

The Having, Doing and Being of Moral Personality

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The language of moral virtue comes easily to most of us. When we think about the moral what comes to mind are certain dispositions to do the right thing at the right time for the right reason. We have in mind the possession of certain traits that conduce to living well the life that is good for one to live. To be honest, generous, fair-minded, compassionate, resolute in the service of justice, these and other virtues are the ambition that we have for ourselves and for our children. Indeed how to raise children of good moral character is a pressing concern of parents and educators alike. We hope children come to exhibit traits of character that are praiseworthy and reflect credibly on their formation as a person. Indeed, we would be disappointed if our children developed only a glancing acquaintance with the virtues.

Traits and Paradigms

Yet it is by no means clear how virtues are to be understood as psychological constructs, or how to understand their causal role in behavior. To say that virtues are *traits* that produce enduring dispositions to act in certain ways is to say something controversial, although this might come as a surprise to the lay reader. Indeed for many decades the language of traits, virtues and character got little traction within academic psychology, although for somewhat different reasons. The behaviorist paradigm was suspicious of the unobserved mentalist entities that traits seemed to imply, and drew attention instead to the reinforcing contingencies of environments as best explanations of behavior (Skinner, 1972). Hence the behaviorist paradigm gave priority of explanation to salient features of *situations*. The cognitive-developmental tradition, particularly in the form of Lawrence Kohlberg's moral stage theory,¹ also doubted the empirical reality of traits as predictors of behavior; and worried that the language of traits might give comfort to ethical relativists (insofar as the valuation of traits could depend upon community or cultural standards; Gibbs, 2013; Kohlberg, 1981).

Traits also seemed to run afoul of the "moral law folk theory"² that has dominated Western reflection on moral matters since the Enlightenment, and is assumed by many of the major theories of moral psychology, including Kantian ethics (Johnson, 1993). This is the view that we are essentially dualistic in our nature, consisting of body and mind, the physical and spiritual that are in conflict, a belief that comes easily to most of us. According to Kantian ethics, reason formulates general laws

¹ Kohlberg's theory proposed that individuals develop cognitively toward a deontological sense of moral judgment, moving through three levels (preconventional, conventional, postconventional) and five or six stages. Moral reasoning develops from active social life during the course of maturation. Neo-Kohlbergian research found that enriched social experience, especially Western higher education, contributes to the development of general postconventional moral reasoning (reasoning like a philosopher).

² Moral law folk theory refers to the common perception that body and mind are separable entities.

about how to act, about what to do and what not to do. The will can act freely with respect to these general laws. When the will acts against the dictates of reason, a person is "immoral". When the will acts from reason, a person is "moral". Consequently, rationality is at the center of the moral life. Rationality is what sets humans apart in creation. Rationality represents the essence of humanity. Morality is considered a deeply rational affair.

Passion, on the other hand, is to be resisted or checked. Passion (and the "body") is the source of error and temptation. Passion is irrational. Passion leads us astray. It is our "lower nature", what is unworthy of us. Part of our folk tradition, then, is the view that our moral life is a relentless struggle between two kinds of forces, the force of reason, and the force of passion, slugging it out for control of the will. As a result, we "come to experience our moral lives as an ongoing struggle to develop and preserve purity of reason and strength of will in the face of constant pressures that arise from our embodiment in the world" (Johnson, 1993, p. 17).

Insofar as moral stage theory partakes of moral law folk theory (by its embrace of Kantian ethics) it should now be clear why personological factors like traits have been viewed with suspicion. Traits seem more deeply rooted in our biological natures, in our embodiment and passions, and hence are just the sort of influence the rational moral point of view is supposed to surmount. The rational moral point of view is indifferent to social particularity, including the characteristics of particular agents, and this to satisfy the demands of impartiality (and universality). Because impartiality demands that one abstract from all that is particular and self-defining, and because moral rules must be applicable to all rational moral agents, little concern is evinced for claims regarding particular moral agents, and the unique qualities of their personality or character (other than their capacity for rationality), since these factors are the source of heteronomous influence.

Hence, armed with Kantian notions of moral rationality, moral stage theory disdains any concern with virtues or with traits of character, that is, with the characteristics of particular agents. Who could be interested in the personological dispositions of particular agents if moral rationality requires us to view such things as a source of error and bias? Who could be interested in personal dispositions if moral rationality requires that the particularities of individual character be transcended? Who could be interested in the needs of particular agents and their life projects, desires and purposes, when these things issue in maxims that are only hypothetical and contingent (and are hence "non-moral")?

On this Kantian account, then, self and personality cannot be trusted to render impartial and objectively fair moral decisions. Only reasoning from the "perspective of eternity" has any chance. One must adopt a perspective that stands apart not only from the self but from the contamination of context, society and culture in order to motivate an impartial, non-relative moral judgment.

But this distrust of both traits and situations puts moral stage theory in the curious and impossible position of embracing a view of moral reasoning without a person and without a situation (Hill & Lapsley, 2009). Moral reasoning is both disembodied and context-free. It is reasoning unattached to personality in situations that don't matter. Hence moral stage theory takes a particular stance on the relative influence of person and situation. The only person variable of interest is reasoning, but it is reasoning without personality. It is reasoning without situations.

In many ways the history of moral development research in the latter decades of the twentieth century is the history of discerning where best to locate the force that drives moral behavior: does it reside within the person as a trait, an unconscious motivation or structure of reason; or does it reside external to the person in the situation, environment or context? If the nature-nurture debate is one of the great antinomies around which a century of research has been organized across a wide swath of psychology (Sameroff, 2010), then the person-situation debate is another that is not far behind in its extension and influence. Understanding of humans and their behavior in terms of dynamic systems clarifies that in both cases the two aspects are hopelessly intertwined and in constant interaction (Lewis, 2005).

Virtues and Personality

Of course the terms of reference for this debate have changed. Few fields of inquiry put up for very long with antimony that presents only either-or options. In this chapter we review the person-situation debate as it has played out in recent approaches to moral personality. We argue that if virtues are the moral dimensions of personality then our account of virtue must be compatible with well-attested models of personality. But personality science appears to divide on how best to conceptualize the basic units of personality (Cervone, 1991). One option appeals to broadband dispositional traits while a second appeals to social-cognitive units (Cervone, 1991). Which are virtues most like? The answer has implications for where to locate moral agency or how to understand it; and implications as well for how best to bridge the person-situation divide.

In the remainder of this chapter we align our approach to virtues and moral personality with the social-cognitive option. After reviewing claims against global traits of personality, we take the alternative that emphasizes social-cognitive constructs as the units proper to moral personality and sketch a possible developmental trajectory. Along the way we note that the distinction between traits and social-cognitive constructs as units basic to personality is itself an either-or option that invites attempt at integration. We will conclude with some comments in this regard, particularly as recent integrative work bears upon the person-situation debate.

Doubts about Global Traits

The person-situation debate has had a lively history in social and personality psychology. According to Cantor (1990), the trait approach illustrates the “having” side of personality theory (as opposed to the “doing” side, represented by social-cognitive models of personality). That is, personality is understood to be the sum of traits that one has, and there are individual differences in the distribution of these traits. Presumably, a person of good moral character is one who is in possession of certain traits that are deemed “virtues,” while a person of poor moral character is in possession of other kinds of traits not considered virtues. Moreover, the traits that one has are assumed to be inherent aspects of one’s personality, on display across disparate contextual settings. The traditional view of personologists and clinicians was that traits are something adhesive and sticky. They are constitutional aspects of persons that produce a subjective sense of self-same unity that is carried across situations and settings, producing uniformity and consistency of behavior (Allport, 1937). On this account the lure of situations is trumped by the generalized causal power of personality. The typical empirical question was to find out whether this was true or not. First identify a trait of interest, say, honesty, or aggressiveness, and then try to predict behavior across various contexts on the basis of the trait.

But the cross-situational consistency of global traits was not readily observed. The moral domain was perhaps the first to cast doubt on this understanding of traits as a result of the Hartshorne and May (1928-1932) studies on “character” conducted many decades ago. These researchers were interested in demonstrating the trait-like stability of certain character virtues, such as honesty, altruism, and caring. With the traditional understanding of “trait” in mind, these researchers fully expected to find a bi-modal distribution of children -- there would be some children who were “honest” and another group of children who were “dishonest.” When given the opportunity to “cheat” on an exam, the honest children would resist temptation; the dishonest children would cave in and cheat.

But this was not what was found. Whether children cheated or not depended on a host of situational factors (e.g., whether cheating was easy, whether adults were supervising, whether the test was crucial or important, whether the risk of detection was high or low). Children who resisted cheating in one situation often gave in to temptation in other situations. The authors concluded, with much disappointment, that honesty (for example) was not a stable, trait-like disposition in children. The expectation that trait-like dispositions would show high degrees of cross-situational consistency was not borne out by these early studies.

Yet the full assault on global traits did not emerge until Mischel’s (1968) magisterial review that cast doubt on the reality of global traits of personality, or at least their usefulness for scientific explanation of behavior. This monograph took dead aim against the classical view that dispositions generate consistencies in behavior and concluded just the opposite: knowledge of global personality traits were not useful in predicting behavior across a range of dissimilar situations. Cross-situational

consistency of behavior is often very poor. He famously concluded:

Individuals show far less cross-situational consistency in their behavior than has been assumed by trait-state theories. The more dissimilar the evoking situations, the less likely they are to produce similar or consistent responses from the same individual (Mischel, 1968, p. 177).

Doubts were also cast on the usefulness of clinical judgments about personality, that is, doubts about the validity of clinical diagnoses that were reached on the basis of a few indirect symptoms, doubts about the adequacy of planning specific treatment plans based on the knowledge of global dispositions, and doubts about social change programs that attempt to predict how individuals would react in particular situations (Mischel, 1984).

Mischel (1969) was also skeptical of the recourse to the genotype-phenotype distinction to explain how seemingly diverse manifestations of behavior can nonetheless be thought to represent the same underlying trait organization of behavior. This gambit allowed one to assert a deep underlying motivational system (“genotype”) while giving allowance for variability across situations (“phenotype”). What seems like cross-situational inconsistency, then, is only apparent. Instead the same trait disposition is being manifested in different ways over time, and in different situations. Clinical judgments are notoriously unreliable (Meehl, 1955/2013). Clinical judgments of genotypic dispositions based on the detection of indirect symptoms or signs are often no better at predicting behavior than are more direct measures, such as the patient’s own self-report, the patient’s past record of mental illness and maladjustment, or, in some cases, seemingly irrelevant measures, like the judgment of the clinician’s secretary or the weight of the patient’s file folder (Mischel, 1990).

Moreover, our judgments about others are often distorted by systematic biases, or “cognitive economics,” that permit us to simplify information processing and to make social inferences more efficiently, albeit erroneously, and experts are just as prone to these biases as are laypersons (Nisbett & Ross, 1980; Ross, 1977; Kahneman & Tversky, 1973; Tversky & Kahneman, 1974). Westerners (the subjects of most psychological research) have a tendency, for example, to seek causal explanations of behavior in terms of underlying dispositions and to minimize the influence of particular settings or circumstances, especially when it comes to explaining the behavior of others rather than our own behavior (the so called “fundamental attribution error”).

This criticism against the classical notion of traits has sometimes been interpreted as a claim that there are no stable dispositions in people at all, or no individual differences, or no behavioral consistencies; or that our behavior is solely determined by situational factors. This view has found its way into recent philosophical rejection of character (Doris, 2002; Harman, 2000). But this is not Mischel’s view. Stable dispositions, individual differences and behavioral consistencies are apparent if one considers the person-by-situation as the unit of analysis. Moreover, even

though it does not fit the person-by-situation analysis, Mischel does not agree with the critics that "trait talk" should be completely abandoned in the study of personality. Instead, he acknowledges the importance of trait language in our lay understanding of persons. He has shown that we tend to prefer and to use trait information in order to predict another person's behavior in a particular situation especially when we lack information about how that person has behaved in similar situations in the past (Mischel, Jeffery & Patterson, 1974).

Many Westerners tend to attribute the cause of another's behavior to traits whenever the other's behavior is distinctive, singular, unusual, or contrary to behavioral norms (Kelly, 1963). Many commit the "fundamental attribution error", as noted above. Most Westerners construe another's behavior in terms of global character traits whenever they think they will have to talk about that person (Hoffman, Mischel & Baer, 1984), or whenever they wish to form an impression of the person or predict his or her future behavior (Hoffman, Mischel & Mazze, 1981). It is clear, then, that the use of trait categories for organizing understanding of persons is a common feature of human information processing (at least in the West; Heinrichs et al, 2012), and is clearly a legitimate focus of inquiry.

Moreover, Mischel is not opposed to the notion of individual differences, or of behavioral consistencies, nor does he believe that individuals are held hostage by situational variables. We are not reactive automatons who merely respond in a crude stimulus-response fashion to the exigencies found in particular situations. Rather, what he opposes is the reduction of the complexity of human functioning to a few global trait indicators. What he opposes is our tendency "to infer, generalize and predict too much while observing too little" (Mischel, 1979, p. 740). He has called for a reconceptualization of personality, one that shifts the emphasis from the notion that social behavior can be adequately predicted with knowledge of a few global dispositional constructs and minimal specification at all of situational factors (other than to treat them as "error", "noise" or "bias"), towards a dynamic interactional view that emphasizes the transaction between certain "person variables" and highly specific contextual settings for the prediction of social behavior (Mischel, 1973, 1979).

The Social-Cognitive View

The reconceptualization of personality requires specification of new sets of dispositional constructs, but conceptualized in a way that acknowledges the fact that persons and situations interact in complex ways. Dispositional constructs, according to Mischel, are conditional "if-then" propositions that specify the relationship between certain kinds of situations, contexts or eliciting conditions ("if") and corresponding tendencies towards certain kinds of behavior ("then").

The social-cognitive approach understands the structure of personality in terms of intra-individual, cognitive-affective mechanisms; and attempts to account for individual differences from the "bottom-up," that is, in terms of specific, within-

person psychological systems that are in dynamic interaction with changing situational contexts (Cervone, 2005; 2009). Scripts, schemas, episodes, plans, prototypes, and similar constructs are the units of analysis for social-cognitive approaches to personality. In contrast, the traits approach accounts for personality structure by classifying between-person variability using latent (implicit) variable patterns identified by factor analysis, of which the Big 5 (extraversion, neuroticism, conscientiousness, agreeableness, openness-to-experience) is a prominent example (McCrae & Costa, 1999).

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

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

The dynamic interaction among these features of personality coherence is grounded in social information-processing, how an individual perceives, interprets and reacts to social events. That is, the cross-situational coherence, and variability, of personality, the dynamic interaction among organized knowledge structures, affect and social context, is understood not by appealing to broad-band traits but to the analysis of the causal mechanisms, structures and processes of social information-processing (Cervone, 1997). Moreover, the model assumes that the activation of mental representations is a critical feature of coherent personality functioning. These representations “include knowledge of social situations, representations of self, others and prospective events, personal goals, beliefs and expectations, and knowledge of behavioral alternatives and task strategies” (Cervone & Shoda, 1999, p. 18), and are variously conceptualized as schemas, scripts, prototypes, episodes, competencies and similar constructs (Mischel, 1990). So, for example, when an adult attends a funeral she is more likely to be subdued rather than show the exuberance she might display at a spectator sport.

It is the distinctive organization of social-cognitive units (schemas, tasks, strategies) and their mutual influence and dynamic interaction that give rise to various configurations of personality, although the range of possible configurations is not infinite, given the “system of mutual constraint” that one part of the system imposes on other parts (Cervone & Shoda, 1999, p. 19). Still, patterns of individual differences arise because people have stable goal systems (Cantor’s “life tasks”) that structure the organization of the cognitive-affective system, and influence the perception, selection and interpretation of various contextual settings. Moreover, people have different interpersonal and social expectations that foster “distinctive, contextualized patterns of response” (Cervone & Shoda, 1999, p. 20) and also different recurring experiences that provide the “affordances” (perceived action possibilities) that give rise to stable configurations of the cognitive-affective system (Brandstadter, 1999). More generally, then, the inter-relationship among these elements of the social-cognitive personality system:

yields cognitive-affective configurations that ‘make sense,’ cohere and thus are more stable. These stable configurations form the basis of an individual’s unique personality. They contribute to the individual’s recurrent style of planning, interpreting and responding to events (Cervone & Shoda, 1999, p. 20).

For example, a person who interprets as threatening social situations with lots of acquaintances (e.g., parties at work) may use self-protective strategies in order to keep her distance from others, such as washing dishes during the party. But at family parties, where she feels close to all participants, she may not feel threatened and instead interact in lively and playful ways.

Moral Personality

We use a social-cognitive view of personality to understand what it means to be a moral person, to have a moral character or possess the virtues. In our view the moral personality is to be understood in terms of the accessibility of moral schemas for

social information-processing. A moral person, a person who has a moral character or identity, is one for whom moral constructs are chronically accessible (habitually invoked), where construct accessibility and availability are dimensions of individual differences. Put differently, moral character, or what it means to be virtuous (or vicious) is better conceptualized not in terms of the “having” side of personality, not in terms of trait-possession, but in terms of the “doing” side, that is, in terms of the social-cognitive schemas, the knowledge structures and cognitive-affective mechanisms that are chronically accessible for social information-processing and action, and which underwrite the discriminative facility in our selection of situationally-appropriate behavior.

From this perspective schemas (rather than traits) carry our dispositions (Cantor, 1990; Cantor & Kihlstrom, 1987). Schemas “demarcate regions of social life and domains of personal experience to which the person is especially tuned and about which he or she is likely to become a virtual ‘expert’” (Cantor, 1990, p. 738). Schemas that are frequently activated should, over time, become chronically accessible. Moreover there should be individual differences in the accessibility of constructs just because of each person’s unique social developmental history (Bargh, Lombardi & Higgins, 1988).

Hence, schema accessibility shows inter-individual variability but also sustains patterns of individual differences over time, and is properly considered a personality variable (Higgins, 1996). For example, if schemas are chronically accessible, then attention is directed selectively to certain features of experience at the expense of others. Schema accessibility (based on experience) disposes one to select schema-relevant life tasks, goals or settings which, in turn, canalize and maintain dispositional tendencies (which illustrate the reciprocal relationship between persons and contexts). It encourages one to develop highly practiced behavioral routines in those areas demarcated by chronically accessible schemas, which provide “a ready, sometimes automatically available plan of action in such life contexts” (Cantor, 1990, p. 738).

Three additional points are relevant. First, chronically accessible constructs are at a higher state of activation than are inaccessible constructs and are produced so efficiently as to approach automaticity. Second, constructs can be made accessible by contextual (situational) priming, as well as by chronicity, and these two sources of influence combine in an additive fashion to influence social information-processing and action. Third, the accessibility of a construct is assumed to emerge from a developmental history of frequent and consistent experience with a specific domain of social behavior, so that it becomes more likely than other constructs to be evoked for the interpretation of interpersonal experience. Consequently, individual differences in construct accessibility emerge because of each person’s unique social developmental history. Thus, for example, a young child who is immersed in positive, mutually-responsive social interaction with parents will develop procedural knowledge that includes joyful, playful interaction which becomes an automatic set of behaviors with loved ones. On the other hand, when a stranger approaches, the

child may first test whether this strange person is a reliable communication partner, withdrawing when the stranger proves incommunicative.

Five Advantages of a Social-cognitive Model of Moral Personality_ A social-cognitive model of moral personality (SCM) has several attractive features. First, it retains the central importance of cognition, although cognition is viewed as a broader set of mental representations, processes and mechanisms than was postulated by the Kohlbergian moral development tradition. Schemas, and the conditions of schema activation, underwrite our discriminative facility in noticing key features of our moral environment. Schemas are fundamental to our very ability to notice dilemmas as we appraise the moral landscape (Narvaez & Bock, 2002). Some individuals never seem to notice the dilemmatic aspects of their experience, never encountering morally significant moments. The moral status of their character, what they want for themselves, their second-order desires, are not quite in the front of their consciousness. Their moral compass is not easily retrieved, nor quite accessible even if available. But for others the claims of morality are easily elicited, readily primed, and accessible to the point of automaticity.

Indeed, as we note below, the social-cognitive approach does not assume that all relevant cognitive processing is controlled, deliberate and explicit. There is now increasing evidence that much of our lives are governed by cognitive processes that are tacit, implicit and automatic. Although this notion may appear to be new to the moral domain, it is not, as Piaget (1932/1965) was well aware of how understanding develops first implicitly before it reaches explicit awareness and verbalization (Narvaez & Lapsley, 2005). Still, the intersection of the morality of everyday life and the automaticity of everyday life must be large and extensive, and social-cognitive theory provides resources for coming to grips with it in ways that the cognitive developmental tradition cannot (Lapsley & Narvaez, 2005).

Second, not to exclude emotion, the social-cognitive approach emphasizes the affective elements of personality. Indeed, personality is considered a “cognitive-affective system” that is organized, integrated, coherent and stable. Emotional states are a regulatory factor within the information-processing system. As Bugental and Goodnow (1998, p. 416) put it, “emotional states influence what is perceived and how it is processed, and the interpretations made of ongoing events subsequently influence emotional reactions and perceptual biases. Affect and cognition are appropriately conceptualized as interwoven processes.” Affect guides selective memory retrieval, influences perceptual vigilance, and constrains the attentional resources available for rational or reflective appraisal and response selection (Bugental & Goodnow, 1998). Understanding personality as a unified cognitive-affective system is in contrast to Kohlberg’s moral stage theory that had little use for non-cognitive mechanisms for explaining moral behavior.

Third, the social-cognitive model is better able to account for the implicit, tacit and automatic features of moral functioning (Narvaez & Lapsley, 2005). There is growing recognition that much of human decision-making is under non-conscious

control (Bargh, 2005) and occurs with an automaticity that belies the standard notions of rational, deliberative calculation (Bargh & Chartrand, 1999). Though this possibility sometimes offends traditional accounts of moral development, there is no reason to think that automaticity is evident in every domain of decision-making except the moral domain. However, unlike the social intuitionist model (Haidt, 2001) which frontloads automaticity prior to understanding, judgment and reasoning and presumes moral judgment to be based on intuitions that are constitutive of human nature (and hence prior to learning and enculturation) the social-cognitive approach to moral personality locates automaticity on the backend of development as the result of immersed and guided experience, extensive and focused practice, intentional coaching and socialization (Lapsley & Hill, 2008, 2009; Narvaez, 2005, 2010). Automaticity emerges from expertise in life domains where we have vast experience and well-practiced behavioral routines (Cantor, 1990).

Fourth, SCM accounts for the felt necessity of moral commitments experienced by moral exemplars, their experience of moral clarity or felt conviction that their decisions are evidently appropriate, justified and true. Typically moral exemplars report that they “just knew” what was required of them, automatically as it were, without the experience of working through an elaborate decision-making calculus (Colby & Damon, 1994). Yet this is precisely the outcome of preconscious activation of chronically accessible constructs that it should induce strong feelings of certainty or conviction with respect to social judgments (Bargh, 1989; Narvaez & Lapsley, 2005).

Fifth, SCM is a dynamic model. It can account for changes in behavior and the situational variability in the display of a virtue (Cervone, 1999). A dispositional signature can be found at the intersection of person and context, as a result of the available and accessible social-cognitive schemas, and the discriminative facility that it provides, and the eliciting and activating aspects of situations and contexts. The accessibility of social-cognitive schemas underwrites not only the discriminative facility in the selection of situationally appropriate behavior, but also the automaticity of schema activation that contributes to the tacit, implicit qualities often associated with the “habits” of moral character (Lapsley & Narvaez, 2006).

Traits and Schemas Revisited

Thus far we have taken sides in the great debate within personality science about how best to understand the basic units of personality. The terms of reference for this debate are often starkly drawn. For example, on the one hand there are broadband global traits that are assumed to adhere to persons as they move through and dominate situations. Persons and contexts may interact but it is the *person* who brings situations to heel. Moreover traits are understood as between-person classifications as they are group characteristics extracted statistically from surveys given to individuals. In contrast, social-cognitive units describe cognitive-affective mechanisms that reside “in the head” as it were. They describe psychological systems that are in dynamic interaction with changing situational contexts. We

followed Cantor (1990) in describing the distinction between traits and schemas as the difference between *having* and *doing*. Moral traits are for doing. The point of dispositions is to help us navigate the interpersonal, social and cultural landscape that both conditions the display of personality and is reactive to it.

Drawing a stark contrast between traits and schemas (and other social-cognitive units) is a narrative device for describing how situationism plays out in personality theory. For one option, traits are more important than situations. For the other, situational influence is built in to the very conception of social-cognitive units of personality. For the social-cognitive option situations and schemas are in dynamic interaction and are mutually implicative. For one option the great person-situation antimony dissolves into trait-dominance, at least in theory, although in practice the person variables disappear in the face of situational influence. For the other, a stable behavioral signature is to be found only at the intersection of Person x Context interactions.

But we do not want to resolve the person-situation antimony by proposing yet another one, namely, the distinction between traits and schemas. Personality science might divide into two disciplines in terms of which construct takes precedence for explaining dispositions, but there seems to be broad consensus among contemporary personality researchers that dispositions and situations must be jointly considered when it comes to predicting or explaining behavior, and this holds for broadband (big-five) traits as much as for social-cognitive units. Caspi, Roberts and Shiner (2005) assert, for example, that the antimony between traits and social-cognitive theory is exaggerated; and that the two approaches are not only complementary and mutually informative, but also capable of useful integration. They write: “By integrating social-cognitive constructs (e.g., mental representations, encoding processes) into research on traits, developmentalists can advance understanding of how traits are directly manifested at different ages” (Caspi et al., 2005, p. 461).

There is also convergence on how to understand the person-situation debate and, in turn, the nature of traits. The person-situation debate pitted social psychologists (who emphasize a person by context variability) against personologists (who emphasize traits that are carried across situations) on the question of whether dispositional traits were consistently displayed across situations (the personologist position) or were trumped by the demand characteristics of situations (the social psychologist position). As we have seen, evidence in favor of cross-situational consistency was often hard to come by. Personologists, for their part, mounted an impressive counterattack that demonstrated dispositional consistency across situations and across time. Several studies showed, for example, that traits measured in early childhood demonstrated temporal stability over many years and, indeed, predicted important outcomes (Funder & Colvin, 1991; Funder & Ozer, 1983; Shoda Mischel & Wright, 1994).

The person-situation debate turns on what to think about the ontological reality of traits (Caspi & Shiner, 2006), and on at least two conceptions of traits there is little daylight between trait and social-cognitive theory. For example, the dispositional conception holds that traits are tendencies to behave in certain ways given certain activating conditions. Personality traits correspond to behavioral logic expressed in “if-then” conditional propositions, such as ----“if Jones is put in a situation where demands are placed upon his sense of competency, then he is aggressive.” This is the view of the social-cognitive conception of personality (Mischel, 1990; Shoda, Mischel & Wright, 1993, 1994; Wright & Mischel, 1987, 1988) but it is not disputed by trait theorists, either (Caspi & Shiner, 2006). It is now a widely shared view that persons and situations interact in complex ways (Kendrick & Funder, 1988; Higgins, 1990); that the person-situation distinction is a false one (Funder, 1996); that situational specificity and behavioral consistency are not antagonistic positions (Ozer, 1986); and that traits are not static, non-developmental and immutable essences but are instead organizational constructs that operate dynamically in transaction with environments (Caspi, 1987; Caspi & Shiner, 2006). Moreover, even the distinction between having and doing is difficult to maintain except as an expository device, given recent evidence that trait possession is very difficult to distinguish from indicators of good adjustment (Ro & Clark, 2013).

With respect to the dispositional notion of personality structure, then, there is much common ground between many trait and social-cognitive theorists. So if there are two disciplines, there is perhaps more that is shared than is contested between them. Of course, the two disciplines differ on just what are the real properties of individuals that account for dispositional coherence. Traits and social-cognitive constructs are very different things, although not necessarily incommensurable things. Our preference for the social-cognitive option represents a strategic bet that these constructs would lead to more robust integration with developmental theory (Lapsley & Hill, 2008, 2009).

But the Picture is Incomplete Without Understanding Development

Personality and morality are often discussed from the perspective of adults, as most of our discussion has demonstrated. But plenty happens before adulthood that bears on adult moral functioning. For example, when compared to a matched comparison group, moral exemplars are more likely to report a childhood with secure attachments, intimate affiliations, and multiple supportive relationships (e.g., Walker & Frimer, 2009). This analysis of exemplar life story narratives confirms recent accounts of early socio-personality development trajectories. For example, children who have relationships with a parent represented by a mutually-responsive-orientation are more likely to develop along a prosocial personality (Kochanska, 1991, 2002; Kochanska & Aksan, 2004; Thompson, Meyer & McGinley, 2006). That is, they develop greater empathy, cooperation, prosocial skills and conscience through early and middle childhood (as long as they have been studied) than those without a mutually-responsive relationship with a parent. But there may be other caregiving practices, especially in early life, that bear on moral functioning as well.

Like all animals, humans evolved to provide an early “nest” for their young to optimize development based on the maturational schedule of the offspring. This is part of an extra-genetic inheritance (Gottlieb, 1991). In fact, intensive parenting emerged with the evolution of social mammals more than 30 million years ago and increased in intensity through human evolution (Konner, 2010). Humans are the least developed among hominids (75% of brain left to grow after birth) with the longest maturational schedule (about 25 years). As a result the functioning of brain and body systems are co-constructed by the type of caregiving received after birth. Because many epigenetic effects occur during the early years after birth, a faulty “nest” can have longterm ramifications (Meaney, 2010; Narvaez, 2014; Narvaez, Panksepp, Schore & Gleason, 2013). For example, the reactivity of the stress response system is highly affected by early experience (e.g., Lupien, McEwen, Gunnar, & Heim, 2009).

Narvaez and colleagues have begun to study what they call the Evolved Developmental Niche (EDN). The human EDN for young children has been documented by anthropologists and is comprised of soothing perinatal experiences; extensive breastfeeding; needs met and cues attended to, preventing distress; copious affectionate touch (constant in infancy); multiple adult caregivers; positive social climate and support; and free play (Hewlett & Lamb, 2005). Narvaez and colleagues find that all these practices influence the development of morality in young (3-5 year old) children, specifically impacting the development of self-regulation, empathy, and conscience (Narvaez, Gleason et al., 2013; Narvaez, Wang et al., 2013). Thus the neurobiology that underlies moral virtues may be dependent on early life experience (though experience during other periods of high plasticity such as adolescence or voluntary therapy, can also redesign brain function). In fact, the type of moral orientation one favors in adulthood may be significantly influenced by early life experience (Tomkins, 1965).

Three brain strata emerged through human evolution—the r-complex, paleomammalian and neomammalian—providing a foundation for different global mindsets (MacLean, 1990). Triune ethics theory (TET; Narvaez, 2008; 2014) builds on this evolutionary theory to identify three basic ethical orientations. A global mindset becomes an ethic when it guides decisions and actions, trumping other values. The r-complex and related structures represent a set of systems for self-protection and organism survival. The stress response facilitates survival, putting older parts of the brain in charge of behavior with fight-flight-freeze-faint responses. When these guide moral decisions and actions, the Safety Ethic is in play. The mammalian stratum emerged later and includes the social-emotional systems that mammals developed to care for and develop the young. When these prosocial emotion systems are dominant, the Engagement Ethic—relational attunement—is more likely to be deployed. The neomammalian is the most recent and most developed in humans and allows for imagination beyond the face-to-face. Fueled by self-protective emotions, vicious or detached imaginations can ensue. When guided by prosocial emotional systems, a communal imagination is likely.

When early life experience does not match up with the EDN, the survival systems may habitually influence decisions and behavior. Because survival systems are oriented to aggressive dominance or appeasing withdrawal, prosocial emotional systems and cortical controls of survival mechanism will be underdeveloped. In this case, the individual will be more stress reactive with a low threshold for threat in social situations. Perceiving threat more easily means that the individual frequently will be channeled physiologically into a self-protective mindset, which also necessarily impairs capacities for empathy and abstract thinking. Behavior enacted from this mindset, a safety ethic, can result in withdrawal, aggression or a general distrust in social situations. Social ranking will be a priority along with aspects emphasized by culture to be part of personal safety (purity, ingroup dominance).

Self-protective moral orientations develop during implicit social cognition development in early life (or subsequently from trauma or during periods of high plasticity) because threat-reactivity is set with a low threshold (as with post-traumatic-stress-disorder; PTSD) or epigenetic effects thwart calm response (e.g., Meaney, 2010). For example, when the stress response is triggered, the brain/body mobilizes survival systems, impairing higher order thinking and prosocial emotions. Decisions and actions taken from this mindset, which can occur very early in processing, represent a safety ethic.

Engagement requires capacities for presence, synchrony and reverent hospitality, capacities orthogonal to the safety ethic. Communal imagination extends engagement with an ethic of love, sympathetic concern and egalitarian respect (Narvaez, 2014). Both of these may require the early optimizing environment of the EDN. Indeed, using a retrospective measure with adults, Narvaez and colleagues (Narvaez, Lawrence, Wang & Cheng, 2014) found that EDN-history influences adult moral orientation. Greater EDN-consistent care was related to greater compassionate orientation toward others (engagement ethic) whereas less EDN-consistent care was related to greater self-protective moral orientations.

But the imagination also can be hijacked for self-protection. When a stress response is activated from perceived threat, the imagination will combine with safety interests and be used for self-protection through deliberate social aggression or withdrawal, maximizing safety through manipulation and control (vicious imagination), or through disengagement from affiliative emotion (detached imagination).

Having, Doing, or Being?

Though we have been discussing ‘having’ versus ‘doing’ in relation to moral personality, a third perspective may be more fundamental. Virtue is typically defined along the lines of doing the right thing in the right manner for the particular circumstances. In this case, *doing* has much to do with *being* because the *manner of doing* has a lot to do with *being*—which is comprised of such things as one’s attentional habits, emotional dispositions and self-regulation, as well as practices of

relational attunement and openness (Hogarth, 2000; Levinas, 1969; Lewis, 2005; Murdoch, 1989; Narvaez, 2014; Smith, 1991).

Small-band hunter-gatherers (SBHG) represent the type of society in which the human genus spent 99% of its history (Fry, 2006). It also represents the type of society for which human brains and bodies are presumed to have evolved. Interestingly, members of these societies display quite a different nature of *being* than individuals raised in typical Western societies (Narvaez, 2013, 2014). They spend much of their time encouraging and experiencing positive social life (laughter, amusement, joy). Ongoing immersion in such a positive “climate” facilitates prosocial behavior and being. In fact, the safety ethic is a rarity among small-band hunter-gatherers. Instead, they tend to live life primarily according to humanity’s highest moral capacities: face-to-face relationally-attuned engagement and prosocial, communal imagination.

Moral personality and virtue may be natural endowments of every human—a human essence, so to speak. But such an essence may only develop under conditions that match with evolution—the evolved developmental niche and subsequent socially-supportive environments that match up with the evolved needs of the individual. Interestingly, small-band hunter-gatherers, who receive EDN-consistent care, are reported to display greater emotional presence, generosity and sense of equality, and perceptiveness—characteristics that comprise the virtues of the wisdom traditions: humility, charity, authenticity (Ingold, 1999; Smith 1991). Communion and agency flow together for the small-band hunter gatherer rather than pull away from one other, as found in Western societies (Bakan, 1966). In circumstances mismatched with evolutionary history, humanity’s fullest capacities may not be nurtured, and the nature displayed becomes less human than pre-human (i.e., selfishness, aggression and lack of self-regulation). If wisdom is a state of being, then how being is constructed and supported should be of central concern. How adults structure their societies (and raise children) influence what duties they perceive, the nature of their autonomy and what is conceptualized as a good human being.

Conclusion

The debates over traits and situations may be best solved by social-cognitive theory which emphasizes the unique personality signature of a person in interaction with type of situation. Yet even this debate may need to shift toward a more fundamental and, dare we say, Aristotelian concern for being. Having the right feelings (‘being’) when taking action (‘doing’) may be as important as the action itself. The evolved nest for optimal development during the critical period of early life may best foster emotion systems and mindsets that can skillfully guide prosocial moral action.

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