction about how to play their parts. Prisoners were rounded up from their homes by real police officers, booked, and then delivered to the "jail" at the Stanford psychology department, which was laid out with designated cells, a rec room, and so on.

The study was called off after four days because each group assimilated to their roles to such an extent that Zimbardo was worried about the safety and sanity of those enacting the role of prisoners. Guards acted with varying levels of emotional abuse (physical punishment was outlawed), and prisoners largely became passive and acquiescent. Again, the assignment of roles was random, though some have suggested that the kinds of people who might respond to an ad for a "study on prison life" are, on the average, different from those who might respond to a typical psychological study.<sup>103</sup> Zimbardo's experiment is, like Milgram's, *de rigueur* in social psychology courses and demonstrates the power of situations and roles in shaping behavior. It is worth noting that each prisoner and each guard did not behave identically; there is room for individual variation in how people act, even in these extreme situations.<sup>104</sup> I will endeavor to show, however, that even these individual differences are shaped socially and that "normal" people are far from exempt from the possibility of evil acts.

Ordinary caring people do take part in extraordinary evil. And they do so with enthusiasm and innovativeness. Given sufficiently appealing circumstances, caring citizens will turn upon the designated enemy with passionate ferocity. In loyalty to a cause they will deprive that designated enemy of freedom and of life itself. To achieve it, in selfless dedication citizens will sacrifice their own lives and the lives of their children, doing so with the noblest of intentions.<sup>105</sup>

Any discussion of evil that touches on the social sciences, then, needs to at least mention these signposts, and thus I have done my duty. We still have not defined evil, and we might justifiably ask how such a loaded term works with the more prosaic notions of immorality that are central

to understanding conscience in daily life. When we judge other people whom we observe violating one of our Bright Lines, calling them or their behavior “evil” seems an extreme rebuke. I find it important to pay my bills on time; if I hear of someone who does not, I will consider their actions morally unworthy (if it seems their fault), but I would probably not brand them evil.

Evil seems on a continuum with immorality, whereby we might consider various sorts of violations as representing greater degrees of negativity, based on a group’s or culture’s judgments. Some acts violate wider societal norms but are not a big deal, such as jaywalking or aggressively showy tattoos (though such displays are desirable to many groups). Stronger violations, such as failing to pay bills or eating off someone else’s plate without permission, are minor moral violations but, again, do not suggest a need for imprisonment. Evil lies somewhere past these sorts of violations and captures a notion of willful disregard for societal norms as well as the rights of an individual or group that is the recipient of such actions. In short, evil entails “human destructiveness,” reflected either in great violence or in persistent acts contributing to harming others.<sup>106</sup>

The work of Baumeister represents the notable exception to the general silence about evil in social psychology.<sup>107</sup> Baumeister focuses primarily on evil as violence, certainly the most widely agreeable demonstration of evil, though one that omits financial and political decisions that might harm people in less immediately direct ways. He suggests four root causes of violence: (1) as a means to an end, (2) in response to threatened egoism, (3) in a misguided effort to do good, and (4) to gain sadistic pleasure.<sup>108</sup> Evil occurs when people focus narrowly on the present without thinking of future consequences.

Evil can entail more than violence, however, and seems to capture a notion of dismissing the humanity of others through intentional action. Tragic occurrences caused by accident or violent actions intended to help a group are not considered evil, though this is a matter of perspective. The death penalty is a deterrent for some and evil to others, as is abortion. Thus, judgments of conscience are in the (socially shaped) eye of the beholder. One man’s freedom fighter is another man’s evildoer. Bright Lines color what we see and how we label it, and people do not agree either on where the lines are drawn or when they have been crossed. Thus, evil may fall into the “we know it when we see it” category and will be reserved for great, willful violations of a culture’s moral codes. For our purposes, it is best to remember that evil is based on perspective and that the term can be used to preclude objective analysis of an action, person, or social group. Calling something “evil” is to play a trump card, cutting off analysis and attempts at understanding.

**CHAPTER SUMMARY AND TRANSITION**

A treatment of morality in the social sciences conjures up various terms that also are used in the real world. Four of those terms (self, values, good, evil) are important to specify as the contours of a theory of conscience begin to take shape. Ultimately, I am going to argue that the self is the fundamental pivot for understanding conscience and that values form a vital, defining aspect of the self. Good and evil are the extremes of moral behavior, though conscience is a concept applied to actions, intentions, and judgments that span a wide continuum. Rather than simply explain evil or good, a social psychology of conscience explores how people draw these Bright Lights and Bright Lines and how, and if, these constructions influence behavior.

We now turn to a focus on the social development of both the capacity and content of Bright Lights and Bright Lines. Chapter 3 discusses how evolution equipped our species with the capacity for moral judgment and then explains patterns in how societies fill in the content of that capacity. Knowing where people were born, how much money their family has, and what cultures influenced them when they were growing up does not tell us everything about where they draw their moral boundaries and what they do with them, but they tell us a lot. Before returning to the individual, then, let us look at the social context that shapes an individual's development.



## CHAPTER 3

# EVOLUTION, SOCIETY, AND CONSCIENCE: SOCIAL INFLUENCES ON MORALITY

Hence, the tendency of society to satisfy its demands as cheaply as possible results in appeals to “good conscience,” through which the individual pays to himself the wages for his righteousness, which otherwise would probably have to be assured to him in some way through law or custom.

Georg Simmel<sup>1</sup>

Conscience is personal, but not idiosyncratic. It is a distinctly human capacity that stems directly from our sociality. No other species forms long-term plans, makes abstract moral judgments, or is motivated by shame, guilt, and pride. This constellation of human moral faculties is intertwined with our ability to develop a self that steers and evaluates our actions, both as we act and after. We can experience emotions due to memories of past transgressions and orient ourselves toward future goals that may be years away. We can develop self-understandings that guide ongoing behavior, such as trying to be a good citizen or a more caring family member. Other animals develop Bright Line equivalents in the limited sense that they possess approach and avoidance orientations toward their environment, but we would not claim—with a few exceptions in our primate cousins<sup>2</sup>—that animals form moral orientations toward the world. Only humans ask themselves questions about what moral goals are most important and then evaluate and potentially alter their behavior in light of those goals.

In this chapter, I focus on the social development of the capacity for moral outlooks and broadly suggest how society fills its content. Both the capacity and content of those outlooks are intrinsically social. Even human evolution has shaped and been influenced by social processes that shape

our current biological capacities. This approach builds toward a model of conscience that shows the universal human capacity for making moral judgments, yet allows for (circumscribed) variation in moral outlooks across societies and throughout history. There may be limitless potential variation in what actions or objects lead to moral reactions of, say, disgust or pride, but the range of emotions is limited by our biology. Even the range of moral goals is limited.<sup>3</sup> These capacities have developed over many millennia within social environments, and while different people and groups have different moral goals and aversions, all people are morally attracted to and repelled by some things. We all develop Bright Lights and Bright Lines, although the content of those goals and moral boundaries differs. Even at the level of economic systems, any particular way of organizing exchange is seen by its members as having a moral dimension.<sup>4</sup> Whatever system is in place (capitalism, socialism) is suffused with moral messages about the moral rightness or wrongness of various actions that, if everybody buys into them, sustain that system.

In humans, first-order Bright Lines are more strongly negative,<sup>5</sup> with our brains having evolved first to protect us from threats to our group's safety.<sup>6</sup> Theoretically, there may be a large set of potential Bright Lines, ranging from objects as diverse as foods to behaviors to goals. Shame, for example, is a universal emotion, but with different triggers in different cultures. In some places, a woman showing her face in public is cause for shame for herself and her family. In America, some men spend thousands of dollars to appear as if they are not losing their hair. The emotion is physiologically similar, but the triggers vary by culture and circumstance.

While Bright Lines signal negative prohibitions, Bright Lights suggest proactive, desirable goals that we orient toward. Bright Line triggers are potentially limitless, but we have evolved to recognize, at their most abstract level, a limited range of Bright Lines.<sup>7</sup> Different societies and groups set out different means to achieve valued ends such as power, security, or hedonism. But, these broad ends (goals) are recognizable across societies. A concern with justice is not unintelligible across cultures—justice is just differentially achieved.<sup>8</sup> Humans universally judge themselves and each other<sup>9</sup> and possess the capacity to ask themselves “what kind of person should I be?” Of course, some have more opportunity to choose and reach their goals than others, but we all compare ourselves to others and to internalized social standards.

### EVOLUTION AND THE MORAL BRAIN

Evolution has shaped the capacity and limited the potential content of conscience. Evolutionary theorizing produces the assumption that animals'

physical behaviors and structures developed through processes of natural selection. Organisms evolve devices that, if successful, address the basic problems of life, including finding energy, maintaining balanced internal chemical states, repairing wear and tear, and fending off disease and injury.<sup>10</sup> Applied to humans, this means that natural selection occurred within social, not just physical, environments.<sup>11</sup> Our ancestors were highly social beings—humans have lived in groups as far back as we have data.<sup>12</sup> We are the only species on earth that demonstrates extensive cooperation among large numbers of genetically unrelated individuals.<sup>13</sup>

Early in our evolutionary history, humans may have been hunter-gatherers, but eventually evolutionarily successful *Homo sapiens* settled down to become horticulturalists. This led to the creation of an “emotionally charged sociocultural cage,” a set of norms that limited individual autonomy but kept the social group from devolving into conflicts.<sup>14</sup> Our minds evolved within these social constraints such that, while our brains share an emotional layer with other animals, distinctively human frontal lobes evolved on top of these emotional centers.<sup>15</sup>

Social scientists, with some notable exceptions, tend to focus on variation among people based on social groupings or on biological differences.<sup>16</sup> Less attention is paid to what human beings share as members of a species, perhaps because of a fear that too much focus on biology would somehow overshadow our species’ social nature. However, social science should incorporate universal human capacities into our models where appropriate. Things that appear to be universal across human societies include<sup>17</sup> status;<sup>18</sup> roles; divisions of labor;<sup>19</sup> speech used for special occasions; proper names; language to describe inner states, thoughts, and weather; tools; elementary logic; facial expressions;<sup>20</sup> a notion of people being partly responsible for their actions; and a notion that people have inner lives and make plans. Sexual attraction and childhood fears are other universal human elements. People use fire, construct shelters, prepare for giving birth, and live in groups. They make reciprocal exchanges,<sup>21</sup> try to predict the future, have some form of government, and regularly demonstrate conflict. They also distinguish in-groups from out-groups<sup>22</sup> and tend to form religious beliefs that include ritual behavior. The details vary, but the capacities for these behaviors are present in all societies. Human societies are organized along three dimensions: horizontal (based on who we feel close to), vertical (based on hierarchy and status), and divinity (based on sacredness).<sup>23</sup> Since properly coding the world is important for survival, our minds have evolved to quickly perceive social information along these dimensions.

Another universal is the presence of moral codes, though content of those codes may differ. Societal codes become internalized into conscience, in concert with the self’s universal capacity to be both a subject and an object

(discussed in the last chapter).<sup>24</sup> According to the evolutionary psychologist Marc Hauser, “[A]ll humans are endowed with a moral faculty—a capacity that enables each individual to unconsciously and automatically evaluate a limitless variety of actions in terms of principles that dictate what is permissible, obligatory, or forbidden.”<sup>25</sup> This faculty is analogous, he suggests, to Noam Chomsky’s influential notion of the capacity for grammar being universally human. Particular cultures develop different languages, but the capacity for articulating social experience within notions of time, quantity, and action are universally hard-wired into the human species. Similarly, Hauser argues, humans have a moral sense that, like grammar, is not necessarily consciously accessible. This sense implicates conscience, what Darwin suggested would evolve from social instincts.<sup>26</sup>

Hauser traces an evolutionary argument for how our minds developed this moral sense. Our most powerful emotions, such as disgust,<sup>27</sup> stem from our first-order processing, a highly adaptive system for an organism’s survival. This portion of our brain developed many years before our reasoning brain, and its fight-or-flight nature still resides within the larger apparatus. Our primary, emotion-related faculties were present even before we split off from our primate ancestors between 5 and 7 million years ago.<sup>28</sup> As we evolved a capability for language, we developed a second-order ability to monitor situations that extended to social bonds, but the first-order processes continued to develop concurrently. Hauser suggests that we have evolved processes that automatically monitor issues of fairness and reciprocity in social relations, evident at age four, and these processes appear as part of the human organism and not as something handed down through cultural teachings. What we share, across cultures, is a “moral grammar” that circumscribes the potential moral systems we will internalize. It is not that we agree on moral systems across societies, but that justice and fairness norms develop in all societies. The content that triggers these first-order reactions when perceived injustices occur differs across time and place, but the first-order reactions are a part of our evolved brains.

Our brains have two broad regions: the frontal lobes and what Tancredi refers to as the emotional brain.<sup>29</sup> Our emotional brain has evolved layers that deal with our ability to absorb information from our environment that triggers our automatic nervous system (the hypothalamus). The amygdala rapidly assesses our environments (working through the frontal lobes), applies emotional meaning to those stimuli, and stores our emotions to be activated in the future. The emotional brain also involves the hippocampus, which focuses the brain on incoming stimuli and helps activate emotions, and the anterior cingulate cortex (good for problem solving and emotional self-control). Our hypothalamus controls the opposing arousal and quiescent aspects of our automatic nervous system, regulates survival-related

behaviors (such as desire for food and sex), and aims to achieve homeostasis. This system evolved early in human history and is more primitive than the problem-solving and planning aspects of our frontal lobes.

The frontal lobes are the “executive centers” of the brain and decide how to respond to the signals sent by the emotional brain. The prefrontal cortex is the central-most aspect of these lobes, connected with just about every part of the brain, including the emotional centers. It guides intentional acts, planning, and other internal thoughts and behaviors. The “self” is thought to reside within the prefrontal cortex. The rest of the frontal lobes are responsible for motor control and movement. The final relevant parts of the brain are mirror neurons, a network that allows us to mirror behavior based on others’ actions. This network observes social interaction, develops patterned responses, and allows us to feel what we perceive others are feeling.<sup>30</sup>

[M]irror neurons “learn” from observation of the patterns of others how to behave morally in social situations. When a challenge occurs to moral decision making, the amygdala revs up inducing a range of emotions from fear and anger to disgust. The inhibitory mechanism—the hippocampus and hypothalamus as well as the prefrontal cortex—steps in to ameliorate the response. This allows for clear-headed deliberation and a reasoned moral decision ... Sometimes the amygdalar response, if very intense, may overpower the inhibitory network. When this occurs the decision maker is no longer able to be objective, which may lead to an immoral decision and behavior.<sup>31</sup>

Large frontal lobes allow us to inhibit responses, meaning that we have the capacity (if not the will) to delay gratification in pursuit of long-term goals.<sup>32</sup> The interesting questions revolve around when, if, and why this occurs. To paraphrase Vilayanur Ramachandran, humans do not have free will as much as they have free won’t.<sup>33</sup>

This description is enough to carry us toward a social psychology of conscience, as evolutionary processes have formed a biological substrate for the dual-processing system at the root of conscience. The two systems connect through the prefrontal cortex, with the faster, more immediately influential system<sup>34</sup> evolving earlier in our species’ history. Quite often, our preconscious processes are evaluating the world around us and calling for various reactions long before our conscious mind has caught up. We may be rational beings some of the time, but quite often, that rationality is in the service of justifying a decision our first-order system has already made. Human rationality, at least in everyday interaction, does not typically employ unbiased Scientist Logic. Rather, our unconscious mind often forms conclusions, and we use the Lawyer Logic of our conscious, reasoning brain to justify those gut feelings.

Antonio Damasio is credited with demonstrating the ways in which our emotional brains are, in fact, vital for making what we consider rational decisions. Rather than rationally calculating costs and benefits, Damasio suggests that the emotional aspect of the brain guides the prefrontal lobes toward making desirable decisions.<sup>35</sup> People who have damaged frontal lobes have normal scores on tests of IQ and reasoning skills, but are unable to make what seem to be simple choices about deciding on future plans or get easily distracted by irrelevant side issues.<sup>36</sup> Even when employing our rational, second-order processes, we rely on first-order cues to help winnow through the various options we are presented with. Damasio refers to these as somatic markers: informative feelings needed for making good decisions. These internal states, ranging between pain and pleasure, are nonverbal signals about how a situation fits with an organism's set of values.<sup>37</sup> Feelings alone are not enough to guide us, but neither is cold rationality. These different processes are linked through a variety of brain structures; situations call on emotionally charged scripts to guide behavior based on past experiences, within a range of biologically limited values for improving one's physical and social condition.<sup>38</sup>

### **EVOLUTION IS NASTY: ARE HUMANS?**

A note on an issue I will take up later in this book—the idea that human beings are naturally selfish. Self-interest is at the root of various models of human action, and a recurring theme in the literature on morality is the extent to which apparently selfless motives really are, deep down, selfish. After all, this argument goes, natural selection is a nasty process of survival and therefore we must be, at root, nasty, self-serving creatures. In addition to a lack of empirical support,<sup>39</sup> however, this argument relies on a mistaken premise, what Frans de Waal refers to as the “Beethoven error.”<sup>40</sup> By looking into Beethoven's dirty apartment, one might wonder how beautiful music ever emerged. Similarly, the nasty process of evolution does not necessitate that only nasty creatures might have evolved from it.

If it is evolutionarily adaptive for an organism to develop processes of empathy or caring, then those processes will survive. Developing a reputation for being altruistic seems evolutionarily adaptive,<sup>41</sup> and if we properly shift the unit of evolution from the individual to the group, this problem of an organism's inherent selfishness recedes.<sup>42</sup> Thus, we can support evolutionary claims of the development of genuinely prosocial characteristics in addition to self-interested ones. Even nonrational animals offer much evidence of cooperative and social instincts.<sup>43</sup> Our moral sense evolved out of processes that encouraged the development of both individual and group interests.<sup>44</sup> A need for living in groups may be more cultural than biological;

however, it is likely that some genetic selection for bonding in groups was adaptive.<sup>45</sup>

There is neurological evidence suggesting that this hard-wired concern with other humans activates different parts of the brain depending on the nature of the moral dilemma. Emotional conflict is, itself, often indicative of the brain encountering a moral issue.<sup>46</sup> However, moral issues are processed differentially if they engage “personal” judgments versus “impersonal” ones.<sup>47</sup> When reasoning about people we know, or we are directly implicated in harming someone, emotional aspects of the brain light up. When we are reasoning about an abstract, impersonal ethical issue, neuroimaging shows only the frontal lobes being activated. The fact that our faster-processing systems swing into action for dilemmas that implicate a personal issue suggests that we have evolved to be quickly concerned about processing such information. Actions that affect a loved one, for example, operate first through our first-order processing. At the basic level, concern for those we care about quickly affects our perception and biological responses.

Consider a difficult moral dilemma: Should you kill a crying baby if you were in a group hiding from the Nazis? The baby’s cries might give away your location and condemn the group to be found. Simple moral problems rely on tried-and-tested solutions, but difficult moral issues can activate conflicting emotional versus cognitive regions.<sup>48</sup> In this example, our emotional, personal brain kicks in with disgust at the prospect of killing a baby, while our second-order, conscious mind reasons through the costs and benefits. Thus, we do not have one moral center in the brain; we have competing systems reacting to moral stimuli.

To this point, we have gone through a summary of the biological substrates for the mechanisms of the moral self. In the next chapter, we will go into more detail about how the moral mind operates during social interaction from a social, not a neurological, level of analysis. Suffice it to say, by building a model of conscience on the dual-processing system, we are safely within the bounds of biological and neurological research. Ultimately, the multiplicity of brain systems that are implicated in any moral judgment or decision suggests that simple models of moral reasoning do not reflect real people in real situations. And much of what we think we will do—in moral domains as in others—tends to get subverted by situational pressures such that our behaviors diverge from our ideal.

### MORAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE INDIVIDUAL

Hauser suggests that “underlying the extensive cross-cultural variation we observe in our expressed social norms is a universal moral grammar that enables each child to grow a narrow range of possible moral systems.”<sup>49</sup>

Humans have evolved with the capacity for both making instantaneous moral judgments and reflecting on them, hot and cold processes that comprise the self's moral dimension. This is not the self's only dimension, but it is experienced as core to one's sense of oneself as a person of worth within various groups and society as a whole. At the individual level, we are predisposed to internalize boundaries between moral and immoral, between acceptable actions and Bright Lines of forbidden or undesired conduct.

The fact that we are at root social beings has influenced the way evolution has shaped a moral apparatus that exists at multiple levels in the brain. Not only has sociality influenced how we are wired, today, but our capacity for language and interaction is at the root of how individuals, not just the species as a whole, develop conscience. As I discuss a relatively brief overview of the evidence for this position, recall that much of the published research on morality involves conventional notions of altruism and aggression, meaning that what we know about moral development occurs within a range of actions and orientations that is narrower than the vision of conscience I am setting forth in this book. Eventually, the empirical study of conscience should encompass a broader range of moral concerns. In addition, much of the developmental psychological research is done with Western samples. While there is evidence that children develop moral capacities as part of being human, the processes outlined here have been largely studied within Western cultures.

Applying the metaphors of this book to biological analyses of the brain's development, we can hypothesize the order of moral development moving from early childhood Bright Lines to the later development of Bright Lights. Young children do not possess a capacity for conceptualizing themselves far into the future, so their goals tend to be more immediate. Children's social learning occurs through actual and envisioned rewards and benefits and grows more and more abstract as the child's linguistic capacity increases. While there may be a few biologically hard-wired tripwires located in our automatic processing system (fear of snakes, perhaps), more advanced moral issues of sharing, fairness, and delaying gratification are only recognizable through language and the use of symbols and within an extended time horizon. These symbols are perceived at both first- and second-order levels, and as they age, children develop their ability to reason about moral concerns. I will talk about emotions more in the next chapter, but there is evidence for a subset of universally developed emotions within our species. Children's development involves the maturing of this capacity and a learning of their culture's content that will trigger the appropriate moral emotion at the appropriate time. What we mean by socialization is precisely how children (or newcomers to a culture) learn the culturally appropriate triggers for universal feelings such as fear, disgust, anger, and happiness.



Socialization involves internalizing the cultural triggers into both the conscious mind and, eventually, the preconscious mind.

Psychologists have primarily focused on early moral development, examining how social interaction “fills in” the innate capacity for developing moral worldviews.<sup>50</sup> Children are born with a “running start” toward prosocial development,<sup>51</sup> particularly with respect to empathy.<sup>52</sup> During the second year of life children become aware of external standards, and around age four they begin to apply standards of good and bad to the self.<sup>53</sup> Early on, children encounter moral rules as tantamount to physical reality, unquestionable and unalterable. Because of this, younger children judge others’ actions without any concern for intentions.<sup>54</sup> By age five, children realize that some people hold moral and factual beliefs different from theirs, and this knowledge contributes to tolerant judgments of others’ actions.<sup>55</sup>

Moral functioning involves learning and internalizing language based in common social practices and symbolic material.<sup>56</sup> Children develop their moral sense as they develop an understanding of selfhood—where their boundaries are and how they interact with other people. Learning language is a vital step in this process. Only through shared symbols, including language, can we begin to abstractly think of boundaries and similarities between ourselves and others. Language gives form to our sensations and to pain and pleasure intuitions that are present in other animals,<sup>57</sup> but allows us greater capacity to reason, analyze, remember, and plan.<sup>58</sup> Language enables thought, and for children, thought is initially a tool that helps solve concrete problems.<sup>59</sup> Moral functioning needs thought, but also requires emotion based in attachment to parental figures; children fortunate enough to be loved acquire a moral sense that provides meaning to their lives.<sup>60</sup> Children who are securely attached to and trust parents, especially mothers, are more open to being socialized by that parent, regardless of their agenda.<sup>61</sup>

Moral learning universally involves a two-step process.<sup>62</sup> First, children learn “moral knowledge,” especially their society’s Bright Lines (“don’t stare at strangers”) and potential Bright Lights (“be a good girl”). At this stage, such rules are experienced as externally imposed. Children as young as six develop “moral motivation, the second step in the process, a desire to follow previously learned moral rules even in the absence of external sanction.”<sup>63</sup> Children internalize moral motivation either in a committed way, wholeheartedly adopting their parental values, or in a more situational way, where they are cooperative but demonstrate moral behavior largely when the parent (usually their mother) is actually around. The former approach leads to prosocial morality being more important to the self; the latter approach leads to a shaky engagement with conventional morality.<sup>64</sup> Mothers’ values are most influential when children both accurately perceive those values and accept them as important.<sup>65</sup> The values that children think their

parents hold are more influential on their beliefs than parents' actual values.<sup>66</sup> Perception is reality.

Recall that even though the content of these rules can change across cultures, what they share at the first stage is the sense that the Bright Line is a universal prohibition, not simply a social convention.<sup>67</sup> Conventions are experienced as particular to one's culture, such as what side of the road to drive on. Bright Lines, on the other hand, wall off actions that are seen as morally deficient regardless of who performs them. The interaction between culture and moral development is complex,<sup>68</sup> but appears to follow the general two-step order of first internalizing external moral rules and then developing a personal motivation to adhere to them in the form of personally important values. Children from America and India are able to distinguish between cultural definitions of right and wrong by age five, suggesting this is a universal developmental timetable.<sup>69</sup> The motivation to follow these definitions may be culturally shaped. Chinese children, for example, demonstrate greater consistency between moral knowledge (step 1) and moral motivation (step 2) than Icelandic children due to the greater societal concern with altruism that motivates the design of school curriculums in China.<sup>70</sup>

The most influential theory of moral development in the last forty years was developed by Lawrence Kohlberg,<sup>71</sup> who was famously influenced by Piaget's work on the social nature of children's development<sup>72</sup> and less famously influenced by Dewey's ideas on the development of the self.<sup>73</sup> Kohlberg's work posits six (later five) stages of possible moral development for children, into adulthood. At the earliest levels, children act morally, defined in the prosocial sense described in the last chapter, because they are instructed to by people with authority. Only later on do some adults appeal to higher ethical systems to undergird their moral beliefs. At first, for example, we do not steal our sibling's toys because parents and older family members tell us not to and threaten us with punishment. Later on, we refrain because we want to be "good" and feel rewarded if we live up to family and community standards. At the higher levels, Kohlberg held, we obey the social order through a deep understanding of abstract principles (individual rights) and feel that violating those principles is a moral violation. Moral breaches are, for those at these higher levels, more fundamental than simply acting well to forestall others' disapproval. Very few adults (only 1–2 percent of people worldwide) reach the highest stages on Kohlberg's scales.

At first blush, Kohlberg's theory seems to add detail to the two-step process discussed above. However, it has been a lightning rod for criticism. For one thing, the word problems that respondents are asked to respond to in order to gauge their supposed level of moral development reward people who reason like moral philosophers, something most research subjects would

have trouble with. Perhaps Kohlberg has developed a theory of moral justification based on the ability to articulate moral feelings, without really delving into the feelings and intuitions themselves.<sup>74</sup> Children demonstrate moral reasoning that is, in practice, much more advanced than the Kohlberg-stages would predict and can vary their reasoning based on context or priorities.<sup>75</sup> Kids are not less logical than adults; they are simply more susceptible to letting emotional stimuli override their logical centers and are known to demonstrate less impulse control.<sup>76</sup> Kohlberg's rational approach privileges justice over other virtues as if it is the only principle that organizes social life.<sup>77</sup> Morality involves more than just issues of harm and justice.<sup>78</sup>

More problematically, the Kohlberg scheme has not received extensive empirical support,<sup>79</sup> especially when examined across cultures. For example, Shweder and colleagues found elements of Kohlberg's rare and elite reasoning (postconventional) in children and adults in both Brahmin Indian and "untouchable" Indian populations. Thus, they argued, such reasoning was not nearly as limited as Kohlberg suggested.<sup>80</sup> They found a variety of principles underlying perceived moral obligations, not simply one scheme based on Western notions of rationality and justice. Shweder posits multiple "natural laws," arguing that morality extends beyond conventional discussions of justice, harm, and rights to include issues of duty, hierarchy, and interdependency.<sup>81</sup> Children are able to differentiate between moral concerns and social conventions as early as forty-two months, much earlier than suggested in Kohlberg's scheme.<sup>82</sup> Perhaps most problematically, individuals who engage in the most prosocial action do not score highly on Kohlberg's scheme<sup>83</sup> or are no different than nonprosocial individuals in the stage of moral development they have supposedly reached.<sup>84</sup> People who score highly on the Kohlberg scale do not act any more ethically than those who score more poorly.

Finally, no discussion of Kohlberg's scheme is complete without at least mentioning the famous gender-based broadside leveled by Carol Gilligan.<sup>85</sup> Briefly, Gilligan suggested that Kohlberg's concern with justice-reasoning precluded a particularly female way of moral development, namely, a concern with care and empathy. She argued that women do not abstractly reason about their moral principles and that women scored lower on average than men on the Kohlberg scheme not because of any deficiency of women but because of deficiencies in the theory.

Gilligan's care-ethic has not fared much better than Kohlberg's scheme when tested empirically. There is very limited empirical support for the notion of gender differences,<sup>86</sup> and even if there are two sorts of ethics for organizing moral outlooks (which, interestingly enough, more often than not arrive at the same moral conclusion), there is little reason to believe they are associated with gender.<sup>87</sup> Defining morality as either justice-oriented

(Kohlberg) or care-oriented (Gilligan) is to oversimplify the matter; empirical reality is not so neatly parceled. Children develop concerns reflecting both justice and care standards, and the application of these standards changes based on situational factors.<sup>88</sup> Ultimately, the field of moral psychology has moved from this abstract focus to more concern with practical applications in concrete situations.<sup>89</sup> The particular moral problem under consideration seems more important than gender for explaining what orientation, or mixture of orientations, an individual employs.<sup>90</sup>

Situations interact with one's developmental age to determine how one is likely to operate within moral realms. Over the last twenty years younger generations across cultures have developed more self-expressive values than older generations<sup>91</sup> and draw different boundaries between what is moral and merely conventional.<sup>92</sup> Recall that moral rules are perceived as objective, externally binding, and universally applicable, while conventional rules are seen as more arbitrary and context-dependent.<sup>93</sup> There is disagreement regarding the extent to which human beings are hard-wired to make this distinction,<sup>94</sup> but evidence seems to support the notion that moral violations are judged more harshly than conventional ones. We get angrier if somebody steals from us (moral violation) than if they cut in line (conventional violation).

Late adolescence is a particularly important time for the internalization of moral beliefs.<sup>95</sup> As we develop a sense of self, deeper moral concerns become vital orienting points. These concerns are largely drawn from our families, peers, and cultural groups, and the Bright Lines we internalize feel inviolate. Adolescents tend to conflict with parents over personal issues, but not over moral ones<sup>96</sup>—a psychologically healthy process not limited to Western adolescents.<sup>97</sup>

This is an admittedly cursory overview, but sets the stage for looking at social forces that influence the development of moral orientations. At early ages, children are taught to draw Bright Lines around various behaviors they are forbidden from engaging in. Some of these lines are aimed at developing a first-order desire to, say, not hurt one's sibling, while others deal with moral ideals like learning to share toys. Parents are the initial agents of socialization, but children, as they age, demonstrate a great deal of agency in their own socialization,<sup>98</sup> and some moral lines are self-taught through the necessary negotiation with peers.<sup>99</sup> We undergo a process similar to Kohlberg's first few stages, with moral prohibitions coming from the outside and then getting internalized, even if the evidence is that most people live their lives without consciously anchoring their moral orientation within abstract principles such as justice or equity.

Our initial concerns are simply to be considered "good" by the adult figures in our lives, and though our motivations become more varied as we

age, this basic theme is discernable within most behaviorist or symbolic interactionist ideas about what motivates us. Our definitions of the “good” are influenced as we develop by our society, our subgroups, and the people and institutions we interact with. Both duties and ideals, the two facets of Bright Lights discussed in Chapter 1, develop in line with our entering adulthood as we assume more responsibility for our actions and develop a more stable sense of self. A sociologist might point out that this learning is not haphazard, but rather structured by society. Amitai Etzioni, for example, suggests four social formations that transmit a society’s “moral infrastructure,” each system situated within the next: families, schools, communities, and the community of communities (wider society).<sup>100</sup>

We are taught Bright Lines so that they become embedded within our automatic processing systems, to keep us safe and help us gain parental approval. Later on, second-order goals can become internalized to the level of guiding first-order, unconscious functions of the brain. Thus, first-order reactions can be linked to very important second-order goals, such as the shame we feel at telling a lie. The moral violation of lying is initially a second-order understanding of the importance of truthfulness in social relationships, but as we age that considered judgment becomes part of a first-order self-understanding. Violations of these initially second-order visions of oneself (“be honest”) seep into first-order Bright Lines we attempt not to violate and feel poorly about if we do.

People vary as to how much they internalize these prohibitions and exhortations, with some children finding them important regardless of who is around and others still trying to please their parents. As we age, we look beyond Bright Lines toward appealing Bright Lights. As these goals and standards become more important to us, chosen largely by our second-order, deliberative processes, they anchor who we think we are and how we want to see ourselves. This process is not always consciously chosen and involves the notion of identities: sets of meanings that proscribe how we are to behave in various situations. We may consciously choose to adopt an identity, such as being a lawyer or a poker-player, and through that conscious choice we open ourselves to a variety of reactions that, over time, become more internalized as the identity grows in importance. As identities get internalized they move from consciously monitored actions to more automatic, first-order guides. The first day I taught a class, I was quite self-conscious of my props and my behavior. After a while, meanings associated with “teacher” became more familiar and less consciously evaluated as the standards for judging the adequacy of living up to that identity became more automatic. A similar process occurs as we become part of communities or groups and learn the appropriate moral standards and boundaries.

Of course, we can develop identities without consciously trying at every step. Much of what we develop as a sense of our gender—the ways we move our body, wear our clothing, and use our voices—occurs before we are consciously aware of it. If we fail to “fit in” with our peers, we may consciously alter our behavior, but for the bulk of children who assimilate to the crowd, much of this is done without conscious reflection. The development of internal guides for behavior can skip the second-order, conscious process and still develop as important first-order guides for perceiving and acting in the social world. I never chose to become more masculine than feminine, but my internal Bright Lines include making sure I stay within a culturally acceptable boundary of masculinity.<sup>101</sup> Morality can work in the same way. We all have Bright Lines we will not cross, even if we didn’t choose them consciously along the way.

Let us now turn to an overview of some of the ways social contexts facilitate the development of Bright Lights and Bright Lines that operate at our first-order level of processing, forming the feelings that tell us who we “really” are. This overview sets the stage for a more microlevel understanding of conscience developed in the subsequent chapters of this book and is thus intentionally more suggestive than exhaustive.

### **FILLING IN THE CONTENT: SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND MORAL CODES**

A social psychology of conscience should build on a sociology of morality. I hope to bring to the discussion some nuance about the ways that situations, groups, subcultures, cultures, and entire societies suffuse individual minds with moral concerns. I have touched on the intrinsically social process of moral development. We depend on our families, peers, schools, and wider societal structures to channel who we interact with, what we do, and what we learn. Our biological capacity for internalizing moral standards gets filled in differentially. We assign greater or lesser moral worth to different actions, ideals, and concerns, depending on the context of our upbringing.

Many patterned social interactions combine to persuade us to draw particular Bright Lines and be motivated by assorted Bright Lights. Any individual, especially in twenty-first century Western culture, can be overwhelmed by the sheer diversity of potential influences.<sup>102</sup> How do we keep track of the messages we hear about what, when, and where to be moral and what morality means? Typically, we talk about some sort of national culture, but that is difficult to precisely define and imposes uniformity on societies that, in practice, may not exist.<sup>103</sup> The American ideal, a “melting pot,” suggests an inherent heterogeneity. In addition to whatever it means to

develop a national sense of morality, by the time one reaches adulthood one has typically encountered messages from a school system, a religious tradition, peers, family of origin, extended relatives, and media (tv, movies, computer). All of these messages carry with them particular and conflicting visions of the right way and wrong way to behave: the Bright Lights that define various groups and the Bright Lines that “proper” people should not cross.

Traditionally, the psychology of morality has been concerned with the development of a rather focused, prosocial orientation toward the extent that we want to help others. Certainly, this is a central area for exploring morality, but we should broaden our focus to take into account the messages we receive throughout our lives beyond a simple concern with altruism or the Golden Rule—messages that suggest we should care about appearing attractive, saving money, and worshipping God. Being a properly decent or moral member of a group or society involves a variety of other concerns that address the “should” and “should not” aspects of our lives. And these messages often conflict. What we should do at school is different from what we should do at home or at church; in addition, perhaps we should spend more time volunteering, cultivating an artistic interest, or traveling. Somehow, people are able to chart a course through the morass of messages, maintaining the fiction, at least, of having some internal coherence. Eventually, I will suggest how conscience is flexible enough to anchor this process, but first I will lay out the social and cultural background that shapes the content of conscience.

At this point, I will not talk in detail about how societal messages become internalized or how we juggle multiple and conflicting messages. Ultimately, identity will be an important mechanism for thinking about how we maintain the various moral commitments that we develop, important for self-definition and guiding behavior. For now, however, let us gloss over that link and focus more broadly on some ways that structural factors influence individual moral outlooks. Who we interact with is largely patterned, even in complex societies, and one goal for a social psychology of conscience would be a thorough mapping of where these interactions take place and what messages become influential. I will not develop such a topology here, but rather outline a suggestive mapping of the ways groups influence individual consciences. Elsewhere, I have mapped this out more fully with respect to values,<sup>104</sup> the most distant Bright Lights. The social psychology of conscience needs a little sociology to be as robust as possible.

Two terms are vital for organizing the links between social organization and individual development: social structure and culture. Social structure is “a persisting and bounded pattern of social relationships (or pattern of behavioral intention) among the units (persons or positions) in a social



system.”<sup>105</sup> Examining social structure means taking into account the patterns of human interaction that are supported by various institutions, such as the family, school, or religion. Social structures can be very abstract, such as the labor market, or more local and formalized, such as a volunteer group. People within social structures have circumscribed options for interacting with others. A typical person cannot call up the president and make an appointment, nor take a job without being hired. Social structures shape our social statuses and our expectations for our behavior as well as that of others.<sup>106</sup> We develop our senses of right and wrong within the various “moral communities” in which we interact.<sup>107</sup>

While social structure refers to the broad pattern of relationships, social psychologists use the term “culture” to refer to “a set of cognitive and evaluative beliefs—beliefs about what is or what ought to be—that are shared by the members of a social system and transmitted to new members.”<sup>108</sup> Culture, in this usage, deals more with beliefs than with interaction patterns, what I translate into social psychology as a concern with the “definition of the situation” that is at the root of the worldviews that are so important for understanding conscience.<sup>109</sup>

These two notions, structure and culture, cohere in the sociological tradition termed “social structure and personality” (SSP). The SSP tradition attempts to demonstrate how social structures influence individual psychological functioning. Nonsociologists know that some people earn more money than others and likely think that rich people see the world differently than working-class people. The SSP tradition explores how precisely this works and what contributes to the ways people of different social classes see the world. It is too simple to claim that money causes these differences. If that were the case, we could simply give a person enough money to change social classes, and they would seamlessly fit into their new social position. A lot of Hollywood comedies explore this premise, reflecting our notion that money, itself, is not what causes people to believe things. Rather, people develop within groups and families (structures) that have belief systems (cultures).

Melvin Kohn’s work is paradigmatic of SSP research. Along with colleagues, he has long focused on tracing how people’s values related to work are shaped. Parents’ values toward work derive from the complexity of their jobs, for both genders and across cultures, and lead to children choosing jobs that often replicate their parents’ location in society.<sup>110</sup> Specifically, one’s occupational conditions shape this process through (1) the closeness of supervision, (2) routinization of work, and (3) the substantive complexity of the work. These three conditions contribute to a person’s level of *self-direction*: how much they value autonomous action as opposed to conforming to the direction of others. This body of literature demonstrates that those who hold advantaged positions in the occupational social structure are



more likely to have jobs with greater levels of self-direction than those in less advantaged positions; people with jobs in the former category internalize this value and then teach it to their children.<sup>111</sup> In turn, those children grow up and look for jobs that fit their own values, meaning that people choose to take the sorts of jobs that mirror what their parents valued and what they were taught. Thus, we find intergenerational consistency in social class partly due to the beliefs that children adopt based on their parents' jobs.<sup>112</sup> Thus, differences in values along class lines become stable and consistent and reproduce inequalities over time.<sup>113</sup>

Kohn suggests that social psychology, as a field, has not accorded a central enough place to structure,<sup>114</sup> but too much focus on structure is "out of sync" with more recent, dynamic conceptions of human agents.<sup>115</sup> Both visions, one privileging patterns in social structural influences and the other focusing on individual capacities to shape their own lives, are operative in developing a social psychology of conscience. Certainly, our socialization shapes who we are and what we choose. We are not mindlessly repeating what our parents have told us, nor are we fully self-constructed. We are shaped by the structures and cultures that we have developed within—that shape our values and frame the choices and evaluations we make about the world. We have free will, but we often choose to do what we are comfortable with, and that first-order feeling of comfort comes from our upbringing and our experiences within particular structures and cultures.

The social structure and personality approach, while kept alive by scholars in the tradition, has been subsumed by a broader field known as life course studies.<sup>116</sup> Life course studies encompass the study of a variety of domains, ranging from how people age to issues of health, crime, and family.<sup>117</sup> Life course theory suggests that "individuals construct their own life course through the choices and actions they take within the opportunities and constraints of history and social circumstance."<sup>118</sup> We make choices, but they are bounded ones.<sup>119</sup> Thus, life course studies add notions of time, history, and human agency to the social structure and personality tradition but retain many of the insights linking individual psychology to larger social and structures.<sup>120</sup> One drawback of both approaches is that they have tended to parcel out human lives into discrete domains and extensively studied those domains.<sup>121</sup> As Margaret Archer puts it, "sociological specialisation [*sic*] means that researchers are only interested in one domain of agential practice, be it employment, the family, education, religion, health and so forth. Such can never be the case of agents themselves."<sup>122</sup> Real people have to juggle a variety of concerns, and from one perspective their lives might take a continuous course, while from another they might appear more disjunct. If you examine someone's educational history their lives might look much more linear than if you looked at their marital history.

In both cases their decisions were influenced by structures, but their agentic choices were important as well and should be studied.<sup>123</sup> Likely, interactions in each domain affected the other, suggesting the need for a multidimensional model of the social actor.<sup>124</sup>

Kohn's work demonstrates one way that social structures shape our worldviews—consistent constellations of concepts that shape how we interpret the world.<sup>125</sup> Part of what feels like a “should” in the domain of employment, then, is shaped by one's location in the social structure. An advantage of drawing on life course theory is its focus (like cultural sociology) on the historical contingency of societal patterns, suggesting that we need to look at more than simply the structure of social positions to understand why any particular person or group develops their “moral compasses.”<sup>126</sup> We develop systems of attitudes and values—preconscious ideologies<sup>127</sup> that shape our reactions to what we see around us.<sup>128</sup>

Ideologies always contain propositions about moral obligations—obligations of patrons to clients, of clients to patrons, of members to communities, of citizens to states and of state representatives to citizens, of persons to one another in their basic dealings (e.g., honesty and integrity), and so on.<sup>129</sup>

Recall that our brain's perceptual apparatuses are working much more quickly than we can consciously follow, and thus our ideologies channel how our minds interpret the social world and signal the strong reactions we have to objects that cross a Bright Line or the intuitive attraction we feel toward a value or goal that comprises a Bright Light. Our ideologies are the starting point for organizing the world, and we go to great lengths to justify ideologies that we perceive as natural.<sup>130</sup> We may develop an ideology to explain the world to us, such as a political ideology, but may do so in the absence of any concrete information;<sup>131</sup> we do not choose our ideologies, but rather develop them subconsciously.<sup>132</sup> For example, Alan Wolfe finds that a core part of American middle-class ideology involves the lessening importance of self-restraint and the increasing acceptability of alternative forms of moral behavior, what he terms “morality writ small.”<sup>133</sup> There is greater middle-class acceptance, he suggests, in terms of other people's right to draw Bright Lines different from one's own, and this is core to the ideology that Americans use to understand themselves and their neighbors. Interestingly, many Americans are highly committed to their moral principles but accept that people from other cultures might differ on how they reason about moral issues, suggesting both an adherence to principle and a tolerance of differing principles.<sup>134</sup>

More could be said about disentangling the structural and cultural elements of this process, but such specifications are not my goal. I simply

hope to expand our notion of conscience's development beyond that of learning what our parents believe, as if they existed in isolation from a larger society that categorizes people based on money, race, religion, and so on. Conscience is influenced by many forces, ranging from local interactions with parents all the way up to macrolevel societal trends.

A different take on how distant structural and cultural forces combine to shape the environments within which individuals develop conscience comes from the political scientist Ronald Inglehart. He argues that economic changes at the societal level are associated with worldwide shifts from absolute values to a more relativistic, postmodern set of values.<sup>135</sup> Under the rubric of modernization theory, Inglehart and colleagues suggest that political conflicts in Western societies revolve around those who take economic security for granted and are concerned with "quality of life issues" such as the environment and a sense of community ("postmaterialists") and those who are more concerned with issues such as a stable economy and law and order ("modernists"). Thus, this view ties together the level of economic development in a society with national-level trends in values, suggesting that as societies become more economically developed, their members shift toward more rational, tolerant, and participative ("postmodern") values. Such changes do not happen for everybody at once, leading to political tensions and a sense that key social structures in a society may be changing.<sup>136</sup> In twenty-first century America, this sense can be captured in fights over the institution of marriage, for example.

These two orientations are not necessarily mirror opposites, with people concerned with postmaterialist values somehow unconcerned with modern issues of security and stability in the economy.<sup>137</sup> Nor does each orientation appear in exactly the same form in different countries. A nation's particular cultural heritage mediates the relationship between economy and dominant values; the nation's level of protestant, orthodox, or Islamic tradition has an effect on national (and individual) value systems, even taking economic factors into account.<sup>138</sup> Even though modernization occurs in pockets around the world, the world as a whole is not necessarily becoming more secular: a nation's cultural history is an important factor, as well. For example, Americans are particularly concerned with Judeo-Christian notions of morality, while the French draw boundaries around people who lack personal integrity or show little concern for others.<sup>139</sup> The more people in a given nation feel existential security, the less traditional their values; the more secure they feel, the more secular their belief system.<sup>140</sup> This thesis explains shifts in values from agrarian to industrial societies and has been supported using different measures and values,<sup>141</sup> though it is not without criticism.<sup>142</sup>

There is a danger of focusing too much on any particular national culture as representative of "the" way its members think. Cultures involve a myriad

of personal relationships, groups, and conflicts that can get obscured if we focus too much on national-level trends and analyses.<sup>143</sup> There is always a great deal of variation within any culture. Thus, a social psychology of conscience begins with these broad-stroke analyses, but quickly focuses in on more proximate influences that shape individual notions of morality.

Culture shapes the worldviews people have—the beliefs people hold about the nature of reality<sup>144</sup>—including those Bright Lights that they find most important. One of the tricky things in studying moral worldviews is that, for the people under examination, their worldview seems natural and not like something to be analyzed at all.<sup>145</sup> This suggests a debate over whether such a universal moral code exists that all people should follow regardless of cultural tradition.<sup>146</sup> Evidence supports the thesis that a limited amount of moral content potentially fills a universal human capacity. For example, universality in emotional responses<sup>147</sup> suggests commonalities among moral emotions (see Chapter 4). Shweder suggests three moral ethics that circumscribe the worldviews in a particular culture: autonomy, community, and divinity.<sup>148</sup> People can utilize any of these ethics to address a particular problem; they represent different organizing logics. If a person draws upon an ethic of community, for example, they privilege the group and value things like loyalty and obedience.<sup>149</sup> Americans, for example, focus more on autonomy than Hindus.<sup>150</sup> Haidt suggests five potential moral foundations based on our species' evolution: harm and care, fairness and reciprocity, in-group loyalty, authority and respect, and purity and sanctity.<sup>151</sup> Moral development within any particular culture involves highlighting a combination of one or more of these ethics as the basis for addressing moral dilemmas, but humans have evolved the capacity to make sense of all five ethics. Different societies, or different groups within a society, may privilege different elements of this typology, but the capacity exists everywhere. Values, as mentioned, similarly demonstrate particular content from universal patterns.

A fuller sociological map of influences on individual conscience would move from the distant level of the nation-state to more focused institutions such as religious groups or family. There are many different vectors along which Bright Lights and Bright Lines become shaped, including religion, social class, and geography. Religiously, these become internalized through "moral cosmologies," general orientations toward spirituality along an orthodox-to-modernist continuum. In this view, religion is not as important for knowing somebody's values as much as how theologically adherent they are to that religion.<sup>152</sup> Orthodox Jews and Catholics, for example, who stress adhering to tradition over self-interpretation of moral laws, have more in common with each other than Orthodox Catholics do with more liberal Catholics. What religion one follows matters, just not as much as one's

adherence to orthodoxy; the more homogeneous a religious culture (and the more regulated that religion is by the state), the more people participate in that religion and the more faith they profess.<sup>153</sup>

Alternatively, we might focus on social classes as a discrete entity. For people who are disadvantaged in the social structure and who perceive their circumstances as a moral violation of justice or fairness, morality can become an important rallying motivation for struggling against perceived injustice.<sup>154</sup> Around the world, groups that are oppressed develop value systems that contradict the dominant moral beliefs in such a way as to help support the oppressed groups' view of themselves as morally worthy.<sup>155</sup> Social class does not operate in the same way in every culture; however; lower-class Americans employ logics of community and divinity that are closer to those employed by Brazilians of any class than do upper-class Americans.<sup>156</sup>

Or, we might focus on gender's place in circumscribing moral beliefs, though there is much evidence that gender is not nearly as important as other factors in determining values and worldviews.<sup>157</sup> Values change a little as people age,<sup>158</sup> and there is evidence that gender matters for some specific work-related values, such as requiring independence and becoming realistic with respect to one's workplace opportunities.<sup>159</sup> All of these forces combine to set the stage for individual conscience, and future research should lay out the topography in more detail. For now, it should hopefully suffice to demonstrate that these forces set the stage for the social-psychological processes to follow.

### CONCLUSION AND TRANSITION

Social structure and culture influence our moral worldviews. The human capacity for seeing the social world in moral terms has evolved (in social environments) such that a limited number of worldviews and values seem possible to discern at the most abstract levels. It is sufficient at this stage to demonstrate that structure and culture are important, distal forces that shape the particular minds of particular people. The architecture of conscience discussed in the rest of this book should be understood as developing within these parameters. Future research should present a full taxonomy of the relationship between conscience and the range of social variables that influence it. This is only a partial list illustrating that conscience develops within a deeply social, multilayered environment. These forces contribute to individual worldviews that shape the way people make sense of their environments and develop fundamental senses of right and wrong.

Understanding human morality involves consideration of both universal principles and culturally variable standards. As Hauser suggests, the capacity

for a moral sense is like the capacity for language—an innate capacity that becomes instantiated within particular social contexts. Humans are hard-wired to develop moral worldviews, though the specific content about right, wrong, and what is obligatory or forbidden may differ across culture, nation, ethnicity, and individual experience. The boundaries appear finite, however, anchored in species-specific capacities developed within a particular history of meeting the demands of successful social groups.

These processes have led to a finite range of emotions and possible moral judgments across societies even as their triggers might be variable. In Chapter 4, I will discuss a more psychological perspective about how our moral minds work and fill in some of the details behind Hauser's notion of a universal moral capacity. The chapter will sketch out how conscience processes moral dilemmas and issues, abstracted from concrete situations. Later on, we will see that regardless of what our mind decides, there are a lot of factors within situations that preclude us from acting as we think we should. Let us turn to how the individual mind processes moral information, remembering that it has developed within a web of structural and cultural forces.

## CHAPTER 4

# PROCESSES OF CONSCIENCE: HOW THE MORAL MIND WORKS

Morality is pervasive, in the sense that no voluntary human action is in principle resistant to moral assessment.

Samuel Scheffler<sup>1</sup>

Our minds have evolved with a moral sense, a capacity for viewing the world and ourselves in moral terms.<sup>2</sup> The capacity for a moral sense is universal, but it varies substantively—within certain boundaries—across different cultures, groups, and societies. Human beings draw Bright Lines and are motivated by Bright Lights, and the most important of these socially learned moral signposts become internalized and viewed as core to a person's sense of self (see Chapter 8). We feel authentic when following our Brightest Lights and feel morally deficient if we cross a Bright Line.

There is a growing body of psychological literature concerning the mechanics of moral perception, judgment, and action. Most of these works utilize the conventional notion of morality as altruism, a narrower definition of morality than advocated here. Recall the distinction between mental processes and actual behavior; what goes on in our minds, including emotions, intuitions, and conscious reasoning, is only partially related to what we actually do, in both moral and nonmoral domains. Does this mean that what we think and feel is irrelevant? Of course not; even if there was no relationship between thoughts, feelings, and behavior, the fact that we share a cultural belief in a tight relationship among these phenomena is culturally interesting. But what goes on in our heads does relate to what we actually do; it is just not a straightforward relationship. People who report holding prosocial values are a bit more likely to engage in prosocial behavior, but

those values are just a subset of many important factors predicting such behavior.<sup>3</sup> What we know about internal processes is that judgment, emotion, and intuition say something about our *intentions* to act but do not have any connection with our actions *per se*.<sup>4</sup> What we actually do is only partially related to our intentions.

We judge the morality of others' actions more critically when we believe they have freely chosen those behaviors, because we assume they have acted in concert with guiding principles they found legitimate. We do not hold people to be morally (or legally) culpable for accidental actions and change our moral evaluations if we discover mitigating circumstances. This means we develop a theory of mind, a belief in how others process information and form intentions that underlie actions.<sup>5</sup> These theories are shaped by the structures and cultures discussed in the last chapter. Understanding moral action requires knowing something about the processes by which individuals make sense of their social environments.

We do not judge other people, however, in the same manner as we judge ourselves.<sup>6</sup> We make what is known as the fundamental attribution error, a core social-psychological principle that describes how we overemphasize situational pressures in justifying our own actions, but overattribute others' actions to their personal dispositions.<sup>7</sup> In other words, we have a bias toward assuming that others' behavior is due to their personality or intentions, but excuse our own actions based on situational factors. When I speed, I am simply keeping up with traffic (situational factor); when others speed by me, they are reckless maniacs (personality attribute). This suggests an inherent bias in the ways we discern our own moral behavior: we focus on the situational pressures that lead us toward certain choices, but assume that others just "are" that way. Cultural background plays a part in this; Hindus, for example, refer more to context when explaining others' behavior than Americans.<sup>8</sup> This chapter focuses on the psychological mechanisms that translate structurally influenced cultural messages into personal moral judgments of right and wrong and accordant intentions to act. Understanding conscience necessitates understanding how moral judgments and reactions work. These mental processes will later be merged with our ongoing sense of self, forming the basis for determining who we are and where we stand on defining moral issues. First, let us look at how the moral mind thinks and feels.

### MORAL JUDGMENT

Morality involves judgments about right and wrong,<sup>9</sup> about what we feel we and others should or should not do. We make these evaluations about a range of social objects, from our personal thoughts and others' actions



to political issues and abstract principles. We feel that we should not covet our neighbor's wife or that proper people should be quiet in movie theaters or that nations should be allowed to start preemptive wars. In principle, anything is subject to moral judgment; evaluation is ubiquitous and constitutive of human lives. Thinking about moral issues is different from thinking about other sorts of things given that it ultimately is concerned with action,<sup>10</sup> things that we feel we (or others) should or should not do. It is, in this sense, a "practical activity," shaped by a shared language within a culture that shapes the evaluation of thoughts and actions.<sup>11</sup> Morality is the primary factor we use to judge others,<sup>12</sup> though interestingly, we judge ourselves based on competency, not morality. Perhaps our own moral worth is taken for granted.

Judging is not a simple process. More accurately, it is wrong to say we simply judge. Moral judgments come in two kinds: impersonal, which trigger cognitive analysis and careful reasoning, and personal, which activate emotional centers in the brain.<sup>13</sup> These two processes, perhaps unsurprisingly, mirror the automatic and controlled distinction in our dual-processing system. We form opinions about moral issues both deliberately and intuitively, and those opinions do not always agree. When confronted with a moral issue, we may have a snap judgment and we may reason through the issue. The crying baby dilemma, presented in the last chapter, is a prime example of an instance in which the two processes conflict. An initial intuition is to protect babies, but one can also logically reason about whether or not saving an entire family is a fair trade-off. The same process is also at the root of racial stereotyping. Many people who do not see themselves as prejudiced nonetheless automatically react in racially biased ways. Some people are more likely than others to override these intuitive reactions, but an unprejudiced action was not necessarily preceded by an unprejudiced reaction.

Understanding moral judgment means simultaneously considering how both elements of our dual-processing system influence moral perception. This is a crucial step for understanding conscience, a cross-situational, potentially self-contradictory aspect of individual selves extended in time. Conscience involves an interplay between automatic and controlled moral judgments, not simply a focus on one at the exclusion of the other. It employs two sets of judgments—one deliberative and the other automatic—when evaluating self and others. Automatic judgments occur fast and they occur outside of conscious awareness, but what they often do is jump to a moral conclusion that feels right, and our controlled processes unwittingly fill in logically sound (enough) Lawyer Logic arguments to support that pre-ordained conclusion. We are far from the dispassionate thinkers often posited in ethical philosophy;<sup>14</sup> second-order reasoning often "follows along and

provides a fancy rationalization to support the immediate judgment of the automatic system.”<sup>15</sup> The fact that we are not always attuned to our automatic judgments or their influence on our conscious deliberation lies at the root of one of the self’s primary paradoxes: Why do we so often behave differently than we think we will?

## MORAL REASONING

Moral reasoning involves thinking through the implication of moral principles.<sup>16</sup> Any particular culture’s or group’s justifications are learned during the socialization process, in which new members learn to identify with that group or culture. In the West, we expect that individuals with sound moral judgment have the capacity to logically reason as well as to know about the different contexts in which they will have to apply their reasoning abilities.<sup>17</sup> Intentionality is an important concern for those studying morality. Can an accidental behavior be immoral? Jerome Kagan suggests that human behavior is fundamentally defined by intentionality, something evident even in two-year-old humans but not in other species.<sup>18</sup> In contrast, Frans de Waal and others suggest that morality is based on emotional reactions that are present in our primate cousins, who, they argue, demonstrate rudimentary forms of moral behavior.<sup>19</sup>

This potential stumbling block appears to me to be a bit of a diversion. I do not see where human intentionality precludes the idea that rudiments of the capacity for making moral judgments also exist in primates. We can be intentional and also emotionally motivated. We certainly judge others’ actions more harshly if we think those actions are either intentional or careless, suggesting the importance we place on others’ capacity to reflect on their own behavior and anticipate outcomes.

The underlying philosophical debate about morality revolves around the universality of moral codes, and while I claim no special insight into what humans *should* treat as moral, we can look at what they actually consider as moral. The majority of psychological research has focused on moral judgment as rational and deliberative, privileging second-order, controlled mental processes<sup>20</sup> typically focused on abstract notions of rights, justice, and harm. Scholars have debated the extent to which moral judgment means developing the ability to understand an invariant, universal moral code,<sup>21</sup> with some suggesting that morality is culturally relative.<sup>22</sup> If one believes in a single moral code, one will study the extent to which people demonstrate a capacity to reach the highest levels of moral reasoning within that code. If one thinks that moral codes can vary, it is silly to impose a single moral reasoning scheme on the people one is researching. Empirical evidence supports the idea that moral codes vary across cultures, but within

a limited range. The traditional focus on a logic of justice can be countered by other valid logics (care, divinity) depending on one's cultural perspective.

Regardless of the number of abstract moral logics, evidence supports the view that specific moral judgments stem from particular cultural and historical circumstances<sup>23</sup> and do not reflect rational deliberation as much as they reflect culturally shaped cognitive shortcuts. For example, only 28 percent of Americans are organ donors as compared with nearly 100 percent of the French. This suggests that different cultures operate with different default cognitive heuristics in defining moral behavior.<sup>24</sup> It is unlikely that people in these two nations rationally considered the morality of organ donation but came to wildly divergent conclusions; more likely, their environments privilege different presumptions, triggering different actions that appeal to different cultural norms. Cultures thus offer ways for members to judge the world, though we should also remember how much variation exists within any culture.<sup>25</sup> Cultures are not monolithic.

Moral reasoning involves working out of logical deductions based on certain presuppositions, a combination of important principles and relevant facts. Debates among different groups may or may not involve different values. More often, opposing sides share similar values but believe in different facts, thus leading to differing conclusions.<sup>26</sup> Such differences in "informational assumptions" are important for understanding the reasoning process. Even young children know the difference between facts and principles.<sup>27</sup> This presents an odd situation where, in one's own culture, we may draw Bright Lines around certain behaviors but accept that people in other cultures—with different informational assumptions—draw different lines.<sup>28</sup> This is not relativism; people still believe their interpretations properly shape right and wrong, but that others who believe differently are using different facts, are self-serving, or are misinformed.<sup>29</sup> Americans, at least, are tolerant of others with different moral beliefs but have little desire to spend personal time with them.<sup>30</sup> This means that, in practice, people accept there are different moral assumptions around the world even if they believe they know the proper way to form unbiased moral judgments. This does not address the epistemological issue of the existence of multiple moralities, but suggests that people can function in a world with multiple possible sets of informational assumptions. People just feel that they, ultimately, have the right way of thinking. One might suggest, as an aside, that the need to build a theoretical edifice for a single, universal moral system is a Western concern; some ancient cultures seem more accepting of the use of different ethical principles for different situations.<sup>31</sup>

This suggests what I might term the "Interstate Theory of Moral Judgment": people who behave differently from me have their own reasons; they are just wrong for doing so. People who drive slower than I do on

highways are a bit of an annoyance; those who are faster are reckless. My speed, however I justify it, is the vantage point for proper driving. I judge others through that lens and morally judge them based on the reasons and principles I use to justify my speed. We see ourselves as less susceptible to bias and more likely to reason correctly;<sup>32</sup> thus we feel justified in reasoning from our own presuppositions without challenging them.

As abstract as a discussion of various ultimate moral principles can get, ultimately moral judgment is a situation-specific process. Moral judgment involves multidimensional rules and standards and depends largely on how the facts at hand are interpreted.<sup>33</sup> Particular situations call forth particular facts, knowledge, and, importantly, intuitions that shape our moral judgments.

### MORAL INTUITIONS

The most exciting theory of moral judgment gaining precedence in the literature is consonant with the dual-processing model. This theory focuses on the primary—but long overlooked—place of our automatic processing system in shaping our moral judgments where the slow cognitive system competes with faster, emotionally laden intuitive reactions.<sup>34</sup> Often, people reach a moral conclusion (“X is wrong!”) but when asked to justify that conclusion, they cannot. This is what Jonathan Haidt refers to as “moral dumbfounding.”<sup>35</sup> We just “know” what is right and wrong most of the time. We might believe our knowledge comes from logically sound justifications, but in fact, most of us are not aware of the various philosophical edifices that justify particular beliefs and judgments nor can we articulate a consistent philosophy.<sup>36</sup> By using our intuitions we do not necessarily end up with morally deficient conclusions; Kagan suggests that normal people use intuitions to more quickly arrive at conclusions that rationality based theories get to in a much more laborious fashion.<sup>37</sup>

Moral intuitions occur effortlessly and automatically at a preconscious level and appear suddenly in our consciousness.<sup>38</sup> Intuitions are not random, but have their own rationale based on deep-seated heuristics within the unconscious mind.<sup>39</sup> Haidt’s social intuitionist model aims at systematizing links between our dual-processing system and moral judgments,<sup>40</sup> with the priority placed on initial automatic intuitions that shape slower, second-order moral reasoning. This approach is initially startling to a field that for years has focused on the process of moral deliberation and is not without criticism.<sup>41</sup> However, it eloquently ties together the dual systems that influence human cognition and fits with the available neurological and evolutionary evidence, consonant with the notion that first-order human moral judgments are anchored in our social, mammalian history<sup>42</sup> embedded in some of the

oldest parts of the brain.<sup>43</sup> Given this history, the prelinguistic need to first identify and react to danger discussed in Chapter 2, negative reactions are more strongly hard-wired than positive ones.

The social intuitionist model dovetails with Antonio Damasio's previously discussed somatic marker hypothesis, which posits that emotional experiences become marked in our brains such that they are automatically triggered if relevant stimuli are present. Rather than reanalyzing information, our brains use emotional markers as shortcuts for determining the proper responses.<sup>44</sup> As we interact in the world, certain stimuli trigger somatic markers and lead to automatic processing that leads to judgments of potential actions. A sociologist looks at this finding and expects that, given patterns in the world for where we interact and who we interact with, our intuitions and somatic markers will occur somewhat predictably. According to this line of thought, past experience with particular moral issues—such as giving money to a homeless person—will be marked with certain intuitive associations and quickly give rise to an inclination to act in a certain manner in other, similar situations. If we have a positive association with giving money based on past experience, then our current intuition might be to give money to this stranger. A negative experience, more likely to stick with us, will lead to a gut-level aversion to a related current stimulus. We might reason through the various relevant moral principles (self-sufficiency, charity to strangers) and make a decision that differs from our initial feeling, but likely the judgment occurred before we entered into the slower process of moral reasoning that sent us looking for confirmatory reasons.

The dual-attitude model builds on our minds' dual-processing capacities.<sup>45</sup> We can have more than one attitude toward social objects, including moral concerns. The implicit judgments we make arise faster and are harder to change than our deliberative opinions. Gut feelings are often given priority, with people reporting intuitions as perfectly valid inputs for dealing with moral dilemmas even as they acknowledge intuitions as far from infallible.<sup>46</sup> We are often unaware that we are using biased Lawyer Logic in our deliberation, rather than the unbiased reasoning we think we are engaging in. Our first order-system, the "adaptive unconscious," operates as a spin doctor leading us to justify conclusions we are predisposed to want to reach.<sup>47</sup>

Values can be interpreted as articulations of deep-seated intuitions or somatic markers about which possible Bright Lights are the most personally attractive. Given the range of possible human values, some values will seem more intuitively appealing than others, more indicative of who we feel we "really" are.<sup>48</sup> Some of us respond more to ideals of benevolence (taking care of others in our lives), while others find issues related to personal security as evoking stronger intuitions linked to more powerful somatic markers. We judge others based on these intuitions without always being consciously

aware that we do so. We rarely articulate and reason about caring for friends that share our values; our feelings just seem right, and we intuit a commonality with these friends. If pressed, we might articulate these shared preferences, but we rarely have to do so.

Values are often treated as truisms, unreflective ways of seeing the world that are rarely questioned.<sup>49</sup> People do not always offer good reasons for their values; an intuition anchored in the feeling evoked along the lines of an important (if abstract) value supersedes a need to reason through that value. It just feels self-evidently right.<sup>50</sup> Values are limited, recall, and privileging one value often means downplaying another, given the necessary trade-offs that occur in complex human lives. But if we can get somebody to consciously think through the reasons that justify their values, they are more likely to keep to those values when situational pressures would otherwise lead them to behave contrary to those values.<sup>51</sup> People who have been forced to think through and articulate support for their values are more likely to engage in behaviors that express those values.<sup>52</sup> Even here, though, reasoning is not employed in an unbiased assessment of our values, but rather to build support for the first-order gut sense that certain abstract aims are preferable to others. Moral intuitions are not just flashes of cold insight, but rather take the form of recognizable emotions that suggest culturally appropriate potential responses.

### MORAL EMOTIONS

Emotions motivate human life.<sup>53</sup> They motivate what we do, determine how we interact, fuel conflict, and recommend reconciliation.<sup>54</sup> This has not always been highlighted in the social sciences, though classic thinkers such as Adam Smith and David Hume believed emotions were central to understanding people, and strides have been lately made in correcting the more recent omission of emotions.<sup>55</sup>

Our social makeup is so obvious that there would be no need to belabor this point were it not for its conspicuous absence from origin stories within the disciplines of law, economics, and political science. A tendency in the West to see emotions as soft ... has made theoreticians turn to cognition and rationality as the preferred guides for human behavior. This is so despite the fact that psychological research suggests the primacy of affect: that is, that human behavior derives above all from fast, automated emotional judgments and only secondarily from slower conscious processes ... Humans seem in fact, about as emotional in their dealing with each other as any social animal.<sup>56</sup>

Far from being the province of illogical people, emotions end up being vital for the capacity to make (supposedly cold) rational judgments.<sup>57</sup> They are

signals about how we perceive current concerns and how those concerns fit into our ongoing lives: "Through their emotions, people comment, to themselves if not to others, on what the interaction that is occurring says about themselves in a given scene, and they also comment on the overall stories that they are constructing as they shape a path through life."<sup>58</sup>

Moral emotions are a subset of moral intuitions, motivational experiences elicited by some trigger that conjure forth an instant, preconscious feeling. Moral emotions are the link between moral standards (Chapter 3) and moral behavior.<sup>59</sup> Moral emotions require the integration of three aspects of the mind: long-term planning structures, perceptions of the current environment, and central motive states (behavior-related emotions).<sup>60</sup> We have especially strong emotional reactions when our core values and moral beliefs are threatened,<sup>61</sup> such as righteousness, ridicule, and vengeance.<sup>62</sup>

In Western culture, emotions are a purported window into the "authentic" self.<sup>63</sup> Social scientists get a better window into people's moral senses by asking about their emotions rather than asking them to justify moral behavior by appealing to abstract moral codes.<sup>64</sup> Normal people are more likely to discuss feelings of shame, resentment, and pride, feelings that suggest moral judgments, if not articulated, fully developed ethical philosophies. Emotions represent responses to concrete social situations and for a long time have been left out of discussions about (supposedly objective) moral reasoning. But real-life moral conflicts are draining; they are not treated as just abstract problems.<sup>65</sup> They are draining precisely because of the important emotional signals they conjure. Truly difficult moral dilemmas do not have a clear-cut answer.

There is a finite list of moral emotions. Rather than reinvent another wheel, I offer here an overview of Haidt's four-family typology of moral emotions:<sup>66</sup> (a) other-condemning, (b) self-conscious, (c) other-suffering, and (d) other-praising.

#### OTHER-CONDEMNING EMOTIONS

These emotions motivate people to change relations with those who are perceived as having violated important relationships or moral codes. They include anger, contempt, and disgust. There is cross-cultural evidence supporting the thesis that anger stems from violations of autonomy, contempt from violations of community standards, and disgust from violations of divinity or purity.<sup>67</sup> Anger involves short-term attack responses but long-term reconciliation, while contempt is characterized by short- and long-term exclusion and rejection.<sup>68</sup> Moral anger (at the violation of a moral standard) can be distinguished from personal anger (at being harmed) and empathetic anger (at seeing someone else harmed).<sup>69</sup> Disgust appears related

to extreme prejudice, motivating extreme biases when activated.<sup>70</sup> Contrary to popular belief, strong emotions such as anger do not necessarily represent a loss of control; in the right circumstances, angered people work harder to reason through support for their positions.<sup>71</sup>

### SELF-CONSCIOUS EMOTIONS

These emotions include shame, embarrassment, and guilt. They are quintessentially interpersonal emotions<sup>72</sup> that derive from violations (or anticipated violations) of personal and social standards. Thus, they function to help uphold social order.<sup>73</sup> Shame, in particular, is important for understanding how society functions<sup>74</sup> and has been described as a “moral gyroscope.”<sup>75</sup> Shame is a reflection of an act that violates an actor’s fundamental self-definition within a social community.<sup>76</sup> It has two variants: stigmatic, which destroys social bonds between the individual and the community, and reintegrative, which helps align an offender’s deviance with wider community norms.<sup>77</sup>

Shame and guilt can be elicited by different events: shame comes from a major social violation and leads to a global feeling of smallness, while guilt comes from specific, often interpersonal violations and leads to people trying to fix them.<sup>78</sup> Guilt may be the more directly moral emotion; shame can occur in nonmoral situations such as performance failure (a poor job interview) or because of socially inappropriate behaviors.<sup>79</sup> Guilt and shame relate directly to feelings of worth, central to the concept of self-esteem,<sup>80</sup> which is in part a measure of the extent to which people are living up to their most important values.<sup>81</sup> Some argue that self-esteem scales can be interpreted as measuring guilt and shame: guilt deals with the self-worth aspect of self-esteem, while shame implicates the self-depreciation aspect.<sup>82</sup>

### OTHER-SUFFERING EMOTIONS

These emotions include empathy and sympathy.<sup>83</sup> Empathy involves the sharing of another’s emotional state, while sympathy is more focused on sharing their distress.<sup>84</sup> Empathy seems to be a universal emotion and is linked in a variety of studies with a greater tendency to help others and to engage in prosocial behaviors.<sup>85</sup> Individual levels of empathy and sympathy seem to be consistent over time and are linked to aspects of self-control; children and adults who demonstrate self-control are more likely to have these prosocial emotions.<sup>86</sup> Children who have positive, supportive parents, especially mothers,<sup>87</sup> are more likely to be empathetic children and more likely to engage in prosocial behavior.<sup>88</sup>



## OTHER-PRAISING EMOTIONS

These emotions are the more positive set of moral emotions and reflect the fact that humans appear to be appreciative of others' positive moral actions. Gratitude, awe, and elevation have all been less studied than more negative emotions. Gratitude seems to have three moral functions: as a barometer of moral relationships, as a motivating force, and as positive reinforcement.<sup>89</sup> We might add trust to that group, as trust appears necessary for the development of a moral community.<sup>90</sup> Individual levels of trust appear shaped more by ongoing social experiences than by individual predispositions,<sup>91</sup> again suggesting the importance of social factors for moral functioning.

This cursory overview of emotions is intended simply to give a modicum of specificity to the later discussion of how internal moral reactions have something to do with later action and self-interpretation. Specific emotions signal us about the potential disjuncture between what is going on and what was expected and implicates visions of who we are and who we want to be. Emotions alone, however, are not enough to motivate moral action above instinctive reactions such as disgust. For positive behaviors, especially, moral emotions need to be shaped and refined according to specific social and cultural frameworks that label the emotions and channel them toward certain ends.<sup>92</sup> This involves what is known in the sociological literature as "framing" and bridges the definitions of social reality given to us by our assorted cultures and the emotional feelings and moral intuitions we develop within those definitions.

**FRAMING INTUITIONS**

The sociologist Erving Goffman articulated the notion of framing to explain how the social world influences an individual's cognitive processes within any given situation.<sup>93</sup> His goal was not to describe how individuals think but to explain how people within concrete situations "bracket" their possible understandings to interpreting the world through the relevant frame. Upon meeting somebody, we try to define the potential interaction. If we frame them as a potential business partner we will present ourselves differently than if we frame the meeting as a one-time encounter. We interpret their actions and statements through this frame and bracket off other possible interpretations. The social rules for meeting business partners effectively rule out all sorts of things we might do in a different situation: yawn, flirt, interrupt, disclose personal information, or gossip about our company secrets. Frames are a way of thinking about the local rules, etiquette, and norms that guide an interaction. They "rule out" potential

actions and interpretations while highlighting others. We take frames for granted, noticing them primarily when norms get breached and people have to work to “fix” a damaged interaction that is no longer going according to the expected frame. Individuals manage their interactions moment-by-moment according to the appropriate frame. Goffman put the spotlight on their external importance; frames do not exist only in people’s heads.<sup>94</sup>

Frames are “schemata of interpretation” that help people interpret the events around them, and Goffman pointed out that accepted frames take on a sacred character to the people who hold them.<sup>95</sup> Frames are provided by various social or cultural groups, often actively through “framing,” attempts to get others to see the world through a particular lens.<sup>96</sup> Frames are, for our purposes, a good way to discuss the social patterning of the informational assumptions<sup>97</sup> people bring to their interpretations of situations, moral or otherwise. It is not enough to suggest that people look at moral dilemmas and intuit or reason a judgment or randomly feel an emotion; people bring a host of culturally shaped presuppositions with them. These presuppositions may have idiosyncratic elements, but they are socially shaped such that people with similar backgrounds tend to interpret, or frame, situations similarly.

The sociological concept of frames can be translated into actual behavior by drawing on the notion of “if/then” statements developed by a personality psychologist, Walter Mischel:<sup>98</sup> “Personality is better conceived as a set of unique cognitive and affective variables that determine how people construe the situation. People have chronic ways of interpreting and evaluating different situations, and it is these interpretations that influence their behavior.”<sup>99</sup> Each person has a “behavioral signature,” predispositions to responding to situations that are not inflexible personality attributes, but rather situation-specific ways of viewing and reacting to situations.<sup>100</sup>

We then have socially shaped personal frames that construe meaning, and these interpretations involve judgments of the if/then variety. The very way we interpret somebody’s words or gestures is vital for understanding how we will (or will not) react. Social actions only make sense against a background of shared meanings. We do not need to reevaluate each and every message we get; responses trigger if/then interpretations within the situationally appropriate frame that, motivated by the accordant emotion, direct our behavior. Interpretation is at the root of many social-psychological traditions, including cognitive psychology and symbolic interactionism. Linking frames to if/then behavioral heuristics allows us to synthesize these various traditions.

What a focus on conscience needs to consider is how much framing occurs outside of our second-order, conscious control.<sup>101</sup> These meanings

and interpretations occur unconsciously; we rarely have to think about the operation of our if/then statements, even if we can verbalize them. When we ask somebody about their presuppositions they may tell us conscious theories that only partially map onto these preconscious frames.<sup>102</sup> We develop theories of reality that involve hierarchical beliefs, principles, and schemas that are, at root, the essence of our personality.<sup>103</sup> We cannot always explain the lenses through which we see the world; we just see the world.

The if/then approach helps make sense of what, at first, seems to be a major analytical problem for personality psychology; namely, we do not act the same across situations or over the course of our lives. If we simply had stable personalities, we would expect greater consistency in others' behavior across time and situation than we actually observe. Numerous studies find that, instead of acting consistently, we change depending on where we are and who we are interacting with. I may be extroverted with my friends, but quiet at work. I may be conscientious where my family is concerned, but rather careless in public. Rather than just categorizing somebody as globally neurotic or extraverted, we are better off figuring out how they see the world in different situations. If/then statements are a way of capturing the unconscious heuristics dictating how people will interpret a situation ("IF a stranger approaches me with a mean look THEN I will run away"). Imbuing people with one stable personality profile is too broad a brush to understand the complexity of human behavior. Understanding how cultures and groups frame situations and how those frames get internalized and translated into expectancies for situated action is at the root of linking macrosocial structures to microaction.<sup>104</sup>

Frames allow us to create a bridge between the discussion of conscience and the discussion of worldviews from the last chapter. We can see the importance of framing for triggering particular first-order moral reactions,<sup>105</sup> especially when there are multiple ways to present a moral issue.<sup>106</sup> Our worldviews are made up of schematic frames linked to informational assumptions that contribute to particular if/then action dispositions. The social world is often ambiguous, especially with respect to possible moral interpretations of actions and ideals; we develop what Janet Walker terms "habits of moral interpretation," formed early in life, that simultaneously perceive and constitute the moral world.<sup>107</sup> Moral action, she argues, does not come from deliberative choice inasmuch as certain people feel certain imperatives in certain situations. Conscience involves the particular constellation of internalized worldviews and informational assumptions that lead to particular imperatives or intuitions for particular people in particular situations. The study of conscience does not simply focus on what any one person considers moral, though that is an important aspect. Any action is potentially subject to moral scrutiny; so what matters are the

frames applied by the actor as well as by others who might judge that action.

Political debates offer concrete examples of framing in action. Discourses about, for example, the nature of abortion (“choice” vs. “life”) are intended to conjure up a particular frame and draw on a morally tinged set of informational assumptions that are suspected to lead to particular if/then moral judgments. Likely, most Americans value both the importance of giving people choice in their lives and supporting life. But the abortion discourse appeals to one or the other value, rendering that interpretation and its accordant sense of moral rightness or outrage as paramount. Depending on how broadly we frame an issue, we can appeal to general moral sentiments that make it seem as if only our side has the moral high ground. The interesting social science issue is how different frames compete for perfectly valid moral intuitions in the same person. Depending on the framing of an issue, different moral emotions can be conjured forth, especially when somebody is unfamiliar with an issue. As we get informed about issues, we build more complicated frames and develop informational assumptions that link up to broader values, largely reflecting our Bright Lights but potentially altering them. Informational assumptions are not simply interchangeable with our broader moral principles, though they are difficult to empirically disentangle.<sup>108</sup>

Values are the Brightest Lights, the most abstract principles that guide the development of particular worldviews, frames, and if/then behavioral predispositions. Values frame cognition, but the range of human values are multiple, conflicting, and potentially ambiguous.<sup>109</sup> Values are broad frames that resonate with particular if/then reactions. Framing an issue along a value of “life” (“benevolence,” in the values literature) might contradict—in a specific case—with a value of “autonomy” or “choice,” depending on which principle we prioritize; we will then tease out a particular moral judgment. Certain words preconsciously register as more personally relevant, and if tradeoffs are necessary, they will be given priority. But the range of human values suggests that different frames can call up meaningful value-intuitions in anyone, if we just frame an issue in terms that resonate with that person’s informational assumptions. We all value, to some extent, personal freedom and security; the political issue is how to juggle potential tradeoffs and how to motivate voters for our side by appealing to these intuitions. This is where informational assumptions play in, for example, whether someone defines a fetus as a “person” or not.

Moral considerations are both different and take primacy from other considerations we incorporate into our potential if/then procedures. For example, take adolescents who commit crime. Changing formal sanctions do not shift adolescents’ criminal behaviors nearly as much as shifts in their

own decisions about what is moral or not.<sup>110</sup> Threatening heavier punishments will not deter crime nearly as much as creating an internal shift toward adolescents framing such activities as immoral. This shift happens most often when peers shift their interpretations about what constitutes acceptable behavior, redefining certain previously acceptable actions as immoral. Thus, new informational assumptions enter into the second-order, then first-order, judgment processes such that adolescents decide to resist behaviors or temptations they used to define as morally acceptable. The same definitional process occurs with respect to corporate crime; people who draw boundaries (Bright Lines) around certain sorts of activities as immoral are more likely to refrain from those activities regardless of official sanctions.<sup>111</sup> For others, however, smaller threats meant they were more likely to engage in questionable behaviors they had not fully decided were immoral.

Scholars disagree about the relative primacy of reasoning, intuition, and broader frames in setting out how individuals' moral minds operate. Haidt's valuable contribution is to offer psychologically sound explications of classic philosophical principles most often associated with Hume, namely, the often-quoted notion that "reason is a slave to the passions." Marc Hauser's recent treatment goes through the philosophical dialogue at length, ultimately ending up with an understanding similar to what I am presenting, here; broader moral principles frame intuitions that in turn lead to particular moral emotions that lead to moral judgments. Our informational assumptions are important filters, as well, but they develop over time in specific contexts through socialization into various groups and identities, so their place in the moral judgment process reflects ongoing development. Pinpointing whether principles or assumptions come first for any specific judgment, viewed from the development of the person over their life course, is at best an issue that needs more empirical exploration and at worst a chicken-and-egg exercise. I am more interested in the larger point; socialization leads to worldviews that can be seen as *both* informational assumptions and broader, guiding moral principles, and these constructs frame how we interpret specific situations and social objects. This lets us situate the social intuitionist perspective within a larger social understanding of the origin of these frames as well as lay the groundwork for later incorporating them into a notion of the self, with conscience as the pivot.

The discussion, to this point, runs the risk of suggesting that we are mindlessly captive to our internalized if/then statements or that we respond unthinkingly to others' attempts to frame (or reframe) our understanding of situations. This is an overly abstract interpretation<sup>112</sup> and not a view I am trying to defend. People are reflective about these issues and do not mindlessly apply principles to situations without taking into account all

sorts of contextual issues.<sup>113</sup> Neither emotion nor frames lead to triggers that we unthinkingly apply to situations, though they influence them more than popular (and social scientific) opinion often suggests. We can replace these emotional intuitions with effort, over time, or override them and behave according to more calculated, second-order conclusions.<sup>114</sup> Haidt suggests this process of change is more likely to occur within the context of group interaction than alone,<sup>115</sup> but the possibility of the lone person in her room changing her moral intuitions is at least theoretically possible, if empirically rare. The take-home point is that while we often invent reasons (using Lawyer Logic) to justify emotional reactions, both processes support—and potentially can alter—each other.<sup>116</sup> The key is to focus on a person in context and over time.

Thus, one goal for developing a social psychology of conscience is to begin to specify a greater empirical disentangling of the relationship among principles and values (Bright Lights), informational assumptions, frames, and individual if/then behavioral predispositions. I am offering a provisional ordering of these concepts, consistent with the dual-process model but situated within a sociological focus on the influences of social structure and culture on individuals' interpretations. But it is intentionally a provisional ordering; my broader goal is to identify the important factors in the process for future researchers to delve into more deeply. Intuitions are vital clues to our larger informational assumptions, but they are not the entire package, nor are they often enough to handle complex moral issues.

Moral judgments are often more than intuitions; they involve concepts about different groups, social relationships, perspectives on society, and distinctions between when rights should be applied and when they should be denied ...[such] reactions are complex and involve reasoning about rights, fairness, and welfare, as well as about the injustices of the dominance and power exerted by one group on another.<sup>117</sup>

The actual process is muddier than can be properly captured, here, especially when considering that we can, over time, reconsider our intuitive responses and even alter them. An interesting research question involves why we so often fail to do so and are content with our already developed worldviews and so rarely challenge them. The larger point, motivating this book, is that we cannot meaningfully talk about human beings without engaging this moral dimension. To be human is precisely to take moral stands and have moral reactions to potentially moral issues.

From a sociological perspective, we become settled in the frames we use to interpret the world around us largely as we become more embedded in sets of particular relationships and social positions. Part of our if/then

automatic and considered response processes involve our particular social identities and the situations that we act within. These identities and situations, as we will discuss, become largely patterned in our lives. Considering the life course as a whole adds a notion of time to the discussions about moral processing overviewed, above, issues I will return to in Chapters 8 and 9. Cultures exist before new members internalize them, and their accordant worldviews (informational assumptions and frames) are encountered differentially depending on an individual's age, experiences, and circumstances. Any snapshot of a particular moral judgment by a particular person runs the risk of obscuring both general patterns in judgments by groups of people and the notion that the person being studied is, herself, someplace along a personal life journey that influences that particular decision. That journey has personally significant signposts (Bright Lights) and forbidden side-trips (Bright Lines).

Society and culture exist before we do; conscience attempts to build a workable sense of coherence—partially illusory, I will suggest—among competing frames and moral claims. Conscience is a constant interplay between potentially conflicting, socially shaped first- and second-order judgments made within the ongoing human life course. Forming a place in moral space is part of being human, but it happens as part of a personal life-project, not simply according to a short-term, isolated application of abstract moral principles.

### CONCLUSION AND TRANSITION

Haidt's social intuitionist model anchors the situational aspects of this model of conscience as a dual-level process. This book aims at expanding and developing the social intuitionist model in two directions: first, by offering additional nuance about the structural and cultural forces that pattern the development of moral intuitions, and second, by suggesting how these intuitions are vital for conscience, the self's moral core. Typically, research on moral judgment deals with abstract, one-time dilemmas; a social psychology of conscience can build on those findings toward a model of the actor as dealing with multiple situations, identities, life-domains, ideals, and future plans. Our intuitions serve as important guides for these choices, while they also channel our explanations if we act in ways contrary to our grander moral ideals.

As we act, our minds are motivated by two streams of motivation: current sensory data from the environment and stored representations of events, assumptions the brain develops through its experiences.<sup>118</sup> I have referred to these as Bright Lights and Bright Lines, socialized understandings that determine how we perceive and react to the social world. Emotions fuel

our actions, and different signals will compel different responses, depending on cultural and situational norms. But emotions are linked to informational assumptions and to frames.

Some emotions are more under voluntary control than others; we may feel shame based on things we cannot control, such as where our parents or even our ancestors come from. These negative feelings, whether due to our own actions or because people or groups that we align ourselves with do poorly (like a sports team or political party), signal a crossing of a Bright Line. Feelings of pride, on the other hand, might need to be downplayed to be polite in a particular encounter, but suggest we have taken strides toward a Bright Light, or successfully refrained from crossing a Bright Line. The feelings a particular situation calls forth implicate our first-order processing, monitoring situations through filters of socially shaped worldviews and informational assumptions. Feelings do not always involve moral issues, obviously, but anything we say or do is at least susceptible to moral evaluation by us or others.

The tools are in place for an abstract understanding of morality, cognition, and feeling. We have a sense of how we judge ourselves and others and how society shapes the assumptions underlying those judgments in patterned ways. Let us move from abstract definitions into a more concrete realm. Morality is central to how people think and perceive the world. If this is the case, why do people so often act in immoral ways, or at least fail to live up to their moral standards? Chapters 5 and 6 deal with this potential conundrum on two different levels: first, how social situations influence what we do, and second, how our social groups shape our perceptions. What we think (and feel) tells us something about what we will do, but not as much as we popularly believe.



## CHAPTER 5

# HOW SITUATIONS SUBVERT CONSCIENCE

To know the right or feel the good is not necessarily to *do* the right or good.

John C. Gibbs<sup>1</sup>

Decades of social-psychological research can be boiled down to one insight: if we want to predict someone's behavior, we are better off knowing where they are rather than who they are. Personality is a poor predictor of behavior, and most of the time our actions are determined by situational pressures, not personality characteristics. Knowing about situations tells us a lot more about what people will actually do than knowing more about the people, themselves.<sup>2</sup> In our own lives, sometimes we are talkative and sometimes we are quiet. It depends on where we are and who we are with. People who are shy (personality trait) do not act shy around close family and friends; the situation has a great deal to do with how shyly a person acts.<sup>3</sup>

To this point, I have discussed ways in which we think and feel along moral lines. Much of this is preconscious and, given our dual-processing minds, can be inconsistent. A goal of developing a social psychology of conscience is to bring some order to the disparate aspects of our thoughts, intuitions, and behaviors over the course of our lives. We grow and change, and what we do at one time may differ from—or even contradict—what we do at another. Yet, we still praise or blame people based on some notion that each person deserves moral praise or blame. We cannot get out of jail by simply saying that our offence will not happen again, no matter how much we might believe it.

It may be startling to come to a point where the author suggests that all of the topics previously discussed—moral feelings, intuitions, and

worldviews—might have little to do with behavior. But as Augusto Blasi suggests, morality is important because of how we act, not simply because of our judgments.<sup>4</sup> Understanding acts, a social psychologist will tell us, means that we need to pay much greater attention to situations. When we watch someone act, we tend to attribute the cause of that action to their personality; the guy driving too fast on the road is reckless, the student asking for a better grade is a whiner, and the politician shifting positions is a craven power-seeker. There is a tendency, particularly in an individualistic culture such as America's,<sup>5</sup> to focus too heavily on other people's personalities and not the situation as a whole. This was described earlier as the fundamental attribution error.<sup>6</sup> The study of moral action has been largely person focused, with less attention paid to contextual influences.<sup>7</sup> A social psychology of conscience, therefore, necessitates paying attention to the power of the situation in addition to understanding an individual's moral outlook. Ultimately, this might mean that intuitions and judgments are less important for understanding behavior than understanding how we make sense of our behaviors before and after the fact.<sup>8</sup>

Kurt Lewin is credited with the classic social-psychological definition of human behavior:

$$B = f(P, E)$$

"Behavior" is a function of the "person" and of the "environment." If we want to know what people will do, we need to know something about them (P) and something about the situation (E) in which they are located. Personality, alone, turns out to be relatively unhelpful in predicting behavior.<sup>9</sup> By "person," then, we do not simply mean knowing about personality predispositions. We need to know how a person sees the world, how they construct what is going on around them, and what outlooks, worldviews, and "if/then" orientations they bring to a situation. For example, a man might be a low-status employee in his company and act subserviently at work. But at home, that same man might be a tyrannical husband and father. He is the same person with the same personality traits. But the situations are different and activate different intuitions and judgments about what is expected and acceptable. The situation is not everything, of course; his neighbor might have the same job but be less assertive at home as well as at work. A person's behavior is an interaction between their situated status, personal predispositions, life expectations, and environment. Certainly some people are more likely to be subservient across situations and others to be more calculating about whether appearing subservient is beneficial; individual differences do exist. But the research suggests that these individual differences matter much less than we think.

Situation and person are not, in practice, distinct variables, since any particular situation only makes sense insofar as we understand how its properties are interpreted by the people interacting within it.<sup>10</sup> But situations have some inherent properties regardless of people's interpretation, with some situations being so powerful that nearly everyone will make sense of them in the same way.<sup>11</sup> Common social situations call forth frames (discussed in the last chapter) that determine what facts people notice and what if/then response patterns feel socially appropriate. These frames implicate different values,<sup>12</sup> which in turn contribute to different responses, both consciously and nonconsciously.

An important sociological point is that situations do not just occur randomly. Situations are structured by the societies we live in and the commitments we have made toward various roles and relationships. A situation in a coffee shop or at the gym might seem random, but certain types of people have the money allowing for the free time to frequent coffee shops and join gyms. Staking a claim to a role, whether in our occupation or in our private lives, suggests that there are certain situations we are expected to get involved in, either at the office or at home or in the neighborhood. Most of what we do in our daily lives falls into the category of general expectations for our behavior, necessitated either by others (parents, neighborhoods) or by ourselves (based on occupation, marital status). Western countries tend to focus more on the individual than on the systems an individual acts within, rendering many of these larger patterns invisible to us. However, a focus on situations represents the places in which larger societal institutions become instantiated.<sup>13</sup>

Situations are places that have their own pockets of meaning, shaped by the cultural expectations that people in that situation typically share. As long as everyone in the coffee shop or at the gym behaves according to their assigned roles, the situation remains normal. We have shorthand labels for people from similar backgrounds—people brought up in families with Old Money interpret the world differently than those raised in urban Chicago or the rural Midwest. These expectations come from subcultures that teach people how they should act and feel in different situations and guide their interpretation of symbols as well as their own reactions.

For example, violent impulses are a part of the human organism, but cultures determine when, how, and where people are allowed to express those impulses.<sup>14</sup> Some people grow up within highly structured, formal situations, and by the time they are adults acting appropriately—with a high level of self-control—is second nature (part of the first-order processing system). Others grow up in different environments and develop an intuitive sense of how to navigate dangerous areas.<sup>15</sup> Rarely do people raised in one of these environments find themselves in the other, and if they do,

each will feel fully out of place. Traveling to a new culture involves the same fish-out-of-water feeling. For most people this feeling occurs rarely, suggesting how significantly our lives are patterned toward the familiar, both by our own doing and by the social structures we live within. The people we interact with create what Peter Berger has called “plausibility structures,” communities of like-minded persons who determine and reinforce a particular (in his case, religious) way of seeing the world.<sup>16</sup> We end up interacting with people who see the world as we do, and this reinforces the validity of our values, beliefs, if/then statements, and frames. This process means that, over time, our frames take on a fundamental, sacred, moral dimension. Their violation is not a small matter.

Situations provide orienting signals, though it is also important to note that people can view the same situation through different lenses. Consider a high school classroom in which an English teacher demonstrates “tough love” by berating a female student about the quality of her work. The student might feel wronged by the teacher being tough on her publicly, and her sense of self-worth may be damaged, leading to feelings of shame and embarrassment. The English teacher, however, feels her actions were justified by her job, in which challenging students and pushing them toward greater achievement might necessitate occasionally embarrassing a student. In this case, the teacher may act in what seems to her to be a perfectly legitimate manner and interpret her actions as morally right, while at the same time the student judges the exchange to be morally wrong.

This means that the social psychology of conscience needs to incorporate both the properties of situations and the people who interpret them. We need to link person to situation—how they find themselves there, act, think of themselves while acting, and make sense of it afterward. Many people act similarly in similar situations, and we should be able to account for that just as much as we try to account for the reasons different people respond differently to similar moral and ethical dilemmas.

### SITUATIONS AND THE MORAL FABRIC

Commonly, situations involving moral issues get studied at the extremes with life-or-death issues about helping strangers or perpetrating interpersonal violence. These certainly are moral situations, but there is a more subtle way in which *all* situations implicate moral issues, what Erving Goffman conceptualized as the “moral order,” taken-for-granted assumptions we all make that others will act according to the roles and situations that we expect to govern behavior.

For Goffman, situations involve norms—approved guides to conduct that can be broken or put aside—that delimit shared definitions needed for

people acting together.<sup>17</sup> These norms constrain behavior in two ways: through direct obligations and indirect expectations. Direct obligations relate to how people are morally constrained to conduct themselves based on these norms, while indirect expectations relate to how others are morally bound to act in return. Goffman offers the example of a nurse who is obligated to follow established medical procedures to care for patients (direct) while holding expectations that her patients will cooperate by allowing her to do so (indirect).<sup>18</sup> The norms of a hospital dictate how people should behave. What Goffman points out is that there is a moral dimension to following these norms; if somebody violates our expectations we are not just lightly bothered; we feel that a moral violation has occurred. Frames, discussed in the last chapter, represent the internalization of these norms.

This general set of constraints and obligations is termed the “interaction order,” the face-to-face domain of human action that emerges when we are in the immediate presence of others.<sup>19</sup> The interaction order is a “deeply moral domain,”<sup>20</sup> grounded in “universal preconditions of social life.”<sup>21</sup> As social beings, there are certain things that all people need to do to communicate, including use meaningful symbols (often language), coordinate action to be predictable, and work together to achieve survival goals (securing food, safety). Part of being an adequate member of a social community, in any society, involves maintenance of the interaction order.

Goffman’s dramaturgical analysis equates the ground rules for situations with the rules for games—social understanding that enables us to successfully comprehend and predict others’ actions. Just like a football game means everybody involved needs to know their roles, what they can and cannot do, orderly social life depends on our knowing how we should and should not behave. Certain things need to happen so that we can present ourselves, such as being able to take turns or show tact when interacting. These let us present ourselves as morally worthwhile members of society. These rules do not necessarily feel constraining; we have wide leeway with how we can act. The key is to remain within boundaries that present us as moral to others. We have deeply felt, embodied reactions (like embarrassment) that clue us into how we are doing.<sup>22</sup> In short, competent members of society agree to accept others’ self-presentations in exchange for their own being accepted, and this trade-off is seen as a moral aspect of face-to-face interaction.<sup>23</sup> And we consider it a moral responsibility to stay within these boundaries, imbuing roles with a moral essence.<sup>24</sup> We make many assumptions when we interact; primary among them is that others will accept our claims and act in expected ways.

This interaction order is so fundamental to a smooth-running social interaction that violations of it are experienced—by the actor and the

audience—as moral violations. Goffman thought interaction was a strange mix of cynicism, ritual, and trust.<sup>25</sup> We act according to patterned expectations even while we are aware that people—ourselves and others—may not be exactly what they seem. But we could not function in a world in which we believed everyone is always deceiving us, so we find ourselves forced to trust that others are as sincere as we try to be. This shared understanding that we will all try to be what we say we are weaves an underlying fabric of interaction, and people who tear at that fabric get judged quite harshly. Deception is perceived as a moral violation by those who are deceived, even if the deceivers can rationalize their actions to themselves.

This is a more subtle understanding of morality than one typically finds in the social-psychological literature on altruism and aggression, in which morality is often used as a codeword for prosocial action. We are not talking about whether people help or hurt others, but rather about the moral requirement that people act predictably. People have to have a moral commitment to creating a working consensus in order for anything to get done; a working consensus is a basic feature of human interaction that is necessary to create and maintain shared social meaning.<sup>26</sup> If somebody unwittingly violates the behaviors we expect to maintain this order, we feel a variety of strong emotions unless they have obvious, mitigating reasons (e.g., if they are children). But if somebody seems to purposefully violate our taken-for-granted rules, we get quite upset. Howard Garfinkel, in a famous example, had students play tic-tac-toe and, when their turn came, erase the other person's "X" and place their "O" in that square.<sup>27</sup> Suffice it to say, even this minor violation was treated with anger and contempt, moral emotions that suggested a fundamental interpersonal understanding had been violated. Humans do not, it appears, like people to mess with their stable sense of social reality.

In addition to basic, interpersonal expectations for how people will behave in general, social situations come with relatively circumscribed expectations about the various roles people will be playing. Being a spouse or a customer puts some limits on potential behavior; else the others in the situation will become upset. These expectations also carry moral weight with them, becoming moral imperatives in themselves; for example, being a good lawyer or salesperson means successfully living up to the expectations for that role, and these expectations possess moral force. This means that some situations present contradictions between what we abstractly think about right and wrong and what our particular role calls for that might override that abstract, moral judgment.<sup>28</sup> What we mean by being "professional" is to remove our own biases and act according to the dictates of a set of role-expectations. Professions have ethical codes legislating ambiguous situations and behavior; while a lawyer might feel

like comforting a sobbing stranger in her free time, as a lawyer she needs to treat clients in a more formal, less empathetic manner. Professionals, while practicing their profession, are expected to ignore the moral intuitions they might have in a different context. And, we might find they actually feel different things in their professional role than they would at other times; they shift the schemas that provide informational assumptions that filter the world around.<sup>29</sup> Thus, while the intuitions and judgments presented in the last chapter might be oriented toward helping others, situational factors come into play as well.

The study of conscience aims at looking at these other factors and necessitates understanding what a person brings to a situation, how she interprets it, and what behaviors she enacts.<sup>30</sup> This view of the individual, however, needs to be situated within a wider understanding of the moral interaction order. This order, we might say, becomes such a part of how we operate that deviation from expectations leads to strong emotional reactions, first-order responses well-beyond conscious control. Committing a faux pas in our own culture is a cause for embarrassment, but if we are traveling and commit one in a culture that we are not familiar with, we will not suffer the same feelings unless our breach is explained and brought to our attention. We have not internalized the expectations of the local interaction order, and thus our automatically processing brain is not monitoring and evaluating our behavior along those lines.

People act based on personal motivation and the ways they frame the world; it is not enough to apply moral principles to a particular situation, especially a complex one. We need to know much more about that person's goals in life and how they see the world.<sup>31</sup> This basic insight is at the root of symbolic interaction.<sup>32</sup> Scholars have explored the various aspects of how people interact within situations in order to enact shared meanings and present appropriate or desired images of themselves. Less attention is paid, in this tradition, to the cognitive self-understandings and frames that people bring to these self-presentations. Understanding conscience necessitates thinking about the person, the situation, and the interaction of these two elements. After focusing on the power of situations to shape prosocial behavior (a subset of what I am suggesting can constitute moral behavior), I turn to person-level constructs that individuals bring to situations that can moderate how they will behave. By focusing on the inner lives of individuals, something Goffman paid scant attention to, I take a view of the person that Goffman would shy away from.<sup>33</sup> I do so in the service, hopefully, of bridging research on the internal self with the external ways we present that self to others. The self interprets situations, and situations need people to present selves. Again, this is not new, but the moral dimension of situations and their interactants is rarely highlighted.

### THE POWER OF THE SITUATION

The most commonly discussed types of moral situations involve direct help or harm toward another person, the conventional sense of morality at the root of most treatments of right and wrong in social psychology.<sup>34</sup> Earlier, I briefly presented the famous Milgram and Zimbardo studies that demonstrate the power of situations to shape behavior. In each case, many participants acted in ways that harmed others even though experts thought that normal people would overcome the power of the situation. Decades of research have demonstrated the ease by which social psychologists can get normal people to behave in seemingly abnormal ways by manipulating situational factors.<sup>35</sup>

Though Freud has fallen out of vogue, one of his central insights still holds water: human beings possess instincts to help others and to be aggressive (cause harm that another wants to avoid). A survey of human history provides examples of both instincts, but especially highlights the latter.<sup>36</sup> War, genocide, and other forms of violence are at the root of human interaction and historical events, and it is unlikely that such behaviors would be so prevalent without some biological capacity for inflicting harm. These instincts are adaptive for survival, in humans and other species, and suggest universal psychological needs for security, interconnection, and control, but can lead toward aggression and hostility under adverse circumstances.<sup>37</sup> What is more interesting is that we have also evolved a capacity to reflect on these instincts, to be ashamed or proud about them. Other animals fight over territory or food; we are the odd ones who may come to regret or eulogize our actions in song and in textbooks.

Historical circumstances and situational pressures can lead to people acquiescing to horrible actions through direct participation (joining a mob) or averting their attention (not questioning their government). Studies of the Holocaust present the horrible ways in which societies can shift toward murdering millions of their citizens while also offering stories of people helping others at extreme risk to themselves. People under stress or in the presence of situational cues that promote violence (such as guns) are in situations in which aggression is more likely.<sup>38</sup> People respond differently to these situations, but when in a high-pressure situation they perceive as dangerous, they are more likely to act aggressively than they would in a different situation. Situation matters more than personality.

Some situations and cultures promote our aggressive instincts, lead us to dehumanize others, and increase the chances of harm and violence. Many perfectly decent, upstanding members of their communities have engaged in harmful actions, whether joining repressive government regimes or overseeing major accounting frauds. People in gangs are quite decent to



their fellow gang members and perhaps even to strangers. We make global judgments about people's personalities based on their worst acts. Does that make them bad people? The accumulated evidence suggests many people would act quite terribly in the right (or wrong) circumstances. Situations can lead people to cross Bright Lines that, outside of them, they believe they never would.

It is perhaps more disconcerting to realize how rare it is that people help strangers in emergency situations. The fact that anybody has the potential for aggression—even pacifistic individuals may become aggressive if a child is threatened, for example—fits with conventional beliefs about human nature. But the opposite extreme, assisting others in obvious crisis, turns out to be a much rarer and more difficult phenomenon than people like to believe. Imagine a situation in which people are walking in a busy park and see a stranger collapse. Research suggests the majority of bystanders will look to others in the situation for cues, and the result of mass uncertainty likely will be a failure of anyone in the crowd to intervene.<sup>39</sup> We are not safer in a crowded area because people's apprehensions keep them from taking the initiative to help others. Therefore, we are better off collapsing with only one other person around.<sup>40</sup> This does not mean that people are selfish; they are theoretically the same person whether they are alone or in a crowded place, but their behavior will differ. That is the power of the situation, even in morally unambiguous circumstances. The behavior of the gentleman I discussed in the introduction, who leapt onto subway tracks to save a stranger, was atypical; most of us would have frozen in fear. The situation overrides altruistic instincts, though this can be mitigated by some personal factors.

A social psychology of conscience should address these extreme situations, but also speak of morality in more mundane situations. Most of us are brought up with messages that we should not lie, steal, cheat, or commit other violations against people and the social order. Some of this is codified into law, but we also learn aspects of interpersonal morality that, if violated, may not be criminal, but are subject to social sanction. We know that situational pressures keep many of us from helping others in extreme situations; imagine how powerful these same forces are for less dramatic situations. Infractions like lying to one's boss, not ratting out one's buddies, or throwing trash over the fence at a house party are minor actions that still cross most people's Bright Lines, at least in theory. If we asked people in the abstract if they would do these things, likely many would deny the possibility or minimize the harm such acts cause (see Chapter 7). But, in real-life situations, most people will misrepresent themselves to a superior, stay silent in the face of cheating, or go along with the crowd. This says less about the person than the power of the situation

and the perceived pressure we feel from others' potential reactions, pressure that can supersede a notion of doing the "right" thing. Conscience is not a construct that simply judges right and wrong and leads us to behave accordingly; our internal moral compass (or compasses, as we will see) can be easily overwhelmed by situational pressures.

### PERSONAL INFLUENCES ON MORAL BEHAVIOR

Situations can override Bright Lights and Bright Lines regardless of what people think they might do before actually encountering a specific situation. The power of the situation, then, is immense, but not absolute. People respond in different ways to similar situations. There are individual differences that make people more or less likely to help or hurt others in emergencies or stressful situations. Some are temporary, like a person's mood, while others are more enduring lessons learned from role models.<sup>41</sup> I want to focus on a specific subset of personal characteristics that affect how people in situations respond, based on the development of frames or worldviews. Certain people develop if/then informational assumptions that lead to more conventional moral behavior. For these sorts of people, helping others is not an act of altruism or self-sacrifice; it reflects a conviction that they could not have acted otherwise<sup>42</sup> and feels like an external compulsion.<sup>43</sup> Such people do not think they've done anything praiseworthy. Situations call forth different aspects of people and thus different expectations for action.<sup>44</sup> Situations are multidimensional, evoking multiple perspectives and standards that influence motivation and behavior.<sup>45</sup>

Recall the example of a stranger collapsing in a crowded park. Research suggests that most people will not help, either walking by, not noticing, or hoping somebody else will take care of the situation. Individuals have varying motivations, skill sets, and information, and a social psychology of conscience should look at personal *and* situational factors that lead to helpful behaviors. Some people walking by may have identities (e.g., doctor) that the situation makes salient and that compel action. Others will be motivated by feelings of empathy to intervene, regardless of possessing useful skills. Others will not perceive a stranger's distress as their problem, exhibiting a self-interested orientation that fails to define the situation as requiring their involvement. Still others might help if it counters a stereotype about their social group, a strategic way to enhance reputation.<sup>46</sup>

For some bystanders, this situation appears as a moral one, necessitating a response, based on their informational assumptions and intuitions. Those who see this situation (a) as an emergency that (b) requires pro-social action and (c) themselves as competent to help are more likely to intervene. Classically, symbolic interactionists discuss how people define

situations, but focus little on individual differences in this complicated process. People attend to stimuli through self-relevant frames that color what they perceive and what potential actions apply to them.<sup>47</sup> Moral action hinges on the informational assumptions, filters, and biases that people bring to any social occasion. These cognitive processes are socially shaped<sup>48</sup> and frame the “interpretive habits”<sup>49</sup> that filter incoming stimuli. Schemas involve informational assumptions that frame interpretations of social events, including moral ones.<sup>50</sup>

These frames filter concrete situational stimuli in concert with our Bright Lights, our abstract notions of who we want to be. People can share abstract moral precepts and values but differ on the facts they find relevant or even notice in concrete situations, leading to differences in the application of particular moral concerns.<sup>51</sup> Alternately, people’s frames may lead to cognitive biases that cause them to change inconvenient facts in moral situations as they occur or afterward as they look back and recount them.<sup>52</sup> I might see myself as a generous person, but when presented with the opportunity to give money to homeless people, I might decide that somebody else will take care of them, blame them for their homelessness, or decide they will just use the money for alcohol. These “facts” will shape my behavior (not giving money), even as they allow me to privilege the Bright Light of being a generous person. These frameworks derive from particular communities and networks, aforementioned plausibility structures, in that other people offer similar interpretations of facts and rationales for action or inaction, though these networks have been less studied.<sup>53</sup>

Frames and informational assumptions are vital for understanding moral action. Three of the following four components of performing a (conventional) moral action involve aspects of perception and judgment: (a) interpreting a situation as containing a moral problem, (b) applying a moral standard, (c) evaluating courses of action, and (d) executing a plan.<sup>54</sup> We can add a step of (e) evaluating success during and after executing that plan and moderating behavior based on such feedback, and these evaluations will occur through the same filters as the initial perception. Additionally, we do not have “a” way of moral reasoning; context is vital for framing moral issues and judgments,<sup>55</sup> and different situations may call for greater degrees of concern with justice, caring, or other metaprinciples.

Differences in informational assumptions are a source of variation in moral judgments,<sup>56</sup> and these differences are not simply random or idiosyncratic. Social-structural position dictates a great deal of our informational assumptions, part of our first-order, automatic processing of incoming information based on mental structures beyond conscious control.<sup>57</sup> To say someone is a member of a social group or class is to say they share some properties of viewpoints and understandings about the world on the basis

of that membership. We often assume men, for example, view the world in one way, just as we stereotypically group the worldviews of the wealthy or immigrants or other groups. There are elements of commonality within these groups, and popular discussions tend to overstate the homogeneity of worldviews within these groups.<sup>58</sup> However, member of particular social groups certainly tend to have some similar experiences that shape perceptual systems.

But socially structured informational assumptions are not everything; people evaluate information differentially also due to their worldviews and values. These are also socially patterned, but again there is variation in the extent to which members of a particular group share a particular value; American college students are quite remarkable compared with college students around the world for being self-interested.<sup>59</sup> But, this is an average; some individual students are quite concerned about other people. The variation is a combination of temperament, upbringing, and cultural influences. Some people are more likely to value others and thereby feel more empathy when they encounter distress, leading to an increased likelihood that they will help.<sup>60</sup> Such values are not simply random; certain people brought up in certain ways in certain subgroups are more likely to have such values and attach them to implicit if/then intuitions that increase the likelihood of their helping a stranger in distress. Thus, when we discuss person-factors that moderate situational effects on action, we need to remember that “personal” does not mean “random” or “unique.” The social psychology of conscience is quite concerned with the *social* aspect of how we construct selves and what we bring to situations.

### WHAT WE SEE, OR DON'T, IN MORAL SITUATIONS

Much of what we have discussed up to this point deals with the proactive aspect of morality, the ways we behave in service of larger Bright Lights that signal who we want to be. Situations, we have seen, can obscure those loftier ideals. Some people exhibit situational ethics, a notion that particular situations (such as a being in a classroom with a bad teacher) justify otherwise unethical behavior (cheating on a test).<sup>61</sup> The situation either changes the moral intuitions about where Bright Lines are drawn or provides enough of a justification for someone to convince themselves that they are acting in line with a Bright Light and are not crossing the corresponding Bright Line.

The flipside of a discussion of conscience involves those situations that Albert Bandura termed “inhibitive,” how we keep from crossing Bright Lines. One important person-factor that situations can influence is self-control.<sup>62</sup> This factor is like a muscle, Roy Baumeister argues, a limited

resource that gets stronger with practice but can also get worn down in certain situations. One mechanism, then, whereby we keep from crossing a Bright Line is through this willpower, which means that situations in which we are stressed or tired increase the odds that we will not have the self-control to refrain from crossing a Bright Line. Many social problems, such as alcohol abuse or violence, are linked to a lack of self-control in tempting situations; couple such a situation with a lack of rest or an undercurrent of negative emotions, self-control can get depleted, raising the odds that we will cross what might otherwise be a Bright Line.<sup>63</sup> Some situations lead us to feel excluded, which contributes to less empathy and, thus, less prosocial behavior.<sup>64</sup>

Situations affect our moral codes in another way, through the perception we have about how fair other people are being. We are not rational, self-interested calculators, like some economic visions of the person suggest. If we think that others in a group are behaving cooperatively, we are motivated by our Bright Lights and act altruistically and honorably.<sup>65</sup> However, if we feel that others are not upholding these standards, or are taking advantage of us, we act much more selfishly. We feel indignation<sup>66</sup> and injustice<sup>67</sup> quickly and automatically, an emotional signal that others have not fulfilled their moral obligations to act appropriately. Trust, it turns out, is important. Where we trust others, we behave much more altruistically. Thus, situations that foster trust will lead people to act more in line with conventional, prosocial notions of morality. Trust is built over time, through observing actions that we feel are due to another's personal characteristics and not due to any obligations they are required to fulfill.<sup>68</sup> Additionally, the public or private nature of a situation plays a part in how well we treat others. When behaviors are made public in experiments in which people can exchange goods with each other, men and women tend to be equally equitable with what they give to each other, but in private, women take less for themselves than men.<sup>69</sup> On a more global scale, some of humankind's most harmful acts occurred quite publicly, suggesting that bystanders who do not comment end up silently complicit in such acts.<sup>70</sup>

So much of this discussion is abstract. To demonstrate how different individuals might interpret similar situations, let us move toward a concrete social domain—that of the corporate workplace. Business organizations are a slice of life where formal rules, such as those mentioned above, govern the behavior of employees as they act in organizational situations.

Indeed, the enduring genius of the organizational form is that it allows individuals to retain bewilderingly diverse private motives and meanings for action as long as they adhere publicly to agreed-upon rules ... As a result, bureaucratic work causes people to bracket, while at work, the moralities

that they might hold outside the workplace or that they might adhere to privately and to follow instead the prevailing morality of their particular organizational situation. As a former vice-president of a large firm says: "What is right in the corporation is not what is right in a man's home or in his church. What is right in the corporation is what the guy above you wants from you."<sup>71</sup>

Conventional understandings of morality, prosocial if/then statements we internalize, are bracketed at many workplaces. Learning the informational assumptions of such workplaces means either learning that moral emotions should be ignored or framing situations in ways that preclude those emotions from even being called forth. Subverting a colleague or making extra certain you get credit for your contribution are behaviors that are frowned upon at home, but in the logic of the business world, such behaviors seem justifiable. Using such metaprinciples, then, frames the way actions are even portrayed, meaning that effective bracketing can restrict moral intuitions that would otherwise unpleasantly signal the crossing of Bright Lines.

However, not everybody experiences this organizational morality in the same way. Once again, we have circumstances whereby different people in the same situational (organizational) environment perceive and behave differently. The overriding assumption in such research is that people act rationally, taking into account the costs and benefits of various organizational threats and rules. Threats and sanctions in the workplace have influence, but the most important factor for how people behave turns out to be how moral they feel the rules are.<sup>72</sup> When authorities were watching (a situational factor), everybody followed the rules. The difference occurred when higher-ups were not actively deterring certain behaviors. The people who defined those actions, what we consider corporate crime, as morally wrong (Bright Lines) were much more likely to comply with organizational rules even in the absence of supervision. Two people who have an equal opportunity to take a little bit extra from the corporation, who are in the same situation, will define their options differentially; one places embezzlement on the wrong side of a Bright Line, while the other draws a different line (or, as we will discuss in Chapter 7, reinterprets his actions as morally adequate). Both people might find it reprehensible to take a little extra from, say, their grandmother, but in the organizational context, different interpretations lead to different behavior.

Research on individual orientations rather globally defines morality in terms of prosocial behavior, a conventional notion of fostering the well-being of others. Let us stick with this narrow conception to summarize what research about individual differences typically explores. There are three, partly overlapping, constructs measuring individual orientations that

affect how people will behave in concrete situations: the moral norm, moral mandates, and moral identity.

Situations carry norms, and people bring with them a sense of what is normally moral when they enter any situation. A moral norm refers to the belief that some behaviors are inherently right or wrong regardless of their consequences. People do not always agree on moral norms,<sup>73</sup> and historically Western norms have shifted from being ordained by religious authorities to a more private level of authorization.<sup>74</sup> That said, most people and religions recognize a general set of moral rules that we might group into a single norm, to “be good to others,” a norm that is motivational for behavior.<sup>75</sup> This norm becomes a first-order, automatic guide for action, shaped by socialization and through interaction with others to test and legitimate the validity of such intuitions.<sup>76</sup> Humans universally have the capacity for developing a prosocial moral norm.

A moral norm is an influential factor in bridging the aforementioned gap between attitudes and behavior.<sup>77</sup> We have many beliefs about what we should do, but for a variety of reasons—ranging from situational pressures to a lack of belief in our own capacity to follow through on such attitudes (like an ability to stick to a diet)—we do not act in line with these beliefs. This is true for both moral and nonmoral attitudes. However, the more a particular attitude-behavior link touches on a belief in a moral norm, the more a person will be motivated to persist in those valued behaviors.<sup>78</sup> Some attitudes are linked more closely to core values, and when people subscribe to a moral worldview that holds “being healthy” or “doing good for others” is right, they are more likely to engage and persist in such behaviors. For example, two people who are slightly overweight may relate to that self-description differently. If we knew one of them felt that being overweight was a moral violation (something a person *should not* be), while the other person simply felt it would be nice to be thinner, we should place our bets on the former to stick with a diet.

Just like our businessperson who follows the rules even in the temptation of taking a few extra dollars from the corporation, it is the people whose worldviews place such behaviors on the wrong side of a Bright Line who persist. Such a moral norm is a central part of the informational assumptions that some people bring to certain judgments and situations. This idea involves a “moral mandate,” the conviction that a behavior is right or wrong and thus should or should not be performed.<sup>79</sup> Moral mandates are like other strong attitudes; we are especially certain of them, but because they are moral and they mandate action. They comprise, as this book suggests, a special class of understanding and perception. While they represent strong beliefs and thus can motivate people toward prosocial behaviors, they also have a dark side: people can use perceived mandates

to employ whatever means necessary to reach a moral end.<sup>80</sup> People may do immoral things in the service of what they consider moral goals.<sup>81</sup>

Later, I will lay out an understanding of conscience as a core of personal identity. Incorporating identities allows for situations to call forth different aspects of our selves, though the (Western) self involves a belief that we are more than the sum of the various roles we play.<sup>82</sup> A theory of conscience needs to account for the different ways in which people treat morality in different situations and should be sensitive to context and the ways different situations potentially call for different moral logics.<sup>83</sup> The situations we encounter, however, are not entirely of our own choosing. A sociological understanding of how situations are presented to us is important for understanding conscience.

### **SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND IDENTITIES**

Earlier, I presented identity theory as a sociological model of how individuals organize the various roles in their lives, but it also explains how many of our roles are determined by our location in society. Some identities occur more often and become more salient to us. Any particular situation frames our local role expectations, but identity theory “focuses on the reciprocal relationship between the individual and the larger social structure and the interactions between sets of individuals and society.”<sup>84</sup> The theory bridges analyses of the individual and the social structure through the concept of identity, the various meanings attached to oneself by self and others that locate individuals in structured relationships.<sup>85</sup>

Identity theory holds that individuals are a compilation of discrete, but overlapping identities, organized sets of meanings that become salient as situations call for them.<sup>86</sup> Traditionally, the focus was on social roles (such as “employee” or “mother”),<sup>87</sup> but recently the theory has expanded to include more sociodemographic, cross-situational identities (such as social class or gender).<sup>88</sup> Most recently, the theory focuses on three kinds of identities: role, group, and person.<sup>89</sup> Role identities are closely associated with the theory and deal with structurally prescribed sets of meanings attached to social roles, often in relation to other roles. Group identities encompass category identities such as American or female, while person identities capture individuals’ traits and internalized expectations. Less is known about how transsituational identities fit with more situational ones,<sup>90</sup> though recent work focuses on differentiating these two types of identities.<sup>91</sup>

Identities are thought to be hierarchically organized within the self, and people are differentially committed to each identity. Commitment refers to the extent one feels attached to the relationships implied by the



identity.<sup>92</sup> The more important people in our family are, the more committed we are to our identity as a family member. The identities themselves are organized through the concept of salience, the probability that an individual will claim a particular identity within a situation. Identity theory posits a hierarchy, with particular situations calling forth particular identities that guide both behavior of self and the perception of others in that situation. An identity serves as a goal or standard for the self within social roles or social situations.<sup>93</sup> Within situations, internal standards are compared with environmental input, and the actor behaves so as to achieve equilibrium between standards, behavior, and environmental feedback.

Scholars in the identity theory tradition have only recently started incorporating morality into the general research program. Viktor Gecas suggests that values influence behavior through value-identities, bringing values into the identity theory framework.<sup>94</sup> Just like we have an identity as “father” or “lawyer,” we might think of holding expectations around a particular value. Being “benevolent” might be a core part of an identity. This view distorts the *in situ* experience of intuitions and horizons on our moral actions. We may be able to articulate a second-order understanding of how important a particular value is to us and talk about our value-identity as if it was another identity in the hierarchy of our lives. But, in practice, we respond with first-order, automatic positive or negative feelings toward values and objects that activate those values. A value-identity, a heightened concern with power or stimulation, makes the process sound more conscious—insofar as somebody actively thinks about themselves in line with being powerful or stimulated—than it actually is. Value-identities are more of a second-order construct, and values operate, I am arguing, at a preconscious, unreflective level.

More directly, a moral identity has been posited as an influential personal identity linking self, situation, and moral outlook.<sup>95</sup> The moral identity is treated as a self-regulatory mechanism motivating moral action,<sup>96</sup> a commitment to promoting or protecting the welfare of others.<sup>97</sup> People vary to the extent they possess this identity, a personal factor that converts something that people feel they “shouldn’t” do into something they “mustn’t” do.<sup>98</sup> Empirical measures of the moral identity contain the two most prominent moral logics (justice and caring) as well as a notion of bravery.<sup>99</sup> Some suggest that a moral identity is stable across time and situation,<sup>100</sup> but like any identity, some situations will make it more salient than others. The more one’s self is organized around moral commitments, the more such researchers would argue one possesses this identity,<sup>101</sup> particularly if one consciously sees oneself in this light.<sup>102</sup>

The moral identity is motivational; if activated, it will proscribe behaviors just like any other role, and people will utilize that standard to guide

behavior. This construct has been empirically validated,<sup>103</sup> though I suggest it is serving as a measure of the extent that a prosocial notion of helping is mixed with the self and not how moral a person thinks they are. The moral identity encapsulates the common, prosocial definition of morality and tests the extent that people respond to that particular constellation of Bright Lines. Scholars in this tradition hold that these expectations are principle-level guides to behavior, like other identities that cut across situations more than many other identities. If I am expected to act like a teacher, then those situated expectations will be salient and guide my behavior and expectations for others. This line of reasoning suggests that the moral identity is one of a number that can be activated depending on a combination of how important it is to the individual and what situation they are in.

The moral identity (and value-identities) is useful within the conceptual framework of identity theory and allows measurement of some particularly difficult-to-capture concepts and a way to organize the relationships between society and the individual. The issue is to what extent people will consciously identify themselves with these Bright Lights. People who do the “right thing,” as we will discuss, do not typically see themselves as very moral. They might not identify with others who also value these prosocial actions. They may have first-order tendencies toward helping but no second-order awareness of how strong, or rare, those intuitions might be. So an idea of having a moral identity obscures the dual-nature of humans even as it necessarily simplifies the link between situation and moral outlooks.

Role identities are guides to behavior in concrete situations, in which we compare the feedback we get from others with our own expectations and adjust our actions accordingly,<sup>104</sup> even as the process can be so automatic as to escape consciousness. In any situation, we have a number of pressures and potential identities to keep straight, so the identity theory model (and its microsociological offshoot, identity control theory) is but a partial simplification of real interactional processes. Ultimately, my argument is that morality merges with, frames, and only occasionally supersedes the situated understandings we have for ourselves. Put differently, all people think they have a moral identity at their core, but many would not agree that the items in *this* measure capture their own sense of self. If I orient myself toward Bright Lights of achievement, for example, then helping others would get in the way. But I might decide morality involves looking out for just me and my family. This frames actions that others might see as immoral (working long hours, embezzlement) as actually moral, given my Bright Lights.

The moral identity approach defines morality along conventional, prosocial lines and limits a social psychology of morality that explores the range

of moral motivations, including those that are deeply held but run counter to what religious teachings might say. While it is safe to say that the dominant version of morality includes some notion of helping others, people might find other concerns (e.g., self-interest or hedonism) as alternative moral metrics. Reifying one brand of morality, no matter how common, precludes the possibility that people orient themselves toward unconventional moral codes. Somebody concerned with achievement might view actions toward that end (more time at the office) as quite moral by one calculus even though they would not score well as having a moral identity in terms of putting others before self. By focusing on one moral identity, we gloss over the conflicting goals and values that social actors face, either within situations or in taking stock of their lives as a whole.<sup>105</sup>

In sum, identities contain definitions of situations and expectations that we use to monitor and appraise our actions, and others', within ongoing situations. Embedded in these expectations is a moral dimension, not just as its own identity, but as guiding the parts we expect to play.<sup>106</sup> Being a good lawyer or salesperson carries with it a moral expectation of how to act and even how to think and feel about what other people do in that situation. With our friends, we might operate by flexible standards of fairness, say, for splitting a dinner bill. But in a role as an accountant or at a professional gathering, we are likely to strictly follow the notion of fairness. Professional codes of ethics, ranging across occupations, are created to precisely spell out how we are to circumscribe our behaviors in that role; to the extent that a person internalizes the role,<sup>107</sup> they internalize the expectations for behavior, and deviations from those expectations will be seen as moral violations.

### CONCLUSION AND TRANSITION

We exist in what Goffman referred to as a "moral order"; situations have pressures, constraints, and expectations that steer what we feel we can and should do. Social order thus has a moral dimension, not simply that we should follow certain Bright Lights and avoid certain Bright Lines—a view of society as an abstract, unified moral order with shared values and rituals<sup>108</sup>—but a more subtle understanding of how concrete situations are experienced. Situations exert a strong influence on us in the form of expectations that we will fulfill our role expectations and that others should fulfill theirs. The anger we feel when somebody does not fit in is palpable evidence of how important it is that we do not mess with the established meanings that comprise our taken-for-granted social order.

In addition to the ubiquitous moral order, there are situations and pressures toward conformity in times of uncertainty where moral issues are

at stake. The power of conformity to change people's behavior in unambiguous situations is well researched.<sup>109</sup> Social groups can change people's perception of physical objects,<sup>110</sup> so their ability to overcome personal ideals should not be a surprise. Whatever people abstractly believe they will do with respect to helping or hurting others, actual behavior often ends up being quite different. People's attitudes and values get short-circuited much more often than they like to believe. This is one reason that I have less affinity for philosophical discussions of right and wrong than I used to; abstract notions of correct behavior do not resonate with real people making real moral choices in real situations.<sup>111</sup> To engage in proper moral philosophy, we need an adequate understanding of psychology,<sup>112</sup> as well as the ways social forces influence individual psychological functioning.<sup>113</sup>

But people are not identical. They bring different elements to these interactions, and some aspects influence some people more than others and might influence them more on one day than on another. We need understandings of situations and the people enacting them, putting the social influences on the development of those people at the forefront of an understanding of conscience. Our abstract notions of right and wrong may or may not influence our behavior in concrete situations. Some Bright Lines will never be crossed, but others might get crossed in the pressure of a real situation, which will then necessitate some after-the-fact rationalization or justification.

I reintroduced the notion of identities as informational assumptions that people utilize to link their sense of self in a particular situation to the understandings they have of themselves and that are shared by wider society. These identities, I will argue, frame situationally appropriate behaviors and help bracket the application of our abstract Bright Lights and Lines, as in the example of the workplace. By now, we can see that thinking of having "a" conscience as an invariant set of moral standards is an oversimplification.

In Chapter 6, I will continue with the discussion of identities, moving away from the situation and toward the notion of in-groups and out-groups. Prosocial morality, I will argue, is largely experienced as an in-group phenomenon, with moral obligations, goals, and prohibitions applied to the in-group but less strictly so to those we place outside of these boundaries. Yet, once again, we will see that situational factors influence the application of flexible and shifting in-group and out-group boundaries, demonstrating how slippery the implementation of our Bright Lines and Bright Lights can be.

## CHAPTER 6

# US AND THEM: SHIFTING MORAL PROVINCES

For Sigmund Freud, life with others is hard. For Emile Durkheim, life with others is easy.

Elliot Turiel<sup>1</sup>

A line of thought, tracing from Aristotle through Aquinas to a narrow reading of Freud into modern scholarship about strict social constructivism, holds that people from different backgrounds possess insurmountable cultural differences and that people are blank slates, waiting to be written on and defined by culture and personal experience. As a result, such thinkers suggest, talk of “human nature” as endemic to the species is a mirage. Different ways of perceiving based on different cultures should pose insurmountable obstacles to understanding people from different places and with different experiences.

This view does carry some sway in a graduate seminar, but it is challenged by riding the 6 train to Yankee stadium. On the subway, you can see Japanese tourists communicating about their favorite baseball player with a group of Spanish tourists and giving high-fives to people with strong Brooklyn accents. These groups do not share a common language, but through counting, pointing, and laughing, they enjoy their time together based on goodwill and a passion for baseball. If only for a few moments on a crowded train, without shared cultural understandings, they nonetheless find enough common ground to bond. Human beings, best we can tell, smile when happy and cry when sad. We vary a great deal, but share some universal aspects.

Even so, groups do not always work toward harmony. As a lifelong Yankee fan, son of Brooklyn natives, I have a great deal of experience with

the ways culture and allegiances push people apart. Even if one does not like professional sports, one likely has some opinion of the New York Yankees, who represent different things to different people, ranging from excellence and tradition to unfettered economic greed and domination of the little guy. Identifying with the Yankees can bring people together on the 6 train, but push people away in other cities. Wearing a Yankees cap legitimates one in one area and alienates one in others. Most others, in fact.

Human beings draw boundaries between groups. This is as universal a human tendency as anything else discussed thus far. But these boundaries are far from stable; people can align themselves with a group and, in the next breath, draw meaningful and strict distinctions with that group. We can focus on commonalities or differences—who we are like and who we make sure to hold ourselves distinct from. These allegiances are a central way in which we define ourselves. We may think of what we have in common with other people of our gender, from our hometown, or from our workplace, and feel like they form an in-group we use to partly define ourselves. The same people, in a different context, might be an out-group. If I align myself with my gender, I exclude some coworkers from that group, but if I think of myself as a sociologist, I include them as an in-group and exclude most of the people I share my gender with.

The way we think about people when they are in an in-group is different than if they become part of an out-group. We feel positively about people when we focus on what we have in common and share an in-group and less positively when we focus on our differences. Potentially, we can find something in common with, or differentiate ourselves from, any person. These boundaries can shift based on context, mood, situational feedback, or cultural events. Our first-order, “hot” processing systems quickly divide the social world into “Us” and “Them,”<sup>2</sup> a universal process fundamental to being a social species.<sup>3</sup> It is evolutionarily important to be able to quickly determine which people are potentially unfriendly (Them), so it makes sense that we have evolved a quick capacity to make this distinction.<sup>4</sup>

Conscience involves potentially conflicting moral systems depending on the operative frame for a situation. Particular identities trigger specific informational assumptions. A person may use different moral logic at work and at home, views of right and wrong embedded in informational assumptions and “if/then” predispositions. Situated sets of role expectations, however, are not the only identities that come into play; one’s social allegiances are a fundamental aspect of conscience. We discussed identities in the last chapter primarily along social-structural lines, but there is another set of identities that is equally important for building a model of conscience: group identities. Conscience involves more than sets of moral logics; it also demarcates the boundaries for who we consider deserving of moral

(widely understood) action. We define ourselves in large part through shifting Us and Them boundaries, how we feel we should treat people, and through these distinctions that carry with them a moral dimension.

### **SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY**

Identity theory offers a formal model of how we organize the various roles we play in our lives. Identities, in the approach discussed in the last chapter, constitute sets of meanings that circumscribe appropriate behaviors within situations. Important, but often overlooked, is the moral dimension of these meanings, spelling out what moral logics are appropriate for a particular situation; we think oddly of somebody who treats her children as formally as she might treat employees. From a big-picture point of view, social structure shapes the situations we act within; those situations conjure up particular sets of expectations that we internalize to a greater or lesser extent, and our behaviors are judged through the lenses of these expectations. Thus, society influences how we act, where and when we act, and how we think and feel about how we act.

But social structure is only a part of the story. There is a more psychological tradition that also focuses on identities but less on concrete situations and more on the commonalities and distinctions we draw with others. Social identity theory, a research tradition distinct from identity theory, posits identities as “commonalities among people within a group, and differences between people in different groups.”<sup>5</sup> The concern is less with guiding actual behavior and more about aligning ourselves with or differentiating ourselves from other people, especially with respect to how we feel about ourselves.<sup>6</sup> Identities, in the social identity approach, still serve to orient people toward the social world, but the focus is more on self-categorization and self-esteem than on situated action.<sup>7</sup> A social identity involves a feeling of belonging to certain groups, connection with a social category, and an aspect of the self that affects perceptions and behavior.<sup>8</sup> Part of feeling good about ourselves involves a sense of how the groups that we associate with are perceived. As such, since we tend to want to feel good about ourselves, we have strong progroup biases in thought, feeling, and action.

Social identity theory was intended as an improved approach for understanding group interactions<sup>9</sup> as compared with the traditional overly individualistic explanations often utilized within psychology.<sup>10</sup> Individuals align themselves with members of social groups with whom they discern commonalities, and over time develop part of their identities around such membership. Identity, in this usage, involves multidimensional self-understandings, a deep sense of oneself as a part of a social group.<sup>11</sup>

Such groups can range from the substantively important (nationality, occupation) to the trivial (sports fan). Social identity theory focuses on the boundaries drawn and the feelings derived from this process of categorizing in- and out-groups. It highlights how quickly and automatically categories emerge, easily shift within a situation, and influence perception, action, and emotion. Some identities are more important to the self long-term, while others are short-term identities—inconsistent, temporary in-group identifications.<sup>12</sup>

Social identity theory parcels out the self-concept into two primary domains: the individual self and the collective self. The individual self comprises personal traits, close and idiosyncratic relationships, and distinctive personal attributes, similar to the notion of personal identity discussed in Chapter 2. The collective self involves in-group identifications, parts of the person based on characteristics they share with others in various groups that they use to define themselves. The self, in this view, is a balance between these different personal and social aspects, and evidence suggests that people focus on the “optimal distinctiveness” they can achieve in this balance.<sup>13</sup> People have needs for both joining groups and feeling unique, though a sociologist would point out that even these feelings are patterned such that people of similar cultural backgrounds report feeling unique in the same ways. Situations, social groups, cultures, and individual self-concepts all influence the relative balance between feeling like an individual and like part of a wider group. These boundaries are fluid.

When a particular social identity is made salient, research supports the social identity theory hypothesis that people demonstrate perceptual and behavioral biases favoring their in-groups and thus do not objectively process incoming information.<sup>14</sup> For example, if we are members of a religious community, we will—both unconsciously and consciously—favor members our religion over others, rating in-group members as more competent, intelligent, and moral. This bias can be overcome, but the great insight of this research tradition is how immediately these biases develop and influence perception without our conscious knowledge. We see the world through the lenses of our social memberships.

People demonstrate in-group favoritism based on the flimsiest division between an Us and Them, even of make-believe groups. Just being told we are a member of a group, even one that is made up and completely new to us, will lead us to favor other members of that in-group. Classic studies randomly assigned people to be “overestimators” of the number of dots on a page, as a portrayal of an in-group identity (with other over estimators), after *randomly assigning them to that group*.<sup>15</sup> Whether or not they *actually* over estimated the dots was irrelevant. A make-believe identity still led people to overreward and favor people they thought were part of that in-group. Given the biases we show toward make-believe in-groups,



it is easy to see how real-world identities are shaped and real-world conflicts fueled by this same process. We like our in-groups more when nothing is at stake; situations with socially significant differences (based on race, religion, or property) will perpetuate these apparently hard-wired, in-group enhancing biases.

The psychological process that people use to draw identity-boundaries is known as self-categorization.<sup>16</sup> Individuals cognitively parse the world into people like and unlike themselves. The more personally important an identity is, the more automatic (and more subtly biased) this process can become. Culturally important symbolic meanings get attached to such identities and internalized, and just as people want to feel good about themselves (see the brief discussion in Chapter 2 about self-esteem), they want to feel good about their groups. Thus, the famous phenomenon of people wearing more jerseys on days their sports teams are successful<sup>17</sup>—stronger self-categorization when doing so makes us look and feel good.

Even members of stigmatized groups, typically aware of how they are stigmatized by a wider culture, focus on aspects of self and group that enhance their self-esteem. Social identity theory suggests that any characteristic that gets ascribed to an in-group can be the basis for positively evaluating that group.<sup>18</sup> People are motivated, then, to find distinctive aspects of their group—even if that group has low status—that can be positively evaluated and then try to emphasize those aspects.<sup>19</sup> In some cases, people may draw a group-boundary around a shared dislike, rather than a positive in-group attribute.<sup>20</sup> People believe they bond over shared likes, but in practice, shared dislike toward an out-group is a powerful cohesive force.

Being a member of a group can mean different things depending on how somebody perceives that categorization. Gender, for example, is a category that is often essentialized, meaning that we see the identities of male and female as having fixed, natural properties.<sup>21</sup> While biology is relevant, social scientists find that perceived gender differences are much greater than actual differences,<sup>22</sup> with much of what we think of as natural actually being brought about by social pressures.<sup>23</sup> Supposedly natural differences turn out to be the product of generations of social expectations and not the by-product of an immutable biology. But the perception that these differences are natural has a great deal to do with how we see ourselves, behave, and treat others, even if these perceptions are inaccurate. If a particular social category is essentialized within a culture, we are especially likely to stereotype members of that category.<sup>24</sup> In America, race, ethnicity, and physical disability are the most essentialized, treated as immutable and believed to explain all sorts of supposed differences.<sup>25</sup>

As we will see later in this chapter, overstereotyping is an important factor in diminishing the status of out-groups. Putting people in certain

categories, often preconsciously, places them outside our notion of what moral treatment they deserve. Defining somebody as *Them* legitimates anti-social actions and feelings toward members of that category. This is another instance of the fundamental attribution error and is known as the “ultimate attribution error.”<sup>26</sup> The same way we overattribute the causes of our actions to situational forces rather than to our personality, we systematically misattribute the cause of behavior of in-group and out-group members. We are more charitable with situational explanations of the undesirable behavior of people we share identities with, while claiming their positive behaviors as the result of shared attributes. For people in out-groups, however, we downplay situational factors and overattribute their actions to supposedly stable, internal factors such as their personality or simply their membership of that group. We blame out-group members for their negative behaviors and dismiss their positive ones, but do the reverse in a self-serving way for members of our in-group. If a graduate from my college achieves something noteworthy, I feel good because of our shared identity. If they are in the news for committing a murder, however, I might try harder to find exculpatory reasons than if they went to a rival school. Thus, once boundaries are drawn, they bias how we judge the world. We typically see what we want to see along group lines.

One of the consequences of this strong in-group bias is that we perceive in-groups as inherently more moral. Important social identities become part of the informational assumptions, or frames, through which we perceive the world, and our valued in-groups are at the forefront of these frames. They lead to what I have referred to as *Lawyer Logic*, biased reasoning and justification processes that legitimate what we already believe at a gut level, namely, that our groups are morally praiseworthy. We feel better if our group is seen as moral and distance ourselves from that group if it is not.<sup>27</sup>

### **THE INHERENT MORALITY OF THE IN-GROUP: HOW WE SHOULD TREAT US**

People identify with in-groups in both cognitive and emotional ways to address the need for security.<sup>28</sup> Identity is a way to anchor oneself in a complicated social world.<sup>29</sup> This in-group versus out-group distinction is fundamental for understanding conscience, and the flexibility of these boundaries helps explain what otherwise seems to be a curiously selective application of moral codes. Concepts like the moral identity suggest that people have one moral system that gets selectively applied when the circumstances are right. I advocate a related proposition, one that utilizes the core human characteristic of instinctively dividing the world into *Us* and

Them.<sup>30</sup> The Us-category changes constantly; now we self-categorize with people of our gender, later we focus on people who were born in our home state, and tomorrow we'll focus on people who vote the same way that we do. We have many Us-groups in our lives, and others can be developed by circumstance (a group on a bus, a section at a concert). The process is ubiquitous.

A lifelong Yankees fan, I identify with fellow fans during baseball season, but as a lifelong fan of the Washington Wizards,<sup>31</sup> I hate Knicks fans during basketball season. An astute observer might notice that these two groups, one I align with, the other I loathe, largely overlap. In actuality, Knick fans and Yankee fans are often the same people. But the rules of logic are suspended, here. I intuitively identify with those who are aligned in the same ways in the relevant social realm.

Being part of Us is a rewarding feeling, and it circumscribes the range of our intuitive moral obligations. We act prosocially toward those we empathize with (see Chapter 4), and we feel more empathy toward people we categorize along the same lines as we see ourselves. We give more to people like us and respond positively much more quickly.<sup>32</sup> As Frans deWaal puts it, "Morality is very much an in-group phenomenon. Universally, humans treat outsiders far worse than members of their own community: in fact, moral rules hardly seem to apply to the outside."<sup>33</sup> What social psychology adds is a focus on how fast and often in-groups shift in practice.

In normal circumstances, we are more likely to help somebody with whom we share an important social category.<sup>34</sup> In optimal circumstances, we might act prosocially toward people in general, holding a door for somebody or choosing to donate to charity. This suggests a large expansion of the in-group circle. But situations, as discussed in the last chapter, often influence us to restrict how widely we extend our sense of Us-ness. We might hold the door for most people, but somebody who looks poor or homeless might not trigger an Us-feeling, a first-order intuition to help. It might even trigger a disgust reaction, leading to a Them-feeling, and an accordant aversion to helping. Thus, even the most moral of people might not extend their prosocial behavior toward somebody who represents a strongly undesired out-group. Other situational factors, such as being in a hurry (in a classic study), make people less likely to help—even in case of people studying at a seminary thinking about giving a lecture on the Good Samaritan.<sup>35</sup> These are precisely the kinds of people we most expect to extend their Us-feeling greatly, yet the right situation (thinking they are late to lecture on helping others) leads to less actual helping.

Some people have values that orient more toward universal concern for all that inform their informational assumptions about who falls into the Us-category. However, even such people (see Chapter 10) in times of war,

stress, or conflict, may align themselves with their ethnic or national identities. Rare are the people who universally code people into the Us-category; most of us draw boundaries at different times to encompass different Us-groups, ranging from family to friends to neighbors to compatriots to coreligionists. These boundaries may shift, but we extend our moral judgments and intuitions most strongly to those who stay within a circle of Us-ness. Social identity research on the drawing of these lines informs the model of conscience developed here, how our moral intuitions, feelings, and obligations may shift—though not randomly—across time and situation.

We extend a variety of moral concerns toward members of in-groups, well-researched domains in social psychology ranging from feelings of reciprocity<sup>36</sup> and notions of justice<sup>37</sup> to issues of trust and cooperation.<sup>38</sup> These obligations are taken as natural within the context of dealing with people who satisfy the in-group condition, and that group may extend broadly (in the case of exchange processes) or quite narrowly (in the case of extreme altruism, say, organ donation). However one defines their in-group, the definition of the group carries with it an illusion that its members are inherently more moral than those of out-groups.<sup>39</sup> Though, again, culture seems to mediate these relationships; Hindus, for example, are more likely than Americans to weigh interpersonal factors rather than abstract concerns about justice when responding to moral dilemmas.<sup>40</sup>

The social psychology of conscience can incorporate research on such processes even as it suggests that the application of these principles will fall within bounded identities and social groups. Some anthropologists and social psychologists, in fact, prefer not to talk about morality or moral codes,<sup>41</sup> preferring instead to focus on the ways people judge fairness during social exchanges. There is strong evidence for the view that people find justice and fair cooperation to be such an important principle that they are willing to act nonrationally, as an economist would define it, to punish people who act unjustly, even at an expense to themselves.<sup>42</sup> A larger perspective on conscience, however, encompasses such a perception of fairness and justice in the service of wider social systems and ongoing concerns with developing a coherent life narrative, a sense of ourselves as moral agents across situations and the life course. We will return to this point in Chapters 8 and 9.

To feel good about themselves people want to believe that highly valued in-groups are fair.<sup>43</sup> The power of Us, however, means that they are not objective appraisers of how fair or just their group is. Evidence suggests that people differ on the extent to which they notice unfairness, most commonly noticing injustice if it affects somebody with whom they share important identities.<sup>44</sup> I may not worry about discrimination in society until it affects people in my in-group. Power is a hidden factor in misperception

of discrimination; people with more power seem more oblivious to unfairness since acknowledging it might suggest that they are not as fair as they would like to believe. People at the receiving end of these injustices, and those who share meaningful identities with them, are more finely attuned to noticing such inequities. Once again, two people looking at the same situation can legitimately arrive at different judgments as to the morality or injustice of particular actions or social practices. It depends on a variety of contextual factors, not just a simple view that we have one single moral code we apply to every situation. People will favor their in-groups to a lesser extent if we can remind them of values they might hold for equality among people,<sup>45</sup> suggesting that judgments about fairness are susceptible to situational priming. When a particular in-group or out-group boundary is triggered, however, defining a situation and its accordant relationships, then the appropriate circle of moral obligation is delimited. Positing someone as an out-group member is a first step, if not a sufficient one, toward all sorts of actions that fall into the “evil” end of a moral spectrum.

#### THE ACCEPTABILITY OF IMMORALITY TOWARD THEM

As positively biased as we tend to be toward Us, we are as negatively biased against those we define as Them. We view out-groups as being less human, having lesser ranges of human emotions, and being overly homogeneous.<sup>46</sup> The stronger an Us-group distinguishes itself from Them, the more it sanctions mistreatment of Them.<sup>47</sup> We necessarily draw boundaries as members of human communities, and not every out-group boundary leads to a dehumanization of Them. But, as with the other processes discussed so far, this shift often occurs at an automatic, first-order level outside of our consciousness, biases our perception, and can be an important step toward mistreatment of a group that is seen as less worthy than the in-group.

Individuals are usually not aware that they are shifting from seeing themselves as individuals to seeing themselves as group members, or that they are scapegoating, rather than correctly identifying, groups that have caused the often very complex life problems.<sup>48</sup>

At its extreme, this leads to “moral disengagement,”<sup>49</sup> when one disassociates oneself from actions that they would otherwise judge as morally wrong, crossing a Bright Line. Albert Bandura, who has written extensively about psychological mechanisms that allow people to override their moral standards, focuses on the use of justifications, euphemistic labeling of others, diffusion of responsibility, and dehumanization of others.<sup>50</sup> I will detail these processes more in the next chapter. For now, the focus is

on how situations can lead to various first-order, automatic reactions that are anchored in in-group and out-group distinctions. If something triggers a sense of outrage or disgust,<sup>51</sup> we quickly and preconsciously shift the cause of that negative moral emotion to the Them-category. People categorized as “Them” are seen as less worthy of our respect and moral efforts. This allows us to ignore our typical moral standards, suspend self-awareness and personal responsibility, and perhaps act in ways that we would find abhorrent if those actions were directed at a proper member of our in-group.<sup>52</sup> At the conscious level, we often provide reasons to justify this prejudice or discrimination that, to somebody without similar first-order reactions, can appear to use tortured logic. But what matters is the fact that the perception and intuition lead to a shift in group boundaries, and somebody who no longer appears to be a morally worthy member of an in-group—be it a family member, a fellow employee, or a member of the wider community—is now open to being subjected to less-than-moral actions.

Homosexuality as a social issue, for example, in the American context operates along these lines. Some people feel a preconconscious sense of disgust at the idea of homosexual activity and go to great political lengths to try to prohibit such actions. The first-order reaction leads to second-order reasoning to defend these actions, but what is emerging is a notion that people who engage in such activities are somehow not part of the world of “good people,” of Us. If such people become Them, then traditional American values of freedom from government, right to privacy, and the rights of consenting adults no longer need apply. Their behavior is seen as less than human—justifying various legal or punitive actions that focus on homosexuals.

Putting somebody into the Them-category contributes to a lack of sympathy for their perspective.<sup>53</sup> Perpetrators of acts that harm others, such as violence, tend to explain away their actions as not their responsibility (an example of the fundamental attribution error) and focus on the actions’ positive outcomes.<sup>54</sup> Three of Baumeister’s four causes of evil (see Chapter 2),<sup>55</sup> involve overriding traditional in-group moral standards while reevaluating the target of these acts into an out-group. Others’ pain is viewed as instrumental, enjoyable, or their just desserts insofar as they are defined as a member of an out-group, unworthy of the moral concern extended to in-group members.

People appear to differ with respect to the ease they can morally disengage, overriding their moral self-standards. Children differ with respect to how easily they get angry, a big step toward backing away from their basic moral standards.<sup>56</sup> Anger shrinks a person’s perception of Us to exclude the object of the anger, a step toward moral disengagement. This can overcome even people who place great value on caring for others and

lead to dehumanization and moral disengagement. This may be positive, as in a mother defending her children from an assault, but suggests that an otherwise highly nurturing woman may harm others if the situation warrants.

Moral standards have to be activated to affect behavior;<sup>57</sup> they are not permanent guides shaping our every action. Situational factors that implicate first-order perceptions activating prosocial behavior norms or identities involve perceiving somebody as an in-group member and thus proper objects of culturally important moral obligations. Differences in values help identities predict some of this variation. Some people find self-transcendence values to be more important, concerns such as being benevolent, helping others, and caring about strangers. If those Bright Lights are more appealing, people will be increasingly likely to extend a wider boundary around their Us-groups in more situations. A different way to think of individual differences lies in the moral identity, since people who report a stronger moral identity demonstrate more regard for out-groups.<sup>58</sup> The moral identity represents one way to conceptualize a key part of personal identity (see Chapter 8) and frames judgments and intuitions people use to construe meaning in situations. While people vary in the ease with which they include others into their sense of Us, individual differences do not seem as important for predicting out-group discrimination; simply defining oneself as a member of an in-group is the strongest predictor of discrimination.<sup>59</sup>

Individual differences in the ability to keep from morally disengaging should not lead us to conclude that some people are just immoral. Recall how fundamental culture and upbringing are to shaping first-order reactions to others. For example, individuals who are consistently socially excluded demonstrate less empathy and less helpful behavior,<sup>60</sup> demonstrating steps toward moral disengagement. People who are treated in certain ways, or find themselves in stigmatized social groups, will be more likely to develop in ways that contribute to moral disengagement. These processes did not start with the individual, but rather with the ways social structure and culture shaped their perceptions and the areas where they drew their Bright Lines.

### MORAL PROVINCES

Social identities are as important as the more structurally based identities for connecting individual conscience to wider social structures and cultures. In this case, social identities that signify perceived group membership—ranging from “humanity” at one end to an in-group focused only on “me” at the other—set up boundaries within which informational assumptions

shape moral intuitions. This sense of We-ness outlines a “moral province,” an understanding of the boundaries where conventional notions of morality (e.g., altruism, justice, and fairness) apply. We intuitively align with and against others due to ubiquitous self-categorization processes, and those who get defined as fellow residents of a province fall within a sphere of morality subject to the rights, duties, and obligations of any Us-member. If somebody is within one’s moral province, an in-group, they are subject to whatever prosocial values (Bright Lights) one associates with prosocial action and obligations. At this point, moral obligations follow a biased Lawyer Logic and are not the stuff of dispassionate moral reasoning.

Empirical support for this approach comes from neurological studies conducted by Joshua Greene,<sup>61</sup> who demonstrates how the dual-system model of the actor plays out in the brain. Abstract issues of moral judgment draw on second-order, logical reasoning, the kind advocated by Kant as taught in Introductory philosophy courses. For these abstract problems, people dispassionately think of costs and benefits of certain actions and come to a logically defensible moral judgment. Greene used a classic problem where the subject decides whether or not to flip a switch that would save five lives in the path of a trolley, but would kill one person who was on a different track. Most people decide that killing one justifies saving five and say they would flip the switch. A variant of the same dilemma, however, activates a different part of the brain and implicates a more emotional, personal, first-order set of moral judgments. While killing one to save five is a logical choice in the abstract, most people report they will not push a person off a bridge onto a track, below, if doing so would save five people on the track. Same calculus, but note the immediacy of the action activates a more emotional aspect of the brain and leads to different reported moral judgments.<sup>62</sup>

In terms of moral provinces, a physical connection with another person focuses an Us-circle of moral responsibility, triggering moral reactions that are anchored in the first-order, Bright Line level of response. The emotional level of moral response short-circuits our logical facilities in the service of Lawyer Logic, biased reasoning aimed at supporting a preconceived conclusion. A cardinal emotional rule is that we should not harm Us, and the thought of causing harm to another triggers aspects of the brain associated with what Greene has referred to as personal dilemmas, shifting emotions away from second-order systems and implicating first-order responses.

This leads to a provisional hypothesis about situations, identities, and moral codes: the *content* of morality gets situationally defined by one’s location in social structures (role identities) and the appropriate *targets* of those moral intuitions or judgments get situationally defined through social group identification. Situations call forth behavioral, cognitive, and emotional



expectations, informational assumptions linked to if/then predispositions that determine intuitions that motivate intended behavior. The vast majority of this process is preconscious, whereby automatic processes filter information through cognitive filters laden with emotional aspects that surface as intuitions and may even direct behavior before we are consciously aware of it. The moral logic that is appropriate, including presuppositions and intuitions, for reactions in a college classroom is different—if somewhat related—to the moral logic that I employ when dealing with family members. I extend different expectations and obligations and have different moral reactions to actions taken by a student than I would by my brother. Thus, situations shape moral experience. Conscience is not a single, abstract, cross-situational construct, but rather a jumble of roles, messages, moral feelings, and intuitions that gets situationally activated in patterned ways.

But situations influence conscience in different ways, depending on context, circumstance, perception, and others' actions. Even as I operate more as a professor at work and as a husband, brother, son, and friend in my personal life, I extend my moral boundaries to different people and groups at different times. At work, I might extend a moral province to encompass everyone in my department, at my university, or in my profession, or I might limit it to the small group of people in my department who also study social psychology. At each juncture that I circumscribe a province of Us and Them, I am intuitively aligning my moral obligations more strongly to Us, even as an Us-group might instantaneously shift. If we could press "pause" at any given moment, we could map this intuitively felt boundary that delimits the objects of a temporary moral province. I'd feel aligned with people within the boundary and less connected to those outside.

A magic pause-button would also let us map out the obligations and moral logics employed within that province. If we could pause time and get a complete report from our unconscious, we would have a rough outline (the unconscious does not always function in unitary fashion) of what Bright Lights have been set up for that role and that situation. A child asking for one more day to do their chores will likely be perceived differently than a student asking for one more day to finish an assignment. The more formal, less particular system of a university calls for deadlines to be applied universally except for extenuating circumstances. The on-going negotiations of family life mean that today's issues bleed into tomorrow's, and reactions to the child's request for more time will be interpreted in line with ongoing understandings between the parent and child about the reasons for wanting an extension. Some reasons will seem too trivial and cross a Bright Line of acceptable behavior for some parents, but the particular intuitions or reactions are shaped by a variety of interactions. Not so in

the more formal world of work, at a store, or in dealing with strangers. This element of time is largely absent from both the identity-literatures and the work on moral judgment and action and will form the basis of later chapters as we incorporate an ongoing notion of the self.

Morality is situated, a drawback of psychological research that abstracts moral judgments, intuitions, and hypothesized behaviors from concrete situations and relationships. How we think of ourselves, both in terms of what roles we play and how closely we align ourselves to others, is influenced by the situations we find ourselves in. A social psychology of conscience is strengthened with a more social understanding of these judgments and behaviors. Personal history is important, of course; another person would not feel any of the same identity pushes and pulls at my office that I do. And some people are more likely to play certain roles in multiple situations; some athletes, for example, play that role even in situations where “athlete” is not relevant,<sup>63</sup> while other people still talk about high school decades later. A lawyer may treat friends as potential partners to argue with, even in situations where they signal a desire for her to play a different role. However, the situation is often overlooked in the psychological literature on morality, and a social psychology of conscience is well served by merging general insights about situations and individuals with general insights about moral functioning.

Bright Lines are automatic, intuitive situational feedback about the moral dimension of thoughts, actions, or feelings. If one approaches violating a Bright Line, they will likely feel some negative emotion (shame, fear, or guilt) that suggests one is violating something stronger than just a simple convention. These lines can shift, depending on how broadly one’s situationally defined moral province has been defined. Failing to share food with a spouse might not trigger a feeling of shame unless history has defined such sharing as a point of contention in the relationship, thus adding moral weight to an otherwise innocuous action. Failing to share food with other people at a dinner party, or strangers sitting at the next table at a restaurant, is not a moral violation and would not trigger a Bright Line-reaction. Same activity, different targets. Us vs. Them defines the scope of potentially moral actions, intuitions, and interpretations.

## CONCLUSION AND TRANSITION

Social structure channels who we interact with, how often, where, and why. Our jobs, geographic location, race, gender, and so on contribute to predictable patterns of interactive situations, and the identities we develop within these situations channel perception, expectations, and behavior. But situational perception and intuition are not channeled only

by social-structural position. Social groupings are vital parts of the process whereby we judge ourselves and others and dictate the extent of our obligations to treat people along whatever prosocial lines we value. These groups are more or less substantial; an Us-feeling can encompass a group of strangers online for a movie (a temporary group) or people of a religion who have never personally met (a valued social identification). In-group and out-group distinctions can be drawn at a variety of levels, but morality seems to be the most important factor for members of a social category or group to positively evaluate their group.<sup>64</sup>

Identities also channel the Lawyer Logic we use, during and after the fact, to justify our actions to ourselves and others. We are strongly biased toward perceiving ourselves as minimally sufficient moral members of our important groups. When we can, we will interpret actions, feelings, and thoughts in ways most charitable to maintaining this sense of self. Maintaining a clean conscience does not necessarily mean acting, feeling, and thinking in line with our Bright Lights; many times it may mean distorting or erasing judgments and memories that do not fit well with our distal, moral senses. Chapter 7 discusses techniques we use to maintain this positive moral self-image in light of the many ways we skirt up against Bright Lines in everyday life.

Popular discourse is full of sayings like “they share our values,” the idea that people like Us share important moral orientations. This may partly be true, but the description of values employed here suggests that people share most values at the most abstract level. Drawing lines around moral provinces serves as a way to legitimate social boundaries that *cause* social cleavages rather than *reflecting* them. We do not simply share values with people in our group and then identify with them because of perceived shared values; rather, we first identify with the group and only then search for reasons, which the structure of human values makes readily available, to articulate the shared feeling of Us-ness. Identifying moral provinces, based on ever-shifting social identities, does not mean we actually share similar values, but that we share similar moral logics and perceived obligations and use values as a way to articulate these core intuitions and feelings. Values are deeply felt, but they are also useful tools for rationalizing behavior and claiming Us is not like Them, when in fact, we very well might be more like Them than we care to admit.

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## CHAPTER 7

# CONSCIENCE IN INDIVIDUAL FUNCTIONING: SELF-DECEPTION AND MORAL SELF-BIASES

How do you get an honest man to lose his ethical compass? You get him to take one step at a time, and self-justification will do the rest.

Carol Tavis and Elliot Aronson<sup>1</sup>

Bright Lines are important anchors for morality, triggers for instant reactions that lead us to try to avoid certain thoughts and behaviors. Bright Lines are “third rails” powering our sense of self. Just like touching the electrified third rail of a mass transit system leads to unpleasant feelings (to say the least), so does crossing a Bright Line. For some people, the negative feelings can occur if they even consider crossing a Bright Line. Thus, Bright Lines carry with them an inherent justification for not being crossed.

To this point, Bright Lines have been treated as if they are all equivalent and consistent across situations. Certainly, this is true for some things, such as incest taboos. If incest is wrong, it is wrong in any situation. Yet, some Bright Lines become “electrified” only in certain situations. It is wrong to cheat on an exam, or lie to a judge, but many people who draw these Bright Lines “exaggerate” on their taxes or illegally download music and feel no remorse. The corresponding abstract, ideal Bright Line (be truthful and honest) can become overridden in some circumstances, meaning that the behavior does not trigger an aversive Bright Line reaction.

Crossing an important Bright Line feels terrible and is something we try to avoid. We might feel mildly ashamed if we forgot a friend’s birthday

or got caught speeding, and these aversive reactions motivate us to try to do the opposite. But, unless we have staked our identity and reputation on always remembering birthdays or being a law-abiding driver, such violations likely will not damage our core sense of self. If we forget a date or get a ticket, we will perhaps rub up against a Bright Line but the pain will not linger too long and is easily deflected from damaging a core sense of ourselves as a good person. Convincing justifications are readily available, for others and ourselves.<sup>2</sup> However, some violations are stronger, crossing fundamental Bright Lines that define who we are, who we are not, and what people in our group or social position should never do. Crossing those lines leads to powerful third-rail shocks through triggering previously discussed negative moral emotions.

### **“IT’S OK IF I DO IT .”.**

If it were possible to ask people to list out all of their Bright Lines—difficult, since many of the lines operate outside of consciousness—only a rare person could objectively say they have never crossed even one. Most of us have crossed lines that are important to us and our social groups, some more significant than others. Consider curfews, speed limits, or pedestrian crossings: for some people these are Bright Lines, while for others they are simply norms or suggestions, but most people violate them at some point. An objective self-accounting for most people should uncover a list of such legal-if-not-immoral-transgressions next to times they were selfish, thoughtless, or otherwise, failed to live up to their ideals. Yet, most people believe they are morally worthwhile beings; the occasional violation does not change this belief. A theory of conscience needs to account for this. The typical view people (Westerners) have of themselves is rather positive,<sup>3</sup> and rarely do people see themselves as immoral, fundamentally unworthy participants in community or social life. This suggests that our self-appraisals are not so objective. Rather, we see ourselves through biased lenses, often dismissing or downplaying our Bright Line violations in self-serving ways that help maintain a positive sense of ourselves. While we offer ourselves favorable interpretations for our violations, we do not as often extend these charitable interpretations to others, especially to members of out-groups.

One way to avoid the pain of crossing a Bright Line is to refrain from doing so, the strategy we teach children or other newcomers to a group or society. Yet, there are other approaches, and it is typically easier to change our beliefs and perceptions than our actual behavior. Earlier, I introduced the notion of Lawyer Logic; people reason like lawyers, not scientists, when examining their own actions, thoughts, and feelings. One way to refrain from the painful experience of crossing a Bright Line is to reason for ourselves

why we did not, in fact, cross that line. Additionally, since much of what we do is preconscious, outside of our awareness, the pain of crossing a line may only be clear after the fact. This becomes most problematic when a short-term transgression cannot be easily explained away, perhaps necessitating long-term changes in self-identification.

Since we typically want to refrain from reevaluating our entire self-concept, we are not objective when we do try to understand our own actions. This is where the incredibly flexible human psychological system comes into play. If we cannot keep our behavior from crossing Bright Lines, sometimes through lack of willpower and sometimes through the way situations bypass our conscious deliberation, perhaps we can convince others (and ourselves) that we did not actually cross that line. Or, alternatively, perhaps we can redraw a Bright Line in a slightly different place, meaning that an action (or desire), on second thought, turns out not to actually hit that third rail. I may find sloth, for example, to be one of the worst possible sins. I may loudly rail against lazy couch potatoes or students who wait until the last minute to do their work. Yet, if I were (hypothetically) to go home after a day of work and lounge in front of the television, engaging in the same behavior I condemned in others, I might charitably interpret this as something other than slothfulness, perhaps an earned indulgence.

We see moral issues through our own reference point, in line with the Interstate Theory of Moral Judgment, presented earlier. Just like driving. Experienced drivers have a speed that feels right to them in relation to the legal limit, taking into account safety, legal concerns, and possible consequences. Some consistently follow speed limits, others go exactly nine miles/hour over, while others want to pass the fastest car they can find. There are legal judgments to be made about these various behaviors, but the morality of any of these decisions depends on our own sense of what the right speed is to drive. If we like to go fifteen miles/hour over the limit, well, people driving within the speed limit are dangerous, annoying, and committing a moral violation of interfering with our right to drive faster. If we are sticklers for speed limits, then those speeding by are reckless and dangerous. Our judgments of the moral correctness of others' driving stem from our own reference point.<sup>4</sup>

Moral judgment and justification operate similarly. Our unconscious sense of "rightness," just like on the highway, is the reference point for judging others' behaviors. This sense may come from conscious deliberation, legal or religious indoctrination, or peer pressure, but it forms the perspective that we use to look out and evaluate the world. On a day we are behind schedule, we may exceed our comfortable speed but excuse ourselves by justifying the violation based on our lateness. Rarely do we extend that possibility to those reckless people who speed by us; we commit

the fundamental attribution error (Chapter 4) by assuming they are just bad drivers, or even bad people.<sup>5</sup> We make the opposite mistake when looking at ourselves; because we know the context and what we intended, we weigh our introspective thoughts and feelings more than we weigh our behavior when evaluating what we are like.<sup>6</sup> Our perspective frames our moral judgments, and part of that perspective involves attending to mitigating factors that might blur Bright Lines. This perspective is influenced by the situation we find ourselves in and the groups we feel associated with, both of which can shift over time and space. The implicit bias that we are the “normal” reference point for judging our actions is common in social psychology, but curiously does not get applied often to discussions of moral judgment, where the presupposition seems to be that we judge from neutral, unbiased standards.

### BEHAVIOR AND SELF-UNDERSTANDING

One of the central contentions about conscience is that much of what our minds do occurs outside of awareness. We exert less control over our behavior than we typically believe; much of what we think we control actually starts long before we are conscious of it. There is a wealth of evidence that our belief that we are deliberately controlling our actions is largely an illusion.<sup>7</sup> Our minds make many decisions and initiate many behaviors long before we are conscious that these processes are underway. Since we do not like to believe that we are not in control of ourselves,<sup>8</sup> we utilize what Timothy Wilson refers to as a “confabulator” to supply reasons that support the illusion that we are, in fact, controlling our actions.<sup>9</sup> Because we are strongly motivated to believe we are in control of our actions, this confabulator gets quite adept at coming up with plausible, if unsupported, reasons for our actions.

Daniel Wegner discusses a famous example from split-brain research, in which people have their two brain hemispheres separated (typically as a treatment for severe seizures).<sup>10</sup> In these cases, the typical communication within the brain between the spatial and verbal hemispheres is taken away, though each hemisphere can process incoming information normally. Visual material or written messages are processed independently, which leads to this fascinating example in which a male patient was visually shown the command “walk.” The right-brain took over, reading the command, and he stood up and started walking. When asked what he was doing, this patient’s verbal, left-brain improvised a response; he told the questioners that he was going inside to get a coke.<sup>11</sup> This was not his original instruction, since the left-brain had no access to the initial command, but his confabulator had no trouble in coming up with a plausible explanation for



his action. And while it was plausible to others, more importantly it was plausible to himself.

This ability to easily and convincingly confabulate has vital implications for understanding conscience. Even with much behavior occurring outside of our consciousness, we are able to quickly and effortlessly supply plausible reasons—to ourselves and to others—that seem to explain our choices. “Why did I do that?” is often followed by a good-enough reason, maintaining the fragile illusion that we are in control of most of our actions. This sense of control is quite important, since for an action to be judged by a moral standard we have to believe it was intentional.<sup>12</sup> Our legal system allows people to reduce their culpability by claiming circumstances beyond their control, such as temporary insanity, suggesting how important perceived volition really is.

Much of what we praise or criticize in others, and ourselves, is less directed by our intentional, second-order consciousness than we colloquially believe. As we saw in the last two chapters, situations have a powerful impact on our behaviors, regardless of what we think we would do before we are actually in them. Situational pressures potentially shape behavior in ways that lead us, after the fact, to be forced to incorporate unexpected actions that do not measure up to our Bright Lights. This may be a common occurrence, such as staying silent when a crowd is picking on a classmate, not stopping to help a person in distress, or being excessively rude to a door-to-door salesperson. We may see ourselves as kind, generous, and a champion of the rights of the less fortunate, but many of us fail to live up to these standards in concrete situations. Still, these deviations from Bright Lights rarely damage a person’s global self-view, and this is the interesting social-psychological issue. Philosophers can debate over how we *should* assign praise or blame. Social scientists are focused on what we actually do and how we often end up justifying actions that did not live up to our original standards.

For example, people see themselves as moral even when doing things that only make them appear more moral to others. In a series of studies,<sup>13</sup> Daniel Batson and colleagues presented subjects with a choice of doing a positive, rewarding task while assigning a boring one to their unseen partner, or the reverse. Choosing to do the rewarding task can be seen as a self-oriented choice, while willingly giving up that task to another and being stuck with a boring task is rather altruistic. This is not the most important moral decision these people will ever make, but it does tap into the moral dimension. Most people in these circumstances chose to take the personally rewarding task.

In a later study, the experimenters gave subjects the opportunity to privately flip a coin to make this choice. This seems like the fairest

approach, strictly speaking, leaving one's possible fortune up to chance so as not to take advantage of a randomly assigned rewarding task. Only half of the subjects chose to flip the coin; the other half still chose the self-oriented option. But here is the fun part: for the half who went in private and flipped the coins, 80 percent came out and said they had "randomly" received the positive tasks. If the coin operated normally, that number should be closer to 50 percent. What it seems, according to Batson, is that people want to appear moral—publicly, at least, they could say that they left it up to chance—but in the end, many people ensured they looked moral but still got the positive benefits. Even people who scored high on a moral responsibility scale did not seem more likely to be moral or even to truly flip the coin. They were more likely to choose the coin-flipping option, but chose the self-oriented result at the same rate as people who did not report being as concerned with moral responsibility.

Batson refers to this process as moral hypocrisy. As he puts it, using the coin allowed some subjects "to appear moral—or at least not immoral—without incurring the cost of being moral."<sup>14</sup> This finding has much to say about moral behavior in general, but it also highlights this strange contradiction for people who report moral responsibility as being more important. They claimed that prosocial, moral principles guided their behavior but ended up acting as hypocritically, if not more, than people who did not consider these principles to be as central. This suggests that people who chose to use the coin to "decide" partially fooled themselves into thinking that was, itself, a moral choice. When Batson and colleagues watched this behavior, many subjects did, in fact, flip the coin. The issue was not just pretending to do so. What happened often was that subjects flipped the coin until they got the result they wanted. Then they were happy to report to others that they had, in fact, done the moral thing. And perhaps they even believed it.

For our purposes, it is more important to focus on how strongly we believe that we are making decisions and how we absolve ourselves from moral blame by appealing to first-order processes beyond our control. We often claim our positive actions as representing our "true" selves and dismiss negative actions as due to forces outside of ourselves or beyond our second-order control. We rewrite our histories using Lawyer Logic that presents ourselves in the best light, to others and to ourselves. From the outside, these processes may smack of hypocrisy. But if they are the typical way humans operate, at least in the West, these processes should be central to our understanding of conscience. Some level of self-blindness or hypocrisy seems to be a routine part of the human condition, contributing to mental health and a minimally moral self-view.

### BIASED SELF-JUSTIFICATION

Social psychologists have long focused on the ways people offer biased justifications for their own acts, though they rarely highlight the moral dimension of this ubiquitous process. Again, morality does not just refer to unambiguously prosocial acts such as saving strangers' lives. Social psychologists largely understand how pressures during emergencies keep people from helping others, especially when matters are ambiguous. We know less about the mundane moral choices we make, or major choices leading to life-turning points that allow us to build a self-image as basically a good person. Deciding that we are morally worthy does not just occur if we help rescue a baby from a burning building, though that is certainly a selfless and noble act. Deciding whether to work late or spend time with our children, spend time on a hobby or with our spouse, volunteer, give blood, read for our own improvement, or respect parents' religious traditions—all of these activities—have a moral tinge insofar as people judge others based on how they choose to spend their time. In a society that values industriousness, sitting on a couch for hours may be seen as an immoral act.

The implication of these choices is that people who do something different might not be seen as good or as better. If I know that my neighbors are spending their Sundays volunteering while I am watching football, I might evaluate what they are doing as more moral. Yet, there are a variety of ways in which I can look at my own life and feel I have moral worth. I might downplay the importance of charity ("they aren't really doing much, anyway") or denigrate their motives ("they just want to look good"). I might overvalue other domains in the world ("at least I teach; teaching is noble") or value spending time with my family. As we have seen, culture and social structure influence individual worldviews that help us rationalize our choices and preferences.

I also want to highlight an underlying motivation that social science has not adequately dealt with. This is the central notion of personhood, that "I am morally worthy." People may not think of themselves as moral exemplars, the way they think of iconic religious figures, but the typical form of self-belief is that "I am a morally good-enough" person. Recall that people may not buy into conventional notions of morality; what society defines as good or just may not be so accepted by all of its subgroups, and in a culture as diverse as American culture we find many instances in which what is considered right violates wider understandings. These can range from activities of gangs to those of immigrant communities who retain cultural standards from their countries of origin. And, one upshot of a diverse society is that people can find subcultures—in person or on the Internet—that help legitimize almost any lifestyle choice.<sup>15</sup>

Self-justification, a well-researched bias, has a lesser-discussed moral dimension. Our societies, social groups, relationships, and the resulting identities frame the positive and negative ways we define good and bad, what is valued and abhorred in ways that help maintain a veneer of self-belief that we are good enough. Perhaps we are not moral if judged by the wider society's standards, but we can legitimize our behaviors, thoughts, and feelings by other standards drawn from meaningful subgroups or alternative worldviews. The punch line is the same: I am morally worthwhile.

Typically, social psychologists talk about self-esteem as the measure of how well a person thinks and feels about herself. My favorite definition was developed by William James,<sup>16</sup> who described self-esteem as

$$\text{Self-Esteem} = \text{Success/Pretensions}$$

James held that success (our actual accomplishments) and pretensions (our aspirations) are defined by the self, but today we would also highlight the role of social structure, culture, and other people in helping define them. Self-esteem is a feeling of self-evaluation, a sense of approval, and "indicates the extent to which the individual believes himself to be capable, significant, successful, and worthy."<sup>17</sup> Self-esteem is conceptualized in three ways. First, it is believed to motivate action, since self-esteem is an intrinsically positive feeling.<sup>18</sup> Second, it is seen as a buffer that protects a person's sense of self from external stressors;<sup>19</sup> the more self-esteem we have, the easier it is for us to handle setbacks in life. Finally, it is seen as a measure of overall psychological well-being.<sup>20</sup> A better term might be "self-acceptance,"<sup>21</sup> since people with high self-esteem often do not think they are better than others, but rather are more accepting of their own strengths and weaknesses.

If being conventionally moral is important to a person, then satisfying that expectation will increase self-esteem.<sup>22</sup> We should keep in mind that scholars dispute the conventional notion that self-esteem is an unmitigated good; sometimes, overly high self-esteem can cause problems.<sup>23</sup> People with unreasonably high self-esteem are quicker to react violently when those views feel threatened.<sup>24</sup> We do not know if such people actually see violence as a justifiable reaction while still drawing conventional Bright Lines cordoning off violent behavior,<sup>25</sup> or if their inhibitions are less stable and more easily overridden by situational pressures. Insults to these irrationally self-satisfied people are felt at an automatic level without a second-order, considered response. Even if they consciously abhor violence, this Bright Light might be overshadowed in concrete situations. Some people hold firmer to their Bright Lights than others, though who, when, and why remain open research questions.

Self-esteem represents a measurable aspect of what Daniel Gilbert refers to as the psychological immune system. Just as we have physical antibodies that try to protect our bodies from external attack that can weaken the organism, we also have psychological processes that try to protect us against unhappiness and low self-esteem. I am suggesting that moral standards are the primary self-views that need to be protected from attack, both from the others' opinion and self-criticism. An inability to construct a psychological defense for viewing ourselves as moral, according to the Bright Lines and Bright Lights that we and our referent groups find important, leads to feelings of shame, guilt, sadness, and lower self-esteem.

Most of us generate "positive illusions," beliefs that we have more control over the world than we do, that our futures will be better than statistics suggest, and our self-views are unrealistically positive.<sup>26</sup> It turns out that it is psychologically healthy to have slightly unrealistically optimistic beliefs about ourselves and our futures. Such people are happier and report better mental health. But these biases seep into our self-judgments for actions that fall into a moral domain, especially when, as we have seen, situations lead us to act in ways that do not always fit with our Bright Lights. If we fail to do so, and cross a Bright Line, we might objectively see ourselves as morally unworthy people. However, this seems not to be the most common occurrence.

There are at least two psychological mechanisms that motivate a bias to continue to see oneself as minimally moral, even if one has crossed one of their Bright Lines. The first is self-verification.<sup>27</sup> People largely desire to confirm the views that they have of themselves, in addition to their general worldviews.<sup>28</sup> We are motivated to receive feedback that confirms our self-images. If we think we are funny, we look for that sort of response. We seek romantic partners who confirm our self-images,<sup>29</sup> and even end up adapting our behaviors to be even more strongly in line with that initial partner feedback. Over time, if our peers or partners see us as the life of the party and we see ourselves this way, we will end up exaggerating those sets of behaviors until they become even more of a part of how we see ourselves and seek feedback to verify that view. Self-verification, then, is an important process behind the bias to view ourselves as moral, given an initial inclination in that direction.

The second mechanism stems from a long-standing notion of dissonance,<sup>30</sup> a psychological mechanism that gets activated when a person's actions do not fit with important, highly valued beliefs. In their classic study,<sup>31</sup> Leon Festinger and James Carlsmith created a situation in which people were asked to tell a lie to another person, for either a large or a small reward. They were asked to lie by saying that the job they had done in the laboratory was exciting, when in fact it was quite a dull way to spend one's

time (turning pegs on a board). People who told the lie and received the large reward remembered the truth, that they had been bored but told a lie. It was easy to justify this, since telling a white lie for a large amount of money does not really cross any vital Bright Lines. But the notable finding occurred for those people who lied but received a miniscule reward. These people remembered the initial task as more interesting than it was. They crossed a Bright Line (“do not lie”) but for a minor, barely justifiable reason. They could not rationalize the behavior as being worth the reward, so they protected their sense of being moral by misremembering the event, thus diminishing the extent to which they lied. “Perhaps,” their preconscious minds seemed to be saying, “it was not such a lie after all.”

Thus, the motivation to maintain a good-enough sense of being a moral person motivates a host of unconscious processes in efforts to maintain that image. We find people who support and verify our self-image, and we sometimes shift our memories in line with how we would like to see ourselves rather than remember things as they exactly occurred. This does not mean we are lying to ourselves. Rather, we use Lawyer Logic to make a plausible-enough case to support a foregone conclusion—that we are decently moral beings. This may not be an objective case, but it is one that is passable for somebody heavily invested in the outcome.

... when one wants to draw a particular conclusion, one feels obligated to construct a justification for that conclusion that would be plausible to a dispassionate observer. In doing so, one accesses only a biased subset of the relevant beliefs and rules.<sup>32</sup>

The primary conclusion people want to draw is being passably moral.

### MORAL SATISFICING AND REFRAMING

At the root of conscience is the overlooked motivation to remain passably moral by the standards of the important reference groups in our lives, including family, peers, coworkers, and religious authorities. Plausibly, not maximally, moral. There is a reason we exalt various moral exemplars such as Martin Luther King and Mother Theresa. These people serve as cultural Bright Lights, signposts of what a culturally defined moral person might be like. As a result, such individuals cease to be thought of as flesh-and-blood, with human foibles, and become essentialized as one-dimensional, idealized humans. Sociologists tracing back to Emile Durkheim have highlighted how important these symbols, cultural Bright Lights, are for societies; we might translate a study of conscience into a broader, collective conscience to suggest cultural Bright Lights that get personified and

become powerful symbols to be used by those who subscribe to those belief systems.

At the individual level, however, people are what we might call moral satisficers, looking to reach a *good-enough* level of morality.<sup>33</sup> Satisficing, as economists discuss the term, refers to a strategy whereby people try to develop an adequate, not an optimal, solution to a problem.<sup>34</sup> Satisficing turns out to be an effective strategy for dealing with consumer goods when many attractive choices are available. Rather than trying to obtain perfect information to make maximal choices, a more effective and successful strategy is to establish good-enough preferences (for soap, for jeans, for leisure) and then go with those.<sup>35</sup> It is not worth the time to pick an optimal selection, especially when we will receive more information later designed to have us question whether we really got the best soap, or pair of jeans, possible. If we shift our standard to satisficing our choices, we forego the disappointment that can emerge from trying—and failing—to reach the perfect decision.

I am suggesting that morality operates in the same fashion, that most people are oriented toward moral satisficing rather than moral maximizing. A core aspect of a person's self-esteem is the ability to present themselves to others, and view themselves, as plausibly moral. We feel pride if we exceed these expectations and commend others who go above and beyond whatever conventions exist in a group or society. But a primal motivational force for humans is to try to remain minimally moral according to the relevant standards. A view of people as moral satisficers goes part of the way toward answering calls for a convincing account of human motivation.<sup>36</sup>

Since we are heavily influenced by our faster, more emotional, first-order systems, those systems swing into action quickly enough to frame our slower, evaluative judgments. A desire to avoid first-order feelings of shame and guilt, moral violations, would be a central factor in framing our later judgments, motivating a Lawyer Logic-approach to justification. Jonathan Haidt refers to the “makes sense” notion that underlies this biased processing; we look for evidence that supports our biased conclusion and do not objectively search for more facts.<sup>37</sup> Since our perspective for forming these conclusions is our own point of view, we have well-established self-serving biases, such as thinking we are more selfless than others.<sup>38</sup>

This bias toward moral satisficing is a prime motivator for what Albert Bandura refers to as moral justification,<sup>39</sup> a set of cognitive mechanisms that shifts perception of one's actions to minimize or ignore the possible negative consequences of an act. We have to develop some plausible justification for acts that we ordinarily might consider immoral,<sup>40</sup> otherwise we fail to live up to the central notion of being morally good enough. In general, we judge our conduct based on culturally framed rules and

standards,<sup>41</sup> Bright Lights and Bright Lines. These constructs capture more emotional and preconscious elements than Bandura's approach, but his theorizing on moral disengagement and moral thinking is indispensable in understanding how these concepts operate in practice. Our mind operates with what has been called a "totalitarian ego" that rewrites our personal histories like a dictator rewrites a nation's history.<sup>42</sup> Our mind destroys information that it does not want to hear and interprets the past through a self-justifying lens.

Consider correctional officers whose jobs entail executing prisoners on death row.<sup>43</sup> People whose jobs involve killing others have to reinterpret this crossing of a culturally important Bright Line that says we should not kill others. They do so through using euphemistic language, through justifying their actions, and by comparing their actions to those of the persons they are to execute. Thus, a biased weighing of the evidence (Lawyer Logic) supports the morally satisfying baseline: I am morally worthwhile.

Bandura and his colleagues are concerned with more significant moral violations, in which moral disengagement is highlighted. But we can extend this notion to include any actions that cross Bright Lines or take us away from Bright Lights. This extends dissonance into the moral realm. Feelings of moral dissonance would be profoundly disconcerting to our notion of being worthwhile beings. The potential for these negative feelings is a key way that conscience steers potential actions, but to the extent that we cross Bright Lines, through situational pressures or unconsciously steered actions, it is often necessary to edit, rewrite, or somehow ignore the violation. These cognitive distortions are quite common for everyday issues, but are even weightier with respect to the moral domain. People who have committed moral violations, ranging from criminal acts to contributing to inexplicable historical events (e.g., the holocaust) self-exonerate through a biased, almost effortless, sorting of facts in order to build a morally satisfying case.<sup>44</sup> People committing what are typically considered evil acts often develop moral justifications for them or argue that the end is moral enough to justify the means.<sup>45</sup>

Does this mean we are deceiving ourselves? One noted scholar suggests self-deception can be either intentional or due to cognitive failures,<sup>46</sup> but it is beyond the scope of this analysis to decide one or the other. I wish to highlight the fact that, for lesser violations, self-deception can be reinterpreted as just a normal, satisfying cognitive process. This is something people do much of the time for both greater and lesser Bright Line violations. At the extreme, an inability to develop a plausible justification can lead to a reordering of one's self-vision as a worse person. Think of stories of people in shame-based cultures who commit suicide when a moral transgression is uncovered.



**IDENTITIES FRAME MULTIPLE SETS OF BRIGHT LINES**

At this point, we can start tying together some of the many threads introduced throughout this book. The study of conscience needs to move beyond the classic notion that people have a single, unitary moral system that applies in all cases and circumstances. It is clear that we are quite flexible with our moral reasoning and evaluation when it comes to our own actions or to the actions of people like us. Additionally, what might be immoral at home (hoarding information that can help the group) might be considered vital at work. We certainly expect stronger obligations from family members than from strangers and from people we share characteristics with than from those we do not. Consider news about plane crashes. If they occur in a foreign country, typically the news reports total fatalities as well as those from the country the news is being broadcast in, even though there is no moral difference between two tragic sets of numbers. Something about being in an in-group makes that latter number feel important.

Identities frame morality, though much of the psychological research on moral reasoning, intuition, and action takes place abstracted from real people in real situations juggling real and important social identities. Psychological research on morality provides many of the most important threads for a social-psychological understanding of conscience, but as we weave them together, we should also focus on how these individual moral phenomena are intertwined with wider social identities of both the structural and in-group and out-group kind. Identities are sets of meanings influencing how an individual perceives and reacts to the social world in concrete situations. Those meanings do not originate within a single person, but are rather learned and internalized as an individual becomes a competent member of particular groups and the wider society.

Societies are organized around many things, but key among them are the worldviews and ideologies that frame particular sets of informational assumptions. These assumptions become internalized by members of the relevant groups, such that Los Angeles Lakers fans see the world through one lens, Protestants through another, and Asian-Americans through yet another. An Asian-American, Protestant, Lakers fan overlaps greatly with a black, Protestant, Lakers fan, but they will have also developed orientations and expectations—at the unconscious level—that diverge. The content of these informational assumptions is not uniform, and the study of what it means to be in any of these categories is the backbone of cultural and social-psychological studies of these groups. But to the extent there is a meaningful identity associated with a group, we can isolate some of the shared meanings and assumptions members hold.

I had a friend in graduate school from Ghana, and her observation about coming to the United States was that she never realized she was black until she came to this country. In Ghana, she said, stratification occurred along class lines; skin color did not matter. The meanings associated with an identity are culturally shaped, channeled, and transmitted. Over time, being treated as black in America created an identity that she did not grow up with, but being seen as a member of this group began to shape how she saw herself. However, the meanings associated with an American notion of being black were formed much later in my friend's life than her original notions, so the identity was not identical to somebody raised here.

Perspective is especially important with respect to the application of moral labels; people who see themselves as victims fundamentally perceive the world differently than victimizers.<sup>47</sup> While both parties distort their stories in biased ways (Lawyer Logic), victims are more likely to perceive the act having caused harm and absolve themselves of responsibility. Victims' stories incorporate a longer time frame than those of perpetrators and discuss circumstances from long ago as relevant. Perpetrators omit these historical factors, tell shorter stories, and end them on a positive note suggesting they believed that even if there was a Bright Line violation, it ultimately was mediated by happy outcomes. How we morally appraise an action, such as getting angry at a friend or starting a war with another country, is largely shaped by our perspective.

Identities fundamentally orient people acting in social situations. We develop first-order, largely unconscious, implicit theories about who we are and how others should treat us based on those identities that we find most important.<sup>48</sup> Depending on what informational assumptions become internalized, we develop different implicit theories. Variation in informational assumptions and implicit theories is an important source of variation in moral judgments.<sup>49</sup> In concrete situations, these stored representations interact with current sensory information to frame and motivate our actions.<sup>50</sup> Feedback is perceived through the lenses of our existing identity-based beliefs, and we respond accordingly. Sometimes we choose a response; other times our actions begin outside of conscious awareness. The situation shapes the person's behavior, based largely on the results that prior situations have had on shaping a person's cognitive and emotional apparatuses. We demonstrate what can be termed a "biased assimilation of the evidence."<sup>51</sup> These biases operate in service of valued identities unless the evidence before us so strongly crosses important Bright Lines that we can no longer convince ourselves to apply self-absolving Lawyer Logic.

Socialization involves the two-stage internalization from second-order, conscious identification to first-order, automatic responses for our most

salient identities. For some people, cheering for the Chicago Cubs is merely a hobby; for others, it is a central part of self-definition. For the latter folks, first-order automatic reactions will be quicker and more motivational about issues concerning the Cubs than for those who find baseball less important. The same goes for religion, ethnicity, school allegiance, and so on. The more important an identity becomes among the set of identities that a person holds, the more likely violations of those sets of meanings are to trip emotional “third rails.”

But the Bright Lines that are associated with one identity might shift for others, even within the same person. Thus, conscience is flexible, dependent on social context, and typically biased to the most charitable self-interpretations possible of our actions. For example, our standards of justice shift based on the situations we are in,<sup>52</sup> meaning we do not simply apply a single notion of justice in all situations. Simply priming a person to think about ethics, in general, leads them to be more likely to report being unfairly overpaid.<sup>53</sup> Our moral beliefs, the fundamental way we align ourselves with and against others (moral provinces), are far from unitary or consistent. We have multiple anchors for making sense of the relationship between situational feedback and our own behavior, which attempt to verify valued identities. An odd quirk of Bright Lights, however, is how the array of possible values, Bright Lights discussed in Chapter 2, offers a great deal of leeway in applying Lawyer Logic in the service of these identities.

### **VALUES AS UNIVERSALLY RECOGNIZED BRIGHT LINES OF SELF-EXONERATION**

Values, introduced in Chapter 2, become an important thread to weave into this model of conscience. Values are the most distant Bright Lights, abstract goals that people find motivational. The universally recognized set of values consists of a series of desirable goals for most people in literate societies around the world.<sup>54</sup> People value security and they value pleasure, and even though they are opposite values when in conflict, people around the world find both important. People value all of these values, even if they might conflict in practice. At some level, people need to make trade-offs between looking out for others and focusing on themselves, or between trying new things and going along with what already works. But few people report a negative response to the list of cross-cultural values presented in Chapter 2.

The fact that people value the entire array, if only to a minimal extent, becomes important for understanding the Lawyer Logic that gets brought into play for specific moral concerns. Values provide people with a series

of culturally acceptable principles to guide whatever Lawyer Logic outcome one wishes to achieve.<sup>55</sup> People can defend their actions appealing to a value of achievement, stimulation, benevolence, or tradition. This range of values is seen as positive, and whichever one might best be used to build the plausible-enough case following the requisite Lawyer Logic is sitting out there to be employed. Values offer a way to defend almost any action. Values support what Gerd Gigerenzer refers to as “one-reason decision making,”<sup>56</sup> the ways our minds make intuitive judgments based on heuristic shortcuts, not as a result of careful deliberation and analysis of both sides of an argument.

Political arguments are a great arena to see values used for advantage. In America, the same values (freedom, choice) are appealed to for both sides of the abortion debate. On one side, supporters appeal to the freedom of a woman to choose her reproductive outcomes; on the other, supporters talk about the freedom denied to a fetus incapable of protecting itself. Or, the argument is pitched about who gets to choose, a woman or her unborn child. The issue is that both parties have culturally credible claims to universal values. But the adherents of each position have not used Scientist Logic, on the whole, to adjudicate the competing moral concerns. Rather, one side (“choice”) or the other (“protecting the unborn”) intuitively appeals to each adherent based on their own informational assumptions, cultural groups, and socialized worldviews. As they align on one side or the other, certain Bright Lights become more salient and motivational for motivating behaviors ranging from giving money to voting to demonstrating. The issue is not who is right in this debate; that is an issue for a different sort of book. The issue is that the same principles, taken to their most abstract point, can motivate each side of the debate with both sides looking to justify their particular outlook.<sup>57</sup>

This suggests how a flexible, self-justifying conscience can draw on a cross-culturally recognized series of values to undergird Lawyer Logic reasoning that ends up supporting a first-order, unconscious moral conclusion. In a particular situation, certain social identities will be salient and more likely to guide the Bright Lights and Bright Lines that motivate moral intuition, judgement, and eventually behavior. Situations lead to all sorts of behaviors, many of which fit with our identity expectations and occasionally some due to the various social pressures discussed in Chapter 5. We often act without deliberating about each action, guided by senses of what fits with a situation’s expectations and pressures. After the fact, however, we may be confronted with behaviors that do not fit the image we have of ourselves.

If these behaviors cross some of our most deeply held Bright Lines, we run the risk of judging ourselves as morally unworthy, leading to painful

feelings of guilt, shame, and lower self-esteem. If we were unable to restrain our actions ahead of time to avoid these negative consequences, we tend to reinterpret our actions through the most favourable possible lens. Any behavior, ranging from the most selfish to the most altruistic, can be translated into an appealing value, since virtually all people understand the importance of culturally acceptable achievement as well as culturally acceptable concern for others. So a mother who spends too much time at the office can view her actions through the lens of achieving success (“providing”) that may help her children at home, and an individual who spends more time helping others than dealing with her own family, like many iconic moral exemplars, can appeal to a wider value of benevolence or concern with universal welfare. Cultural values provide our adaptable minds with a menu of palatable rationales for behaviors that operate within societal Bright Lines.

### CONCLUSION AND TRANSITION

People exhibit biases when processing information about people, situations, and events, and they are typically self-serving. The moral component of these aspects is often overlooked, but it is the central self-aspect that people employ biases to protect. The social psychology of conscience places primacy on this motivation, holding that people view themselves as at least minimally, acceptably moral. People try to morally satisfice, provide a *good enough* rationale to explain why their behaviors fall within a society’s accepted bounds of moral action. They are biased toward applying Lawyer Logic to explain actions that cross their own Bright Lines or deviate from paths toward important Bright Lights.

Identities are vital aspects in this process, linking situations to moral codes and circumscribing how widely people extend their in-group notion of the proper recipients of their moral obligations. People’s most important, strongly held identities operate at a first-order, preconscious level to frame perceptions and initial reactions. A member of a valued in-group who crosses a Bright Line will be absolved more quickly than an out-group member crossing that same Bright Line. Many people who were upset when a Democratic president misled the American people were silent when a Republican president misled them a few years later, marshalling a series of Lawyer Logic arguments in defense of what was, at its most abstract level, a similar Bright Line violation. Identities provide the punch line that Lawyer Logic becomes aimed at supporting—that I (and my in-group) am morally satisfactory. Values provide the capacity for developing plausible Lawyer Logic justifications for most actions, as the entire range of cross-culturally recognized human values are appealing to

the vast majority of people. If forced to choose, people place a greater priority on certain values. But, presented as part of an attempt to justify an action, ideal, or intention, any value can tap into first-order, prelinguistic feelings of its worth.

At this point, most of the threads needed for understanding conscience as a vital but flexible aspect of the self are in place. The self is our representation of the particular identities, values, and intuitions that we identify as being most important. The notion of personal identity will come into play in Chapter 8, a way to systematically organize what is sometimes considered too idiosyncratic a part of the person to submit to social-psychological analysis. Our particular constellation of social, role, and personal identities develop over time through an ongoing life course, embedded in social actors that appraise their pasts and orient their futures along moral principles. Our most important identities and values shape first-order, preconscious intuitions that guide much of our behavior, as well as how we judge ourselves and others. Conceptualizing conscience means incorporating these concepts into social-psychological understanding of the self.

## CHAPTER 8

# CONSCIENCE AND MORAL HORIZONS

In American families, the primary loyalty is to self—its values, autonomy, pleasure, virtue, and actualization. Most parents accept this criterion for maturity and try to arrange experiences that will make it easier for their children to attain this ideal. Some societies tip the other way.

Jerome Kagan<sup>1</sup>

In her book *Crafting Selves*, the anthropologist Dorinne Kondo describes staying with a local family during her stint as a researcher in Japan. She was planning on visiting relatives on the other side of Tokyo one warm day and started to leave the house wearing a long-sleeved blouse. The woman she was staying with suggested, in no uncertain terms, that wearing long sleeves on a warm day might be uncomfortable. Kondo, an American, responded that the sleeves were breathable and she would be kept quite cool. The Japanese woman was nonplussed.

She immediately retorted that what I was feeling was quite beside the point. I should change to a short-sleeved blouse in some cool pastel, for then “when someone sees you, they’ll look at you and think, ‘Oh, how cool she looks!’ and they will feel cooler themselves.” Chastened, I went back upstairs and found an ice blue short-sleeved blouse, which seemed to pass muster. But I was astounded that I was supposed to dress, not for personal comfort, but for the sake of the comfort of *others* ...<sup>2</sup>

The primary rationale for figuring out what to wear was not personal comfort, not what she desired. In Japan, Kondo reports, “I was always defined by my obligations and links to others.”<sup>3</sup> This is, for most Westerners, an alien way of thinking. Our culture is quite powerful in its constant exhortations to be unique—go your own way, blaze trails, and otherwise

develop your own identity. This message often comes across through advertisements that want us to feel unique even as we buy the same products as millions of other consumers. But the feeling of being one-of-a-kind by buying a particular soft drink, station wagon, or light beer motivates billion-dollar industries. Something in Western culture, especially in America, acknowledges the pull of individual desires as more significant than that of social obligations.<sup>4</sup>

Understanding the social actor in terms of conscience's dual-processing systems helps us organize our understanding of these various pulls. Many of our most powerful first-order desires are rooted in quite selfish desires for pleasure; in this, Freud had some useful insight. Not all of our first-order desires are selfish, however. Many people experience powerful Bright Line reactions to behaviors that are careless toward others; they will feel negative moral emotions if they do *not* help when they have the opportunity. But many first-order pulls toward pleasure overlap a great deal with survival necessities—food, procreation, and hedonistic things that put the good of the organism largely upfront. Over time, some of these feelings overlapped with activities good for the species, suggesting how evolution works in clever ways to make what is good for the group also pleasurable for the individual (like food and procreation). I return to this point in Chapter 10.

Second-order desires, however, are anchored in our social lives. While we may want to do something immediately pleasurable at the cost of what is good for the wider group, such as stealing dessert, skipping our tax payments, or sleeping all day and playing hooky from work, we demonstrate the self-control to overcome these desires (some people more than others, and some days the same person has more self-control than other days). What Kondo's research suggests is that the *balance* between internal feelings and external concerns can vary by culture and subgroup. To this, I would suggest the balance can also vary by situation. Ralph Turner has argued that the very balance of concern with "impulses" versus "institutions" (societal roles) is shifting over time toward more of a concern with the individual.<sup>5</sup> The idea is not that there is a natural human propensity to be selfish or to ignore inner desires in the service of external, social constraints. Rather, societies differ on the weight they give to either side of the internal and external signals. Some societies value tradition; others pay more attention to self-oriented feelings such as hedonism or personal achievement.<sup>6</sup> Thus, our sense of self is fundamentally shaped by the cultures and groups we live in, with some cultures placing greater weight on second-order desires and others privileging first-order desires as more important.

In Chapter 2 I introduced classic terms by George Herbert Mead and William James, the "I" and the "Me." These terms are shorthand for capturing two elements of the self: the spontaneous part ("I") and the evaluative,



after-the-fact aspect (“Me”). These two classic usages may not map perfectly onto the dual-processing model we are using here, but they are close enough to develop our understanding of the self’s moral dimension.<sup>7</sup> The “I” is shorthand for our vast, complicated, and sometimes conflicting array of unconscious first-order processes. Mead’s use of the concept suggested spontaneity,<sup>8</sup> a “prediscursive” ability to act and respond to social situations.<sup>9</sup> The “Me” is more stable, socially shaped and backward-looking, making sense of the “I’s” actions. Mead focused on reflexivity, how both aspects respond to each other.<sup>10</sup> Reflexivity is at the root of sociological thinking about the self<sup>11</sup> and focuses both on how people’s actions are spontaneous (“I”) and judged afterward according to personal (“Me”) and societal (the “generalized other”) standards. As Harry Frankfurt put it, to be a “person” is to have attitudes about yourself.<sup>12</sup> In conversation, we typically do not know *exactly* what we will say next. Sometimes, something slips out that, after it is public, leads us to be embarrassed we said it. “Where did that come from?” we might wonder. According to Mead, the in-the-moment “I” did a poor job of anticipating how we (“Me”) and others would evaluate what we said.

Our notion of conscience dovetails nicely with these abstract but influential terms. The particular balance between the importance given to first-order and second-order desires, between the “I” and the “Me,” varies across societies and cultures. The general process, however, whereby an individual juggles the various standards, intuitions, and goals in their lives, falls under the rubric of conscience. These evaluative aspects, both the instant reactions (first-order/“I”) and the more considered judgments (second-order/“Me”), are strongest and most self-defining in the moral realm.

This is not to say that any cultures are more moral than another; to make such a claim, we would have to establish what our standard for morality is, and I am suggesting those standards are culturally based.<sup>13</sup> For the social scientist, there is no a priori reason to favor first-order or second-order intuitions as truly moral, especially when each level can contribute to prosocial or antisocial behavior. At this point, I am simply laying out the architecture for the ways societal and individual factors combine to create and sustain conscience, not making global claims about what should be or is more worthwhile.

### PERSONAL IDENTITY: A MORAL CORE OF THE SELF

I have asserted throughout this book that morality is at the root of the human organism and the sense of self that we construct. I am not alone in making this claim.

As moral animals, humans are inescapably interested in and guided by normative cultural orders that specify what is good, right, true, beautiful, worthy, noble, and just in life, and what is not. To be a human person, to possess an identity, to act with agency requires locating one's life within a larger moral order by which to know who one is and how one ought to live.<sup>14</sup>

A social psychology of conscience adds specificity to claims like these, anchored in models of how human psychology works. It draws on sociological insights about the inextricably social nature of the person, including the social development of language that shapes everything we think, believe, and desire. There is no self without reflexivity, no reflexivity without language, no language without society, and no society without other people. Human beings might be able to survive in a world where language and symbolic communication did not develop, but they would not be meaningfully human in the fullest sense of the term.

Earlier chapters have laid out the building blocks for understanding the fundamentally social nature of the person and described how moral intuitions, informational assumptions, emotions, and judgments operate before, within, and after situations. The next move is to tie these aspects into a theory of the self. A person, especially in the West, holds a number of roles and places in various social groups. In any particular situation, the concrete sets of expectations related to these roles and places determine perception, behavior, and judgment. If I am at work, my role expectations circumscribe what I do and how I interpret others' actions. If I am at a restaurant I have a different set of expectations. Group membership, such as gender and race, cross-cuts these situated roles in complicated ways, and part of being a professor or a judge involves gender expectations as well, especially if a person does not fit with the dominant stereotype of a person who holds that kind of position.<sup>15</sup>

But to conceptualize a whole person, we need a way to bridge all of these potential roles and social groups. We begin with focusing on those that are most important to us, the identities we are most committed to.<sup>16</sup> The pivot for bringing all of these various identities together is what I described in Chapter 2 as the personal identity.<sup>17</sup> Among all of our various sets of expectations is an idiosyncratic sense of being unique that merges with the particular experiences and relationships we have to allow us to develop an intuitive sense of "who I am," a sense of authenticity we can use to judge our behaviors and actions as either "like me" or "not like me." In contrast with social identities, personal identity comprises those aspects of the actor that are considered idiosyncratic to that individual's experiences, temperament, and development. There are many similarities between two people occupying the lawyer role, for example. They are different,

however, in their sense of personal identity—the history, experiences, orientations, and behavioral intentions that mark each like no other individual. Our personal identity is experienced as constitutive of who we are. In the moment, this takes the form of intuitions and preconscious feelings. After the fact, it takes the form of reflexive deliberation and evaluation of one's actions in line with one's ongoing life course (see Chapter 9). To change an aspect of one's history or core moral orientations is to fundamentally change a person.

Personal identity is intertwined with a sense of authenticity, a primary motivational aspect of the self.<sup>18</sup> Experiences of authenticity are intensively real and forceful for social actors, and while these experiences are felt as unique they are developed socially. We feel inauthentic if we fail to live up to the identity expectations that are most important to us, and feeling inauthentic involves powerfully disturbing moral emotions in Western society.<sup>19</sup> These emotions serve as windows into our identities,<sup>20</sup> sudden intuitions that strongly signal our evaluations of self, situation, and other people.<sup>21</sup> They signal the “I” in Western society, intuitions that clue us into our authentic sense of self.

The “I” that guides situated behavior is often discussed as a random, spontaneous influence. But it is not, in fact, random. This creative aspect of the self has what might be termed a “patterned spontaneity.” Discussions of the “I” often focus on the pure spontaneity, the fundamentally unknowable nature of human action, contrasted with the more stable “Me,” self-understandings built up through experience and reflected appraisals. The “I,” however, does not create itself anew in each situation. Rather, over time a pattern develops for this creative, spontaneous aspect of self. The “I,” a personal anchor used to discriminate among actions that may or may not reflect our “true self,”<sup>22</sup> forms a relatively stable basis for developing an inner logic of the self. The “I” reflects cognitive-emotional predispositions about moral concerns and includes first-order response tendencies (“if/then” behavioral predispositions, discussed in Chapter 3).

Thus, when we have an internal reaction that fits with our expectations, we feel as if that match represents something authentic. This is easiest to see with trivial things such as flavors or smells. I like mint chocolate chip ice cream and have positive associations with the taste and the color of the package of my favorite brand. This immediate response to people and things having to do with my country, religion, and workplace are all part of a piece. I associate myself with the positive reactions I have toward these valued objects. If somebody criticizes my favorite ice cream, I may not have a strong reaction of anger since taste is typically a conventional, not moral, element. But insulting my family, religion, or occupation is to challenge a core level of who I am, since my identifications have become

wrapped up in these allegiances. And as they have become more central, they have become part of my patterned, instantaneous “I” reactions. In fact, much of what it means to identify with a group is to share attitudes and, ultimately, values. These are shared, intuitively important Bright Lights and Bright Lines that signal for us where we stand in the range of possible things to value or abhor, to like or dislike. These Bright Lights and Lines are, I am arguing, central windows into our sense of having an authentic self. Were I to value something different, to suddenly find something immoral that I previously believed moral, I would experience a fundamental shift in my sense of who I “really” am.

This ongoing, flexible-but-stable sense of self involves regularities in the schemas we use to make sense of the world.<sup>23</sup> These informational assumptions frame what we notice in the world around us, determine the meaning of these things, and trigger predictable intuitions that discern if something is viewed positively or not. Our personal identity reflects a prelinguistic sense of our cross-situational barometer, the instantaneous evaluator that lets us know when our Bright Lines have been crossed. The personal identity is related to, but not identical to, our assorted social identities. The more salient a role or group identity, such as our job, gender, or family relations, the more overlap between the expectations inherent in that identity and the expectations we have for ourselves at the level of personal identity.<sup>24</sup>

Identities are not just simply packets of information about specific situations; they are motivational<sup>25</sup> in at least two senses. First, they motivate us within situations to live up to the expected identity we are trying to claim. If I want to seem as if I am a real police officer or politician, I’m strongly motivated to act in line with others’ expectations for me in that role. Violations of their expectations will damage the image I am trying to carry off and may lead to embarrassment or shame. Anybody who thinks back to their first day at school or their first day at a job knows how much effort goes into appearing to know more than you actually do about those expectations.

But identities are motivational in a second sense, beyond the concrete situations we find ourselves in. Our selves are not just oriented toward what is going on, now, around us. Our sense of self is also oriented toward the future (see Chapter 2). We have a sense of where we are going in our lives and who we want to be, and this sense shapes our current feelings, reactions, and behaviors. People differ as to how well they follow their future ideals in the moment; some people are better at deferring gratification or making long-term plans.<sup>26</sup> But the *capacity* for aligning with ideals is part of being human—a meaning-making creature who can reflect on the past or plan for the future. We are not simply stuck reacting to stimuli in our immediate environment. We can react to potential or future stimuli or goals. Identities

often instantiate these goals (our Bright Lights). They can be talked about reflexively, using second-order processes, but as we become more committed to an identity, its expectations become our own first-order expectations.

### PERSONAL IDENTITY AND BRIGHT LIGHTS

This future-oriented aspect of the self is rarely discussed in the social science literature. Much of the empirical work is about how people enact selves within situations, with less attention paid to the fact that people's sense of self contains a sense of where they are going. The most popular treatment involves what has been called "possible selves,"<sup>27</sup> people's ideas about what they would like to become or are afraid of becoming. The same way Mead and other thinkers talk about how the past-self is really only interpretable through the present, so too does the future say something about where we are right now. The commitments we have made now make sense only in the context of some idea of the future, some notion that we plan to continue with these commitments or are geared toward other visions of ourselves.<sup>28</sup> Working at our job, today, is something we do within the ongoing understanding of having a life course, that today's actions are in some way related to the past and on a journey into a future however clear or vague it might be. Our futures are unknown and may not turn out as we plan, but we still possess goals and possibilities.

These future possibilities, I am arguing, have a moral dimension to them. We aim in the future to morally satisfy, to be minimally moral enough to maintain a positive (perhaps distorted) view of the self and find acceptance in our social communities. One way to think about these future selves comes from self-discrepancy theory, though its progenitor (E. Tory Higgins) does not highlight the future, *per se*. Higgins finds support for the idea that the self has three components: the actual self, the ideal self, and the ought self.<sup>29</sup> The actual self vaguely covers the sets of identities that I've discussed throughout this book—personal and social identities that an individual identifies with and finds personally meaningful. The ideal and ought selves, however, can be reinterpreted as dealing with future aspects of the self. One's ideals are personally meaningful goals and Bright Lights that frame who we want to be in a perfect world. They may never be fully attainable, and even if we momentarily achieve an ideal goal of honesty or integrity, the fact that life keeps moving means we have to keep trying to realize these goals. Bright Lights, recall, are rarely achieved. They are distant motivating goals.

Higgins's ought self, tantamount to Freud's superego or Mead's generalized other, is a sense of what society says we ought to be like or work toward. The moral rules that we are taught to follow become part of a future

sense of self in terms of their effects on what we should be working toward as opposed to what we would ideally like to be working toward. If I am thinking about a choice to be made—and this assumes that we have time and motivation to reason about our behaviors, something I hope to have demonstrated to be less true than we like to believe—one factor is what society (or important reference groups) thinks I ought to do. While these goals, ideals, and oughts may shift over time, rarely do they change suddenly. Thus, some continuity in future selves is present even if what we do in actual situations overshadows these goals. People do not change what they believe is good and bad from week to week,<sup>30</sup> except in rare cases, nor do they hapazardly shift their life-goals and ideals.

For some people, and this is an empirical question that to my knowledge has not been extensively explored, the ideal self and ought self are quite similar. Such people are quite well socialized into the expectations of a society or group, whereby their Bright Lights match onto the society's Bright Lights. This can mean somebody is well socialized, though the Marxist tradition discusses this as a state of "false consciousnesses" in which people with less power in society are misled to believe that society works in their interest.

Either way, we teach children to obey the law not only because society says we should, but because parents think children should also believe that obeying the law is the right thing to do. Lawrence Kohlberg's scheme, discussed earlier, would suggest that this is an improvement in moral reasoning, doing something because we believe it is morally right and not simply to avoid punishment. But the ideal and ought self way of thinking about things allows for more flexibility than the Kohlberg scheme in terms of having multiple versions of what one ought to do; what a college student's parents think they should do is often different than what their peers think they ought to do. This allows more input for a person's own ideals. The ideal of fitting in with one's peers, an important Bright Light for many people but especially adolescents, may override an ought from parents, teachers, or the police.

Richard Ryan and James Connell discuss a related distinction in terms of "introjected" versus "identified" motivations.<sup>31</sup> Introjected motivations are things we consider duties, mandates for action. These are contrasted with identified motivations that come from our values and visions of what we want to be, what I am calling Bright Lights. For some people, introjected and identified motivations overlap,<sup>32</sup> suggesting that Bright Lights can encompass oughts depending on the person and their relationship to their social communities. People who believe that their social groups or the wider social order is legitimate are more likely to feel harmony between what they should do and what they ideally would do. Adolescents,

counter-culture movements, and revolutionaries are all rebelling against the perceived unfairness of a social order and likely feel wide gulfs between their ideals and society's oughts.

The guiding aspect of building a model of conscience is that the interplay between ideals, oughts, and personal identity is often intuitive and nonreflective, with the preconscious, first-order mind sending signals to our reflective, second-order mind. Since what we do in the moment has ramifications for our future versions of ourselves, even if this is done automatically and without reflection, these visions preconsciously shape what we do. Underlying all of this, I argue, is the moral dimension.

### PERSONAL IDENTITY AND PERCEPTION

We have a variety of role and social identities that we use to define ourselves with and make sense of the situations we act within. In contrast with those identities that link people to others and to social roles, personal identity is the most salient way to conceptualize the orientations and experiences that constitute each of us as an individual. It reflects our stable-yet-flexible predispositions of thought and action across explicit and implicit moral domains. These if/then predispositions are regular and do not change willy-nilly. However, they can shift over time in response to situational pressures, second-order reflection and effort, or changes in social circumstances.

Personal identity connotes an enduring, patterned moral orientation (a "Me"), yet also signifies the patterned internal intuitions (the "I") that provide reflexive feedback as situations unfold or moral issues are pondered. It involves what MacIntyre refers to as "continuities of each individual's history" that lead to a sense of integration vital for understanding people as moral agents.<sup>33</sup> These continuities extend forward to intended goals and expected future outcomes that are related to one's personal sense of self. The moral aspect of personal identity involves prereflective, patterned social intuitions that draw on fundamental proactive and prohibitive moral orientations. This does not mean a person has a rigid, unchanging moral sense, but refers to consistencies in cognitive interpretation developed over time.<sup>34</sup> Some individuals are more predisposed to interpret a situation as calling for benevolent action; others are more likely to interpret the world through a window of self-interestedness. The social psychology of conscience is partly concerned with when, why, and who develops such orientations and how situations activate or override these personal moral worldviews.

The moral dimension of personal identity incorporates individual patterns in judgment (interpretive habits) about inherently ambiguous situations.<sup>35</sup> Different people attend to different aspects of their social environments, but they do not do so randomly. Some people approach

situations with empathy; others are motivated by principles of self-interest. These principles operate as cognitive-emotional filters for incoming information. People find facts within interaction that fit with their preconceptions and schemas, and they are motivated (in part) to verify their view of themselves.<sup>36</sup> These judgments occur through informational assumptions (schemas) that develop over time and in patterned ways.<sup>37</sup>

People can share moral precepts but differ on the facts they find relevant, leading to differences in the application of particular moral concerns.<sup>38</sup> For example, two people may both place a high value on achievement, but for one that represents monetary gain, while for the other it represents how fulfilling their career feels. The primary Bright Light is similar at an abstract level, but in practice leads to different facts and interpretations. Alternately, cognitive biases may lead people to change inconvenient facts in moral situations as they represent them in memory or to others.<sup>39</sup> These interpretive habits and schemas form cognitive filters through which social actors interpret, understand, and thus react to situations and events.<sup>40</sup> These frameworks do not perfectly determine future action; people innovate and shift habits throughout their life course. But their personal identity frames what facts they observe, what arguments seem persuasive in moral situations, and what triggers particular if/then action predispositions. People might be able to override these predispositions with second-order reasoning, but over time they develop patterns—based on personal experience and cultural codes—that save them the trouble of having to think through most situations that they encounter. They just “know” what is right, much of the time.

Being uncertain about moral action may be the most stressful of uncertainties.<sup>41</sup> Augusto Blasi, a rare social scientist who extensively argues for morality’s centrality, suggests that moral judgment is largely a cognitive process motivated by a desire for self-consistency.<sup>42</sup> If we see ourselves in a particular way, actions that fail to live up to that self-definition will lead to uncomfortable feelings. We want our intuitions and cognitions to match our view of ourselves as moral beings. When a social object (action, issue, person’s behavior) strikes us as either morally wrong or laudable, we undergo something deeper than a simple cognitive evaluation; it triggers something more central to our selves.

### PERSONAL IDENTITY AND VALUES

Personal identity represents the standards for moral judgment, intuition, and decisions. Particular social and role identities shape our informational assumptions for particular social groups and concrete situations, and the more important those identities, the more they will be intertwined with



our personal sense of who we are. Of course, different situations conjure up different identities, and an identity that is not especially important to us (say, as a customer at a clothing store) may frame certain informational assumptions that lead to certain moral intuitions. So, having somebody wait on us may not be an important part of who we are, unless we have a particularly regal upbringing, but when shopping for clothes the expectations of that situation call for a salesperson to be polite and attentive, and if she is not, we will feel moral reactions of anger or injustice. In a different situation, that same behavior would not trigger much of a reaction at all. Some behaviors, like overt insults, will trigger a reaction in just about any situation. These represent Bright Line triggers that lie at the root of our personal sense of who we are.

This sense of personal identity is, at root, a moral construction. We are far from neutral in judging moral matters as they relate to ourselves, and the power of needing to feel minimally moral leads to more Lawyer Logic than Scientist Logic in our self-evaluation as well as in our evaluation of those with whom we share meaningful identifications. Adopting identities as our own, that is, situating them as important parts of our personal identity, means making and accepting moral claims.<sup>43</sup> We are making commitments to ourselves and others about where our loyalties lie and offering implicit promises about what others can expect from us on the basis of those commitments. We adopt identities that we feel do not conflict with our global moral sense, and those identities in turn shape our interests and goals as well as what we continue to find moral.<sup>44</sup> An identity can be adopted through conscious choice, though more often it develops through social interaction rather than abstract philosophical reflection.<sup>45</sup> The moral core of personal identity is patterned among group members and is not idiosyncratic. Though moral outlooks are experienced as constitutive of who we are both as individuals and as members of a moral community, the inhibitive and proactive aspects of morality are inextricably social in origin.

Values, the most distant and abstract of Bright Lights, form the basis for individual proactive moral orientations.<sup>46</sup> Values are derived socially but experienced personally and are important for understanding human lives.<sup>47</sup> At the most abstract level, an individual's most strongly held values locate them in the range of possible human values. Situations may override acting on those values, but the way somebody sees herself is anchored in caring more about certain Bright Lights than others. Some people value social power most strongly and judge their actions and others' actions in view of this Bright Light, while other people value caring for others as their highest value. Potential reasons for these differences were discussed in Chapter 3, based on a person's location in social structure and the associated web of cultural influences. This value is a representation of their most abstract

informational assumptions that becomes coupled with an emotional valence that frames how that person sees her world. Particular situations implicate particular identities, but the personal identity transcends situations in terms of how one views herself, and values are a way to measure this moral dimension.<sup>48</sup>

Talking about values is useful because of the large bodies of research that link people's personal values to social structures.<sup>49</sup> Personal values are developed within a web of social relationships, group memberships, and social-structural influences.<sup>50</sup> Over time, these values shape our subsequent decisions about where we go and what we do. We select into situations, roles, and relationships (where we have the opportunity) that fit with our sense of who we are. Classic studies by Melvin Kohn and colleagues<sup>51</sup> detail how social structure shapes the values parents teach their children. These values, in turn, shape the occupational choices and aspirations of the next generation. Parents who have more complex jobs tend to value things such as personal autonomy, teach that value to their children, who grow up looking for similar types of jobs. Thus, people choose things that end up reproducing social structures. Few kids of high-achieving parents end up wanting to work at factories or in hourly jobs. Fewer children than you might think whose parents have those hourly, low-skilled jobs end up moving far up the economic ladder from their family of origin. Values, once formed, seem to be relatively stable,<sup>52</sup> though not invariant. Over our lives, we often select situations and relationships that reaffirm important values.<sup>53</sup> Personal continuities in values contribute greatly to continuity in personal identity and informational assumptions as individuals shift into different identities and roles over their lives. As we mature, we internalize whatever moral codes as personal motivation and do not act simply based on the tenets of what an authority commands.<sup>54</sup>

### SELF-HORIZONS

The philosopher Charles Taylor refers to our moral outlooks on the world as horizons.<sup>55</sup> This horizon metaphor offers a useful means to think about the ways culture and identities systematically structure our informational assumptions and accordant if/then action orientations. Taylor forcefully argues that human beings cannot be seen apart from their moral commitments, and these combine to form what he describes as their "identity." In our terms, he is describing the personal identity.

People may see their identity as defined partly by some moral or spiritual commitment, say as a catholic, or an anarchist. Or they may define it in part by the nation or tradition that they belong to, as an Armenian, say, or

a Québécois. What they are saying by this is not just that they are strongly attached to this spiritual view or background; rather it is that this provides the frame within which they can determine where they stand on questions of what is good, worthwhile, admirable, or of value. Put counterfactually, they are saying that were they to lose this commitment or identification, they would be at sea as it were; they wouldn't know anymore, for an important range of questions, what the significance of things was for them.

And this situation does, of course, arise for some people. It's what we call an "identity crisis," an acute form of disorientation, which people often express in terms of not knowing who they are, but which can also be seen as a radical uncertainty of where they stand. They lack a frame or horizon within which things can take on a stable significance, within which some life possibilities can be seen as good or meaningful, others as bad or trivial.<sup>56</sup>

It makes no sense to talk about a person without understanding the goals and values through which they make sense of their life,<sup>57</sup> what Antonio Damasio refers to as a continuity of reference.<sup>58</sup> Taylor's notion of horizons is not particularly sociological and can be improved by incorporating more sophisticated notions of identity to become more specific about how and when horizons develop and operate. But Taylor's work moves us in the right direction, past a view that people are only rational or cognitive and toward a focus on how a person's moral codes are experienced in a holistic, could-not-do-otherwise fashion.<sup>59</sup>

Bright Lights and Bright Lines are, then, ways that we orient ourselves in social space. They shape the views that we have on the social world and on our lives, framing the horizons of what we perceive and how we react. Values, the most abstract of our Bright Lights, shape what we see as acceptable or not, in ourselves or in others.<sup>60</sup> Certain potential actions, issues, or even people feel right, while others do not. These intuitions are experienced as constitutive of who we really are, as genuine expression of our personal identity. Once developed, moral horizons constitute the frames by which selves obtain coherence across time, space, and the various social identities we claim.

To know who I am is a species of knowing where I stand. My identity is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose. In other words, it is the horizon within which I am capable of making a stand.<sup>61</sup>

Values shape horizons that are mutually intelligible to ourselves and others. We cannot deliberate about nor understand ourselves (or others) without appealing to a moral language.<sup>62</sup> Values are largely first-order interpretive

constructs that feel stable as we utilize them in any particular situation. Over time, however, they can shift as a result of experiences, rational deliberation, or others' influence. As they shift, however, the newer horizons will feel as total and absolute as the old. Thus, we can look at the stability people exhibit across their lives with an understanding of conscience that also allows to conceptualize change. People feel absolute in their senses of right and wrong at any given moment, and those senses in large part define who they are and where they stand in the world. The senses, both second-order and first-order notions, can shift over time or in a different situation. The sociologist Christian Smith states:

As moral animals, humans are inescapably interested in and guided by normative cultural orders that specify what is good, right, true, beautiful, worthy, noble, and just in life, and what is not. To be a human person, to possess an identity, to act with agency requires locating one's life within a larger moral order by which to know who one is and how one ought to live.<sup>63</sup>

Bright Lights include what Taylor calls hypergoods, metaanalytical schemata for adjudicating about social reality. The moral informational assumptions we develop are fundamental for how we evaluate the world and ourselves. We judge our actions as moral based on these standards. Bright Lights frame the ways in which the self understands and decides among various available options. They imbue objects with positive or negative valences and weigh certain options as more desirable.<sup>64</sup> They are moral theories of reality, implicit understandings we have that shape what we see and how we perceive the world.<sup>65</sup> We make first-order implicit associations in line with these informational assumptions,<sup>66</sup> and then, following Jonathan Haidt's social intuitionist model, utilize biased Lawyer Logic to build a "good enough" case to support those intuitions. The horizon metaphor successfully captures how these socially shaped schemas, informational assumptions, and if/then predispositions frame what we see, how we react, and eventually how we behave.

Horizons capture a sense of distance, future, and perspective. We can only see up to the horizon and do not typically concern ourselves with things beyond it. Bright Lines are one representation of the edges of one's horizon; for some people even discussing things outside of their Bright Lines (e.g., incest, eating pets) is taboo. They literally cannot conceive of such acts. Controversial art, movies, and books often tread close to cultural Bright Lines, with some people refusing to expose themselves to art that goes outside of their moral horizons. Bright Lights, on the other hand, are ideals in the distance that, perhaps, shape the outer reaches of people's moral horizons, distant destinations that they find motivating to travel toward.

### EXTENDING THE HORIZON METAPHOR INTO SOCIAL SPACE

Horizons offer the possibility of incorporating identities into a metaphorical geography of social space. In a sense, this metaphor is a modern offshoot of Kurt Lewin's classic Field Theory, which held that all of the "coexisting facts" that an individual perceives structures their behavior.<sup>67</sup> In his view, individuals operate in a series of map-like spaces (home, work, public spaces) and in each one, a different set of facts was present. Behavior was a combination of needs and the "pushing forces" of other people. Thus, how we behave is a function of our own personal psychological systems and the environments we find ourselves in.

We can superimpose a moral dimension on this map metaphor, with one's location in social space activating a situated identity that frames the coexisting facts (informational assumptions) that steer purposeful human behavior. The moral code that we feel operating in any particular situation channels our perceptions and intuitions about any moral issues that emerge. Most of this operates outside of conscious thought; rarely are we explicitly asked about lying, stealing, or surviving (issues of life and death). We operate through situations, whether ordering food at a restaurant, doing our job, or spending time with family, with many of our informational assumptions operating outside of our awareness. Situated identities, as discussed in Chapter 5, circumscribe what moral code is operational in that situation. The same behavior (being told what to do) is interpreted very differently if it occurs from our boss or our children. Context, as they say, is everything.

But the moral topography metaphor lets us do something more than just update Lewin's classic notion with an improved understanding of cognitive psychology. Any particular situation calls for a specified moral horizon, a way of interpreting and responding to what happens in that situation. These horizons may change for some people across situations, while they remain the same for others. We live in a highly differentiated society; we have a variety of nonoverlapping identities and situations that we encounter in our daily lives. There is no reason to consider that the worker at our dry cleaner has the same view of us as our coworkers or our drinking buddies. In smaller societies, and historically, groups were less differentiated. Everyone in our town knew us and saw us the same way; we did not put on different hats (identities) for different situations. With Internet research and some online shopping we could create completely new identities tomorrow in ways that previous generations could not.<sup>68</sup> Let's say I want to become a lumberjack. I could research it online, order the right clothes, and try to develop a new identity as soon as the mail arrives. I may know I am just acting, but if I do it well, others may not know this is a new identity. Each new

potential identity carries with it a potentially new moral horizon through which we would see the world. Our obligations, commitments, and sense of right and wrong might shift with a new identity or in a new situation.

There is another dimension to this, however, that a moral topography metaphor allows us to develop. Each horizon shapes the obligations we feel we have toward ourselves and others in a particular situation, what Bright Lines are operative and what Bright Lines we should not cross. Those obligations can extend widely or narrowly, and this is the second dimension in our metaphor. The range of the horizon, what I referred to in Chapter 6 as moral province, differs to the extent we consider certain people to be in our in-group ("Us"). The circumference of our moral horizon may be broad or may only include a narrow group of friends or coworkers. What we consider right and wrong is one dimension; who this applies to is another.

This metaphor has resonance in the physical world. Kondo discusses how Japanese homes reflect a physical version of the linguistic division between "Us" (to whom moral obligations are paramount) and "Them" (to whom a different set of obligations are owed). Certain areas are public, and courtesy is expected and the social fabric must be protected in terms of not upsetting others or doing other things that ruin social harmony. To one's immediate family, however, one owes higher levels of honesty. Lying to others is acceptable if it keeps social interactions running smoothly; lying to one's family violates deep understandings of the priority placed on one's inner social circles.<sup>69</sup> Family homes physically represent this linguistic distinction.

We have the rudiments of a more formal theory, with role identities situating a person in social space and activating locally important moral boundaries, and social identities (in-group and out-group) forming a radius of how far those moral identities extend. Typically, what is considered prosocial behavior (one kind of morality, but not the only one) extends to those who fall within the radius of the in-group. As we saw in Chapter 6, the in-groups that we consider important can shift quickly, so at one point we might be kindly disposed toward people of our race or gender, at another minute we might think of our family, first. Whichever group is activated, I am suggesting, is at that moment considered the proper recipient of in-group moral obligations. Most people do not promote health of everyone in the world, or do so only in rare cases, such as in a religious setting where group boundaries are lowered. We promote our gang, family, gender, or whatever in-group is highlighted by that situation. Situations can overshadow personal identity, though for some people more than for others.

Concrete situations often overshadow our Bright Lights. In church, at a political rally, or in other mass-group situations in which people are taken outside of themselves, many honestly feel a connection with humanity as

a whole, a nation, or a political party. The radius of their concern can go very wide; the difficulty is in maintaining that connection with a wide range of benevolent values after the pressures of the social situation are removed. This relates to what Randall Collins calls emotional energy, a collectively fueled internal social motivation.<sup>70</sup> We build energy from interacting with others, and the force of that operates much like the Durkheim suggested: it can take us outside of ourselves and in touch with larger social forces. At those times of collective effervescence, one consequence sometimes may be to expand the radius of our first-order, felt in-group to encompass quite a large radius. When a religious preacher talks about loving fellow humans, a politician talks about pulling together as one country, and a coach or general exhorts their teams and armies to get in touch with something larger than themselves, they are tapping into this capacity to extend our in-group quite broadly. The same people can earnestly intend to help all of humankind in one situation and vote for parties that punish the poor or give very little to charity later on. Each time, real feelings are triggered, but the situation leads to different applications of the first-order desire to help others, to larger or smaller in-groups, based on the combination of personal factors (what a person values most) and situational pressures that trigger certain informational assumptions. Leaving church or the sports arena may lead to the dissipation of the wide moral realm that resulted from being part of an emotional experience and shrink it back to some personal set point. This level, a part of the personal identity, might only circumscribe one's family and close friends.

This suggests a number of assignments for a social psychology of conscience. Both person and situation factors influence behavior, and we have much to learn about how strongly each factor influences action and how and when they affect each other. For example, how stable are individual priorities? Do some people develop stable Bright Lines that lead to more consistent moral codes across identities? We know a lot about how situations can override moral principles, but less about what principles might be more resistant than others. Much of the situational research assumes that people are approximately the same, but little has looked at different values and different Bright Lights as they affect people in situations differently.

I am positing a relatively stable core of personal identity that forms the primary horizons through which we look at the world. These are the abstract Bright Lights captured in survey measures or in late-night conversations with friends by the lake. They relate extensively to self-conception, how we think of ourselves. These self-conceptions come into play at meaningful junctures in our lives (like choosing a career). But they can get overshadowed by situational pressure. Some situations highlight one's personal identity; at those junctures we expect behaviors that reflect personal Bright Lights.

There are cultural differences, as well, as to the balance between cultural Bright Lights and personal ones. And age differences, likely, as well. Much needs to be understood; ideally, conscience offers a perspective to organize seemingly disparate research domains to address these core questions about being human.

The metaphor of horizons allows for the fluidity that is evident in social life. What we see in the horizon may shift, and horizons are not fixed entities. Some people extend a wide prosocial horizon, defining many others as eligible for aid, comfort, or charity. For others, their prosocial horizon is quite limited, extending perhaps only to family and a few friends. We would expect these two different categories of people to prioritize different values and other Bright Lights. But their behaviors for those that fall within their in-group horizon will likely be similar. Our personal identity is comprised in large part of the ordering of the range of possible human values that are motivational; these are largely stable but, in certain situations, a value from lower in our hierarchy might become more salient.

This points to the importance of framing, discussed earlier, in thrusting any particular value highest in any situation. The value of security, for example, is at some level an important Bright Light to everyone. For those who feel greater security, as Inglehart and others argue,<sup>71</sup> can focus more on prosocial or personal freedom values. If a situation leads one to feel less secure, people who typically extend their prosocial horizons to encompass many people might withdraw into a more self-oriented set of concerns. In America at the turn of the twenty-first century, sparking a sense of insecurity was a successful political strategy. Framing issues in this way increases the salience of one Bright Light over others, and that can have dramatic influences on the horizons a person makes choices through. People can, with rare exceptions, be attracted to all of the Bright Lights in the range of cross-culturally recognized human values. Their personal identity represents the default valuing of these various values in situations where trade-offs need to be made or where they conflict. We are typically at least minimally attracted to the universal range of Bright Lights, from self-oriented to altruistic values or along a personal freedom to security dimensions. This potential attraction for a particular Bright Light may typically be overshadowed by other Bright Lights, but if a situation or leader or commercial highlights a lesser Bright Light, that one may temporarily shape one's horizon and the accordant informational assumptions, if/then predispositions, intuitions, and actions that shape behavior. The range of cross-cultural values signals abstract potential motivations that serve to justify almost any action.

I have focused on moral horizons as metaphors useful for conceptualizing the ways that identities and situations influence moral judgment, emotion,



and intuition. There are other horizons, however, including temporal ones. Some people think about things long in the future; others are more focused on the immediate moment. This too can change with age or situation.<sup>72</sup> Young children are focused on what is in front of them, and the idea of delaying gratification takes time to inculcate and may represent social class differences in how people make choices. In times of danger, also, we might not worry about our vacation plans next summer but be more focused on an immediate threat. This time horizon colors what we perceive and how we react. It seems that we tend to prefer things that pay off quickly instead of richer, but slower-paying options.<sup>73</sup> Again, the current situation will trigger different moral reactions and judgments depending on the way it influences a person's time horizon. This helps explain why a person who is doing things that might cross a personal Bright Line might nonetheless feel quite positively; they may not be acting perfectly in line with a Bright Light, but feel they are moving toward that goal quickly enough so they feel good about themselves.<sup>74</sup> A person trying to quit smoking might be proud of cutting back to one pack a day; in the long run, they are showing progress when compared with past behavior. For an ex-smoker, however, that same pack might feel quite guilty as it demonstrates a relapse. Somebody who tries hard to live up to prosocial Bright Lights might feel greater guilt if they make a minor moral violation. The key is how the act compares to one's sense of personal identity, both in the moment and within a sense of an ongoing life project. Our ideal selves are self-representations of our Brightest Lights.

### CONCLUSION AND TRANSITION

Conscience implicates our personal identity, our core intuitive sense of our motivational Bright Lights and the Bright Lines we will not cross. Personal identity represents our most abstract self-conceptions. These concerns are often the most salient to us, but can be overridden by situational pressures that shift our moral horizons. Thus, the self is both stable and flexible across time and situation.

This chapter introduced the metaphor of a horizon to capture the ways that societal and cultural forces lead to informational assumptions, then to intuitions that trigger related if/then response tendencies toward or away from certain Bright Lights and Lines. The horizon metaphor lets us begin to capture a more realistic notion of the fluidity of our moral judgments, feelings, and actions. Certain situations render salient related identities, and part of an identity involves the particular construction of moral notions of right and wrong in relation to the meanings that comprise that identity. What is morally justified at work may not be the same as at home. Identities

also capture the fluid drawing of in-group boundaries around wider or narrower social groups, and I hypothesized that whoever is delineated in that situation as a member of the in-group is the beneficiary of what is conventionally discussed as prosocial behavior (often measured as the extent to which a person has a moral identity—a loaded term). This motivates future research to engage issues of (a) what people extend their prosocial values and motivations to the largest audiences in the most situations and (b) how do situations differentially influence people with different moral concerns privileged in their personal identities? The horizon metaphor organizes the ways that larger social forces shape individual, personal identity notions of right and wrong and the situations that circumscribe, activate, or suppress those notions.

In modern society, it is difficult to have an invariant sense of self that gets presented similarly to everyone we meet in every situation. Regardless of how certain we are about our own Bright Lines, we are confronted daily—in the media if not in person—with alternative worldviews and people who prioritize different values. Figuring out our core moral orientations involves negotiating among these conflicting discourses and moral claims.<sup>75</sup> A social psychology of conscience needs to develop a multifaceted understanding of human lives based on the recognition that there are multiple legitimate moral claims as well as potentially conflicting moral goods.<sup>76</sup> We have horizons that shape our abstract views of the world, and they are more or less durable for shaping how we see particular situations and judge particular relationships. We potentially act differently in different situations and across our lives, yet have a sense of coherence that underlies the set of identities we claim. A theory of conscience needs to address how this occurs. In Chapter 9, I will suggest some ways that build what we might think of as a “useful fiction” of coherence, anchored in our core moral intuitions and self-conceptions, that guides us through the thicket of social situations, identities, and relationships that we encounter. We are fundamentally moral beings, but not necessarily as consistent as we like to believe.

## CHAPTER 9

# THE MORAL AMBIGUITY OF PERSONHOOD

Most everyone is virtuous at the abstract level.

Albert Bandura<sup>1</sup>

Modern life contains multiple options and possibilities, and people possess an awareness of alternatives that is relatively new in human history. In the distant past, a person occupied a single social role in a small group<sup>2</sup> in which nobody conceptualized having privacy or having the possibility of changing their station in life. In contrast, we are aware today of myriad ways we could change our lives, allegiances, and careers. Whatever religious or political beliefs we have, we have at least minimal exposure to the fact that millions of people—theoretically bright, caring, and decent—hold quite different, incompatible beliefs. Even if we are certain about our beliefs, the presence of diversity and possibility is part of today's cultural environment in ways that people in more homogeneous societies never dreamed. As Jerome Kagan puts it, the “extraordinary heterogeneity of values among class, religious, and ethnic groups in the United States and Europe guarantees that each person can count on disapproval of his or her values from some people each and every day.”<sup>3</sup>

Our notion of self is complicated by this range of possibility. The self has paradoxes, thought to be stable but also changing (across time and situation),<sup>4</sup> a predictably consistent set of personality traits but also fluid, constantly constructed and under our control. As biological beings, our behavior is influenced by causal forces (neurons firing in our brains), yet we believe we have free will. We have choice, yet many ways in which we act seem beyond our control. People spend thousands of dollars a year going to therapists to analyze why they act the way they do in the hopes of changing their lives. We believe there is something consistent about ourselves

across situations, yet, as we have seen, situations can shape behavior in ways that surprise us. We have many roles, but feel we are more than just their sum. This self is an ephemeral thing, indeed.

This is not simply an academic debate. We encounter hundreds or thousands of people over the course of our lives who we must make moral judgments about: Is this person someone I can trust? Did she mean to treat me that badly? Is he a good person? Why did that guy cut me off in traffic? We develop parsimonious explanations for the moral worthiness of these people, and we have to do the same for ourselves. Why did I do that? I do not mean to hurt people I care about; am I a bad person? When do I live up to my Bright Lines, and when do I ignore them?

The paradoxes of academic debate and the importance of understanding why we—and others—act as we do, revolve around this notion of a self, of an entity that each person develops that captures who they are, what they do, and how much moral credit or blame we should assign them. As we have seen throughout this book, making moral judgments and drawing moral lines are ubiquitous—even constitutive—human acts. The standards for those judgments and lines, however, depend largely on perspective. That perspective may be of a victim or perpetrator or disinterested bystander. It may be shaped by one's culture, groups, or social role. Philosophers can argue about the abstracted Archimedean point whereby we can assign moral judgment, but the place of social science is to focus on mechanisms underlying the ways people develop moral reference points while highlighting the importance of this process.

The self is one of the most studied constructs in social psychology, but the overwhelming amount of theory and research revolves around the self in concrete situations; only in parts of sociology and some pockets of psychology does the self-in-situation get linked to the self-across-the-life-course, what we might call the life-project aspect of self.<sup>5</sup> Research is often concerned with how a person presents herself in a particular situation or how she sees herself more generally. With few exceptions, serious social-psychological research has obscured the notion that we construct a sense of self *over time*, oriented toward the future and anchored in our pasts.<sup>6</sup> We are more than the sum of situated identities we find important; we have future selves and past behaviors that shape the Bright Lights that motivate us and determine the Bright Lines that we will not cross.

The larger framework for thinking about the ongoing self falls under the umbrella of life course studies,<sup>7</sup> a perspective that aims at studying the interplay of individual lives within a broader sociological and historical context.<sup>8</sup> An individual's life involves overlapping trajectories in a variety of domains, from occupation to family life, that set out expected sequences of roles (identities). People develop over time, socially and biologically, and

within these trajectories are a set of typical transitions (e.g., leaving high school) that orient people's lives. Sometimes, a person undergoes a substantial change such that a previously traveled trajectory no longer fits; they experience what is called a turning point. Historical events like the Great Depression<sup>9</sup> or World War II shifted the possible economic and social pathways available to the population, thus causing major—but patterned—changes in people's lives (and selves). Thus, a person's life project is something that is partially self-initiated,<sup>10</sup> but occurs in the context of particular historical eras with their accompanying institutional arrangements (e.g., WPA or the GI Bill). A person's sense of self, including their personal identity, discussed in the last chapter, reflects our best attempts to build a coherent vision within various cultural, structural, and historical contexts. This core sense is circumscribed by identity-horizons instantiated with Bright Lights and Bright Lines, the pushes and pulls of conscience. Understanding conscience means more than simply outlining what these goals and boundaries are and where they come from; it means incorporating one's life project into an understanding of the self and personal identity. We make moral judgments based not simply on abstract principles, but on the way our Bright Lines and Bright Lights capture who we are today, where we've been, and where we believe we are going.

### MORAL AMBIGUITY IN REAL LIFE

Much of the research on values, morality, and prosocial behavior is necessarily abstracted from real people making real decisions in real lives. This is not a fault of the researchers; people are inherently difficult to study, and finding ways to understand social processes requires compartmentalizing the various aspects that go into a human life. Most psychological research occurs in laboratories, artificial ways to streamline the complexity of human life into a few manageable variables. More sociological work explores lives outside of the lab, but even there it is largely domain-specific, focused on familial or occupational issues or issues of a particular salient social category (such as gender or race).<sup>11</sup> Even understanding one domain of a person's life is complicated given the variety of factors that play into any person's situation, ranging from personality dispositions to incentives to ideals to personal experiences.<sup>12</sup> These are not meant to be damning criticisms, just to point out the inherent complexity in studying people. While the biological sciences are certainly difficult, at least there is consistency with regard to much of the subject matter; particles do not make their own decisions, nor do chemicals decide they do not feel like mixing a certain way, today. Humans are complicated, largely as a result of their

second-order ability to analyze, reflect on, and override their first-order desires. Even if we could adequately understand our unconscious desires, no small feat, that would not be enough to understand what we actually do.

It is dangerous for a nonhistorian to make sweeping historical generalizations, but modern life has multiplied the number of opinions, voices, world-views, and ideologies that we have easy access to. We can get news instantly from faraway places, see live pictures, or even communicate directly with people all around the earth. We do not have to go far to find theorists and social commentators bemoaning or rejoicing over the effects of this constant stream of potential information.<sup>13</sup> For the purposes of a social psychology of conscience, the salient fact is that our strongly held informational assumptions have easy access to encounter differing perspectives.

In the Platonic world of moral ideals, perhaps, there are correct answers to life's moral issues. Real life, however, is full of contradictions,<sup>14</sup> and actual situations often implicate competing values and principles.<sup>15</sup> Classic psychological studies show a variety of ways in which group pressures can lead people to mistakenly report about unambiguous issues, such as the length of a simple line.<sup>16</sup> Group pressures lead to both conformity and, it appears, actual shifts in perception.<sup>17</sup> Given that many of our potential moral dilemmas occur in social context, we should not be surprised at how difficult it is to do the right thing, as if we even agreed on what the right thing was. Philosophers have been arguing about the proper way to make moral decisions for millennia. If great minds cannot agree on principles when they are outside of stressful situations, it is asking a great deal of ourselves to make perfect, even consistent, moral choices within the social pressures of concrete situations.

The issue becomes, then, how do people make sense of the ambiguity and conflicting pressures? As this book has tried to demonstrate, understanding conscience means focusing on both the person and the situation with respect to moral factors.<sup>18</sup> This means a focus on how culture and social structure have shaped their personal identity, including the informational assumptions their first-order mental processing has made and the subsequent emotional intuitions that result to guide behavior. We also need a focus on the properties of situations as they are structured in any particular institution or society—what norms are operative and how social pressures will influence the individual. And, if this architecture is not complicated enough to direct social science inquiry, we should recall that members of different societies tend to focus differentially on how important personal factors are relevant to situational ones; Americans tend to see themselves as having more consistent personalities across situations than the Japanese, for example.<sup>19</sup> Even if philosophers and participants could agree on what moral issues were at stake in any given

choice, there exists the real possibility that people from another culture or era would weigh those factors differently.

This all remains admittedly quite abstract. Certain moral issues concerning children's safety or unprovoked violence are easier to categorize as crossing a Bright Line. These strongly influential Bright Lines are less interesting for a nuanced study of conscience, however. Cultural factors likely merge with evolved predispositions against these forces so that the majority of people feel and intuit that they are morally right or wrong. In many societies the legal system is, in fact, set up to enforce these strong Bright Lines against harming others, and debates tend to be over the facts of a specific case more than the abstract moral justness of the action. What I am developing here, however, is the framework for understanding the more prosaic issues that face people in their everyday lives, moral choices that may not rise to the level of legal battle or epic cinematic drama. In Western societies there are many choices; however, these are circumscribed by the amount of money we have, the way society responds to our race or gender, and the way other sociological factors affect our lives. Yet, even there, we have choice, ranging from what career to pursue to how to treat those in our lives: whether to spend more time at work or with family, whether to volunteer to help strangers, or whether to say something to the parent threatening their child in a public space. Everyday choices activate our deeply held sense of being a morally sufficient person, yet may be difficult to resolve in the face of social pressures and become influenced by dueling values and ways of interpretation.

An additional set of ambiguities comes from the very fact that any concrete, ongoing situation will not fit perfectly into our informational assumptions (schemas) for what should happen. Every interaction with a cashier, every trip on the interstate, every conversation with a parent is technically different in the way no two snowflakes are supposed to be alike. We develop understandings for typical situations, and our place in them, as we age. Our various identities help anchor us within these situations to understand what should and should not be happening and how to keep our part in the interaction within a range of acceptable behaviors.<sup>20</sup> Sometimes these routines are disrupted, sometimes different identities come into conflict in a particular situation, and sometimes weighty life choices need to be made. These conflicts are a regular part of social life.<sup>21</sup> What matters are not the choices, themselves, but how particular people conceptualize them. Certain framings will be more likely to lead to certain intuitive responses and, hence, one choice being desired over another. This is what political campaigns and social movements are all about, using loaded words ("choice" or "life") to appeal to people's moral intuitions so that they align on one side or the other of a particular debate.<sup>22</sup> Who is

against having choice or against life? Both fall within the realm of universally recognized, desirable moral values. But some people develop first-order intuitions that are more oriented toward one side of the issue or the other and thus mute the potential influence of one loaded term over the other.

Not only is social life ambiguous, but constructing moral lines feeds into processes that harden divisions that cut through ambiguity by precluding an objective appraisal of the situation, group, or issue. In America's abortion debate, the autonomy of the person—a core American value—is at the root of both sides' framings; the issue is which person's autonomy, mother or unborn child, takes precedence. The debate is not about the value, itself, but the informational assumptions that dovetail with actors' moral intuitions about the rightness or wrongness of each side of the debate.

The social science question involves understanding how different people adjudicate among these competing values. It seems that individual moral conviction, the extent to which one's personal identity sets up horizons that frame a particular moral issue as paramount, influences who we even want to spend time with. These differences are not just symbolic; those who have strong convictions about a moral issue prefer more physical and social distance from those who disagree.<sup>23</sup> Believing we have moral differences with another group leads to less tolerance of that group and less goodwill and cooperation toward it. Social identity theory (Chapter 6) suggests we draw group boundaries quite quickly and effortlessly; when these boundaries are based on moral issues, it seems, they become Bright Lines, triggering a set of assumptions and biases that preclude fair-minded, objective interaction. In the desire to reduce ambiguity, we often try to keep from exposing ourselves to contrary moral views. Thus, although we live in an age with remarkable potential for exposure to different perspectives, that very diversity may reinforce our initial perspectives because we put extra effort into securing our moral views from contamination. We do not objectively validate our own views, but simply work to avoid having to confront their weaknesses.

### **CONFRONTING AMBIGUITY: THE SELF AS "USEFUL FICTION"**

Social science needs improved models for how a person makes sense of the variety of situations, roles, worldviews, and cultural influences that shape their life course. In the last chapter, I argued that the personal identity allows us to create a social model of the person, anchored in their moral horizons, that flexibly allows us to link self to both situations and social structures. But even such a model runs the risk of oversimplifying real life, the multiple but sometimes conflicting demands people face across and within situations in a complex society. To develop this model, we turn



away from cutting-edge theory and research and turn to the century-old work of one of the forerunners of modern social psychology, the American pragmatist John Dewey.<sup>24</sup>

When Dewey was writing, overly mechanistic models of the self were dominant, what has since been termed “behavioral psychology.” This centered on the notion that behavioral psychologists felt they did not need to journey inside people’s minds to understand behavior. Just like they could manipulate rats’ behavior with the proper rewards and punishments, behaviorists thought they could shape human behavior. There was no need to understand how people thought if we could control behavior. Dewey, on the other hand, did not subscribe to the view that humans are simple, passive, stimulus-response organisms. Rather, he carved out space for intentional, reflective, flexible actors. He emphasized the fundamentally novel character of behavior that emerges within the flow of interaction. Like Mead, Dewey felt that humans actively process their environments and develop consciousness through interaction with others. Consciousness, fundamental for self-development, distinguishes us from other animals by offering the potential for novel action as opposed to always giving the same response to the same stimulus, like a rat. Interaction is a flow that we have to react to, not a simple unfolding of responses to stimuli.

Dewey highlighted the fact that human actors are aware of their behavior, can exercise choice, and yet operate in both new and familiar situations. Rarely do we act in the exact same manner in different kinds of situations, yet we do not view ourselves as being shifting, conflicting creatures. He posited that we assemble a guiding fiction of a coherent self that serves as a “useful illusion.”<sup>25</sup> This illusion is not experienced as illusory, but ties together the many disparate encounters and social selves that we experience. The “whole self” is, for Dewey, an idealized but necessary projection; without building this useful fiction, we would not feel a sense of self-coherence.<sup>26</sup> Dewey felt that, in actuality, we never actually experience our self as a whole but rather as a series of ordered experiences that we imaginatively use to create what feels like a single, complete image. Rarely do we construct this fiction in a fully orderly way, written down so that we can catch any contradictions. Rather, there is a sense of coherence and fit between the experiences we have and the view we have of ourselves, often unarticulated (mirroring the first-order dynamics of the brain at the root of this book). The various psychological biases discussed in Chapter 7 allow us to maintain a fiction of ourselves as coherent even as an unbiased observer might detail lots of contradictions or inconsistencies in our behavior across time and space. Dewey highlighted the fact that this fiction was not just cognitive, in our current terms, but deeply held and anchored in emotional experience.

This fiction becomes the final piece of the architecture of conscience, an edifice that covers the social, cultural, and group influences on the development

of personal identity and captures the myriad roles and groups they identify with. This all occurs within the context of a human life project within normatively defined understandings of the timing and sequence of various life activities. Put differently, a person's moral core, the first-order sense that they are a morally decent person, is intertwined with the various Bright Lights and Bright Lines that circumscribe the moral horizons that frame what a person thinks and feels is morally appropriate for themselves and for others. At the root of all of this is a useful fiction that we are coherent, anchored in first-order intuitions and emotions that signal our Bright Lights and Bright Lines and shape the second-order way in which we tell others—and ourselves—who we are. We do not experience ourselves as incoherent and conflicting; we have a prearticulate sense that we are coherent, nonrandom actors engaged in developing our life story.

Dewey talked a good bit about values, what I have held to be our most abstract Bright Lights. There are a lot of values that are desirable, he thought, and over our lives we encounter situations that may pull us toward different ideals. He suggested that people develop lines of activity that seem to unify these conflicting values.<sup>27</sup> Dewey was less concerned about how successfully we actually unified these principles than with the idea that they were always subject to potential for revision; whatever we abstractly consider our highest principles, actual circumstances may not allow us to adhere to them so flexibility was of the highest importance. Not flexibility of action; sometimes we take jobs or have relationships that no longer allow us much room for a wide range of behavior, leading us to commitments that channel future behavior, what Howard Becker referred to as making "side-bets."<sup>28</sup> Rather, flexibility of mind, of having a useful fiction specific enough to get us through the day without feeling like self-contradictory hypocrites but flexible enough to deal with the ambiguity and contradiction inherent in a modern human life. If we intuitively believe we have coherence and can tell a good-enough story to build a useful fiction tenuously holding it all together, our mind's need to maintain this story will fill in the rest. At the root of this story, I am arguing, is conscience, a core that is not rigid but flexible, potentially contradictory, and anchored in a deeply held first-order sense of being morally satisfactory.

The self, then, is not a "thing" as commonly discussed but rather an ongoing process that at any time we can present a snapshot of, but this snapshot is not an adequate representation of the complexity of the process over time and across situations. The self is, as Daniel Wegner calls it, a public relations agent,<sup>29</sup> convincing others and ourselves of a coherence that portrays the cacophony of social influences as a plausible, manageable narrative. What matters is less where we've been than where we are in the present

moment, when the useful fiction snapshot needs to be presented and the public relations operation tells its story.

We all need a sense of ourselves; the idea of “me” is powerful and needs to be preserved. Identity requires a story, and the best story we have, in spite of what may actually happen, is the story of progress, continuity, gradualism, and orderliness ... accidents and chance encounters are part of life. That life is not orderly or predictable and thus the past does not seal our fate. Instead ... life [is] complex and emerging, where the task is always adaptation to the present.<sup>30</sup>

We construct and present a useful fiction as a way of organizing the diverse first- and second-order responses, judgments, thoughts, and feelings that we have into one plausibly coherent package. We are not a thing apart from this loop of thought, feeling, intention, and memory; we are the loop.<sup>31</sup> Morality is, I have been arguing, the core to this loop, the filter through which our moral horizons comprise an apparently stable, though actually flexible, sense of self. We need stances on moral issues and principles to develop a sense of personal integrity.<sup>32</sup>

There is a tradition of scholarship on this self-as-fiction approach in sociology, typically with the buzzword “narrative,”<sup>33</sup> but to my knowledge the only social scientist to link up narrative with anything like the first-order and second-order psychological model of the human mind is Dan McAdams. He focuses on narrative as a third level of personality, operating on top of what he terms “basic traits” (what we might think of as first-order response predispositions) and “characteristic adaptations” (goals, values, beliefs, and life concerns—what I have called Bright Lights).<sup>34</sup> Just like other social scientists who talk about how the present self is the pivot through which a person makes sense of their history and future, McAdams stresses upon personal fiction as necessary to achieve a narrative about oneself.<sup>35</sup> We do not just look at ourselves as a single snapshot in time; rather, we tell a story about where we are, where we’ve been, and how the past and present relate to where we are going. And these stories are not somehow self-generated, but draw importantly from the various cultural plots and understandings that are available to us.<sup>36</sup>

The self, then, our innermost senses of who we are and who we are not, is far from a fixed entity. First-order feelings, intuitions, and emotions may not always neatly line up. Second-order beliefs, goals, and ideals may conflict across roles or social groups. And our narrative fictions that we tell ourselves and others to make a partly chaotic, rarely linear life course fall neatly into an apparent trajectory that may change with time or with audience. Looking back on our lives, certain events or meeting certain people appear

to have been inevitable, but at the time, no such inevitability existed. Our totalitarian ego<sup>37</sup> edits, omits, and reconstructs important events to create the narrative that allows us to seamlessly take today's self and link it to yesterday's. Some people construct stories of linear growth where they knew all along that they would get to this point, while others highlight lucky breaks or tragic events that changed the lives they expected. But either way, we build these events into a coherent, sequential story implying that the memorable events somehow caused our current circumstances. The power of the useful self-fiction is that it provides this story, glossing over the chance and unseen forces that affect us to impose a semblance of order—even inevitability—on our lives. Given the primacy of first-order moral intuitions and emotions, our moral senses (Bright Lights and Bright Lines) become powerful organizing constructs—both cognitively and preconsciously through triggering emotions—for building this fiction.

### CONSTRUCTING A MORALLY COHERENT FICTION

The useful fiction is not assembled randomly. Simply because we cannot find an abstract point to identify a true self does not mean that the fiction is beyond discussion. Elements of this fiction have been discussed throughout this book, ranging from the importance of situation for rendering certain identities salient to the totalitarian ego that edits our vision of our past and future. Our brain is, in many ways, fractured, with different modules handling different cognitive tasks;<sup>38</sup> for our purposes, we have simplified these different aspects along the first-order and second-order lines introduced in Chapter 1, drawing from current psychological research. Adding to the complication is the issue of time. We have visions of past selves—often constructions that tell us more about our present view of ourselves than our actual past—that are in dialogue with visions of the future, what are referred to alternately as possible or ideal selves. As shorthand, I have been referring to the moral dimension of these future selves as Bright Lights, but even these are erroneously treated as unitary or constant over time.

Who we want to be is part of the organized story we tell in the development of a narrative life project, the useful fiction that simplifies the array of first-order and second-order desires, goals, intentions, and experiences that we streamline into a good-enough version of how our current self-view fits into the story developed out of (edited) past experiences and geared toward a currently important future set of goals. Our memory is better, for example, for emotions that are anchored in our values than for those that are incongruous with our values.<sup>39</sup>

The goal of this book is to lay out the architecture of conscience, how society influences the individual and the situation along moral lines of

thought, feeling, and behavior. The precise mechanics of each of the components and relationships within this architecture deserve focused empirical study. I refrain from making too many specific claims about the relative importance of first- versus second-order processes, or personality versus situation, with respect to making predictions about what kinds of people in what kinds of situations will engage in what kinds of behavior. Evidence suggests, of course, that both personality and social factors are important for understanding what people do in their lives.<sup>40</sup> Are these factors the same for everybody? Does a person born with little money have the same opportunities as somebody born into wealth to have their personalities lead to a more advantageous life? Recent studies suggest that a person born in the bottom fifth of the income distribution has a 6 percent chance of reaching the top fifth in America.<sup>41</sup> Alternatively, if one is born with a father who is president, one seems to have the capacity for multiple business failures, yet, with a winning personality, can reach the pinnacle of elected government. For some people, personality attributes will have more opportunity to shape their lives than for others.

As we construct a useful fiction of a (moral) self, then, many issues about circumstances beyond our control and intuitions and reactions outside of our second-order, conscious awareness are vital to explore. We can posit some aspects of these relationships that fit with current research and hope that future, focused explorations support these contentions. George Ainslie, who argued that we construct Bright Lines around certain behaviors so that we do not have to continually think and reason about what behaviors we should avoid, offers a vision whereby each of us bargains with our future selves. We have many urges and desires that are appealing, ranging from short-term pleasures to long-term life successes, and need to navigate among them. For Ainslie, the past, present, and future are all connected as we juggle competing urges, goals, and desires. He uses the term “hyperbolic discounting” to lay out the way that long-term benefits tend to get overshadowed by short-term potential pleasures.

Hyperbolic discounting makes decision making a crowd phenomenon, with the crowd made up of the successive dispositions to choose that the individual has over time. At each moment she makes the choice that looks best to her; but a big part of this picture is her expectation of how she'll choose at later times, an expectation that is mostly founded on how she has chosen at previous times.<sup>42</sup>

We draw Bright Lines to develop first-order, automatic shortcuts that keep us from revisiting the bargains we have made with past and future selves. The problem is, as Daniel Gilbert explains in great detail, that we are bad

at judging our future selves.<sup>43</sup> Biases in how we judge our future prejudices our fictions from the start.

Let me offer a handful of preliminary hypotheses about how individuals might vary with respect to the relative influence of first- and second-order guides to behavior. Popular understandings suggest that our first-order impulses tend toward the selfish and potentially destructive, while second-order processes check those impulses. Throughout this book, I hope to have also suggested that some people have altruistic first-order impulses, a point I will return to in the next chapter by arguing that we are not naturally selfish. I have suggested that first-order moral impulses are also influenced by context and that the same person might have different impulses about what is moral in different situations when enacting different identities. Similarly, one person's Bright Lights may not be considered appropriate by another person, so any simple dichotomy with first-order impulses as bad and second-order as good is erroneous from the start.

That said, a primary goal of socialization agents (such as parents, schools, and government), people and institutions responsible for shaping the character of others, is to lead people to develop first-order intuitions in line with second-order Bright Lights those agents define as morally desirable. We want our children or our students or our citizens to have certain spontaneous, first-order intuitions when faced with moral dilemmas. Often, these are prosocial, but occasionally less prosocial reactions might be cultivated, for soldiers or for stockbrokers. The conscious shaping of conscience in others is very much in line with the popular Freudian idea that we need to control our inner negative impulses. Intentional rewards and punishments are certainly oriented toward shaping behavior, hoping over time that we internalize not to steal cookies, cheat on tests, or drive too fast. These Bright Lines are taught and sometimes become internalized.<sup>44</sup> But the target of these Bright Lines may not be conventionally prosocial or may have limited application (deciding that it is fine to help citizens, for example, but not illegal immigrants). More can be explored about how successful various Bright Line drawings can be and for what kinds of people. People who develop Bright Lines that diverge from the dominant powers in a given community or society are, typically, labeled morally deficient.

When do our second-order Bright Lights, our better angels capturing who we hope to be, help override or shape first-order Bright Lines? One hypothesis is that more successful socialization agents are more likely to achieve this consonance. More totalizing religious communities and educational institutions or less diverse societal subgroups offer multiple messages and pressures toward a singular moral orientation. Some combination of unsuccessful or conflicting messages with individual dispositions to question those messages contributes to people developing different Bright Lines

than a group intends. Moral philosophy has been concerned for eons with the proper drawing of Bright Lines, usually in concert with the abstract principles that motivate whatever Bright Light guides that particular philosopher. Translating these understandings into action, however, is more difficult. At the societal level, governments are aimed at either holding together individuals who view different Bright Lines as inviolate (as in the multicultural American case) or unifying (even repressing) people who do not go along with powerful interests' definition of morality.

Another suggestion for how and when second-order controls can override first-order impulses, if those impulses are not developed along the prosocial or societal definitions intended by socialization authorities, might rely on the classic notion of Malsow's hierarchy of needs.<sup>45</sup> To the extent that our more self-oriented, first-order needs (safety, food) are sated, we have the capacity for orienting ourselves toward others.<sup>46</sup> We might expect that individuals, or societies, who have more of these needs met will demonstrate more concern for others, though in practice this is not always the case at the level of nation-states. Future research can explore how often, when, and for whom need fulfillment influences prosocial moral feeling and action.

Another way to think about the relationship of second-order, conscious control with first-order impulses comes from Roy Baumeister's body of work on "ego depletion."<sup>47</sup> Simply put, self-control is like a muscle that can get tired with overwork or stress.<sup>48</sup> Being virtuous often requires elements of self-control, but this is a limited resource.<sup>49</sup> Not every first-order impulse is immoral, but automatic reactions often can be self-focused. With practice, this self-control muscle can be strengthened, though alcohol or stress can wear it down. From a sociological point of view, certain groups in society are more chronically stressed<sup>50</sup> and thus might be more likely to have depleted amounts of self-control, leading toward more behaviors that are considered immoral within that society. Willpower,<sup>51</sup> it seems, is not a constant but a force that varies among people and even within the same person depending on situational factors. There is evidence that creating if/then intentions helps fight ego depletion,<sup>52</sup> suggesting that conscious creation of response behaviors that eventually become internalized at the automatic level is a way to maintain desired behaviors in the face of stressors or lack of willpower. Self-control is not always seen as a moral good; Kagan points out that in many areas in modern life, people with too much self-control are ridiculed as uptight.<sup>53</sup>

### THE AMBIGUOUSLY EVIL SELF

If beauty is in the eye of the beholder, evil is as well.<sup>54</sup> The inherent ambiguities of social life, of the facts and informational assumptions we

bring to making sense of them, mean that perspective shapes our moral experience and judgment. We are not naturally good or evil, but have templates for prosocial and aggressive action wired into our bodies.<sup>55</sup> Certain circumstances will make the most pacifistic among us to act aggressively, while the most aggressive of us only spends a small amount of time fighting or breaking laws. We are not essentially one thing or the other. Some people likely have more destructive urges than others, but we all can imagine circumstances where we would feel such urges. Some of us have different abilities to overcome those urges, thus demonstrating more self-control. Being good, then, is in part the ability to override destructive urges, not simply the absence of them. In addition, the range of human values offers intuitively plausible justifications for nearly any action—aggressive, selfish, or destructive—and many supposedly evil actions are undertaken in pursuit of high ideals.<sup>56</sup>

Take a paradigmatic example of a Bright Line that we teach children: do not lie. Any competent adult knows that this Bright Line, alone, is too simplistic, and circumstances might require crossing that line, whether to keep the peace in a community or to simply exercise tact. We consider it morally acceptable for doctors to lie to insurance companies if it helps their patients.<sup>57</sup> Even children draw lines around lying that are different for covering up wrongdoing than for moral or personal reasons.<sup>58</sup> We try to take into account the totality of the circumstances when judging the moral permissibility of an act of lying. At least, we attempt to focus on the balance of reasons for or against lying when dealing with a member of an in-group. We are less charitable to those we do not identify with. As discussed before, the moral benefit of the doubt goes more to people who are like us, to those on our team (sports, politics, ethnic group), than to those outside.

As I have detailed earlier, this process pivots around the development of identities and, eventually, a largely consistent, intuitively coherent sense of personal identity. To have an identity is to take a stand in social and moral space, to align oneself with people or roles that find X to be justified, Y to be abhorrent, and Z to be mandatory. To be a police officer means to follow and enforce laws, to draw Bright Lines around behaviors that would embarrass oneself or the force, and to be vigilant about such lines on and off the job. To be a schoolteacher might mean being self-consciously aware of Bright Lines to model for children, but these may be forgotten at home at night by smoking marijuana or doing drugs. Contextualization, it seems, is key.<sup>59</sup> We need to contextualize our Bright Lights and Bright Lines across situations and identities to juggle commitments so that we can have a plausibly coherent fiction of a single, unitary self.

But we exist in more than situations; we have life projects that orient us toward future action, even in current situations. We have ideal and ought



selves,<sup>60</sup> Bright Lights that frame the informational assumptions that channel situated intuitions, emotions, and reactions. We might also look at what Charles Carver and Michael Scheier refer to as the feared self,<sup>61</sup> a future Bright Line that is motivational in a different way. They suggest this might be an even stronger motivation, moving the notion of Bright Lines into a life-project framework. We can think of a person as an agent who makes choices (constrained by structural and cultural influences on their informational assumptions) both in the present (as part of salient social and role identities) and oriented toward the future (life project).

*A person* has to be able to keep in contact with past and anticipated intentions, and one of the main roles of the brain's user-illusion of itself, which I call the self as a center of narrative gravity, is to provide me with a means of interfacing with myself at other times ... the larger, temporally and spatially extended self.<sup>62</sup>

This useful illusion, a center of narrative gravity, is inherently self-justifying and moralizing. The core of this illusion is that we are minimally moral, moral satisficers who are (with rare exceptions) morally worthy members of some community.

Evil, then, is conceptualized differently in the eyes of perpetrators and others, and while a social psychology of conscience is concerned with both, a focus on personal identity privileges the actor. A person will feel they have done something evil, or perhaps simply morally questionable, if they cross a Bright Line. This feeling will be stronger, and captured largely in the moral emotions of shame and guilt discussed earlier, if this action cannot easily be rationalized away. Choosing to cross a Bright Line is a stronger violation than feeling like a situation made us do it. For people who contribute to acts of genocide or massacres, for example, a situational force that triggers a gut feeling of "don't break ranks" can override the Bright Lines most people develop against murder.<sup>63</sup>

The inherent ambiguity of so many possible social actions, given both a lack of clarity on moral issues implicated in many situations and the multiple possible interpretations of any one action, means that initially minor decisions may lead to major moral trajectories, one more evil than the other.<sup>64</sup> A small decision, such as downloading some music, "borrowing" a few dollars from one's parents, or telling a white lie (the basis for a large percentage of situation comedies) can, over time, lead to a temporary-but-justified crossing of a Bright Line. Somebody who does this may have a good, situational reason for the action, short-circuiting any powerful moral emotion. The empirical questions involve how and when one of these early, small deviations ends up shifting one's Bright Lines. I am suggesting that

the lack of a moral emotion (see Chapter 4) is a signal that one has not yet crossed a Bright Line. One way to keep that trigger from activating is to offer enough of a second-order explanation to avoid first-order negative intuitions and feelings. If this happens, the Bright Line gets moved a little bit in the direction of that action. Initially, this may be a small violation or bending of the rules. Over time, this can lead to a trajectory of behavior that exacerbates the initial violation, but since the Bright Line has been moved, the moral core of one's personal identity does not feel violated. Our flexible fiction accounts for these deviations as we construct a second-order narrative, and this can cause us to ignore the first-order feelings of moral violation. Conscience is flexible and self-justifying, unless the violations get too strong to plausibly justify.

A final bulwark for moral self-justification in situations and lives of ambiguity is our social identities, the groups we align with. Perhaps I do something that seems evil, cross a Bright Line, but can claim that it was for the good of some group. This may justify many behaviors, whether we exploit customers in order to make money for our families or begin wars in defense of our country. This higher ideal, of doing something bad for others' sake, is a powerful potential justification for actions typically considered morally wrong. Like the range of values that exists, group identities are often floating out there ready to be employed as moral trump cards if other justifications are not convincing. Even those who act less prosocially are aware of society's moral standards; people are aware of conventionally correct moral options even as they make other choices.<sup>65</sup> They report regret for moral shortcomings, but utilize other principles to justify their decisions.

## CONCLUSION AND TRANSITION

This chapter highlights the ambiguity of social life and discusses how real-life concerns can be more complicated than the necessarily simplified models that social scientists have developed to explain the self. Being human means, as Isaiah Berlin states, being "doomed to choose,"<sup>66</sup> so we must organize the complexity and ambiguity in some workable fashion. Bright Lines, following Ainslie, are one way that we simplify these choices, developing automatic, first-order programs for limiting the range of possible options in any situation. Identities serve the same purpose, guiding our behavior first through self-conscious identification with the expectations of our role or group, then by doing this automatically. Finally, our personal identity, which includes an ongoing life project, offers one more means to simplify the range of potential ways we might act and the choices we will make. We intuitively have a sense of what feels like "us," and that allows us to create the useful fiction of individual coherence.

This model synthesizes social science approaches, and organizing it around conscience incorporates the moral dimension missing from so much social-psychological and sociological theorizing about the self. We are, at root, moral beings forming judgments about the worthiness of our actions as well as others' and could not exist in a world where we did not have horizons through which to make sense of the world. Erving Goffman hints at this aspect with his aforementioned discussion of the moral order, the fact that we all are expected to treat each other as morally important entities. Social actors enter into interaction secure in the knowledge that they are morally decent and worthy of respect and recognition. Depending on one's development, this may be a tenuous sense, but for most people the idea is at the root of their sense of self. I am good. I am good because my society values individuals, or members of groups, because my parents say so, or because the world has wronged me and I have persevered.

Moral intuitions and emotions occur when situated actions violate our internalized Bright Lines, and we feel positive emotions such as honor and pride when we act in line with our Bright Lights. These moral dimensions operate within a broader perspective than any situation, as our useful fiction helps us narrate how our situated activity fits into our ongoing life project. To this point, I have laid out the constituent parts of a social architecture of conscience, the mechanisms that fit together to form the moral horizons at the root of our selves. By highlighting the complexity of this process and the self-justification that so often occurs, I fear I have painted an amoral notion of the actor. In fact, I am arguing the opposite; morality is central to a person, but its content and processes vary across people, groups, and societies. In Chapter 10, I will conclude with an exploration of the possibility for moral action, conventionally understood, within this complexity. Despite ideas that people are somehow selfish, and the fact that we justify most of our actions as plausibly moral, we find abundant evidence of prosocial behavior.

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## CHAPTER 10

# THE POSSIBILITY OF MORALITY

Questions about morality are, or rather should be, at the heart of sociological inquiry.

Alan Wolfe<sup>1</sup>

You can glean almost as many social psychological insights from reading Bill Waterson's comic strip *Calvin and Hobbes* as you can from reading the research journals. After Calvin breaks a plate, his mother suggests that he lacks common sense. Calvin replies, capturing the essence of this dual-process model of conscience, "I've got plenty of common sense! I just choose to ignore it."

Calvin succinctly captures the complicated interplay between first-order intuitions of right and wrong (captured in the colloquial notion of common sense, an unarticulated understanding of how the world works) and second-order decisions to listen to or ignore those first-order understandings. This book has outlined the architecture of conscience, ranging across its cultural and sociological influences, its psychological mechanics, its relationship to situated behavior, its biasing power on our self-understandings after we act, and its centrality for understanding the human self. Moral issues, whether for an individual, group, or society, are not just a set among many equal concerns. They are foundational, defining orientations toward the just, right, and good in a world of options.

I will conclude this discussion of conscience on three optimistic notes. First, I will briefly engage a popular idea—in the social sciences and among the broader public—that human beings have evolved to be selfish. This contention is at the root of various economic and psychological models of the actor, Hobbesian philosophy, and beliefs of Ayn Rand disciples and many American politicians. Then I will turn to explore whether American culture really is as polarized as conventional wisdom holds. Turns out, we

agree on much more than we disagree. Finally, I will focus on those people who behave in particularly exemplary ways and explore what lessons they might have for the rest of us. These morally laudable people challenge the assumption that people are just naturally selfish. Certainly, there are many self-interested people out there, and self-enhancement is a primary value recognized around the world. But are all people, at root, self-interested? There are those who defy this simplifying assumption of human selfishness and demonstrate that humans are not motivated all of the time by rational self-interest.

This book ends with this foray into the more positive aspects of people and the more unified aspects of society. We will look briefly at what social scientists know about people who develop—and follow—systems of conscience oriented toward helping others. This is not to say these exemplars are perfectly moral. “Whereas theories of moral ideals can be constructed ‘cleanly’ in the abstract, persons cannot; in reality, no one is an unblemished paragon of morality.”<sup>2</sup> But some people come closer than others.

### **ARE PEOPLE NATURALLY SELFISH?**

The idea that people only look out for themselves is an old one in human history and is used to rationalize all sorts of behavior. But is it true? This particular meme argues that individuals are optimally rational (though this book suggests otherwise) and that as such they are rationally selfish creatures, always acting for their benefit. The idea that people seek to maximize personal outcomes is a truism in economic thought, and given economics’ prominent place in our culture it is a popular notion among the general public, as well. As a broad generalization, it has been useful in explaining a lot of behavior. People do seem to be oriented toward achieving personal goals and many of those goals are oriented toward themselves. However, the variety of goals (Bright Lights) they develop can, for many people some of the time and some of the people much of the time, be oriented less toward themselves and more toward close others and strangers.

Supposed support for this idea draws on what at first seems an intuitively plausible version of evolutionary logic, that for individuals to survive, they have to be concerned first about their own well-being. Thus, organisms (and early humans) who were more successful at protecting themselves survived, bred, and largely shaped our current psychological tendencies to look out primarily for ourselves. Those humans who have more prosocial tendencies, this logic suggests, would be more likely to risk themselves to help others and potentially be killed, taking their beneficial genes out of the pool. Surviving in a cruel and dangerous world takes a good bit of looking out for oneself.

Empirically, the people who behave most like this version of people found in economic theory are, well, economists, and even they only partially behave this way.<sup>3</sup> This analysis makes a large mistake in conceptualizing our species' development. Namely, humans are a fundamentally social species.<sup>4</sup> Thinking about human evolution as if it only affected individuals mistakenly shifts the analysis away from how our species actually evolved, within groups.<sup>5</sup> People are more successful when coordinating behaviors with others than when acting alone.<sup>6</sup> What is good for individuals may be different than what is good for the group, and doing what is necessary for group survival may take precedence over what is rationally good for any one individual. Thus, evolutionary arguments in support of selfishness might be interpreted through a different lens, one where groups that developed altruistic personalities or rewarded prosocial actions might have been more able to survive and reproduce. Selfish *people* might be more likely to survive in certain situations, but selfish *groups* would ultimately have less success.

This is the classic free-rider problem in economics; why pull my weight in any collective when I can get the same benefits by free riding, but at much less personal cost of time and energy? Why actually *be* moral when I might just *appear* moral and get the credit without the work? The philosopher Daniel Dennett outlines an argument explaining how evolution might have led to us internalizing moral feelings and constraints rather than just appearing to feel this way. This argument has the advantage of fitting well with how people actually behave. Wouldn't a group, he argues, that is self-aware and learns from mistakes be on the lookout for free riders? Wouldn't it develop ways to ensure people pull their weight? Through this simple shift, Dennett succinctly demonstrates that members of such a self-interested society would have necessarily developed external controls that limited free riding, and the most efficient way for evolution to maintain these controls is for them to become internalized over time. I refer readers to his work for the philosophical details of his analysis.

The important move for our purposes is to show how taking the perspective of a *society* of self-interested actors suggests that evolutionary survival forces would create something that looks like our notion of morality. Altruistic orientations could evolve from self-interested beings; there is no reason to simply assume selfishness is the only possible result. In fact, economic studies find strong support for the idea that people engage in behaviors based on strong notions of reciprocity even when selfish choices are possible, suggesting that successful groups created internalized prosocial norms that are part of our species, today.<sup>7</sup> Evolution is, as Dennett suggests, short-sighted. But groups that developed far sighted notions of moral behavior may certainly have been more adaptively successful than any particular individual.

Evolutionary success of groups with altruists may have happened for a few reasons.<sup>8</sup> Groups that encourage reciprocity in helping can derive strong benefits over time since members can count on aid when they need it. Groups in which members work together are more likely to survive a competition with a group full of self-interested people since the members will help each other in ways that the latter would not. A definitive answer is difficult; the point is that there are strong evolutionary reasons to believe the prosocial capacity in humans is an adaptive trait, even more adaptive than pure self-interest. Self-benefiting motivations explain some behavior but don't reflect real people. The idea that we make choices that are most personally beneficial poorly explains the range of self-defeating behaviors that people exhibit, ranging from overeating to drug abuse.<sup>9</sup> Jon Elster reports that, although it would be self-rewarding for people to buy a pill that would make them guilt free, people say they would not take such a pill.<sup>10</sup> We are, it appears, not particularly adept, as a species, it appears we are not particularly adept at behaving in ways. Rather, we have a concern for reciprocity that overshadows self-interest, even punishing those who violate such norms at a cost to ourselves.<sup>11</sup> We would rather enforce these norms than gain more positive outcomes for ourselves.

This does not stop those who advocate the people-are-inherently-selfish meme from moving the goalposts, reinterpreting acts of charity and altruism to suggest that helping others is selfish *if* people find these behaviors rewarding. This makes sense from a narrow, noncontroversial view that people want to do things they find pleasurable or rewarding. But in moving these goalposts, an important shift occurs. This leads us toward the type of behavior Weber called "value-rational," whereby people act rationally in line with their important values (Bright Lights). Even if people operated in ways that rationally achieve their goals, to the contrary of much social-psychological evidence, why would they all decide the same things were pleasurable or rewarding? Different people make different conscious and implicit calculations about what should or should not be done, what I've been referring to as "if/then" assumptions. In the moral realm, these become internalized into the core of one's personal identity. The issue is not whether or not it is rational to behave morally (and for the rest of this book I will use moral in its conventional sense of orienting one's actions toward helping others); the issue is what kinds of people orient their rationality, the horizons they use to interpret the world, toward moral concerns? People who derive rewards from being selfless have different informational assumptions and make different choices from those who do not.

This suggests that models assuming people act for rewards or pleasure obscure the origin and maintenance of different rewards for different people. Philosophers have long distinguished between types of pleasures, so my argument breaks no new ground. With respect to moral behavior,



however, we can see two sorts of pleasures using the dual-process model: the first more directly hedonistic; the second reflecting conscious Bright Lights. Driving late at night to deliver something to a friend in the hospital is likely not a first-order pleasure if we are tired, cranky, and need to get up early the next day. But if it is an important Bright Light to help a friend in need, then there is a different sort of satisfaction in this behavior. The phrase “doing good is its own reward” fits if doing good involves behaviors captured in our personal Bright Lights.

But for many people, crossing Bright Lines may carry an unexpected, tangible thrill, a sense of joy or of power.<sup>12</sup> These first-order responses can become seductive and might supersede or bias their second-order rational processing. The idea that people act rationally tends to obscure how second-order notions of rationality may get short-circuited by powerful pulls toward short-term, nonrational desires:

Lying, cheating, killing, stealing, and satisfying short-term bodily needs (wrath, lust, greed, gluttony, sloth) are all actions that produce immediate pleasure and drive-reduction at the expense of our overall well-being in the long run. This fact explains the congenital weakness of human nature in its tendency to succumb to the unruly temptations of the flesh.<sup>13</sup>

This common human tendency to indulge in one or more nonrational behaviors mystifies those who think people just perform actions that make sense for their long-term benefit, but should not be an issue for those studying the social psychology of conscience. If people’s first-order systems feel drawn to one of these bodily needs, they have the power to shape their second-order (supposedly logical and self-interested) processing, leading to biased Lawyer Logic justifying falling prey to these temptations.

Of course, some people develop first-order reactions that are fully oriented towards helping others, especially those close to them. These people would not feel a first-order joy or thrill at sneaking around, overeating, or indulging in any of the other popular sins. Societal roles (e.g., parent, family member) frame interpretations such that people filling those roles do not have their selfish intuitions triggered; instead, their first-order framings put others first. The idea that people need a superego to battle their selfish intuitions is misguided; many of their automatic responses are not hedonistic or self-serving. As Richard Joyce sums up, “[a]ll of the empirical evidence shows that humans are often motivated by genuine regard for others, and not ultimately by selfish motives.”<sup>14</sup>

### **CONTEXT FOR CONSCIENCE: A POLARIZED SOCIETY?**

Human behavior is a combination of internal and external factors. People develop personality predispositions, first-order response tendencies, to

behave in certain ways. Yet, as stressed throughout this book, situations contain tremendous pressures that channel behavior and can override these first-order intuitions. This means that any study of conscience needs to look at multiple levels—ranging from the neurological to the societal—to understand human action. Modern society, as I have highlighted, offers an especially broad array of potential moral influences, and the United States likely contains as much ambiguity in terms of moral messages as any nation given its overt attempt to bring together people from vastly different ethnicities and religions under one societal umbrella. The attempt to bridge divides roils many nations around the world, as we are at root a tribal species. In America, one's beliefs are under consistent potential challenge by the sheer diversity of available ideas and interaction partners and through various media. Even if we do not personally know anybody who is gay or non-Christian or Hispanic, we are aware such people exist and make claims to citizenship and rights in society. This is the backdrop for the ambiguous moral landscape discussed in the last chapter,<sup>15</sup> but at the same time, does diversity of perspective necessarily mean polarization? Is America really at a “culture war”?

Competing moral discourses are a constituent feature of modern social life.<sup>16</sup> This is due to the sheer variety of social groups and the improved ways for them to be heard with modern communication, but is also due to the competing moral spheres within which we operate. What is right in a legal sense may not mesh with what is right in our family life or in the political arena. We interact within many domains and have at least cursory knowledge of fields that we don't participate in. We've all seen movies about the legal system, jail, courtrooms, and so on. The same person may act morally at work and at home but use different moral codes (if/then intuitions) to guide behavior. Multiple social roles can mean multiple or conflicting moral codes over and above our awareness of multiple perspectives. Society is structured around multiplicity simply through creating different public and private spheres within which we interact.

Many legal and political debates revolve around balancing the sphere of personal liberty with the notion of collective rights (such as security) or redressing historical grievances (such as affirmative action). There is a great deal of social-psychological evidence that members of disadvantaged groups get treated more harshly or have to perform better to get equivalent assessments as members of more advantaged groups. If one is an African-American, one really does have to perform better than a white counterpart to get a similarly positive evaluation. How much should the government assist with evening out such processes? Issues of both liberty and equality certainly come into routine conflict.<sup>17</sup> Both are important Bright Lights within a society, so the issue is not choosing one guiding principle but adjudicating between compelling ideals. As suggested earlier, framing

becomes the important way to motivate potential supporters of any particular issue. But those frames, far from abstract notions, tap into real values and Bright Lights that resonate with particular individuals.

This is a place where overheated political rhetoric obscures a sociological reality. The popular discourse concerning a “culture war” turns out to be overstated for almost all contentious social issues (with the exception of abortion).<sup>18</sup> It seems that a person who’s Bright Lines get crossed by immigration, flag burning, welfare, or other hot-button issues makes the most noise. The population as a whole, however, has attitudes clustered in the middle of the debate, not at the noisy ends. This suggests that the *Sturm und Drang* about these issues is done to motivate certain people through framing and triggering Bright Line reactions, not to accurately capture some sort of real split between Red and Blue states. In fact, the public comes to more similar—or at least closer—conclusions about most issues than the leaders of political parties who have a real stake in creating a perceived schism within a society. This schism, if communicated effectively, motivates a minority of people at the first-order, “hot” level. Certain narratives appeal to the more polarized true-believers of each political party,<sup>19</sup> and this motivates people into giving time, money, and votes to one party or the other. It is important to try to motivate those people who are not already invested in one party or another through triggering Bright Light and Bright Line, first-order reactions. Framing is so important precisely because the bulk of values people argue over are important to all of them.<sup>20</sup> Effective political strategies, it seems, involve triggering Bright Lines in certain people to override rational attempts at building consensus. Bright Lines seem to be better motivators than Bright Lights; bad stimuli get more reaction than good.<sup>21</sup>

We can compare the United States to other nations by drawing on a body of literature based on the World Values Survey.<sup>22</sup> As mentioned in Chapter 3, these authors claim that economic changes predict shifts from those who value materialist concerns (stable economy, law and order) to those who are focused on postmaterialist quality-of-life issues because their societies take for granted material concerns (a sense of community, concern for the environment). A country’s level of economic development predicts its members’ values (Bright Lights). The more stable a nation’s economy and polity, the more abstract its Bright Lights. This shift is associated with a global trend toward self-expressive, less iron-clad values (though a nation’s particular cultural history matters as well). For economically advanced countries, there is a trend toward allowing more space for individual self-expression rather than conforming to tradition or societal norms. But, because of different starting points based on history and religion, worldwide values are not converging into a single pattern.<sup>23</sup>

While the United States is *not* nearly as divided as its internal political discourse makes it seem, it *is* a world outlier. In most technologically

advancing countries there is less of an emphasis on religion as the basis for values,<sup>24</sup> highlighting the importance of self-expression values anchored in secular sources. Religious authority is typically not seen as an important justification for those values. The United States is different,<sup>25</sup> a “deviant case,” with respect to these society-values patterns.<sup>26</sup> The United States has become more concerned with self-expression values, like much of the rest of the world, but has paradoxically become *more* religious, as well, the only country in the world to find self-expression values more important while also anchoring them in religious authority.

In addition to this comparatively greater religious focus, the United States also has a high level of residential mobility. Stability within communities contributes to more prosocial activity in those communities.<sup>27</sup> Thus, the highly advanced economic environment in the United States contributes to people moving at a comparatively higher rate, and these factors seem to undermine religious calls to be less selfish. Compared with other Western nations, we live in a climate of mixed messages. We might think we would like this, since Americans profess a desire to be exposed to different moral codes. But, we do not like to build friendships or communities with people who draw different moral boundaries.<sup>28</sup> Hence, the societal context adds to ambiguity and seems to undermine traditionally moral orientations. While we vaguely agree on most issues, we are most responsive to those on which we disagree; moral disagreement does contribute to less solidarity.

This is a good place to revisit the lack of engagement with religion in a book on the social psychology of conscience. I mentioned in Chapter 1 that religion would not be my focus, largely because many people around the world share broadly similar values regardless of their religious beliefs. Discussing the architecture of conscience means exploring the mechanisms whereby cultural beliefs become incorporated into an individual’s personal identity and identifying how those horizons frame their thoughts, feelings, actions, and post hoc justifications for behavior. The sources of the legitimacy for those beliefs are beyond the scope of this inquiry. Whether we believe in equality because of its logical derivation (from a number of philosophical traditions) or because our religious authorities say equality is important, the end result for conscience is the same. Equality will form a Bright Light that we identify with, and violations of equality will trigger Bright Line reactions of unfairness or unjustness.

There are likely distinct patterns by religious group about which Bright Lines and Bright Lines are considered important, though evidence suggests that specific religious affiliation is less important for predicting values than the extent to which an individual is orthodox in their beliefs.<sup>29</sup> Highly practicing Catholics have more in common, in other words, with Orthodox Jews than with less-practicing Catholics. There is evidence that

people who are more religious develop more prosocial values,<sup>30</sup> and certainly regular people believe that morality is something associated with the especially religious.<sup>31</sup> However, as scandal after scandal suggests, some highly religious people engage in decidedly nonmoral behaviors—ranging from inappropriate relations with children to their cover-up—or religious leaders engage in homosexual acts while simultaneously condemning others for those same acts. Thus, religion, itself, does not guarantee moral behavior. What religion might do is develop contexts that contribute to the possibility of either shaping first-order impulses or stronger second-order restraints on nonmoral impulses, thus strengthening the prosocial aspects of conscience within situations.

### WHAT MAKES A MORAL EXEMPLAR?

We typically do not find paragons of morality outside of fiction, but there are people we hold up as moral exemplars. Anne Colby and William Damon, psychologists who have done the pioneering research in this area, suggest five criteria for thinking of a person as a moral exemplar: (1) a sustained commitment to moral ideals or principles that include a generalized respect for humanity; (2) disposition to act in accord with one's moral ideals or principles; (3) willingness to risk one's self-interest for the sake of one's moral values; (4) tendency to be inspiring to others and move them to moral action; (5) and realistic humility, lack of concern for one's ego.<sup>32</sup> Note that religiosity has not been empirically found to be a prerequisite for moral action, nor is there only one sort of moral exemplar.<sup>33</sup>

We are all faced with social pressures and obstacles to helping others. It is precisely because some people act in the face of external constraints that we consider them to be more moral.<sup>34</sup> When interviewed, moral exemplars—such as those who led civil rights struggles or hid Jews from the Nazis—did not report feeling like they made a special choice; rather, they felt that they had no choice at all. That is, they did not calculate their actions. Exemplars seem not to agonize over right and wrong but rather easily come to prosocial, moral conclusions.<sup>35</sup> Their intuitions seem to automatically operate in line with larger moral principles, and they did not feel like they had a choice as much as it was self-evident to them what actions they needed to take.<sup>36</sup> This is the way our most powerful Bright Lights operate, as external forces that self-evidently are true and do not need logical justification.<sup>37</sup> Moral appeals are rarely processed rationally, though we can be persuaded to alter our principles,<sup>38</sup> but typically we do not shift our most valued Bright Lights or Bright Lines in response to logical, persuasive arguments.<sup>39</sup>

Exemplar behavior is rooted in identity, not calculation.<sup>40</sup> Their combination of informational assumptions—anchored in a prosocial personal

identity—and the resulting prosocial intuitions frame situations actions as *requiring* prosocial action. Exemplars do not score more highly on measures of moral development, such as the classic Kohlberg scheme.<sup>41</sup> They do not have advanced philosophical understandings of right and wrong. Rather, prosocial Bright Lines are more central to their self-concepts. When asked about their actions, exemplars do not appeal to abstract principles;<sup>42</sup> they appeal to concrete feelings rather than to generalizations. They do not appeal to Platonic or Humean philosophical principles of right and wrong. They offer narratives suggesting that their moral intuitions and informational assumptions allowed little choice but to “do the right thing,” even when many others did not engage in such actions. They could articulate some of these abstractions when pressed, but typically these ideals so deeply framed their interpretations of the world that they did not recognize their influence.

Moral exemplars do seem to share some personality-level attributes. Exemplars seem to have greater certainty about their actions, demonstrate more positive outlooks in general, and find moral goods (prosocial Bright Lights) to be more central to their sense of self.<sup>43</sup> There is some evidence that highly moral individuals have more agreeable personalities across situations (as measured in standard personality scales) that lead them to rise above their own distress to orient toward helping others in difficulty.<sup>44</sup> In Chapter 9, I introduced Dan McAdams’s three-level model of personality, highlighting how the stories we construct about our lives over time form an additional aspect of conscience above first- and second-order processing. For moral exemplars, it appears, part of their narrative self-understanding involves telling a moral story about choices they have made and how they see themselves.<sup>45</sup> This is especially true for people who demonstrate moral behavior over time as opposed to responding morally once in an emergency situation. They are more likely to describe themselves in terms of ideal selves, a form of Bright Lights, than nonexemplars.<sup>46</sup> Moral exemplars are diverse; some have stronger first-order intuitions toward helping others, some have second-order self-understandings that motivate helping, and some tie these two levels into an ongoing life story revolving around helping others. These three levels of conscience draw on social influences and interactions, not just magical personality traits. We need to know more about why some people develop stronger intuitions than others, especially in a society that focuses so much on individual success.

### THE COMMITTED FLEXIBILITY OF CONSCIENCE

Do moral exemplars speak to the rest of us, trying to live lives in line with our Bright Lights in an ambiguous world full of perspectives and voices

that claim legitimacy? We cannot simply accept all perspectives as equally valid; modern life necessitates making identity claims. Treating all moral claims as somehow equal, what is termed pure relativism, defies what seems to be a human need to make distinctions.<sup>47</sup> We find living in a morally variable world unpleasant. We need horizons through which to interpret the world; otherwise we feel unmoored.<sup>48</sup> These interpretations do not just tell us what is, but also what should be, even if they are vague and inarticulate notions.<sup>49</sup> They circumscribe our perceptions, verbal and nonverbal, and thus frame what actions seem appropriate when confronted with situational factors.

To lead more moral lives, by conventional standards, it is too simple to just suggest that people develop a stronger superego or become better socialized. For one reason, there is too much diversity in situation and role and social group to ever unilaterally apply a single moral standard to every problem. Teaching morality means teaching the process of interpretation; overly simple notions ("just say no") will rarely cover all situations.<sup>50</sup> Stubbornly imposing simplistic standards on complicated moral issues can, in fact, lead to immorality.<sup>51</sup> Except with young children, simple moral rules do not work. Amitai Etzioni highlights the famous example of Antioch College's unsuccessful institution of a behavioral code of conduct mandating explicit negotiation for every step in their students' sexual activity. These explicit rules on paper were rather unworkable in daily life, and their rigidity became the object of much derision.<sup>52</sup>

At the same time, when something becomes an internalized Bright Line, it largely acts to short-circuit the need for explication and become an unconsciously self-imposed rigidity. Our sense of self is circumscribed by those inviolate moral prohibitions that intuitively trigger strong reactions. These negative moral prohibitions, as we have seen throughout this book, are not enough to keep our behavior in line with our Bright Lights. Situations and short-term desires may overcome some of our longer-term ideals.

Bright Lines and Bright Lights are alliterative shorthand terms introduced to capture positive and negative moral guidelines. They are the often-unarticulated proactive and inhibitive orientations we develop toward our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Some thoughts or actions are taboo in general (incest), some are taboo in certain situations (sexual behavior at work), and some are simply conventional matters of personal choice (the style of eyeglasses). Some of these Bright Lines are stronger than others, though I have spent little time on their mechanics, instead suggesting that more research should be done about their nature. Are they transposable? Does having too many Bright Lines dilute our energy and thus behavior? How easy is it to talk somebody into redrawing a Bright Line?



Our strongest Bright Lines, those most central to our sense of personal identity, operate as intuitive, electrified “third rails” if we even think about crossing them (note the phrase “shock the conscience”). Given that our minds are fallible and biased, however, Bright Lines are not fixed, or at least we can fool ourselves that we may not have crossed one when we have. The shock of crossing a Bright Line can be severe, since it signals that we did not necessarily live up to a morally sufficient self-image. Thus, we go to tremendous lengths (see Chapter 7) to ignore or distort or forget such violations. If our behaviors, rather than our thoughts, cross these lines we often employ Lawyer Logic to attempt to convince ourselves and others that we did not, in fact, cross that Bright Line. Self-justification occurs for individuals, groups, and nations who would rather not directly engage in historical, morally questionable acts or acknowledge the validity of an adversary’s argument. We start with the idea that “I am” or “My group is” morally good, right, and just, and reason from there. This motivation is central to human personhood, but is only found sporadically in the literature on motivation and the self.

The flexible conscience is not unteathered from reality, but is not an objective judge. It operates through the prism of identities as discussed throughout this book. Identities signal our allegiances to others and to our place in the social order and thus provide situated guidance for interpreting moral situations as well as channel our Lawyer Logic. “In the way we draw the lines of our loyalties, we define ourselves as persons.”<sup>53</sup> Our allegiances and social locations frame our interpretations of the world and explain how the same person might reason and intuit differently in different situations. The reference point for right and wrong, the horizons that help interpret the world, can shift based on internalized situational expectations as well as highlighted allegiances. Even creating a common group identity leads people to help others more, even if the people in that new group were once considered out-group members.<sup>54</sup>

The ethical question for living life more in line with one’s Bright Lights, then, requires an understanding of the extent to which people can control their own situations and their resulting actions, to exert what is referred to in social science as “agency” over their lives. Agency is the capacity to act outside of social-structural pressures and psychological forces. This is a complicated issue in social theory,<sup>55</sup> but for our purposes it largely refers to the ability to exert second-order control over our first-order reactions, to make choices and stick with them when faced with situational pressures and across the life course. Some believe that we have a responsibility to cultivate control over our emotions.<sup>56</sup> As Jonathan Haidt puts it, drawing on his analogy that our dual-processing system is like an elephant and its rider, “virtue resides in a well-trained elephant.”<sup>57</sup>



If we want to change our decisions, we need not only to shift our internal thoughts and reactions, we need to shift environments.<sup>58</sup> Ethical responsibility lies in part in self-preparation to make tough choices when the situation demands.<sup>59</sup> The fact that so much of human action is routine and does not employ much second-order, conscious thought means that situations trigger long-established if/then behavioral dispositions for action and we respond pretty automatically. The saying “if you do what you always do, you’ll get what you always get” is a rather apt description of most of our social behaviors. If we want to live in line with Bright Lights that we find difficult to achieve, then, changing situational factors may be as important as trying to change ourselves. This can mean shifting places or even our friends.<sup>60</sup> Behavioral therapy groups, such as Alcoholics Anonymous, certainly know this is how we work.

If we are a parent worried about socializing others, it appears that later life prosocial behaviors can trace back to early socialization and modeling.<sup>61</sup> Increasing empathy, as discussed earlier, also contributes to prosocial horizons of interpretation.<sup>62</sup> Empathy is partly a learned behavior, so once again parenting—as most people suspect—does matter. It is an open question as to how much of the first-order empathetic response can be taught and how much it differs among individuals along with temperament. And, people with strong second-order Bright Lights toward helping others might do so without strong first-order empathetic feelings; doing the right thing from feeling, according to Kant, is an improper motivation. Moral behavior comes from choosing to act according to higher principles, in this view. In practice, however, people rarely operate this way.

Exemplars who exhibit long-term moral behavior, caring exemplars, demonstrate second-order agency to stay within situations that facilitate prosocial action. Any of us can arrange our lives and friends and situations to allow for greater chances to help others. Most of us rarely find ourselves in situations where we might demonstrate a different sort of exemplar behavior, that of bravery. If we did, research on helping behavior has long established that situational factors (like being the only one available to help or when there are low costs to helping) increase the likelihood that anybody, regardless of individual dispositions, will help others. In this, situation matters.

Other factors get in the way of our Bright Lights, as well. Previously, we drew on the notion of ego depletion to suggest that being tired or stressed out might reduce second-order control over our behavior, and thus taxing situations might make it less likely for us to behave in line with our Bright Lights. Similarly, we might suggest that being too rigid with our Bright Lines, not offering ourselves the flexibility to adapt to the exigencies of a particular situation and holding firmly to not crossing Bright Lines might

aid in this depletion. Drawing too many Bright Lines might take up conscious and unconscious processing capacity to ensure that they are not crossed, rendering us more susceptible to situational pressures and ego depletion. These are, as they say, empirical questions.

In the face of this complexity, perhaps the ease with which we confabulate (Chapter 7), manufacturing plausible reasons to let us morally satisfice is part of maintaining a clean conscience across our lives. The reasons we salute moral exemplars are precisely because they do what is so much more difficult for the rest of us, either bravely override first-order impulses of fear or construct lives around second-order, prosocial Bright Lights. Both are remarkable and supposedly tell us a great deal about a person's inner character, at least in our culture. As we have discussed, however, these are elements of the useful fiction that we construct about ourselves. Brave leaders may be selfish in other areas of their lives, and selfless volunteers or religious leaders who have dedicated their public lives in the service of others may, too, cross cultural Bright Lines in less public arenas. Conscience involves weaving together a coherent-enough useful fiction across all of our life's domains, highlighting some and distorting others, in the service of convincing ourselves and others that we are plausibly morally decent members of our communities.

### A FINAL NOTE ON SOCIAL SCIENCE AND MORALITY

Apart from the notable exceptions that I have presented throughout this book, social science studies of morality have waned over the past century, especially in my home discipline of sociology.<sup>63</sup> The relative marginalization of studying morals and morality may come from a fear of appearing to advocate a particular moral system. Doing so would mean scientists would be stepping outside the scientific objective of value-neutrality. Economics and psychology in particular suffer from "physics envy" (a phrase my brother introduced to me), a desire to understand humans as precisely as physicists understand particles. This level of prediction is, as I have argued, a lost cause, given both the complexity of human life and the fact that people—unlike chemicals, quarks, and cells—are self-aware. Social science should properly strive for the precision of the more natural sciences even while accepting people are exceptionally complicated. I am quite relieved that our best models of human behavior only explain a part of what people do. It is scary to imagine being able to perfectly predict, and potentially manipulate, human behavior.

Ironically, part of the reason for the decline in the study of values and morality (Bright Lights and Bright Lines) is a desire to avoid advocating any *particular* value or moral system. In philosophy, this is known as the

“is/ought” problem; studying what “is” does not tell us anything about what “ought” to be. But studying the “is” of the social world need not mean advocating for a particular “ought.” This worry has led to stilted models and theories about human action and obscured the central point that human beings exist in moral space. To do good social science, we need to examine the world(s) of “oughts” (and “ought not”) that define self, allegiances, judgment, emotion, intuition, behavior, and self-justification. Studying the “is” involves exploring *all* of the dimensions that make up a human life. And moral concerns are primary for understanding the human condition, both in situations and across the life course.

Social scientists can examine the processes and relationships that surround morality without advocating for any particular value system. We should leave that to philosophers, theologians, and everyday people. But the fact that all societies have some version of philosophers and theologians, people who grapple with issues of good and evil, suggests the centrality of these concerns for social life. Can we ever begin to understand a person without properly engaging the moral dimension? Ideally, social psychologists can build toward models that reflect real people acting in real situations: conflicted, messy, self-serving, biased, sometimes rational, and sometimes irrational people who represent the inherent paradoxes of social life.<sup>64</sup> Human beings do good things, bad things, and many things in-between and many more whose judgment depends on their particular perspective. This should be at the root of understanding the self.

People’s Bright Lights and Bright Lines may have less to say about situated behavior, the focus of much social-psychological research, but people still morally evaluate their behaviors and either incorporate them into a useful fiction or dismiss them. This process incorporates the notion of time missing from too much current social psychology<sup>65</sup> and looks at human behavior as part of an ongoing life narrative, not simply as occurring in isolated situations. The study of morality writ large need not be about advocating any particular morality, but taking moral stands should mean understanding how people actually operate. Understanding the “is” means also understanding people’s “oughts”; both are necessary for understanding morality and conscience. As Alasdair MacIntyre writes,

“[I]t is not clear to me ... how *any* adequate philosophical analysis in this area could escape being also a sociological hypothesis, and vice versa. There seems something deeply mistaken in the notion enforced by the conventional curriculum that there are two distinct subjects or disciplines—moral philosophy, a set of conceptual enquiries, on the one hand and the sociology of morals, a set of empirical hypotheses and findings, on the other.”<sup>66</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Conscience is an umbrella for grouping a variety of social processes—ranging from our dual-processing mental systems to sociological factors that provide content (Bright Lights and Bright Lines) for those systems, through our situated behaviors and our after-the-fact incorporation of those behaviors—into a social-psychological understanding of the self across time and situation. Two constructs rarely applied to the study of morality, identities and the life course, round out a flexible-but-not-arbitrary understanding of how the conscience develops and operates within situations and over time. Bright Lights, including values, are not simply intriguing options for an individual. They are paradigmatic orienting horizons, framing if/then behavioral predispositions that translate perception into action. To understand people, we need to understand behavior. To understand behavior, we need to understand social situations. To understand situations, we need to understand how social structure patterns situations. To understand the individual incorporation of structural and cultural beliefs, we need to understand the self. And to understand the self, we need to highlight the centrality of morality to personal identity. This last step is the goal of this book.

Building an understanding of the moral actor that informs—and is informed by—empirical research draws on multiple social sciences. Their synthesis offers the empirical possibility of studying the moral dimension and hinges on understanding how Bright Lines and Bright Lights anchor the self. Bright Lights, including value-structures, represent moral intuitions about prohibited and desired behaviors. Socially shaped Bright Lights and Bright lines anchor personal identity, consistencies of the self that exist within and across situations. Personal identity offers the possibility for linking individual moral predispositions, self-reflective capacities, and ongoing life narratives to both action and social structure. A social psychology of conscience should, eventually, be able to walk through all of these linked social processes. This book sets out the architecture for such a synthesis, supporting the contention that the capacity for moral facilities is part of being human but that its content is shaped by culture within certain evolved constraints.<sup>67</sup> The capacity belongs to our species; the content is socially channeled.

We do not have “a” conscience. Conscience, like the self, is an ongoing, fluid, self-aware process. At the root of conscience, for most people, is the biased idea that “I am a morally worthy person.” We feel we are morally good enough, even if most of us are not moral exemplars. We are biased to interpreting our actions and the world around us in ways that support this view. Bright Lines are intuitive heuristics that mark off certain actions

and thoughts as outside of being morally worthwhile or as morally abhorrent. Situations may lead us to cross those lines; thus we draw on a range of values (Bright Lights) that are publicly recognizable justifications for those times. Maybe I lied to my boss, but it was for a good reason (keeping my job, feeding my family). Perhaps I drove recklessly, but there are good moral reasons for that (such as protecting my right to space, not being late to appointments). Since we all share attachment with the array of Bright Lights captured in the values discussed in Chapter 2, we can pick the ones that intuitively feel plausible for justifying those actions that do not fit our self-images. Unsuccessful justification leads to shame and other moral emotions discussed in Chapter. 4. Too much shame, and we have to reevaluate our sense of self as morally worthy.

Our Bright Lights and Bright Lines anchor our sense of personal identity, but are suffused throughout the other roles and allegiances we find personally important. The extent of this is an empirical question, since some situations activate different Bright Lines than others. But, in a potentially conflicting and ambiguous world, these aspects of conscience offer intuitive signposts to guide actions and interpretation. Conscience operates within and across situations, even as situated social pressures lead us to act in ways that we would not predict. Peer pressure, status, and even simply being around others leads us to act in ways that can surprise us, including blocking us from prosocial behavior (such as helping strangers) that we otherwise think we would perform.

But situations do not affect everyone the same way, so we need to know more about how any particular individual conceptualizes themselves and their relation to others in that situation, whether based on societal understandings, situational roles, or social group allegiances (Chapters 3, 5, and 6). I hypothesized that role identities circumscribe horizons for appropriate action—including those with a moral valence—within a situation, and group identities circumscribe the range of people (“Us” and “Them”) to whom we apply prosocial judgments. Picturing social action on an imaginary grid, our situations are mapped through our role commitments and moral provinces map how far we extend those particular moral obligations. When we leave work at the end of the day, we move to another part of this social map and draw different boundaries leading to different, but similarly important, understandings of self and obligations to others.

Some psychologists, notably Haidt, posit a limited array of metaethical principles that evolution has developed within our species. They argue that we are able to develop larger moral schemes around certain core issues, including harm restriction, fairness, loyalty, and purity. I have argued that in many cases, loyalty to our in-group can trump our interpretation of the application of these other principles. Unless somebody in our group

does something indefensibly heinous, and even there history offers examples of people defending their national leaders after immoral actions (and even there), we treat people in the “Us” group better than those outside of that group and offer wider latitude when judging their actions. Decades of research demonstrate that the reference for these groups can change depending on where we are and what identities are salient. Some people consistently evidence a wider circle of “Us,” willing to selflessly assist all kinds of people, and we consider them moral exemplars. Their informational assumptions, whether derived from upbringing or culture or personality, call forth intuitions geared toward helping others more often and more consistently across situations than for the rest of us. And when they have the capacity, such people arrange their lives to encounter more situations whereby they can actualize these intuitions (volunteering), thus reinforcing them over time.

A society’s culture and its social structure lead to situations that shape individuals. This is the root of sociological science. However, those individuals make choices within situations that society places them in, and sometimes they can choose those situations. Most of the time, people choose situations that reaffirm their sense of self. As the sociological truism goes, society shapes individuals who (re)shape society. Conscience lets us include an often-overlooked moral component in our understanding of these processes.

This moral component shapes our life narrative, the useful fiction that articulates feelings of consistency across time and space. This sense of unity derived from first-hand experience is only partly recognizable to somebody who only knows us in one situation. It anchors conscience and plausibly holds together a variety of impulses, desires, needs, wants, experiences, fears, and self-identifications. Our stories help explain our behavior to ourselves and to others, even as we might overlook the power of situations and society to shape and guide that behavior. These fictions cut through the randomness and fundamental ambiguity of social life and help us connect our past and future to the present. An overlooked aspect of this fiction involves the bias that we are minimally moral no matter how others interpret our actions. This useful fiction is the core horizon through which we view ourselves, develop informational assumptions, orient behavior, and prop up our sense of being moral satisficers. Conscience, properly understood, constitutes the fiction of consistency between our mercurial first-order intuitions and socially patterned second-order identifications and forms the core of ourselves that, depending on our perspective, potentially oscillates between being moral and evil.

# NOTES

## PRELIMS

1. This term is vital to the book. Keep reading.

## INTRODUCTION

1. Buckley, Cara. "A Man Down, a Train Arriving, and a Stranger Makes a Choice." *New York Times*, January 3, 2007, p. A1.
2. Hunter (2000); see also Haidt (2001).
3. E.g., Frankfurt (1971).

## CHAPTER 1

1. Zimbardo (2007), p. 3.
2. McCarthy (1912–1989).
3. Allport (1954).
4. Jahoda (2007).
5. Gintis (2003).
6. Hare (1993).
7. Callahan (2004).
8. Haidt (2007).
9. Haidt (2006).
10. Jost (2006); Zelditch (2006).
11. Epley and Dunning (2000).
12. Kunda (1990).
13. Carver and Scheier (1998).
14. Taylor (1989); see Vaisey (2007) for an empirical analysis. I expand on this point at great length in Chapter 8.
15. Yeung and Martin (2003); Zuberi (2001).
16. Hitlin (2003, 2006, 2007).
17. E.g., Hechter et al. (1999); Vaisey (2007).
18. Kohn (1989); Smith (2003).
19. Mischel (2004).
20. Wuthnow (1992).
21. Calhoun (1991).

22. Epstein (1985).
23. Kagan (1994 [1984]), though some primatologists suggest we are not so unique (see Chapter 3).
24. E.g., Massey (2002), among many others.
25. Maryanski and Turner (1992).
26. Baumeister (2005).
27. Turiel (2002).
28. Turiel and Neff (2000).
29. Etzioni (1996), p. xv.
30. Smith (2003), p. 8.
31. Nichols (2002).
32. See also Turiel (2006).
33. Bandura (1999); Piaget (1932 [1960]) makes a similar distinction.
34. Ryan and Connell (1989).
35. Haidt (2006).
36. Lakoff (1996), p. 380; see also Lakoff and Johnson (1999).
37. Ainslie (2001).
38. Katz (1993), p. 5.
39. Hart and Carlo (2005).
40. Nucci and Turiel (2000).
41. Hewitt (1989).
42. Walker and Pitts (1998).
43. Colby and Damon (1995); Walker et al. (1995).
44. Baker (2005); Nevitte and Cochrane (2006); Nucci and Turiel (1993).
45. Wolfe (1998).
46. E.g., see Starks and Robinson (2007).
47. Kluckhohn and Murray (1948), p. 176.
48. Wolfe (1998).
49. Taylor (1989).
50. Baumeister (1997b).
51. See Bellah et al. (1985) for a prominent treatment of this argument; see also Seidler (1996).
52. Frankfurt (1971), p. 7.
53. Baumeister (2005).
54. Bargh and Chartrand (1999).
55. Wilson (2002).
56. Metcalfe and Mischel (1999).
57. Zajonc (1980).
58. Epstein (1985).
59. Wilson (2002).
60. Mischel (2004).
61. Gigerenzer (2007).
62. Massey (2002), p. 17.
63. Haidt (2006).
64. E.g., Wegner (2002).



65. Wilson (2002).
66. See Joas (1993); for a history of pragmatist thought see Menand (2001); West (1989).
67. Camic (1989).
68. For more, see Dewey (1896, 1939); Joas (1985); Mead (1934), among many others.
69. See Carver and Scheier (1998) for a thorough overview of goal setting.
70. E.g., Bellah et al. (1985); Vaisey (REF).
71. E.g., Haidt (2006).
72. Turner (1976).
73. E.g., Kondo (1990).
74. E.g., Coontz (2005).
75. Helwig, Turiel, and Nucci (1996); Matsumoto (1999); Nucci and Turiel (2000); Oyserman, Coon, and Kimmelmeier (2002); Takano and Osaka (1999); Turiel (2002); Turiel and Neff (2000).
76. Wilson, Lindsey, and Schooler (2000).
77. Wegner (2002).
78. Haidt (2001, 2002, 2003, 2004); Haidt and Craig (2004).
79. Haidt (2001, 2005).
80. Kunda (1990).
81. Dictionary.com
82. Joyce (2006). This also initially reads like Kohlberg's (1981) infamous scheme, which I will discuss in detail in Chapter 4. His broad outlines are convincing; the devil is, as they say, in the details.
83. Thomson et al. (2006), p. 267.
84. Vaisey (2007) develops this argument within a sociology of culture framework.
85. Fish (2005).
86. Gecas (1991); Miyamoto (1970). But see Turner (1987) for one notable attempt.
87. Nisan (1996).
88. Carver and Scheier (1998).
89. Devine (1989); Devine and Sherman (1992).

## CHAPTER 2

1. Wiley (1994), p. 144.
2. Kelley et al. (2003).
3. Doris (2002), p. 101.
4. Scheffler (1992).
5. E.g., Baumeister (1999, 2005); Callero (2003); Gecas and Burke (1995); Owens (2003); Kashima and Foddy (2002); Leary (2007); Leary and Tangney (2003); Stets and Burke (2003).
6. Joas (2000), p. 2.
7. Demo (1992); Gecas and Mortimer (1987).

8. Stryker (1994).
9. Markus and Wurf (1987).
10. Owens (2003).
11. Tesser et al. (2000).
12. Hewitt (1989).
13. E.g., Sedikides and Brewer (2001).
14. Baumeister (1999).
15. Cooley (1902); see McCall (2006).
16. For overviews see Blumer (1969); Fine (1993); Joas (1985); McCall (2006); Stryker and Vryan (2003).
17. Wuthnow (1992).
18. Famously, see Mead (1934).
19. Gibbs (2003); Schwalbe (1991).
20. E.g., Dunning (2003); Tesser (2003).
21. E.g., Banaji and Prentice (1994); Schlenker (2003), and anything by Goffman (but see 1959).
22. Carver and Scheier (1998); Gecas (2001).
23. Gecas (1991).
24. See Leary (2007) for an overview. Also, Bandura (1982); Cast and Burke (2002); Ryan and Deci (2003), among others.
25. E.g., Swann et al. (1987); Tice and Wallace (2003).
26. See Nisan (1996); Brubaker and Rogers (2006).
27. Cote (2006); Stryker (2000).
28. Gecas and Burke (1995).
29. Stryker (1980). For overviews, see Stryker and Burke (2000); Stets and Burke (2003).
30. Tajfel (1981); Tajfel and Turner (1979, 1986). See Hogg (2003) for an overview.
31. Hogg, Terry, and White (1995).
32. Thoits and Virshup (1997). See also Burke (2004); Stets and Burke (2000).
33. McCall and Simmons (1966).
34. Hogg (2001).
35. Burke (2003); Burke and Reitzes (1981, 1991).
36. Stets and Burke (2000); But see Burke (2004).
37. Deaux (1996).
38. Trafimow, Triandis, and Goto (1991).
39. Deaux (1992); Reid and Deaux (1996).
40. Lemmon and Moore (2001).
41. Mead (1934).
42. Mead (1932, 1938).
43. Flaherty and Fine (2001); Joas (1985).
44. Flaherty (1999, 2002, 2003).
45. James (1890).
46. Markus and Nurius (1986, 1987).
47. Higgins (1987a, 1987b).
48. Hitlin (2003).

49. Spates (1983).
50. Alexander (1987).
51. E.g., Baker (2005); Dimaggio, Evans, and Bryson (1996); Evans (2003).
52. Berlin (1990).
53. Schwartz (1992).
54. Damasio (2005).
55. Schwartz (1994), p. 21.
56. Schwartz (2004).
57. Kluckhohn (1951), p. 395.
58. Marini (2000).
59. James (1902); Joas (2000).
60. Hodges and Baron (1992).
61. E.g., Fischer (2006).
62. E.g., Halaby (2003); Johnson (2001, 2002).
63. Rokeach (1973).
64. See Howard (2003); Schuman (1995).
65. Konty and Dunham (1997); Maio et al. (2003); Rohan (2000).
66. Ajzen (1985); Ajzen and Fishbein (1977, 1980).
67. Schwartz (1996).
68. Katz (1960).
69. Schwartz and Bilsky (1987, 1990).
70. Schwartz (2006) has applied his values-scheme to demonstrate cultural orientations.
71. This scheme has been supported with different methodologies; Oishi et al. (1998); Pakizeh et al. (2007).
72. E.g., Hechter et al. (1999); Inglehart (1995, 1997); Rokeach (1973).
73. Carver and Scheier (1998), p. 346.
74. I go into more detail elsewhere (Hitlin and Piliavin 2004).
75. de Waal (2006).
76. Delamater and Myers (2007).
77. Fehr and Fischbacher (2003).
78. Smith (2003).
79. For a review of altruism, see Piliavin and Charng (1990).
80. E.g., Darley and Latane (1968).
81. Colby and Damon (1993).
82. Calhoun (1991).
83. Camic (1986).
84. Hart and Fegley (1995).
85. Shweder, Mahapatra, and Miller (1990).
86. Padilla-Walker and Carlo (2006).
87. Damon and Hart (1992); Smetana (1995); Tisak and Turiel (1988).
88. Shweder, Mahapatra, and Miller (1990).
89. Ibid.; Wolfe (1998).
90. Nucci (1996).
91. Baumeister, Stillwell, and Wotman (1990).
92. Haidt (2006).

93. See Hewitt (1998) for a critique of this societal fascination with high self-esteem.
94. E.g., Gecas (1986); Rosenberg, Schooler, and Schoenbach (1989).
95. Baumeister, Smart, and Boden (1996).
96. Alexander (1992).
97. Kaminsky (1984).
98. Dollard et al. (1939).
99. Berkowitz (1993).
100. For an overview of stress and the individual, see Thoits (1994).
101. Not the least of which are Milgram (1974) and Zimbardo (2004, 2007). Good overviews of this research can be found in DeLamater and Myers (2007); Doris (2002); Staub (2003), among many others.
102. Zelditch (2006).
103. Carnahan and McFarland (2007).
104. Haslam and Reicher (2007).
105. Katz (1993), p. 36.
106. Staub (2003), p. 5.
107. Baumeister (1997).
108. See also Baumeister and Vohs (2004).

### CHAPTER 3

1. Simmel (1902), ff, pp. 18–19.
2. de Waal (1996, 2005).
3. Tangney et al. (2007).
4. Fourcade and Healy (2007).
5. Haidt (2006).
6. Boehm (2000).
7. E.g., Schwartz (2006); see also Kagan (1994[1984]).
8. E.g., Scott (1976).
9. Castro and Toro (2004); Fry (2006).
10. Damasio (2003).
11. Kenrick et al. (2003).
12. de Waal (2006).
13. Gintis (2003).
14. Maryanski and Turner (1992).
15. Massey (2002).
16. Ibid.
17. This list is derived from Brown (1991, 2004); see also Kenrick et al. (2003).
18. See also Ridgeway (2006).
19. Famously, see Durkheim (1933).
20. See also Ekman and Friesen (1971).
21. See also Fry (2006).
22. E.g., Tajfel (1978).
23. Haidt (2006).
24. Brown (1991).

25. Hauser (2006), p. 36; see also Flack and de Waal (2000); see also Krebs (2008).
26. Gray (2007).
27. Haidt et al. (1993).
28. Flack and de Waal (2000).
29. This paragraph draws heavily from Tancredi's (2005) overview of research on the brain.
30. Hauser (2006).
31. Tancredi (2005), pp. 40–41.
32. Hauser (2006).
33. Quoted in Rosen, Jeffrey. "The Trials of Neurolaw." *New York Times Magazine*, March 11, 2007.
34. E.g., Zajonc (1980).
35. Damasio (1999, 2003); see also Tancredi (2005).
36. H. Damasio (2005); Moll et al. (2002).
37. Damasio (1999).
38. A. Damasio (2005).
39. Fehr and Fischbacher (2005).
40. de Waal (2005).
41. Dennett (2003); Simpson and Willer (2007).
42. Dennett (2003).
43. de Waal (1993, 1996); see Grey (2007) for a nonacademic discussion.
44. Flack and de Waal (2000).
45. Maryanski and Turner (1992).
46. Dennett (2003).
47. Greene et al. (2004).
48. Quoted in Vedantam, Shankar. "If It Feels Good to Be Good, It Might Be Only Natural." *The Washington Post*, May 28, 2007, p. A01.
49. Hauser (2006), p. 420.
50. See Kagan (1994 [1984]); Smetana (1995); Tappan (1997), for overviews.
51. Hodges and Baron (1992).
52. Damon (1999).
53. Kagan (1994 [1984]).
54. Goodman (2000).
55. Wainryb (2000).
56. Tappan (1997).
57. de Waal (1996).
58. Maynard and Perakyla (2003).
59. Vygotsky (1978).
60. Marris (1996).
61. Kochanska et al. (2004).
62. Nunner-Winkler (1993).
63. Asendorpf and Nunner-Winkler (1992).
64. Kochanska (2002).
65. Padilla-Walker (2007).
66. Gecas and Seff (1990).

67. Shweder et al. (1990).
68. Keller et al. (2004).
69. Shweder et al. (1990).
70. Keller et al. (1998).
71. Kohlberg (1981); Kohlberg and Candee (1984); Colby and Kohlberg (1984).
72. E.g., Piaget (1960 [1932]).
73. Gibbs (2003).
74. Liebert (1984).
75. Killen (2007).
76. Steinberg (2007).
77. Helwig et al. (1996); Kurtines et al. (1990); Walker and Pitts (1998).
78. Haidt (2007).
79. See Smetana and Turiel (2003) for one overview of these criticisms.
80. Shweder et al. (1990).
81. Shweder (1990).
82. Tisak and Turiel (1988).
83. Youniss and Yates (1999).
84. Hart and Fegley (1995).
85. Gilligan (1982).
86. Nunner-Winkler (1984).
87. Jaffee and Hyde (2000); Prince-Gibson and Schwartz (1998); Walker (2006).
88. Smetana et al. (1991).
89. Hart and Carlo (2005).
90. Shweder et al. (1990); Walker (2006).
91. Inglehart and Welzel (2005).
92. Nunner-Winkler (2004).
93. E.g., Turiel (2002); see also Nucci and Turiel (2000); Smetana (1995b).
94. See Kelly et al. (2007) for criticism of this distinction.
95. Damon and Hart (1992).
96. Nucci and Turiel (2000).
97. Smetana and Turiel (2003).
98. Corsaro and Fingerson (2003).
99. Piaget (1960 [1932]).
100. Etzioni (1996).
101. See Kimmel (2000) for a good introduction to such gender issues.
102. Gergen (1991); see Joas (1998) for a brief rejoinder that puts Gergen's argument in perspective.
103. Turiel (2002).
104. Hitlin and Piliavin (2004).
105. House (1981), p. 542, quoted in McLeod and Lively (2003).
106. E.g., Berger and Webster (2006); Correll and Ridgeway (2003).
107. Calhoun (1991).
108. House (1981), p. 542, quoted in McLeod and Lively (2003).
109. For those interested in a cultural sociology perspective on these issues, see work by Vaisey (2007), including his use of Bourdieu (1977) and Giddens

- (1984, 1991) to explain a different, though related, micro-to-macro link between culture and the individual. Other prominent cultural treatments include Bellah et al. (1985); Dimaggio (2002); Hunter (2000); Lamont (1992); Sayer (2005).
110. Kohn (1959, 1969, 1976); Kohn and Schooler (1982, 1983); Kohn et al. (2000); Kohn et al. (1990); Kohn and Schoenbach (1993); Pearlin and Kohn (1966); Slomczynski, Miller, and Kohn (1981).
  111. Kohn (1959, 1969); see also Xiao (2000).
  112. Kasser et al. (2002); Kohn and Schooler (1982); see also Mortimer and Lorence (1979).
  113. Schooler et al. (2004).
  114. Kohn (1989).
  115. McLeod and Lively (2003); see also Pallas (2003).
  116. McLeod and Lively (2003).
  117. For an overview compellation, see Mortimer and Shanahan (2003). For a shorter summary, see Elder (1998) or Elder and O'Rand (1995).
  118. Elder, Johnson, and Crosnoe (2003), p. 11.
  119. Archer (2000); Evans (2005); Shanahan (2000).
  120. Elder (1994); George (1996).
  121. Macmillan and Eliason (2003).
  122. Archer (2003), p. 148.
  123. Macmillan (2007).
  124. E.g., Hitlin and Elder (2007).
  125. Lakoff and Johnson (1999).
  126. Bellah et al. (1985); Hunter (2000).
  127. Maio et al. (2003).
  128. Lakoff (1996).
  129. Wuthnow (1992), p. 154.
  130. E.g., Jost and Hunyady (2005).
  131. Jost (2006).
  132. Famously, see Bourdieu (1977).
  133. Wolfe (1998).
  134. Wainryb (1993).
  135. Inglehart (1977, 1990, 1995, 1997, 2006); Baker (2000); and Welzel (2005).
  136. Inglehart (1997).
  137. Marks (1997).
  138. Inglehart and Baker (2000); Welzel (2005).
  139. Lamont (1992).
  140. Norris and Inglehart (2004).
  141. Schwartz and Sagie (2000).
  142. Clarke et al. (1999); Davis et al. (1999); see Hofstede (2001) and S. Schwartz (2004) for comparisons across different measures of values at the societal level.
  143. Turiel and Perkins (2004).
  144. Wuthnow (1992).

145. Shweder et al. (1990).
146. See Shweder (1990) for an argument defending multiple natural laws against Turiel (1994, 2002) who defends a justice- and harm-based notion of universal morality.
147. Ekman and Friesen (1971); Tsai, Knutson, and Fung (2006).
148. Shweder et al. (1990, 1997).
149. See Haidt (2006) for a longer discussion.
150. Shweder et al. (1997).
151. Haidt and Joseph (2004); Haidt and Graham (forthcoming).
152. Starks and Robinson (2007).
153. Norris and Inglehart (2004).
154. Sayer (2005); Scott (1976).
155. Turiel (2002).
156. Haidt et al. (1993).
157. Rokeach (1973); Prince-Gibson and Schwartz (1998); Struch et al. (2002).
158. Schwartz and Rubel (2005).
159. Halaby (2003); Johnson (2002); Lindsay and Knox (1984); Xiao (1999).

#### CHAPTER 4

1. Scheffler (1992), p. 25.
2. Hauser (2006); see Chapter 3.
3. Padilla-Walker (2007).
4. Ajzen and Fishbein (1980); see also Carver and Scheier (1998).
5. Hauser (2006) has an extended discussion of the theory of mind notion.
6. E.g., Pronin and Kugler (2007).
7. Ross (1977).
8. Miller (1984).
9. Haidt (2001).
10. Habermas (2005).
11. Tappan (1997).
12. Wojsiske (2005).
13. Greene et al. (2004).
14. Lakoff and Johnson (1999).
15. Baumeister (2005), p. 239.
16. Haidt (2006).
17. Nunner-Winkler (2004).
18. Kagan (2000).
19. de Waal (1996); Flack and de Waal (2000).
20. See Turiel (2002) for an extended discussion.
21. E.g., Kohlberg (1981); Turiel, Killen, and Helwig (1987).
22. E.g., Lemert (1994); Shweder et al. (1990).
23. Shweder and Haidt (2000).



24. Todd and Gigerenzer (2007).
25. Haidt, Koller, and Dias (1993); Shweder (1990).
26. Wainryb (2000).
27. Wainryb (1991).
28. Wainryb (1993).
29. Wainryb (2004).
30. Haidt et al. (2003).
31. Gray (2007).
32. E.g., Pronin and Kugler (2007).
33. Bandura (1991), p. 45.
34. Greene (2005).
35. Haidt (2001).
36. E.g., Bellah et al. (1985); Wolfe (1998).
37. Kagan (1994 [1984]).
38. Haidt (2001).
39. Gigerenzer (2007).
40. Haidt (2001, 2003a, 2004).
41. E.g., Pizarro and Bloom (2003); Saltzstein and Kasachkoff (2004); Turiel (2006).
42. de Waal (2006).
43. Greene and Haidt (2002).
44. E.g., Damasio (1999, 2003).
45. Wilson, Lindsey, and Schooler (2000).
46. Walker (2004).
47. Wilson (2002).
48. E.g., Hitlin (2003).
49. Maio and Olsen (1998).
50. Joas (2000).
51. Maio et al. (2001).
52. Karremans (2007).
53. Elster (1999).
54. Verbeek (2006).
55. See Smith-Lovin (1995); Stets (2003); Turner and Stets (2006) for overviews.
56. de Waal (2005), pp. 5–6.
57. Damasio (1999, 2005); see also Hauser (2006).
58. Katz (1999), p. 324.
59. Tangney et al. (2007).
60. Moll et al. (2005).
61. Tetlock et al. (2000).
62. Katz (1988).
63. Erickson (1995); Hochschild (1983).
64. Montada (1993).
65. Walker et al. (1995).
66. Haidt (2003b).

67. Rozin et al. (1999).
68. Fischer and Roseman (2007).
69. Batson et al. (2007).
70. Taylor (2007).
71. Moons and Mackie (2007).
72. Baumeister et al. (1994).
73. Tangney (2003).
74. Scheff (1988, 2000).
75. Scheff (2003).
76. Grasmick and Bursik (1990); Arneklev (1993).
77. Braithwaite (1989, 1993).
78. Tangney and Steuwig (2004).
79. Eisenberg (2000).
80. E.g., Crocker (2002); Wolfe et al. (2001, 2004).
81. Hitlin (2007).
82. Owens and Goodney (2000).
83. Jahoda (2005) argues that, classically, these two terms were interchangeable.
84. Hastings et al. (2006).
85. Hardy (2006); see Hoffman (2000) for an overview.
86. Eisenberg et al. (2004).
87. Soenens et al. (2007).
88. Michalik et al. (2007).
89. McCullough et al. (2001).
90. Uslaner (2002).
91. See Glanville and Paxton (forthcoming).
92. Blasi (1999).
93. Goffman (1974).
94. Goffman (1981).
95. Scheff (1997).
96. E.g., Snow et al. (1986); see Benford and Snow (2000) for one overview.
97. E.g., Turiel (2002); Nucci and Turiel (2000).
98. Mischel (1973).
99. Wilson (2002), p. 71.
100. Mischel (2004).
101. E.g., Ainslie (2001); Wegner (2002).
102. Wilson (2002).
103. Epstein (1985).
104. This is a more psychologically nuanced treatment of Sewell's (1992) discussion of schemas.
105. E.g., Lakoff (1996).
106. Kahneman and Sunstein (2005).
107. Walker (2000).
108. Helwig et al. (1996).
109. Hodges and Baron (1992).
110. Paternoster (1989).

111. Paternoster and Simpson (1996).
112. Helwig et al. (1996).
113. Helwig (2006).
114. Greene (2005).
115. E.g., Haidt (2001, 2002, 2003, 2004).
116. Kagan (1994 [1984]).
117. Turiel (2006), p. 20.
118. Tancredi (2005).

## CHAPTER 5

1. Gibbs (2003), p. 111.
2. E.g., Nisbett and Ross (1991).
3. Manning and Ray (1993).
4. Blasi (1984).
5. Triandis (1995).
6. Ross (1977).
7. Kurtines (1986).
8. Kurtines (1984).
9. Mischel (1973, 2004).
10. Kelley et al. (2003).
11. Wilson (2002).
12. Stolte and Fender (2007).
13. Famously, see Giddens (1984); Sewell (1992).
14. Baumeister (1997).
15. E.g., Sharkey (2006).
16. Berger (1967); Berger and Luckmann (1966).
17. Goffman (1956).
18. *Ibid.*, p. 474.
19. Goffman (1983).
20. Rawls (1987).
21. Goffman (1983).
22. Shilling (1999).
23. Goffman (1967).
24. Katz (1975).
25. Manning (1992).
26. Rawls (1987).
27. Garfinkel (1967).
28. Oser and Reichenbach (2005).
29. Hochschild (1983).
30. See Robinson (2007) for an overview of these control processes in sociology.
31. Nunner-Winkler (1998).
32. Famously, see Blumer (1969); see Stryker and Vryan (2003) for an overview.
33. See also Cahill (1998).

34. For discussions, see DeLamater and Myers (2007); Baumeister (1997); Staub (2003); Zimbardo (2007).
35. Zimbardo (2004).
36. E.g., Dutton (2007).
37. Staub (2004).
38. Berkowitz (1993).
39. Darley and Latane (1968).
40. See Piliavin and Charng (1990) for a more thorough review of this literature.
41. See DeLamater and Myers (2007) for a further discussion.
42. E.g., Damon and Hart (1992).
43. E.g., James (1890); Joas (2000).
44. E.g., Onorato and Turner (2004).
45. Bandura (1991).
46. Hopkins et al. (2007).
47. Smetana (2006); Wainryb (1991).
48. Howard (1994); Zerubavel (1997).
49. Walker (2000).
50. Howard (1995).
51. Wainryb (2000).
52. Bandura (1991).
53. Calhoun (1991).
54. Rest (1984).
55. Smetana (2006).
56. Wainryb (1991, 1993).
57. Epstein (1985).
58. E.g., Barnett and Rivers (2004).
59. Schwartz and Bardi (2001).
60. Batson et al. (2007).
61. Murdock et al. (2007).
62. Baumeister and Exline (2000).
63. Twenge and Baumeister (2002).
64. Twenge et al. (2007).
65. Kahan (2006).
66. Kahneman and Sunstein (2005).
67. Jasso (1980).
68. Molm et al. (2000); see Molm (2006) for an overview.
69. See Hegtvedt (2006) for an overview of this research.
70. E.g., Baumeister (1997); Staub (2003).
71. Jackall (1988), p. 6.
72. Paternoster and Simpson (1996).
73. Haidt et al. (2003).
74. Nunner-Winkler (2004).
75. Blasi (2004).
76. E.g., Habermas (2005).
77. Manstead (2000).
78. Godin et al. (2005).

79. Skitka and Mullen (2002).
80. Ibid.
81. E.g., Baumeister (1997); Staub (2003).
82. E.g., Hewitt (1989); Wuthnow (1992).
83. E.g., Nucci (2004).
84. Owens (2003), p. 217.
85. Gecas and Burke (1995).
86. Stryker (1980); Stryker and Burke (2000).
87. McCall and Simmons (1966).
88. Thoits and Virshup (1997).
89. Burke (2004).
90. Stets and Burke (2000).
91. E.g., Stets (1995); Stets and Burke (1996); Stets and Tsushima (2001).
92. Owens (2003).
93. Burke (1991); Burke and Tully (1977).
94. Gecas (2000).
95. Stets and Carter (2006).
96. Aquino and Reed (2002).
97. Atkins et al. (2004).
98. Goodman (2000).
99. Walker and Hennig (2004).
100. Aquino and Reed (2002).
101. Lapsley and Narvaez (2004).
102. Schwalbe (1991).
103. See Hardy and Carlo (2005) for an overview.
104. E.g., Burke and Reitzes (1981).
105. E.g., Archer (2003).
106. E.g., Oser and Reichenbach (2005).
107. E.g., Turner (1978).
108. Etzioni (1996).
109. E.g., Asch (1957).
110. Berns et al. (2005).
111. Wolfe (1998).
112. Doris (2002); Lakoff and Johnson (1999).
113. E.g., Kohn (1989).

## CHAPTER 6

1. Turiel (2005), p. 245.
2. Berreby (2005).
3. E.g., Brown (1991).
4. E.g., de Waal (1996).
5. Hogg (2001), p. 131.
6. For comparisons, see Hogg, Terry, and White (1995); Stets and Burke (2000).
7. E.g., Tajfel (1981); Tajfel and Turner (1986).

8. Korostelina (2007).
9. Owens (2003).
10. Thoits and Virshup (1997).
11. E.g., Demo and Hughes (1990); Hughes and Demo (1989); Oyserman et al. (2001).
12. Korostelina (2007).
13. Brewer (1991); Brewer and Roccas (2001); see Brewer (2003) for an overview.
14. See Hogg (2003) for an overview.
15. E.g., Tajfel (1981).
16. J. Turner (1985, 1987).
17. Cialdini et al. (1976).
18. J. Turner (1987).
19. Tajfel and Turner (1979).
20. Bosson et al. (2006).
21. Barnett and Rivers (2004).
22. See Wiley (1995) for an overview.
23. E.g., West and Zimmerman (1987).
24. Bastian and Haslam (2006).
25. See Prentice and Miller (2007) for an overview.
26. Pettigrew (1979).
27. Leach et al. (2007).
28. Staub (2003).
29. E.g., Taylor (1989).
30. See Berreby (2005); Brown (1991); Tavis and Aronson (2007), among others.
31. Who should change their name back to "Bullets."
32. Fiske (2004).
33. de Waal (2006), p. 53.
34. Levine et al. (2005).
35. Darley and Latane (1968).
36. See Lawler (2006); Molm (2006) for overviews.
37. See Hegtvedt (2006) for an overview.
38. E.g., Burke and Stets (1999); Glanville and Paxton (2007).
39. Janis (1983).
40. Miller and Bersoff (1992).
41. Fry (2006).
42. Fehr and Gintis (2007).
43. Tyler et al. (1996).
44. Clay-Warner (2001).
45. Karremans (2007).
46. Haslam and Bain (2007).
47. Cohen et al. (2006).
48. Staub (2004), p. 65.
49. Bandura et al. (1996); see also Turiel (2002).
50. Bandura (1999).

51. Taylor (2007).
52. Zimbardo (2004).
53. Baumeister and Vohs (2004).
54. Baumeister et al. (1990).
55. Baumeister (1997).
56. Bandura et al. (1996).
57. Osofsky et al. (2005).
58. Reed and Aquino (2003).
59. Reynolds et al. (2007).
60. Twenge et al. (2007).
61. E.g., Greene (2005); Greene and Haidt (2002); Green et al. (2004).
62. See Nado et al. (forthcoming) for a comparison of the Greene approach with others discussed here, including Hauser (2006) and Haidt (2001).
63. E.g., Adler and Adler (1989).
64. Leach et al. (2007).

## CHAPTER 7

1. Tavis and Aronson (2007), p. 37.
2. E.g., Hewitt and Stokes (1975).
3. E.g., Hewitt (1998).
4. E.g., Chambers et al. (2006).
5. See Katz (1999), Chapter 2, for an interesting analysis of the embodied sense of injustice that can occur while driving in Los Angeles.
6. Pronin and Kugler (2007).
7. Wegner (2002).
8. Fiske (2004).
9. Wilson (2002).
10. Wegner (2002), pp. 181–3; see also Damasio (1999), Chapter 6.
11. Gazzaniga (1983), discussed in Wegner (2002).
12. Blasi (2005).
13. Batson et al. (1997, 1999, 2002).
14. Batson et al. (2002), p. 337.
15. E.g., Bellah et al. (1985).
16. James (1890).
17. Coopersmith (1967), pp. 4–5.
18. Gecas (1986, 1991, 2001).
19. Cast and Burke (2002); Sommer and Baumeister (2002); Thoits (1994).
20. Rosenberg et al. (1995).
21. Rosenberg (1965).
22. Crocker and Wolfe (2001); see also Hitlin (forthcoming).
23. E.g., Hewitt (1998).
24. Baumeister (1997); Baumeister et al. (1996).
25. Gilbert (2006).
26. Taylor and Brown (1988, 1994).

27. Swann (1983); see Swann et al. (2003) for an overview.
28. Ross and Ward (1996).
29. E.g., Swann et al. (1989).
30. Starting with Festinger (1957).
31. Festinger and Carlsmith (1959).
32. Kunda (1990), p. 493.
33. Nisan (1996) suggests a similar point.
34. Schwartz et al. (2002).
35. Schwartz (2004); Keys and Schwartz (2007).
36. E.g., Smith (2003).
37. Haidt (2006).
38. E.g., Epley and Dunning (2000).
39. Bandura et al. (1996).
40. Bandura (1999).
41. Bandura (1991).
42. Greenwald (1980); see also Tavis and Aronson (2007) for a good overview.
43. Osofsky et al. (2005).
44. See also Zimbardo (2004, 2007).
45. E.g., Skitka and Mullen (2002).
46. Wainryb (2000).
47. Baumeister et al. (1990); Baumeister and Vohs (2004).
48. Epstein (1985).
49. Wainryb (1991).
50. Tancredi (2005).
51. Ross and Ward (1996).
52. See Hegtvedt (2006) for an overview.
53. Bersoff (1999).
54. E.g., Schwartz (1992, 1994), discussed in detail in Chapter 2.
55. See also Rokeach (1973).
56. Gigerenzer (2007).
57. See Tavis and Aronson (2007) for more details about this psychological process.

## CHAPTER 8

1. Kagan (1994 [1984]), p. 245.
2. Kondo (1990), p. 242.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 26.
4. Classics include Bellah et al. (1985) and Hewitt (1989).
5. Turner (1976); also Turner and Billings (1991); Turner and Gordon (1981); Turner and Schutte (1981).
6. See Inglehart (2006); Schwartz (2006) for recent overviews.
7. For notable theoretical development of the self, see Baumeister (1999); Burke (2004); Callero (2003); Hewitt (1989); Holstein and Gubrium (2000); Stryker and Burke (2000); Wiley (1994).



8. Mead (1932, 1938).
9. Dunn (1997).
10. See Emirbayer and Mische (1998) for an extended treatment.
11. Callero (2003); see also Archer (2006).
12. Frankfurt (1993).
13. See Vaisey (2007).
14. Smith (2003), p. 118.
15. E.g., Ridgeway (2006).
16. Archer (2000); see also Stryker (1980).
17. Deaux (1992); Hitlin 2003.
18. Erickson (1995); Gecas (1986, 1991).
19. Blasi (1999).
20. Hogg and Smith (2007).
21. Classically, see Hochschild (1983).
22. Turner (1976).
23. See also Mischel (2004).
24. See also Bergman (2004).
25. Hardy and Carlo (2005).
26. Clausen (1991, 1993); Shanahan et al. (1997).
27. Markus and Nurius (1986).
28. E.g., Archer (2003).
29. Higgins (1987a, 1987b).
30. Bandura (1982).
31. Ryan and Connell (1989).
32. Carver and Scheier (1998).
33. MacIntyre (1999).
34. E.g., Mischel (2004).
35. See Walker (2000).
36. Swann (1983); Swann et al. (2003).
37. Howard (1994); Zerubavel (1997).
38. Wainryb (2000).
39. Bandura (1991).
40. For an overview of the mechanics of schemas, see Maio et al. (2003).
41. Marris (1996).
42. Blasi (1984); see also Schwalbe (1991).
43. Nisan (2005).
44. Scheffler (1992).
45. E.g., Haidt (2001).
46. Nisan (1984); Schwartz (2004).
47. Lesthaeghe and Moors (2000).
48. Hitlin (2003).
49. See Hitlin and Piliavin (2004); Rohan (2000); Spates (1983) for overviews.
50. E.g., Kohn and Schooler (1982); Leiberian (1965); Xiao (2000).
51. Kohn (1959, 1969); Kohn and Schooler (1982, 1983); Kohn et al. (2000).
52. Konty and Dunham (1997).
53. Alwin et al. (1991); Bandura (1982).

54. Nunner-Winkler (1993).
55. Taylor (1989); see also Holstein and Gubrium (2000).
56. Taylor (1989), pp. 27–28.
57. Smith (2003).
58. Damasio (1999).
59. Calhoun (1991).
60. Fish (2005).
61. Taylor (1989), p. 27.
62. Taylor (1994).
63. Smith (2003), p. 118.
64. E.g., Feather (1992).
65. Epstein (1985).
66. See Nosek et al. (2007) for a wide-ranging review of implicit attitudes and stereotypes.
67. Lewin (1951).
68. For a slightly overdramatic version of this view, see Gergen (1991).
69. Kagan (1994 [1984]).
70. Collins (2004).
71. E.g., Inglehart and Baker (2000).
72. See Flaherty (1999, 2002, 2003); Flaherty and Fine (2001); Hitlin and Elder (2007).
73. Ainslie (2001).
74. Carver and Sheier (1998).
75. Keller (1984).
76. Calhoun (1991).

## CHAPTER 9

1. Bandura (1999), p. 206.
2. E.g., Maryanski and Turner (1992).
3. Kagan (1994 [1984]), p. 146; see also Cascardi (1992).
4. Stryker (1994).
5. See Archer (2000, 2003) and Giddens (1991).
6. See the collection in Gecas and Mortimer (1987); also Demo (1992).
7. See Mortimer and Shanahan (2003) for a collection of overview papers; see also Elder 1998; Elder and Johnson (2002).
8. See Elder, Johnson, and Crosnoe (2003) for an overview.
9. Elder (1974).
10. Honneth (2004).
11. Archer (2003).
12. Kagan (2007).
13. E.g., Gergen (1991).
14. Turiel (1996, 2002).
15. E.g., Tetlock (1986); Tetlock et al. (1996); Hodges and Baron (1992); Hodges and Geyer (2006).

16. E.g., Asch (1957).
17. Berns et al. (2005).
18. See also Kurtines (1986); Smetana et al. (1991).
19. Kanagawa et al. (2001).
20. See Burke (2004) for one description of this process.
21. Berlin (1990).
22. See Calhoun (1994); Lakoff (1996); Turiel (2002) on this point.
23. Skitka et al. (2005).
24. Dewey (1896, 1939).
25. Gecas and Burke (1995).
26. See Antonovsky (1993) for more on this psychological principle.
27. Gouinlock (1978).
28. Becker (1960).
29. Wegner (2002).
30. Lewis (1997), p. viii.
31. Dennett (2003).
32. Honneth (2005).
33. E.g., Holstein and Gubrium (2000); Mason-Schrock (1996).
34. McAdams (1995, 2001).
35. See also Haidt (2006).
36. E.g., Somers and Gibson (1994).
37. Greenwald (1980).
38. See Holt, Jim. "The New Soft Paternalism." *New York Time Magazine*, December 3, 2006.
39. Oishi et al. (2007).
40. Roberts et al. (2007).
41. See Robinson, Eugene. "Tattered Dream: Who Will Tackle the Issue of Upward Mobility?" *Washington Post*, November 23, 2007, p. A39 for an overview of this research.
42. Ainslie (2001), p. 131.
43. Gilbert (2006).
44. Wilson (2002).
45. Maslow (1959).
46. Staub (2004).
47. See Baumeister et al. (2007) for an overview.
48. Twenge and Baumeister (2002).
49. Baumeister and Exline (2000).
50. E.g., Thoits (1994, 2006).
51. See Ainslie (2001).
52. Webb and Sheeran (2002).
53. Kagan (1994 [1984]).
54. E.g., Baumeister et al. (1990).
55. Zimbardo (2004).
56. E.g., Baumeister and Vohs (2004); Zimbardo (2007).
57. Turiel and Perkins (2004).
58. Perkins and Turiel (2007).

59. Moshman (2004).
60. Higgins (1987a, 1987b).
61. Carver and Scheier (1998).
62. Dennett (2003), p. 253.
63. E.g., Gigerenzer (2007).
64. Tavis and Aronson (2007).
65. Nisan (1993).
66. Berlin (1990).

## CHAPTER 10

1. Wolfe (1998), p. 36.
2. Walker and Frimer (2007), p. 846.
3. E.g., Carter and Irons (1991); Marwell and Ames (1981).
4. E.g., de Waal (2006).
5. Dennett (2003).
6. Gintis (2003).
7. Gintis et al. (2005).
8. See Penner et al. (2005).
9. Ainslie (2001).
10. Elster (1999).
11. Fehr and Gintis (2007).
12. Katz (1988).
13. Gintis (2003), pp. 180–1.
14. Joyce (2006), p. 48. See also Piliavin and Charng (1990); Penner et al. (2005).
15. See also Walker (2000).
16. Cascardi (1992).
17. Berlin (1990).
18. Baker (2005); DiMaggio, Evans, and Bryson (1996); Evans (2003); Evans, Bryson, and DiMaggio (2001); Mouw and Sobel (2001).
19. E.g., Lakoff (1996).
20. Wolfe (1998).
21. E.g., Haidt (2006).
22. E.g., Inglehart (1997); Inglehart and Baker (2000, 2005); Norris and Inglehart (2004).
23. Esmer (2006); see also Schwartz and Sagie (2000).
24. Inglehart and Wetzel (2005).
25. Nevitte and Cochrane (2006); Welzel et al. (2003).
26. Inglehart and Welzel (2005).
27. Oishi et al. (2007).
28. Haidt et al. (2003).
29. Starks and Robinson (2007).
30. Hardy and Carlo (2005).
31. Walker and Pitts (1998).
32. Colby and Damon (1992), p. 29.

33. See Zimbardo (2007) for a discussion of different forms of heroism, p. 468.
34. Colby and Damon (1993).
35. Gibbs (2003).
36. E.g., Monroe and Epperson (1994).
37. See also James (1902); Joas (2000).
38. E.g., Haidt (2001).
39. Scheffler (1992).
40. Youniss and Yates (1999).
41. E.g., Colby and Damon (1992); Hart and Fegley (1995).
42. Colby and Damon (1993).
43. Colby and Damon (1995).
44. Graziano et al. (2007).
45. McAdams (1993); Walker and Frimer (2007).
46. Hart et al. (1995).
47. Calhoun (1994).
48. E.g., Taylor (1988).
49. E.g., Fein (1997).
50. Wainryb and Turiel (1993).
51. Collins (1989).
52. Etzioni (1996).
53. Fletcher (1993), cited in E. J. Dionne Jr. "Rudy's Red Sox Romance." *The Washington Post*, October 30, 2007, p. A15.
54. Gaertner et al. (1999).
55. But see Hitlin and Elder (2007a, 2007b) on this point. Also Archer (2000, 2003); Bandura (1982, 2006); Gecas (2003); Giddens (1984, 1991); Marshall (2000, 2003).
56. Ben-Ze'ev (1997).
57. Haidt (2006).
58. Todd and Gigerenzer (2007).
59. Dennett (2003).
60. E.g., Hart and Carlo (2005); Paternoster (1989).
61. E.g., Pratt et al. (2003).
62. See Penner et al. (2005) for a review; also Eisenberg (2000); Hoffman (2000).
63. This argument is made by, among others, Calhoun (1991); Holstein and Gubrium (2000); Smith (2003).
64. Stryker (1994).
65. See Elder (1994).
66. MacIntyre (1981), p. 70. See also Appiah (2008) for an extended discussion on this point.
67. E.g., de Waal (2006); Hauser (2006).

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# INDEX

- adaptive unconscious 23
- adolescence 64
- aggression 48–49
- aggression, frustration and 49
- Ainslie, George 19, 177, 182
- altruism 45
- altruism, evolution and 58, 187–88
- America, emotional
  - experience and 27, 170
- America, moral culture and 20, 21, 66, 70, 79, 172, 190
- America, supposed “culture war” 190–93
- anger 83
- Archer, Margaret 69
- attitudes 43
- authentic self 82, 150–53
- automatic processing, changes in 28
- Autrey, Wesley 6
- Bandura, Albert 18, 31, 104, 121, 139, 140
- Batson, Daniel 133–34
- Baumeister, Roy F. 23, 38, 51, 104, 122, 179
- Becker, Howard 174
- Berger, Peter 96
- Berlin, Isaiah 182
- biases 76, 118, 130–40
- Blasi, Augusto 94, 156
- brain 56–57, 132–33
- Bright Lights
  - Bright Lights, automatic processing and 26, 65
  - Bright Lights, definition 20
  - Bright Lights, ideals and 46, 54, 65, 102, 138, 152, 165
  - Bright Lights, justifications for evil 48, 180–81
  - Bright Lights, possible selves and 42
  - Bright Lights, second-order goals and 28, 32, 110, 153–54, 189
  - Bright Lights, values and 32, 44, 88, 143–45, 157, 159, 174, 190
- Bright Lines
  - Bright Lines, automatic processing and 26, 28, 65
  - Bright Lines, definition 19, 62, 160
  - Bright Lines, examples 54, 101, 124, 126, 129–30, 138, 157, 189
- Calhoun, Craig 16
- Calvin and Hobbes* 185
- Carver, Charles 181
- Chomsky, Noam 56
- Colby, Anne 193
- Collins, Randall 163
- confabulator 132, 198
- Connell, James 154
- conscience
  - conscience, Bright Lines, Bright Lights and 30–33

- conscience (*contd*)  
   conscience, contradictions of 15,  
     16, 77, 114  
   conscience, definition 14,  
     30–33, 198  
   conscience, human  
     capacity for 53  
   conscience, mechanics of 87–91,  
     125, 149, 169–70, 175,  
     182, 185  
   conscience, social psychology and  
     31, 32, 46, 57, 66–67, 69,  
     72, 90, 93–94, 96, 102, 104,  
     126, 146, 150, 163, 166,  
     200–03  
 consciousness 173  
 corporate morality 105–06  
 culture 68, 71–73
- Damasio, Antonio 58, 81, 159  
 Damon, William 193  
 de Waal, Frans 45, 58, 78, 119  
 deception 98  
 Dennett, Daniel 187  
 Devine, Patricia 33  
 Dewey, John 25, 62, 173–74  
 dissonance 137–38, 140  
 dual attitudes 27  
 dual-processing model 22, 81, 124  
   dual-processing model, automatic  
     system 23, 56, 121  
   dual-processing model, basis of  
     conscience 31, 59, 114,  
     142–43, 148–49  
   dual-processing model,  
     mechanics 22–26, 38  
   dual-processing model, notion of  
     “two minds” 27  
 Durkheim, Emile 15, 22, 138, 163  
 duties 18
- ego depletion 179, 197–98  
 Elster, Jon 188  
 emergency intervention 46  
 emotions, moral dimensions of 56,  
   59, 82–85, 176, 187  
 emotions, socialization and 60  
 empathy 85, 105, 197  
 Etzioni, Amitai 65, 195  
 evil, aggression and 48–49,  
   100–02, 180  
 evil, Bright Lights and 48, 101  
 evil, definition 19, 47–51, 179–83  
 evolution 54–59, 186–88
- first-order desires, definition 22–23  
 frames 86–88, 95, 98, 103,  
   164–65, 191  
 framing, see FRAMES  
 Frankfurt, Harry 22, 28, 149  
 Freud, Sigmund 30, 48, 100,  
   148, 153  
 fundamental attribution error 76,  
   94, 118, 131–32
- Garfinkel, Howard 98  
 Gecas, Viktor 109  
 gender 73  
 Gigerenzer, Gerd 144  
 Gilbert, Daniel 136, 177  
 Gilligan, Carol 63–64  
 goals 18  
 Goffman, Erving 86–87, 96–97,  
   98, 99, 111, 183  
 good 44  
 gratitude 86  
 Greene, Joshua 124  
 guilt 84
- habit 47  
 Haidt, Jonathan 24, 28, 80, 83,  
   89, 90, 139, 160, 196, 201  
 Haidt, Jonathan, Lawyer  
   Logic 28–29, 139  
 Hauser, Marc 56, 59, 73, 74, 89  
 Higgins, E. Tory 153  
 human nature 7  
 Hume, David 82, 89  
 hyperbolic discounting 177
- ideals 18, 165  
 identities 39–42

- identities (*contd*)
  - identities, behavior and 108–11
  - identities, definition 39–42, 108
  - identities, moral
    - frames and 141–43
  - identities, role: see IDENTITY THEORY
  - identities, social 66, 123, 155, 182
- identity theory 39, 108
- identity: see identities
- ideologies 70–71
- if/then interpretations 86–87,
  - 90–91, 94, 102, 151,
  - 158, 179, 188
- informational assumptions 86, 89,
  - 102, 141, 171
- Inglehart, Ronald 71, 164
- intentions 76
- interaction order 97
- Interstate Theory of Moral Judgment 79, 131
- intertemporal bargaining 19, 177
- intuitions 24, 80–82
  
- James, William 41, 136, 148
- Joas, Hans 37
- Joyce, Richard 189
- justice 62, 63, 120
  
- Kagan, Jerome 78, 80, 167, 179
- Kluckhohn, Clyde 43
- Kohlberg, Lawrence 62–64, 154, 194
- Kohn, Melvin 68–70, 158
- Kondo, Dorinne 147–48, 162
  
- language 60–61
- Lawyer Logic, definition 28
- Lawyer Logic, moral biasing and
  - 30, 57, 76, 81, 90, 118, 124,
  - 130–32, 134, 138, 142, 160, 189
- Lewin, Kurt 94, 161
- life course 69, 168–69
- life-project 91, 168, 174, 180–81
  
- MacIntyre, Alasdair 155, 199
- Maslow, Abraham 179
  
- McAdams, Dan 175, 194
- Mead, George Herbert 15, 25, 41,
  - 148–49, 153, 173
- Milgram, Stanley 49, 50, 100
- Mischel, Walter 86
- modernity, morality and 22, 170
- moral ambiguity 169–72
- moral communities 68
- moral, definition 17
- moral disengagement 121, 122,
  - 139
- moral dumbfounding 80
- moral emotions 47, 182, 187
- moral exemplars 193–94
- moral hypocrisy 134
- moral identity 107, 109–11, 123
- moral judgment 76–82, 103
- moral justification 139
- moral mandates 107–08
- moral norm 107
- moral order 96–98, 99
- moral provinces 123–26, 143
- moral reasoning 78–80
- moral satisficing 38, 138–40,
  - 153, 202
- morality
  - morality, as in-group phenomenon 119–21
  - morality, biased reasoning and 29
  - morality, conventional aspects 47
  - morality, definition 17–18, 45
  - morality, distinct from religion 20
  - morality, evolutionary aspects 18, 54–59
  - morality, groups 17
  - morality, inhibitive elements 18, 19, 157
  - morality, missing from social science 2, 12–13, 16
  - morality, motivational aspects 18
  - morality, proactive elements 18, 19, 33, 157

- morality (*contd*)  
     morality, universal capacity 22,  
         53–55, 72  
     morality, violations of 64  
 motivation 35, 154–55  
  
 narrative 175–76, 199, 202  
  
 Parsons, Talcott 43  
 personal identity 22, 40–41,  
     150–58, 201  
 personal identity, patterned  
     spontaneity and 151  
 personal identity, values and 42,  
     156–58  
 personality 86, 93–94  
 personhood 43, 55, 135, 149, 196  
 Piaget, Jean 62  
 plausibility structures 96, 102  
 positive illusions 137  
 prosocial behavior 45, 85, 98,  
     119–21, 162, 178  
  
 Ramachandran, Vilayanur 57  
 rationality 63  
 reflexivity 149–50  
 religion, distinct from morality 20,  
     192  
 religion, patterns of values 72,  
     192–93  
 roles, expectations and 98, 108  
 role-taking 38  
 Ryan, Richard 154  
  
 Scheier, Michael 181  
 Schwartz, Shalom 43–44  
 Scientist Logic 29, 57, 144  
 second-order desires, definition 23  
 self  
     self, as useful fiction 172–79  
     self, definition 37–42, 116,  
         150–53, 168, 174  
     self, “ideal” vs. “ought”  
         selves 42, 153, 176  
     self, identities and 40  
     self, institutional and  
         impulsive 26–27, 148  
     self, motivational properties of 38  
     self, paradoxes of 37–38, 167  
     self, possible selves and 42, 176  
     self, time and 41–42, 153–54,  
         168–69, 176, 199  
 self-categorization 117, 119  
 self-control 95, 104–05, 148,  
     179, 180  
 self-esteem 48, 84, 136, 139  
 self-horizons 158–65, 174  
 self-interest 58–59, 105, 186–89  
 self-justification 135, 196  
 self-verification 137  
 self-zoo 37  
 selves: see SELF  
 shame 54, 84, 201  
 Shweder, Richard 63, 72  
 situations, importance of 6, 15, 46,  
     49, 64, 93–111, 133  
 Smith, Adam 82  
 Smith, Christian 17, 160  
 social class 73  
 social identity theory 39,  
     115–18, 172  
 social intuitionist model 80,  
     89, 160  
 social structure 67–71, 115  
 social structure and personality  
     tradition 68–71  
 socialization 60–62, 69, 197  
 socialization, cross-cultural  
     elements of 62  
 socialization, groups and 31  
 sociopaths 1, 13  
 somatic markers 58, 81  
 Stanford Prison Experiment 50  
 symbolic interaction 38, 86, 99  
 sympathy 85  
  
 taboos 18, 33  
 Taylor, Charles 17, 22, 158–60  
 totalitarian ego 139, 176  
 Turner, Ralph 26, 148



- ultimate attribution error 118
- universal human elements 55,  
113–14
- value-identities 109
- values
  - values, as truisms 82
  - values, Bright Lights and 32, 36,  
44, 81, 123, 157, 174
  - values, cross-national
    - aspects of 104, 191–93
  - values, definition 42–44
  - values, falsely divided cultures  
and 79, 88, 144, 191
  - values, parental transmission  
of 61, 69, 158
  - values, personal identity and 42,  
109
  - values, universal aspects of 43,  
143–45
  - values, work-related 68–70
- violence 51
- Walker, Janet 87
- Watterson, Bill 185
- Weber, Max 15, 188
- Wegner, Daniel 132, 174
- Western culture 66, 71, 147–48
- Wilson, Timothy D. 24, 132
- Wolfe, Alan 70
- Yankees, New York 113–14,  
119
- Zajonc, Robert 23
- Zimbardo, Phillip 49, 50, 100