

## CHAPTER 19



# Morality for Us versus Them

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**Do people deploy the same moral cognition across social contexts, or are there critical cleavages within moral cognition?**

We propose that conceptualizing moral cognition for close others as fundamentally different from moral cognition for distant others can help explain systematic differences in how people deploy social cognition (e.g., theory of mind), as well as how people apply moral foundations across different motivational contexts.

Moral cognition—which encompasses our ability to determine whether an action is right or wrong—allows us to navigate the social world. Critically, we identify actions as right or wrong *in order to* identify agents as friendly or hostile and to decide how to act and react ourselves. In turn, our social cognition—our ability to make sense of others and ourselves—supports our capacity for moral thinking and doing. That is, our assessments of others as moral actors depend on our assessments of others' mental states, including their beliefs, intentions, and motivations. Attributing minds to others and reasoning about the contents of those minds are crucial components of both moral judgment and social interaction (Gray & Wegner, 2009; Gray, Young, & Waytz, 2012; Waytz, Gray, Epley, & Wegner, 2010). When determining whether an individual is friend or foe, it is insufficient to evaluate agents on the basis of their external, observable ac-

tions; moral judgment depends on an assessment of internal mental states. For example, innocent intentions in the case of accidents (e.g., putting poison in a colleague's coffee while believing it to be sugar, inadvertently causing the colleague's death) decrease blame, whereas malicious intentions even in the absence of actual harm (e.g., putting sugar in a colleague's coffee while believing it to be poison, enhancing the colleague's enjoyment of the coffee) increase blame (for reviews, see Young & Dungan 2012; Young & Tsoi, 2013). Recent work reveals that mental state information informs moral judgments of not only individuals but also entire groups of people (e.g., corporations, unions, countries; Waytz & Young 2012; Waytz & Young 2014), animals (e.g., Gray, Gray, & Wegner, 2007; Piazza, Landy, & Goodwin, 2014; Waytz, Cacioppo, & Epley, 2010), and technology (Waytz, Heafner, & Epley, 2014).

In this chapter, we propose that systematic differences in how people deploy social cognition, in particular mental state reasoning (theory of mind; ToM), as well as how people apply moral foundations across different contexts, reflect critical cleavages within moral cognition. Specifically, we propose that moral cognition as applied to individuals we identify as members of our inner social circle, “us,” is fundamentally different from moral cognition as applied to individuals we identify as outside of our social circle, “them.”

In this chapter, we survey evidence suggesting that people focus on different aspects of mental states, as well as different moral foundations, depending on their relationship with the moral target. In particular, we suggest that people make the following distinctions when judging close versus distant others. By “close” others, we mean people who are socially close or people with whom we desire social closeness—those who we feel belong to our ingroups, are similar to us, and are likeable. By “distant” others, we mean people who are socially distant or people with whom we prefer social distance—those who we feel belong to our outgroups, are dissimilar to us, and are unlikeable. First, we propose that when considering close versus distant others, people focus on different moral characteristics, preferentially seeking information about and attending to others’ experience-based mental states (e.g., emotions, feelings) versus agency-based mental states (e.g., intentions, plans, goals, beliefs), assigning greater moral patiency (i.e., the degree to which an individual deserves moral treatment) versus moral agency (i.e., the degree to which an individual is morally responsible for his or her actions), and attributing love-oriented motivations versus hate-oriented motivations for actions. Second, we propose that people assign different weight to different moral foundations, focusing more on considerations of loyalty and purity for close others and more on considerations of fairness and harm for distant others.

### Moral Characteristics

Effective social interaction requires considering others’ minds; however, which aspects

of another person’s mind we consider varies significantly from moment to moment. When approaching a potential romantic partner, we wonder, “Does this person find me attractive?” When interacting with a fussy child, we wonder, “What does this person need?” When asking the boss for a raise, we wonder, “Is this person in a good mood?” We propose that, more broadly, the aspects of mind we consider differ systematically depending on whether we are interacting with close or distant others, targets that typically activate different motivations.

In one set of studies examining people’s reasoning about outgroup actions, we found that different motivations elicit selective attention to distinct kinds of mental states (Waytz & Young, 2014). In these studies, we experimentally manipulated American participants’ motivational aims: to predict the actions of an outgroup country (effectance motivation) or to affiliate with the outgroup country (affiliation motivation). We asked people first to write short essays about either how they might accurately predict what the country might do in the future (effectance) or how they might establish an allegiance with the country (affiliation) and then to evaluate various characteristics of that country. These judgments included evaluating the importance of attending to the country’s *agentive mental states* (i.e., capacities for planning, intending) and *experiential mental states* (i.e., capacities for emotion, feeling; Gray et al., 2007) and also whether or not the country possessed these mental states. Across studies, participants induced to experience effectance motivation allocated greater attention to *agentive mental states* relative to *experiential mental states* compared with participants induced to experience affiliation motivation. In addition, we found that people attributed greater trustworthiness and warmth-based traits when they were motivated by affiliation versus by effectance.

People’s preferential perception of close others in terms of experience and prosocial motivations and their preferential perception of distant others in terms of agency and antisocial motivations is also broadly consistent with the hypothesis that people represent close versus distant others as different moral archetypes as well. Together with moral

typecasting theory (Gray & Wegner, 2009), this research suggests that people should represent distant others more as moral agents (capable of doing good or evil) and close others more as moral patients (capable of having good and evil done to them). Based on this distinction, people should focus more on judgments of moral rights when evaluating close others and more on judgments of moral responsibility when evaluating distant others. Study 4 of our research described above provides partial support for this hypothesis (Waytz & Young, 2014). We found that people assigned greater *moral responsibility* to an outgroup country in the effectance condition but also marginally greater *moral rights* to the outgroup country in the affiliation condition.

Additional suggestive evidence of this distinction between perceiving close others as moral patients and distant others as moral agents comes from Study 7 of Gray and Wegner's (2009) work on moral typecasting. In this study, they demonstrate that people treat both good agents (e.g., the Dalai Lama) and bad agents (e.g., Ted Bundy) more like moral agents than moral patients (e.g., an orphan), assigning agents more pain and less pleasure to these targets based on the belief that agents in general are able to tolerate adverse experiences. However, in this study people nevertheless treated good agents, compared with bad agents, more like moral patients, suggesting that people might afford patiency to targets with whom they might desire social closeness (relative to targets they might want to avoid).

Yet another study examined this moral distinction between close and distant others by asking American participants to listen to ostensible American or Afghan soldiers speak about atrocities they committed during war and justifications for these atrocities (Coman, Stone, Castano, & Hirst, 2014). When prompted to recall information from these narratives, participants recalled fewer of the atrocities committed by and more of the justifications for American soldiers compared with Afghan soldiers. In other words, people recalled outgroup members more as moral agents who inflicted harm on others (e.g., tortured enemy soldiers) and ingroup members more as moral patients, forced to commit atrocities to avoid further attack. Of course, this pattern, along with the one

described above (Gray & Wegner, 2009), is consistent with generic ingroup bias, the desire to see ingroup members as more moral and to treat ingroup members better. Thus more targeted research is needed to test the hypothesis that people perceive close others as moral patients and distant others as moral agents.

The findings described above suggest that reasoning about the particular mental states essential for moral cognition is determined both by the features of the target and by the *motivations* of the judge. When interacting with distant others, the motivation for predicting and anticipating their actions, avoiding them, or blaming them for wrongdoing leads people to attend to the plans, intentions, and goals of others. When interacting with close others, the motivation for affiliation and moral justification can lead people to attend to these mental states as well but also appears to increase people's desire to understand others' emotions and feelings, which are critical components of empathy (Batson, 2011; Zaki & Ochsner, 2012). Thus the different motivations that are typically activated toward socially close and socially distant others drive different applications of moral cognition to these targets.

A recent functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) experiment we conducted also supports the idea that people attend to different aspects of mental states when they are motivated by cooperation versus competition (Tsoi, Dungan, Waytz, & Young, 2016). Participants played a game (modeled after "rock, paper, scissors") involving a series of dyadic interactions requiring participants to think about what their partners are thinking. Interactions were either competitive and zero sum—for example, if the participant guesses "paper" and his or her partner guesses "rock", the participant *alone* wins a monetary reward—or cooperative—for example, if the participant and his or her partner both guess "paper", both parties earn a reward *jointly*. We found that, although brain regions for mental state reasoning were recruited similarly robustly for both competitive and cooperative trials, these regions discriminated between competition and cooperation in their spatial patterns of activity. The results suggest that these regions encode information that separates competition from cooperation—

perhaps the difference between agency-based and experience-based mental states, alongside the consideration of an individual as a moral agent versus a moral patient, as consistent with the behavioral research presented above.

In another line of work, we have examined how people attribute a distinct type of mental state—motivation—to close and distant others in the context of moral conflict over political and religious issues. In particular, we examined real-world conflict groups, American Democrats and Republicans, as well as Israelis and Palestinians in the Middle East (Waytz, Young, & Ginges, 2014), and assessed how people attribute different motivations to their ingroups and outgroups. In these experiments, we tested whether people deliver different assessments of the mental states, namely, the motivations underlying conflict for groups with whom they typically compete (i.e., outgroups) versus cooperate (i.e., ingroups). In political and ethnoreligious intergroup conflict, adversaries attributed their own group's aggression to ingroup love more than outgroup hate and their outgroup's aggression to outgroup hate more than ingroup love. For example, Israelis reported that Israelis support bombing of Gaza because of their love of Israelis, not hatred of Palestinians; and Palestinians attributed Israeli aggression to outgroup hate (toward Palestinians) and Palestinian violence to ingroup love (toward Palestinians). Similarly, both Democrats and Republicans attributed political conflict initiated by the opposing party to outgroup hate, but they attributed conflict initiated by their own party to ingroup love. Critically, this biased pattern of attribution also increased moral attitudes and behaviors associated with conflict intractability, including unwillingness to negotiate and unwillingness to vote for compromise solutions. Again, these findings suggest that people place different emphases on different mental states when reasoning about the morality of close and distant others.

### Moral Foundations

Beyond focusing on different mental and moral characteristics when interacting with close versus distant others, people also ap-

pear to rely on entirely different psychological foundations for what constitutes right and wrong. Moral foundations theory (MFT; Graham et al., 2013; Haidt & Joseph, 2004; Haidt & Graham, 2007) suggests that these foundations fall into two types—binding foundations (ingroup loyalty, respect for authority, and purity/sanctity), which emphasize values that bind and build social groups, and individualizing foundations (care-harm, justice-cheating), which emphasize the rights of individuals, regardless of group membership. These domains appear to be defined by their descriptive content (e.g., shooting a person belongs to the harm domain; taking more than one's share belongs to the fairness domain). Meanwhile, other researchers highlight the key role of the relational context of an action (e.g., taking a car from a stranger is considered stealing, while taking a car from a sibling may constitute borrowing; Carnes, Lickel, & Janoff-Bulman, 2015; Fiske & Tetlock, 1997; Kurzman, DeScioli, & Fein, 2012; Rai & Fiske, 2011). Applying this context-driven account to the use of moral foundations, we suggest that moral foundations are differently deployed depending on the identities of the parties involved and, importantly, their relationship. Recent work indicates that when people consider socially close versus distant others, they focus more on binding foundations relative to individualizing foundations. In particular, people seem to focus on considerations of purity versus harm and loyalty versus fairness; in addition, individual differences in endorsement of binding versus individualizing values track with treatment of ingroup relative to outgroup members, as reviewed below.

First, recent research examines the relevance of harm and purity norms for different relational contexts. People judge purity violations committed within their own group and harm violations outside their group more harshly (Dungan, Chakroff, & Young, 2017). In one study, moral condemnation increased as the target of a purity violation became more self-relevant, whereas the opposite pattern was true for harm. Another study extended this distinction to the level of groups. People who strongly identified with their ingroup delivered particularly harsh moral judgments of purity violations (but not harms) compared with people who

weakly identified with their ingroup. When it comes to purity violations, people may be especially harsh on the people closest to them—those who have the greatest potential to affect them either indirectly by association or directly via physical or moral contamination. Indeed, in a third study, across a wide array of violations varying in severity, people judged that it is more morally wrong to defile (vs. harm) oneself, but it is more morally wrong to harm (vs. defile) another person. Concerns about oneself may track with concerns about one's group (ingroup). Keeping oneself pure may be advantageous only insofar as others in close proximity also maintain their purity; thus concerns about contagion or contamination may apply more to ingroup members. As such, condemnation of another person's impurity may still stem from concerns about one's own purity.

Additional evidence supports the account that concerns about purity are more salient when one is considering oneself, whereas concerns about harm are more salient when one is considering others (Chakroff, Dungan, & Young, 2013; Rottman, Kelemen, & Young, 2014). This body of research also shows that mental state reasoning is deployed for moral judgments of harmful acts to a significantly greater extent than for moral judgments of impure acts (Chakroff, Dungan, & Young, 2013; Russell & Giner-Sorolla, 2011; Young & Saxe, 2011).

Second, other moral concerns such as loyalty as opposed to justice or fairness may also apply more to the ingroup. Pilot data indicate that people prefer loyal friends and family but value justice and fairness across group boundaries (Dungan, Waytz, & Young, 2017). Indeed, recent work on whistle-blowing decisions directly reveals the tension between norms concerning loyalty (to friends and family who support oneself) and norms concerning justice and fairness for all (Waytz, Dungan, & Young, 2013). In several experiments, we primed participants with specific moral values—fairness versus loyalty. Participants were instructed to write an essay about either the value of fairness over loyalty or the value of loyalty over fairness. Participants who had written pro-fairness essays were more likely to blow the whistle on unethical actions committed by other members of their communities. Par-

ticipants who had written pro-loyalty essays were more likely to keep their mouths shut in solidarity. However, regardless of condition, participants were less likely to blow the whistle on friends and family than on strangers and acquaintances, suggesting that the foundation of loyalty is far more relevant for close others.

Another line of work shows that people describe immoral behavior committed by one's ingroup more in terms of binding foundations and describe immoral behavior committed by one's outgroup in terms of individualizing foundations (Leidner & Castano, 2012). When Americans were asked to describe American soldiers or Australian soldiers (an outgroup) engaging in wartime atrocities toward Iraqis, they described these atrocities more in terms of loyalty and authority for American soldiers and more in terms of harm and fairness for Australian soldiers.

Finally, convergent evidence indicates that individual differences in endorsement of binding values—loyalty, purity, and authority—track with the treatment of ingroup versus outgroup members (Smith, Aquino, Koleva, & Graham, 2014). In particular, people who strongly endorsed binding values were also more likely to support torturing outgroup members posing a critical threat to ingroup members and to preserve scarce resources for ingroup members, thereby withholding them from outgroup members; this pattern, though, was unique to individuals reporting a weak moral identity or moral self-concept.

## Conclusion

Gray and Wegner (2009, p. 506) note, "It is difficult to be moral or immoral alone in a room." After all, the primary function of morality is to make sense of and interact with the social beings around us. Identifying an action as right or wrong matters only insofar as we are able to interpret others' behavior as hostile or benevolent and to decide how to respond. The many components of moral cognition all operate in the service of social navigation: Assessments of moral traits and mental states support evaluations of others' behavior, including judgments of their moral



worth and blameworthiness; moral foundations guide intuitive ethics. Yet assessments of moral and mental traits and applications of moral foundations, as well as consequent judgments and behaviors, depend crucially on the social and motivational context.

Furthermore, as Rai and Fiske (2011) propose, people might consider the same individual using different relational models in different situations and therefore apply different moral motives (e.g., two individuals might invoke the communal sharing model when exchanging jazz records but the market pricing model when one sells the other one a bicycle). By the same token, the same interaction partner might occupy close or distant status depending on context. For example, a salesperson might consider a sales colleague to be an ally when considering how to best a competing organization, but not when their mutual organization offers a Rolex watch for its salesperson-of-the-month award. Given the flexibility of relationship status, we predict that, over the course of a relationship, people might rely differentially on different moral characteristics and moral foundations, as established here.

This prediction also helps explain why when affiliative relationships turn acrimonious, they become difficult to repair (Keysar, Converse, Wang, & Epley, 2008; Kramer, 1999; Lount, Zhong, Sivanathan, & Murnighan, 2008; Waytz et al., 2014): because morality has shifted. When an ally turns even momentarily into an enemy, people shift their focus from concerns about the other side's moral rights (patience) and moral norms concerning social cohesiveness to a focus on concerns about the other side's moral responsibility and norms concerning individual morality. This shift in moral focus might then contribute to a cycle of blame and a desire for punishment for the ostensible offender. Perhaps more optimistically, in the rarer cases of enemies becoming allies, morality should shift in a positive direction to reinforce conciliation. For example, when formerly warring countries establish a peace treaty, the focus of these parties should shift to moral rights and establishing social cohesion rather than finger-pointing over past wrongs. We welcome future research to test these hypotheses and to elucidate key differences in moral cognition for "us" versus "them."

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