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## Personal Integrity, Morality and Psychological Well-Being: Justifying the Demands of Morality\*

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### Abstract

Most moral theories purport to make claims upon agents, yet often it is not clear why those claims are ones that can be justifiably demanded of agents. In this paper, I develop a justification of moral requirements that explains why it is that morality makes legitimate claims on agents. This justification is grounded in the idea that there is an essential connection between morality and psychological well-being. I go on to suggest how, using this justification as a springboard, we might be able to develop a viable theory of moral requirements that maintains the strict and demanding status we take to be distinctive of moral requirements, yet avoids worries of alienation.

### Keywords

alienation, moral motivation, obligation, personal integrity, pride, well-being

Most of us know what it feels like to be pulled by morality: to feel that we *should* do the right thing; to feel driven by some sort of ‘sense of duty’; to be told repeatedly that we should always do the right thing. This is the idea, pushed by philosophers and laypersons alike, that morality trumps and should take precedence over our non-moral interests. This idea is also something many moral theorists take for granted. Most assume that morality obligates individuals and that people are bound by morality’s requirements, whatever those might be. As a result, the bulk of work done in moral philosophy focuses on developing the content of morality’s requirements, without seriously addressing why it is that people are bound to these requirements. This puts

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moral philosophy in the precarious position of proposing moral requirements that make very real demands on the agent; demands that, however, quite possibly have no legitimate claim on agents.

This problem of justification is a theoretical one that has important practical implications for issues concerning moral motivation. When moral requirements lack justification, yet nonetheless purport to make demands upon agents, it is unclear as to how and why agents should be motivated to act on them. Many have described the resulting situation as being ‘alienating’.<sup>1</sup> Such a situation occurs when agents are told to follow moral requirements, even at the cost of pursuing their personal projects and interests. They thus must set aside those things they find to be important and are motivated to pursue in order to fulfill the demands of morality – demands they very well may *lack* the motivation to pursue. Moreover, it is often difficult for agents to ascertain the importance of moral demands. This is particularly true when such demands are not properly justified. Given these two features of moral requirements – their claim to override non-moral pursuits and their lack of justification – such requirements alienate agents from those things they truly care about.

To avoid placing morality and moral agents in this precarious and potentially dangerous position, we need to either relinquish the claim that moral requirements are generally overriding, or find a proper justification for their overriding status. It seems clear that, *if* there is a justification for moral requirements (that is, a solid explanation of why they hold an overriding normative status), then we should not deny them this status. Thus the first step in resolving this practical problem of alienation and motivation is to seek out a justification of moral requirements. As I have argued, solving the problem of justification not only will legitimize the demands of morality, but it also stands to address the problems of moral motivation highlighted by defenders of the ‘alienation’ objection. It may not convince all agents that *they* should be moral, but it certainly provides a start.

This is my project here. I first offer an account of why moral demands make legitimate claims on agents, and then suggest how we might be able to develop a viable theory of moral requirements that maintains the strict and demanding status we take to be distinctive of moral requirements, yet avoids worries of alienation. My hope is that by providing a justification of moral requirements, we can reach a better understanding of the nature of moral motivation. I do

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Michael Stocker, ‘The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories’, reprinted in Steven M. Cahn and Joram G. Haber (eds.), *20th Century Ethical Theory* (Englewood, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1995), and Bernard Williams, ‘Persons, Character, and Morality’, in idem, *Moral Luck* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

not pretend that such a largely theoretical account of the importance of morality will *actually* motivate all people to act morally, but do hope to convince those who, as depicted in the opening sections of this article, feel bound by moral requirements, yet are not sure why, and so do not always end up acting on these moral requirements.

In so doing, the first step of my project is to borrow a strategy fundamental to political philosophy. Political philosophers have long argued that the project of justifying political requirements is essential to any political theory. The first section of this article explores why this theme is central to political philosophy and argues that essentially the same reasons hold for moral philosophy, and that strategies similar to those justifying political requirements should be employed to justify moral requirements. The second section goes on to develop an account of justification that is grounded in the connection between morality and psychological well-being; the third section addresses the implications of this justification for the content of moral requirements; the fourth section addresses the implications of this justification for accounts of moral motivation; while the fifth and final section explores how this approach to moral theorizing is preferable to other responses to the problems of justification and motivation.

## 1. Legitimacy and Justification in Political Philosophy

Political philosophers take the need to provide a justification of political requirements to be a fundamental and basic criterion of a political theory: if a theorist is going to claim that people are obligated to act in certain ways, then it is essential that they ground these claims in facts about the actual natures of the people said to be obligated by them. Without such a justificatory grounding, the claims lack legitimacy.

The reason why it is important to provide such a justification is because, quite simply, people are free. If this freedom is going to be restricted, then there must be some justification for so doing. Absent such a justification, any restrictions placed on people's freedom are illegitimate and pose no *real* obligation.<sup>2</sup>

Political requirements make demands on agents that purport to be overriding and to take precedence over an agent's personal interests and it is largely in virtue of this normative status that political philosophers demand justification

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<sup>2</sup> This is not to say that there are not, in fact, all sorts of political requirements that do coerce people absent proper justification.

for them. In this regard political requirements occupy the same normative status as is commonly attributed to moral requirements.<sup>3</sup> While moral requirements are not legally enforced in the same fashion as political requirements, they nonetheless claim to *obligate* agents in the same manner as political requirements. Thus, it is reasonable to expect that, just as political requirements must be justifiable in order for their demands to be legitimate, so too should moral requirements.

It is also reasonable to think the same sort of justification appealed to in political philosophy can serve as a model for justification in moral philosophy. In particular, we as moral philosophers can benefit from the struggles of political philosophers, and, importantly, learn from their mistakes. One important lesson to learn from political philosophy is that justification must address agents, as they actually exist: the justification must be one that appeals to the actual nature of agents and the desires fundamental to it.<sup>4</sup> This point is echoed by defenders of the alienation objections, who argue that part of the problem with contemporary moral philosophy today is that moral requirements are imposed on agents without regard to their desires and interests.

Thus, just as in political philosophy, the best justifications of political requirements center around the actual needs and interests of people that serve to be advanced by a political system,<sup>5</sup> it seems that the best method for seeking a justification of moral requirements is to figure out why, in fact, morality is important to individual agents, and what – if any – needs and interests it advances. This is the goal of the following section: to figure out why morality is an important aspect of people's lives. Upon exploring this question, what we will find is that morality plays a critical role in the development of people's psychological well-being and is important in virtue of this role. The reason why people should act morally, and why claims obligating them to do so are legitimate, is because doing so enables them to fulfill their non-moral and personal interests. The upshot is that, for most people, moral action is actually *requisite* to the fulfillment of their personal projects.

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<sup>3</sup> Note that my discussion concerns just those moral theories, such as utilitarianism and deontology, which take their requirements to be strict, generally overriding ones.

<sup>4</sup> We can draw this lesson from the many criticisms of the Rawlsian veil of ignorance, which many accuse as failing to provide satisfactory justification in virtue of proposing an inaccurate depiction of human beings. See Michael Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2nd edn, 1998).

<sup>5</sup> This is the basic idea underlying the social contract tradition, and is also essential to contemporary projects of public justification. For example, Rawls's project in political liberalism is to show how political principles can be justified through an appeal to an overlapping consensus of people's particular systems of beliefs and values.

## 2. Grounding Moral Requirements: Morality's Place in Human Psychology

If we are to provide a justification of moral requirements that appeals to the actual natures and desires of individual agents, the first step is to figure out what these fundamental natures and desires are. Thus, we must focus on the psychological drives fundamental to human nature itself, which constitute the most basic personal point of view and set up the conditions for psychological well-being. While there are many different understandings of psychological well-being developed in both philosophical and psychological literature, one influential account, which I'll take as a very general model for psychological well-being, suggests that psychological well-being is a multi-faceted notion incorporating six elements: autonomy, environmental mastery, meaningful purpose in life, self-acceptance, positive social relations, and personal growth.<sup>6</sup>

As psychological well-being provides the necessary conditions for all agents to go on and take true satisfaction in individual pursuits and projects, it is natural to assume that a base level of psychological well-being can be attained only when an agent's fundamental desires are fulfilled. The essential questions for us to address, then are: What moves people and which of these desires fundamentally characterizes human nature? Historically, this question has been answered by describing human nature in terms of sociality and asociality. While some extremists argue that human nature is entirely asocial, most agree that human nature is much more complicated than being simply asocial, or social for that matter. So most, like Grotius, Locke, and Hume – to name just a few – agree that people are basically social animals, however internally conflicted by their asocial desires. Recent contemporary discussions of human nature take this conflicted picture for granted, and focus mainly on the social side of people, disputing, for example, whether there are any pure, other-regarding desires or whether all apparently other-regarding desires such as benevolence ultimately reduce to self-regarding desires. My contribution to these explorations of human nature looks past this debate regarding the exact nature of our social desires and instead focuses on the role that positive social interaction plays in people's lives, and, in particular, their psychological development. I thus take for granted the claim that people need positive (i.e. peaceful, cooperative) social interaction and explore the exact ways in which they require it.

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<sup>6</sup> Carol Ryff, 'Happiness is Everything, or Is It? Explorations on the Meaning of Psychological Well-being', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 57 (1989), p. 1069-1081.

Social interaction plays an important role in people's lives in at least two different areas: On a very basic level, people need social interaction itself – we are social animals and have what Darwin called 'social instincts': the desires for friendship, intimacy, basic companionship. These desires are undeniable, and countless psychological studies of the deprivation of positive social interaction shows them to be fundamental to our nature.<sup>7</sup> The ill-effects that result from a lack of social interaction prompt some psychologists to posit that a person's need to belong generates a motive that can be 'almost as compelling as a need for food'.<sup>8</sup>

While not all will agree that a person's need to belong is as strong and compelling as the need for food, the existence of such basic social desires is relatively uncontroversial. The fact of their existence, however, makes a significant contribution to our understanding of psychological well-being: a lack of positive social interaction clearly threatens one's psychological well-being. The second area in which social interaction contributes to people's psychological well-being is less obvious, and will be my primary focus here. The second area concerns people's more sophisticated desires for the fruits of social interaction, which emerge from their experiences of positive social interactions.

Social interactions open the door for people to develop many passions that make significant contributions to their well-being: they allow for people to experience trusting relationships, they show people the importance of having respect, and the negative effects of losing respect. In this sense, people are psychologically dependent on one another for the fulfillment of those psychological drives that depend on interactions with others – i.e. for the satisfaction of their psychologically-rooted social desires. The question arises: Which psychological drives are so dependent? It certainly seems that many of our desires are of this sort. Obvious ones include desires for things that depend on other people's judgments of oneself, such as the desire to be trusted, admired, and respected. Perhaps more importantly, though, there is good reason to believe that one's basic self-concept and corresponding judgments of self-affirmation, such as pride and self-esteem, are also psychologically dependent on others, and so are made possible only through social interaction.

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<sup>7</sup> Deprivation of positive social interaction has been shown, for example, to lead to increased stress, poor immune system, psychological pathology and mental illness, higher risk of suicide, and a general negative impact on well-being and happiness. See Roy F. Baumeister and Mark R. Leary, 'The Need to Belong: Desire for Interpersonal Attachments as a Fundamental Human Motivation', *Psychological Bulletin* 117 (1995), pp. 508-10.

<sup>8</sup> Baumeister and Leary, 'The Need to Belong', p. 488.

Judgments of self-affirmation are crucial to a person's overall well-being and psychological well-being in particular. Experience teaches us that self-esteem, to name only one important sort of self-affirmation, lies at the foundation of our psychological well-being. Psychologists – particularly of the well-established field of symbolic interactionism – have long argued that self-esteem is an integral part of psychological well-being, suggesting 'no one can maintain a psychic health and a negative self-concept at the same time'.<sup>9</sup>

While some may be tempted to think that positive self-image results solely from first-person judgments about oneself that are independent of the third-person judgments of others, empirical psychology shows us that this is clearly false: one's self-image is formed on the basis of, and is dependent on, the judgments other people make of oneself. This idea has philosophical roots in Hume (although they probably extend further beyond Hume) who argues that judgments of pride depend not only on the agent's first-person judgments of herself, but also, and equally so, on the feedback she receives from others.

Typically, when we think of pride, we think of an agent taking pride in some object related to herself; for example, her first philosophy paper. Pride initially seems to be simply a matter of self-affirmation, possible without any interaction with others. Our agent could sit at home, with only her computer, writing a paper and feeling very proud of herself.

However, upon further reflection, many people would hesitate to think this simple explanation fits the whole story. After all, people can be mistakenly proud of things: they could feel proud of something that really bears no relation to them, or they could feel proud of something that is unworthy of pride. These are cases of ill-founded pride, what Hume calls an 'over-weaning conceit', which carries with it negative connotations of viciousness.<sup>10</sup> A healthy, well-founded pride, on the other hand, does not have to be vicious; rather, as Hume observes, 'although an over-weaning conceit of our own merit be vicious and disagreeable, nothing can be more laudable than to have a value for ourselves, where we really have qualities that are valuable'.<sup>11</sup>

So how, then, does an agent know whether or not her judgments of pride are truly warranted? How does our agent know that she should feel proud of her paper? Assuming she has written it herself, the answer is obvious: she

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<sup>9</sup> Robert Lauer and Warren Handel, *Social Psychology: The Theory and Application of Symbolic Interactionism* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 2nd edn, 1983), p. 269.

<sup>10</sup> David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), section 3.3.2.7.

<sup>11</sup> Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, section 3.3.2.8.



determines whether she should feel pride based largely on the feedback she receives from others.

Hume's account of pride emphasizes the need for this sort of 'feedback', albeit on a psychological level, what he calls a 'seconding', in order to secure judgments of pride. He argues that there are two causes of pride: 'original causes' such as reputation, character, beauty and riches, and 'secondary causes', which are the opinions of others. Both causes, he argues, have an equal influence on our judgments, for the original sources of pride have 'little influence, when not seconded by the opinions and sentiments of others'.<sup>12</sup>

On Hume's account, it is only through our estimations of the opinions of others that we can attain pride in the original causes. Social interaction thus lies at the foundation of one's judgments of pride and is important on a very deep level: it provides a necessary constitutive condition for the development of passions that are intrinsic to the development of one's self-concept.

Hume's understanding of the role social interaction plays in psychological development is supported through research conducted in many different branches of social psychology. Self-psychologist Heinz Kohut, for example, famously argues that the self needs social interaction in order to develop psychologically. His position, as described by Pauline Chazan, is that it is 'the self's conscious and unconscious experience of the relationship with another which determines the cohesion, vigour, harmony and self-esteem of the self'.<sup>13</sup> The self, in Kohut's eyes, needs social interaction in order to develop psychologically. This view it needs is similar to what we find in Hume's account of the 'seconding' of one's judgments by others. The self needs feedback from others, what Kohut describes as 'the shoring up of our self'.<sup>14</sup>

Kohut's basic idea is that in order to develop self-esteem, one must have a consistent conception of oneself, and that this largely depends on the reactions one gets from others. Other psychological studies on self-esteem support this hypothesis, especially with respect to the agent's need for the 'imprints' of others. The psychologist Michael Jackson argues that self-representations are never the result of isolated activities; in fact, his research suggests that 'without a context of social interaction, the individual's objectification of his or her own activity. . . could not represent the individual as a *self*'.<sup>15</sup> When it comes to the issue of self-esteem, Jackson's studies of cases where subjects

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<sup>12</sup> Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, section 2.1.11.1.

<sup>13</sup> Pauline Chazan, *The Moral Self* (New York: Routledge Press, 1998), p. 70.

<sup>14</sup> Heinz Kohut, *How Does Analysis Cure?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 49.

<sup>15</sup> Michael R. Jackson, *Self-Esteem and Meaning: A Life Historical Investigation* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1984), p. 190.

report feeling any degree of self-esteem show that ‘in every case, the self is defined only in the context of social interaction’.<sup>16</sup> Jackson’s research supports Kohut’s fundamental observation: social interaction makes a necessary and significant contribution to the self.

This research on self-esteem is really just an off-shoot of what many take to be the fundamental principle guiding contemporary social psychology: this is the idea that one’s self-concept develops only through social contexts. A highly influential branch of mainstream social psychology holds that the development of each individual’s self-concept depends on social interaction. This is the field of symbolic interactionism, a paradigm that cuts across a number of different theoretical orientations of social psychology. Symbolic interactionists, such as Mead and Cooley, amongst many others, hold that the self develops only in a social environment through interactions with others. According to these psychologists, people develop a conception of their selves only through indirectly experiencing the standpoints of others: ‘the self-concept arises in, and changes in, interaction through the mechanism of the perceived reactions of others’.<sup>17</sup> This basic idea, that the feedback of others plays a fundamental role in one’s self-development, has been vindicated through decades of empirical studies,<sup>18</sup> leading one psychologist to claim that ‘all competent students recognize that the mind of a person develops through social interaction’, as this proposition has become ‘commonplace’.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Michael R. Jackson, *Self-Esteem and Meaning: A Life Historical Investigation* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1984), p. 191.

<sup>17</sup> Robert Lauer and Warren Handel, *Social Psychology: The Theory and Application of Symbolic Interactionism* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 2nd edn, 1983), p. 263.

<sup>18</sup> See Lauer and Handel, *Social Psychology*, chapter 10, for a review of some of these studies.

<sup>19</sup> Robert Angell, ‘Introduction’, in *The Two Major Works of Charles H. Cooley* (Illinois: The Free Press, 1956), p. xvi. Of course, there are a number of difficulties that need to be addressed before fully embracing the symbolic interactionist paradigm. One such difficulty concerns the differences between perceived responses to oneself and actual responses to oneself. Research has shown that, while there is a significant correlation between perceived and actual responses, there is often a gap between the two (see Lauer and Handel, *Social Psychology*, p. 264). People quite simply often mistake what people think of them: it is always up to the individuals to interpret the cues of others, and this process of interpretation is often complicated by outside factors, such as the societal norms that make people reluctant to convey a negative evaluation of others, and discrepancies between verbal and nonverbal behavior (Shelby L. Langer and Elissa Wurf, ‘The Effects of Channel-Consistent and Channel-Inconsistent Interpersonal Feedback on the Formation of Metaperceptions’, *Journal of Nonverbal Behavior* 23 (1999), p. 46). Thus, for example, an individual may feel reluctant to negatively evaluate another’s performance, and so will lie to the other, giving her positive verbal evaluation. While lying, however, the individual most likely sends out nonverbal behavior that corresponds to her actual, negative response. If it is true that people’s conceptions of themselves depend on the responses of others, then at some point we will need to sort out to some degree how we should go about interpreting the responses of others.

Hume's arguments, and contemporary psychological research on the self done in social psychology, give us good reason to believe that human nature requires social interaction for its psychological well-being: without social interaction, people would fail to develop cohesive self-representations, fall far short of satisfying their passions for pride and self-respect, and, in addition, people would be unable to satisfy their basic social desires, such as the desire for friendship or intimacy. Moreover, not just any sort of interaction will suffice: what is necessary is genuine, positive social interaction marked by a *mutual* caring and respect for others. Researchers have discovered that much of the value of social interaction comes from not just, for example, *being* cared about, but also from *caring* about other people.<sup>20</sup> This suggests that social relations should not be entered into simply for the sake of attaining instrumental benefits ('being cared'), but must instead be entered into with full appreciation of the people involved and a commitment to treating them well. These are the social interactions that will produce the positive affirmations of oneself and others, as well as satisfy one's basic desires for companionship and belonging.

We are now in a position to determine the role morality stands to play in an agent's psychology: If morality is in any way connected to human psychology, it must be so in virtue of its connection to social interaction.<sup>21</sup> Morality enables the positive social interaction that is so crucial to the development of a person's self-concept and self-affirmations, both of which are crucial ingredients of her psychological well-being. Such social interaction also provides the opportunity to develop close relationships, thus enabling people to fulfill more basic social instincts.

Consider, for a moment, some of the most uncontroversial moral requirements: do not harm innocent people; do not lie, cheat or steal; do not break promises absent good reason; help others when you can. These are the rules that, when followed, generate the specific sort of positive social interaction that has been proven to be essential to psychological well-being. They will enable people to develop trusting bonds, to be respected and to respect others. They will generate stable patterns of expectations and interactions. They will provide the foundations for deeper relationships to develop and flourish. These are the characteristics of positive social interaction, and we have every reason to think that interactions between those that are committed to these sorts of guidelines will be of this nature. Of course, this requires a *genuine* commitment to morality

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<sup>20</sup> Baumeister and Leary, 'The Need to Belong', pp. 514-15.

<sup>21</sup> As I will go on to argue, morality's requirements *must* be conceived in this limited sense. Demands that extend beyond this lack legitimacy.

by all parties; without such a commitment interactions would lack the mutuality and reciprocity proven to be critical to them. Interactions amongst parties whom are ‘in it for the wrong reasons’ and are merely going through the motions of positive social interaction do not receive the full psychological benefits that result from genuine engagement with others.<sup>22</sup> They must believe that the moral guidelines are important for their own sake, and not just for the sake of attaining some reward, for otherwise, interactions lack the reciprocity and mutuality essential to establishing positive social interaction.

While I think it is clear that moral guidelines play a central role in generating the positive social interaction essential to our psychological well-being, the existence of moral guidelines does not *guarantee* that the social interaction will be at the required level where it is marked by ‘mutual and reciprocal’ caring, concern, and affection.<sup>23</sup> We can, however, be sure of the opposite: that interactions amongst parties who do *not* follow basic moral guidelines (consciously or not), will *not* be of the positive sort required by our psychology.

Absent moral guidelines, people’s interactions with each other would be unstable, brief, cold, and unpredictable. Life probably would not be ‘nasty, brutish, and short’, but it nonetheless would not be rewarding; certainly, it would not enable people to produce the stable, cohesive self-representations and positive levels of self-esteem essential to the fulfillment of our basic social desires.<sup>24</sup>

The upshot is that, if we accept that positive social interaction is necessary for psychological well-being, then we must accept that those moral requirements that are necessary to (and, in fact, definitive of) positive social interaction are also necessary to psychological well-being. Moreover, since, as I have argued, psychological well-being is requisite for the fulfillment of an agent’s overall well-being (constituted by whatever sort of projects and plans she commits herself to), these moral requirements are justifiable and make legitimate demands on her.

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<sup>22</sup> Studies on prostitutes show that, despite frequent intimate interactions with their customers, prostitutes fail to satisfy their needs to belong through these interactions. The same effect is seen on those who are in one-sided relationships: regardless of which side a person was on (the cared about, or the caring), the relationship was an ‘aversive’ experience for both parties. (Baumeister and Leary, ‘The Need to Belong’, p. 514).

<sup>23</sup> Baumeister and Leary, ‘The Need to Belong’, p. 514.

<sup>24</sup> Given the social aspect of our natures, I do not think such a state of interaction would ever have a prolonged existence. My point here is to try to show the essential connection between moral obligations and the positive social interaction that is necessary for psychological well-being.

At this point one might reasonably question whether or not there might be other, alternative ways of securing psychological well-being. If this were so, moral guidelines would operate as prerogatives, rather than as obligatory demands. I hope to have shown that this view is mistaken; to underscore why, consider again the distinction between psychological well-being and overall well-being. Psychological well-being refers to the basic psychological state people must attain in order to go on to attain overall well-being; in this sense it operates as a baseline. While a person's overall well-being is individualistic in that it is defined by her contingent interests and the specific desires they give rise to, psychological well-being is defined in terms of the social desires that *necessarily* belong to people simply in virtue of their psychological make-up; desires which can only be fulfilled through engaging in positive social interaction. Because the requirements of psychological well-being are in this sense inescapable, they can give rise to justifiable and legitimate demands.

Morality – conceived in terms of the rules and prescriptions that promote positive social interaction – thus enables a person to attain a basic level of psychological well-being that is requisite for the fulfillment of her personal projects and overall. Given this connection between those moral requirements that promote social interaction and an agent's psychological well-being, it is easy to see why such requirements are justifiable and so legitimate: because they help agents to fulfill needs that are fundamental to human nature itself.

### 3. Implications for the Content of Moral Requirements

An important implication of our investigation into the role of morality is that moral requirements that do not promote social interaction may not be legitimate and thus would impose no true obligation upon agents. This means that the scope of legitimate *requirements* of morality is rather limited, a claim that might strike many as objectionable. Upon proper reflection, though, I think we will find this initial reaction to be mistaken.

Here are just some of the moral requirements that are justified in their claims to hold an overriding normative status, in virtue of their role in enabling and promoting positive social interaction:

- Help those in need, when you are in a position to do so.
- Avoid harming others.
- Respect other's opinions, and decisions.
- Keep one's contracts and promises.
- Do not take another's property.

- Be honest, and do not deceive others.
- Respect duties of gratitude and reparation.<sup>25</sup>

What sorts of requirements did not make this list? Quite clearly, this list does not, and perhaps cannot, include non-humans as sources of moral claims – such as animals or the environment. It is also questionable as to the extent which this list can or cannot include duties to strangers on other sides of the world: Does charity to third-world countries help promote positive social interactions? While I think that such a case may be possible to make, the important consideration now is whether or not the fact that such cases are questionable shows that our investigation into the role of morality has gone astray. And I think the answer must be no.

The goal of this project has been to discover when, if ever, moral requirements can occupy an overriding status such that they must take precedence over one's non-moral and personal interests. I have argued that moral requirements can occupy such a status only when they promote positive social interaction. This is not to say that other moral considerations are not important, just that they cannot be *required* of agents (unless we can establish the connection between these considerations and pro-social behavior). Thus, a full-blown moral theory should have distinctions between requirements and recommendations, or perfect and imperfect duties, or allow for supererogatory acts, and so on.

#### 4. Addressing the Problem of Moral Motivation

Now that we have seen how moral requirements can be appropriately justified as strict and overriding, let us consider how this justification can help us solve the problem of moral motivation. The problem, recall, occurs when an agent feels the demand of moral obligations – feels the 'sense of duty' – yet nonetheless suffers from a lack of motivation. She knows she should do it – or at least, has been told she should do it but, at the same time, lacks the necessary motivation to do it.

While my proposed account of how we can justify moral requirements gives us a clear answer to the question of *why* morality is important to agents

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<sup>25</sup> These requirements are those necessary for trust and mutual respect to evolve, the essential ingredients of genuine social interaction. Feasibly, they will allow for cases of conflict, and should be structured as a hierarchy in terms of which rules are most conducive to social interaction.

(because it is requisite for the development of their psychological well-being and fulfillment of their personal projects), the question still remains as to *how* agents are supposed to be motivated to act morally. The issues of justification and motivation are, after all, distinct ones: providing a justification of moral requirements is not identical to providing an account of moral motivation, although it is the first step in so doing. As we have seen, in the process of providing a justification of moral requirements, we come to a better understanding of the role morality plays for agents – an understanding from which we can develop an account of moral motivation. In what follows, drawing on the role morality plays in psychological well-being, I offer a developmental account of how people come to be motivated by morality, and precisely what that motivation consists in. My hope is that from this developmental account we can provide an answer to the question of *how* agents are supposed to be motivated to act morally.

### *The Development of Moral Behavior*

As self-esteem, along with other judgments of self-affirmation, is both interpersonal and significantly correlated with psychological well-being, people thus need to engage in positive social interaction in order to attain psychological well-being. Yet, we must not forget that human nature is essentially conflicted: we have asocial tendencies that crop up, interfering with social interactions, and perhaps making positive, genuine social interactions impossible. It is easy for us to enter social interactions without thought, treating others simply as means to our own ends, forgetting about the social desires that are incompatible with doing so, and our psychological dependence on the opinions of others. Unless we can control these asocial desires, our basic social desires go unfulfilled and, because they are a fundamental feature of our natures, individual well-being is thereby made impossible.

As we have seen, morality enters into the picture at this level. Positive social interaction is requisite for psychological well-being; yet it is often made impossible by an agent's asocial desires such as the desire for material self-interest. While these asocial desires are not incompatible with social interaction, and, in fact, can be satisfied through social interaction, they nonetheless get in the way. People need to regulate themselves in order to develop and sustain social interactions in the face of these nagging asocial desires.

Fortunately, however, through our interactions with others and our ability to empathize with them, we are able to develop and recognize modes of action that are necessary to foster and sustain social interaction. Our moral practices thus evolve as we engage in positive social interaction. We learn not to harm

others, and to offer amends when we do. We learn to listen to one another, and to respect the opinions of others. In time, we come to count on one another: we begin to trust others, a move that raises social interactions to a moral level.

In a trusting relationship, each party knows she can count on the other to restrain her self-interest and live up to the other's expectations, and the result is a relationship marked by mutual dependencies. Annette Baier describes trust as 'accepted vulnerability to another's possible but not expected ill will (or lack of good will) toward one'.<sup>26</sup> This 'accepted vulnerability', which is a crucial component of trust, demonstrates the agent's social needs: in trusting another, she accepts that she herself needs to engage with other people, and, in becoming a 'trusted' person, she likewise discovers the crucial and important role she can play in others' lives. As she satisfies her basic desires, she thus develops more sophisticated social desires for this sort of mutual trust.

While this experience of mutual trust occurs most tangibly in personal relationships where people feel most comfortable in adopting vulnerable positions, there is a very important sort of impersonal interaction, which is also marked by trust. Society itself depends on a level of trust for its continued existence: we trust strangers not to push us into on-coming traffic, we trust fast-food employees not to poison our drinks, we trust other drivers to drive on the right side of the road. This 'societal trust' is a minimal form of trust indeed, but it highlights the fact that we are all vulnerable and depend on each other, both psychologically and physically, daily.

The more an agent experiences and sustains positive social interaction, the more she evolves as a moral being, for, in order to maintain such social interactions, she must regulate her conduct upon the recognition of the needs of others. As she begins to regulate her actions, and so begins to develop and sustain significant social relationships, she develops a certain appreciation for the role morality plays in her personal life. She realizes that there is an important connection between her moral actions and her psychological well-being, and starts to affirm herself insofar as she consistently follows the moral rules requisite for the development and maintenance of social interaction. Because of the connection between moral action and social interaction, others inevitably second her self-affirmation. What results from this solidified self-affirmation is a certain breed of personal integrity that is similar to pride and self-esteem, yet is made unique in virtue of the trait which is affirmed: one's commitment to moral action, that is, her sense of duty.

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<sup>26</sup> Annette Baier, 'Trust and Antitrust', *Ethics* 96 (1986), p. 15.



The sort of personal integrity I have in mind is one that involves both self-integration and commitment to a purpose. Being self-integrated involves more than having a consistent set of beliefs: it involves satisfying one's basic desires and, in effect, fulfilling one's fundamental nature. As I have already argued, human beings have both social and asocial desires. They have a need for positive social interaction that is often impeded, yet not necessarily so, by asocial self-interested desires (desires which, incidentally, can be fulfilled equally well, if not more so, through social interactions). Given this understanding of human nature, a fully integrated person is one who works towards positive social interactions and recognizes the importance of doing so. While being self-integrated, she is also committed to a meaningful and important purpose: sustaining positive social interaction, which is marked by a level of trust and mutual respect. While of course she may have other purposes as well, she may not have purposes and commitments that conflict with the fulfillment of her social desires.

The person who is fully integrated and committed to developing trusting, meaningful relationships with others, esteems her character and is esteemed by others, and has personal integrity. The person with this sort of integrity is without question a virtuous person. She regulates her behavior in line with others, and acts on principles that make positive social interactions possible.

This sort of personal integrity emerges through an agent's interactions with others, and the affirmation of an agent's self-worth by herself and those around her. Its significance is not to be underestimated. Because the agent with personal integrity satisfies her fundamental desires and exists on a meaningful and genuine level with others, she secures a significant aspect of her psychological well-being. Moreover, upon experiencing personal integrity, the evolved agent will begin to desire personal integrity for its own sake. She cannot value personal integrity only for its instrumental value, for the instrumental value of personal integrity is contingent upon its being valued for its own sake. Only the person who values personal integrity for its own sake truly possesses personal integrity and so will experience the positive contributions it makes to her psychological well-being. Successful moral development thus culminates in the development of personal integrity that gives an agent a consistent motive to regulate her behavior. Because the agent desires personal integrity for its own sake, and not just for its effects, she commits fully (and not just apparently) to morality and so engages in genuine, positive social interaction.

### *The Nature of Moral Motivation*

If this account of moral development is correct, and I hope to have shown that, given the established connection between morality and psychological

well-being, we have substantial reasons for thinking it is, then we find ourselves in a promising position to understand the nature of moral motivation itself. For the fully developed moral agent, moral motivation consists in recognizing the important role of morality and in committing to giving moral considerations priority. These are the ingredients involved in the conception of personal integrity that, I'm suggesting, operates as a motive to morality.

This understanding of the way in which personal integrity functions as a motive nicely parallels Leary and Downs' understanding of self-esteem as a function, which serves to facilitate social interactions. They argue that:

The successful maintenance of social bonds requires a system for monitoring others' reactions and one's inclusionary status. To the extent that one's inclusion can be jeopardized in a moment by behavioral discretions, people must have a ready way of assessing their standing in others' eyes...self-esteem is the cornerstone of this system, functioning as a *sociometer* that (1) monitors the social environment for cues indicating disapproval, rejection, or exclusion, and (2) alerts the individual via negative reactions when such clues are detected.<sup>27</sup>

When an agent reaches the point where personal integrity functions as this sort of 'sociometer', and leads her consistently to regulate her behavior in alignment with it, she has reached a new and final developmental stage, which is marked by her integrity.

Recent work by empathy theorists supports this account of what is involved in moral motivation. Martin Hoffman, for example, describes this ideal moral agent as one who has developed a 'moral self' – a self that recognizes and understands the importance of genuine social interaction, and is committed to acting prosocially. He writes:

When one has internalized and committed oneself to a caring or justice principle, realizes that one has choice and control, and takes responsibility for one's actions, one has reached a new developmental level. From then on, considering others, refraining from harming them, and acting fairly not only reflect one's empathic concern but may also be an expression of the moral principle one has internalized and a kind of affirmation of oneself. One feels it is one's *duty* and *responsibility* to consider others and be fair in one's dealings with others. One may feel that he is not the kind of person who would knowingly harm another or act unfairly, and that he would find it hard to live with himself if he seriously harmed someone.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Mark R. Leary and Deborah L. Downs, 'Interpersonal Functions of the Self-esteem Motive: The Self-esteem System as a Sociometer', in Michael H. Kernis (ed.), *Efficacy, Agency, and Self-Esteem* (New York: Plenum Press, 1995), p. 129.

<sup>28</sup> Martin Hoffman, *Empathy and Moral Development* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 261. (original italics)

This final developmental level is marked by the regulation of an agent's conduct according to her conception of herself, and the role she wants to play in social interaction. She recognizes her psychological dependence on others, realizes what is necessary for the development and fulfillment of her passions, and she sees their fulfillment as something important and necessary to her own well-being. The moral agent thus recognizes and appreciates the role moral behavior plays in her psychological well-being, and so sees morality as something personally important. While morality may require her to act against her immediate self-interest, these requirements will not alienate her in any damaging way, precisely because she recognizes the importance of psychological well-being and has seen the importance of taking on the character of the moral agent who is driven by a sense of duty. The ideal moral agent regulates her conduct by the sense of duty in such a way that the conflicts between her self-interest and moral action simply will not arise as problems over which to be deliberated. She returns money without hesitation, and helps strangers when she can, without weighing the pros and cons of the moral act against her self-interest.

Obviously, very few of us reach the level of the ideal moral agent, who is consistently driven to morality as a matter of personal integrity. So what can the rest of us take away from this picture of what being fully motivated by morality consists in? One thing is very clear: we would be better off, psychologically speaking, were we to consistently act morally. Like it or not, our psychology demands and requires moral action, and while not all of us fulfill these particular desires consistently, they nonetheless exist. For those of us who *do* feel the pull of morality, we now know why: because morality is essential to our psychological well-being. And even if morality requires us to make personal sacrifices on occasion, these sacrifices are short-term costs for a much more important long-term benefit of psychological well-being. Recognition of these facts will justify the importance of acting morally, and should provide agents with a very real motive to follow the pull of morality: because doing so is ultimately the only way they can ever gain true fulfillment.

Unfortunately, for those who do *not* feel the pull of morality, the only thing that we can do to convince them is to explain the role morality plays in their psychological well-being – to try to convince them that they really would be better off were they not to lie to their 'friends' and were they not to steal from their employers. In other words, we can explain to them why morality's requirements do, in fact, make legitimate demands on them. Since we can back up this explanation with empirical evidence, there is reason to hope that such an explanation might convince some people, at least. But convincing those who do not at all feel the pull of morality is not my project here; my

project is to try to provide an account of why morality is important to agents and how agents are supposed to be motivated to act morally – it is to justify the pull of morality. By exploring the development of moral behavior, we have seen that the justification of moral requirements plays a central role in moral motivation: agents become motivated insofar as they learn, for themselves, exactly why morality's requirements are legitimate: because moral behavior is integral to their well-being.

### **5. Concluding Remarks: Putting the Literature into Perspective**

I hope to have shown that, by seeking out a justification for the demands of morality, we not only legitimize the strict and generally overriding requirements of morality, but that we also develop insight into how to address problems of moral motivation highlighted by defenders of the alienation objections. This is an important project, largely in that it shows that we can hold on to common views of morality as involving strict and generally overriding requirements, while, at the same time, addressing sufficiently the worries regarding justification, alienation, and motivation. The worries, again, are that agents will become alienated when they feel themselves pulled to act in favor of morality at the cost of their personal interests without having any real understanding of why they should do so or how they are supposed to be motivated to do so.

Most theorists who take seriously the above worries think that the best way to respond to such worries is to change (sometimes dramatically) the way in which we conceive of morality: either we should stop seeing morality itself as being even generally overriding, or we should stop seeing moral *duties* as the focus of morality, and instead focus on what sort of person we should aspire to be. I hope to have shown that such revisions are uncalled for.

#### *The First Response: Give up Overridingness*

Defenders of the first response, such as Stocker and Williams, argue that the best, if not only, way to avoid worries of alienation is quite simply to stop seeing moral requirements as more important than personal requirements. Williams, for example, argues that in cases where moral actions conflict with non-moral, personal courses of action, to require that the agent perform the moral action and 'step aside from his own actions and the source of his actions in his own convictions' would be 'to alienate him in a real sense' and 'to neglect the extent to which his actions have to be seen as the actions and decisions

which flow from the projects and attitudes with which he is most closely identified. It is thus, in the most literal sense, an attack on his integrity'.<sup>29</sup>

In claiming that such a sacrifice tears an agent from the things that she identifies with most, Williams *assumes* here that the typical agent – who is committed to a range of personal, non-moral projects – cannot identify strongly with the moral requirements themselves. It is untenable, Williams suggests, to think she can be fully committed to both her personal non-moral projects and the requirements of morality. Thus, Williams seems to think that there is neither a justification of moral requirements, nor an account of moral motivation that will enable her to attach priority to the moral without sacrificing her personal interests, and the implicit but very clear recommendation is that we stop treating morality as taking priority over our non-moral projects.

William's claim that there is an irreconcilable disparity between how an agent identifies with the moral and the personal is echoed by others, who claim more generally that the moral point of view, from which moral actions are prescribed, conflicts on a fundamental level with the personal point of view that focuses on the agent's non-moral interests and projects. Like Williams, they assume that moral requirements cannot be properly grounded within the typical agent's psychology and, given the threat of alienation, they suggest we downplay the importance of the moral point of view in order to preserve the personal point of view, which is most fundamental to one's identity and character. Owen Flanagan, for example, argues that the root of the problem is that no one point of view should matter more than the other.<sup>30</sup> Since there is no reason to think that the moral point of view takes precedence over the personal point of view, there is no reason to grant any special normative significance to moral reasons.

I hope to have shown that these claims regarding the inherent conflict between the moral and the personal are simply false, and that we do not need to make such a dramatic revision to our ordinary conception of morality: my account shows that there is an important and fundamental connection between the moral and personal points of view, such that not only do we not *have* to, but also that it would be a very serious mistake to revise our common conception of morality.

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<sup>29</sup> Williams, 'Persons, Character, and Morality', p. 474. Williams argues here specifically against utilitarianism and its demands, although he makes the same point elsewhere with respect to deontology.

<sup>30</sup> See Owen Flanagan, 'Admirable Immorality and Admirable Imperfection', *Journal of Philosophy* 83 (1986), p. 41-60.

*The Second Response: Give up Duties*

This second response, unlike the first, tries to retain notions of the special significance of morality; however, at the same time, it suggests a serious revision to our concept of morality – to dismiss the concept of moral duties. It is different than the first in that defenders of this response maintain the idea that morality is important to individual agents, and that moral considerations take priority over personal projects. Nonetheless, it does suggest that we make a dramatic revision to our ordinary conception of morality – namely, that we reject the idea of a moral *duty* as being the fundamental concept of morality. Elizabeth Anscombe was the first to call for this explicit revision, arguing that the concept of a moral duty becomes problematic absent the conception of a law-giver. Anscombe's suggestion, combined with increasing worries about the threat of alienation, has prompted a return to virtue ethics which many interpret as a theoretical framework that takes the concepts of duties and right action out of the primary focus of morality, and instead focuses primarily on the importance of the virtues and the development of particular character traits. The virtue ethicist thus maintains the importance of morality, yet conceives of morality in a way that departs significantly from common sense understandings of morality by rejecting the idea that there are such moral requirements (or, at least, that there are moral duties that exist independently of consideration of the virtues).

While, unlike the first response, the second response may not, in fact, lead to a theory that stands to *damage* agents by encouraging them to ignore the demands of morality, this second response nonetheless calls for a revision of the common conception of morality that, we can now see, is unwarranted. Virtue ethicists enjoy as part of their appeal the fact that they avoid the alienation objections to which deontological and utilitarian theories are typically subject; however, we now know that we don't need to move to virtue ethics to avoid these objections. And, as my account shows, this means we can maintain our common conception of morality, a central part of which involves the idea that there are moral requirements.

After all, people are committed to the idea that there exist moral duties; this is the reason why they experience a conflict between the sense of duty and their personal interests. People think that they should not steal from their friends; that they should not beat up children for fun; that they should not break promises absent good reasons. They believe each of these things represents a moral requirement that cannot be captured solely by an appeal to the virtues. At the very least, a moral theory ought to be able to account for an average person's everyday moral experiences. The phenomenon of being pulled

to do something because it is right – because it is a moral requirement – is something that many people experience; these people believe there are moral requirements that restrict their personal interests and seek a justification for this belief. If there were no justification for this belief, then we should revise our understanding of morality, but, in the presence of such a justification, there is no need to make such revisions.

## Conclusion

By understanding the role morality plays in an individual's psychology, I hope that we have not only come up with an answer to our guiding project of justifying the overriding normative status of moral requirements, but have also reached a new and convincing account of moral motivation without sacrificing what many take to be a basic component of a moral theory: its commitment to strict, generally overriding, moral obligations. Strictly following the demands of morality does not alienate an agent from those things she cares about; rather, it is what enables her to care about those very things. This is why she is morally required to follow them, and this is why she should want to follow them.

Two implications follow from this account of justification. One implication concerns how we are to understand and address the problem of moral motivation. I have argued that the key to moral motivation is an appreciation of the role morality plays in the development of each person's psychological well-being. Individuals must be able to develop this appreciation by identifying with both the purpose and requirements of morality. As we have seen, this places a restriction on the nature of the moral theory itself; namely, the moral theory must be one that the agent *can*, in fact, identify with. And, in order for this to be the case, the moral theory itself must not depart significantly from its designated role in promoting positive social interaction. It is in virtue of *this* role that morality is important to individual agents and a moral theory loses its obligation on individuals insofar as it departs from this role and starts demanding its agents to perform actions that are not directly conducive to positive social interaction.

This leads us to a second implication, which is that if a moral theory is to make strict demands of its agents, then these demands must be ones that serve to promote positive social interaction. This means that requirements of morality are and should be limited in scope: they will consist of those principles that are necessary to sustain genuine social interactions marked by trust and respect. While limited, however, they will require strict adherence: a person cannot maintain integrity while she 'occasionally' breaks her promises for no important

reasons. Such moral lapses harm her particular relationships, reduce the esteem others have for her, thereby diminishing her self-worth and negatively affecting her psychological well-being.

Before we begin constructing moral theories and developing normative prescriptions, we must first stop and ask ‘what role is morality meant to serve?’. Without asking this question we risk developing moral theories that cannot adequately justify the demands they place on agents. Once we ask this question, we see that, as long as the scope of a moral theory is appropriately limited to its role, we can justify the demands of morality. Political philosophers have long been aware of the need for this approach; it is time for contemporary moral philosophers to do so as well.



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