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Morality and Justice:
An Expanded Theoretical Perspective and Empirical Review

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Abstract

Two metaphors of human motivation have dominated justice theory and research: *homo economicus* (people as rational utility maximizers) and *homo socialis* (people as status and social value maximizers). This chapter reviews theory and research inspired by a recent third perspective: *homo moralis*, that is, people as innately concerned about morality. When people have strong moral convictions at stake, their perceptions of outcome fairness and decision acceptance are shaped more by whether outcomes are consistent with perceivers' moral priorities than by whether authorities act in procedurally fair ways; moreover, whether authorities yield morally correct outcomes shapes subsequent perceptions of the legitimacy of these authorities or authority systems. Emotion plays an important role in both of these effects.

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Research tends to be guided by “hard core” assumptions, or guiding metaphors (Lakatos, 1978). For example, the metaphor of *homo economicus*, the idea that people are rationally self-interested utility maximizers, represented a hard core assumption of classic social exchange theories, as well as early theories of distributive justice (e.g., Adams, 1965; Blau, 1964; Homans, 1961; Walster, Walster, & Berscheid, 1978). The assumption was that people are basically selfish, but rational, because they defer their immediate self-interest and engage in social cooperation to maximize their long term self-interest. Justice theories that used economic exchange as a metaphor, not surprisingly, led to studies that focused on the fairness of outcome allocations and people’s reactions to what they “got” out of a given encounter or relationship.

A shift in the metaphor that guided justice theorizing and research in social psychology occurred during the early 1980s with the introduction of the group value model of procedural fairness. The guiding metaphor of this program of research was the notion that people more often seek to satisfy relational motives, such as needs to feel valued, respected, and included in important social groups, than pursue material self-interest; that is, *homo economicus* yielded to *homo socialis*. Therefore, research began to focus more on how leaders’ or authorities’ behavior and decision making affected recipients’ reasoning about fairness and less on outcome distributions and the factors that determined them (e.g., Lind & Tyler, 1988; Tyler & Lind, 1992). By using “need to belong” as a lens for examining what mattered in the psychology of justice, researchers broadened their understanding of how and why people make fairness judgments. For example, researchers identified the pervasive influence of procedural treatment (such as variations in opportunities for voice, being treated with dignity and respect, and freedom

from bias) on perceptions of fairness. Researchers may not have discovered the importance of treatment to justice judgments had they remained solely committed to constructs consistent with a guiding metaphor of economic exchange.

Now another shift seems to be underway. Specifically, there is increasing interdisciplinary interest in the notion that a concern with morality may be an evolutionary adaptation that facilitates social cooperation, e.g., in behavioral economics (e.g., Fehr & Fischbacher, 2004), primatology (e.g., de Waal, 1996; Brosnan & de Waal, 2003), organizational behavior (e.g., Folger, 2001; Turillo, Folger, Lavelle, Umphress, & Gee, 2002), evolutionary psychology (Cosmides & Tooby, 2006), as well as social psychology (e.g., Haidt, 2001). The assumption guiding this recent line of thinking is that people are born with an innate capacity to care about morality, and they are predisposed to maintain cooperative systems by rewarding those who behave morally and punishing those who do not. The moral perspective maintains that humans have a basic predisposition to care about morality independent of their material self-interests or belongingness needs. In short, an emerging alternative guiding metaphor in justice research and closely related areas is *homo moralis* that is, the notion that people have an intrinsic propensity for caring about and acting on conceptions of morality.

Guiding metaphors strongly influence what is to be observed and scrutinized, what questions are considered interesting and important, how these questions are to be structured, as well as how the results of scientific investigations are interpreted (Kuhn, 1962). For example, the initial focus on *homo economicus* led to research on reactions to allocations and resource exchange (e.g., wages for labor). Then, the *homo socialis* metaphor led to studies of procedures and interactional treatment. Now, a shift in guiding metaphor toward *homo moralis* directs attention to a different set of research questions. For example, to what extent are justice

judgments related to concerns about basic questions of right and wrong, moral and immoral, rather than only concerns about serving self-interests or belongingness needs? Does the relative importance of different types of justice-relevant information (e.g., procedural treatment and outcome distributions) change as a function of whether people perceive their strong moral convictions to be at stake? The goal of this chapter is to begin to explore these questions by presenting (a) an updated and integrated theory of how and why people's moral convictions reflect something different from equally strong, but non-moral preferences, (b) focused discussion on how and why moral convictions shape perceptions of outcome and procedural fairness, (c) a brief review of research that has tested hypotheses generated from this theory, and (d) a delineation of directions for future research and justice theory.

An Integrated Theory of Moral Conviction

Our integrated theory of moral conviction (ITMC⁴) posits a number of ways that attitudes held with strong moral conviction differ from equally strong but non-moral attitudes (see also Skitka, Bauman, & Sargis, 2005; Skitka & Bauman, in press). Building on insights from theory and research on moral development, we propose that there are important distinctions between people's senses of subjective preference, normative convention, and morality (Nucci & Turiel, 1978; Rest, Narvaez, Bebeau, & Thoma, 1999; Turiel, 2002) that have important implications for how people think about justice. Preferences are by definition subjective and in the eye of the beholder. Preferences represent instances when people favor one outcome more than another, but there is no expectation that others would or should feel the same way. Others' preferences about the same object are not seen as either right or wrong; they are simply different. For example, it is

⁴ We refer to our theory as an "integrated theory" because the basic framework has been developed through an integration of various other theories of moral philosophy, development, cultural anthropology, and psychology.

acceptable for you to prefer apples even though I prefer oranges because people are entitled to have different tastes about fruit.

People's sense of normative convention, in contrast, is based on formal or informal group rules or expectations about the way things are done. For example, someone might expect a raise after one year of employment at a company because that is the informal or formal rule in that organization. Although it would be normative to expect a raise after one year in that particular organization, people would not generalize from the norm and assume that individuals at all jobs everywhere should get a raise after one year or perceive it to be unfair if they did not. Moral convictions, in contrast, are absolute convictions about right and wrong that transcend specific contexts⁵.

There may be individual variation, however, in the degree that people view the same attitude object as a preference, convention, or a moral imperative. Although many people seem to see the abortion issue in a moral light, for example, other people have conventional attitudes about this issue. For example, someone with a conventional attitude about abortion may believe that abortion is acceptable in their state because it currently is legal there, but would think it was wrong if it were against the law; alternatively, they may support or oppose abortion because their neighbors do, but would change their mind if the opinion of the majority changed.

People's sense of morality differs psychologically from their sense of preference or normative convention in a host of ways. For example, moral sensibilities are experienced as more objectively and universally true than preferences or conventions. Moral sensibilities also are inherently more motivating and self-justifying, are more autonomous, and have different and

⁵ Some may see a similarity between our conception of moral conviction and what Zelditch and Walker (1984; Zelditch, 2001) call a sense of propriety ("...a particular individual's personal belief that an act, norm, value, belief, practice or procedure is right," Zelditch, 2001, p. 6). It is not clear, however, whether propriety is a strong sense of normative convention or has the weight of moral imperative.

potentially stronger ties to affect than preferences or conventions. Each of these characteristics of moral conviction is explained in more detail below.

Universality. Unlike preferences or conventions, people tend to believe that their personal moral standards ought to apply to everyone. If one has a strong moral conviction that female circumcision is wrong, for instance, one is likely to believe that the practice is wrong not only in one's culture-of-origin, but in other cultures as well. For example, some western activists vehemently object to the practice of female circumcision in Middle Eastern and African nations where the practice is normative and culturally valued (Dorkenoo, 1994), and consumers will boycott foreign goods when they learn it is produced by child labor (Chowdhry & Beeman, 2001). People experience attitudes held with moral conviction as absolutes, or universal standards of truth that others should also share.

Objectivity. Another distinguishing feature of people's self-identified moral convictions is that people treat their moral beliefs as if they were readily observable, objective properties of situations, or as facts about the world. For example, if you ask people with a strong moral conviction about female circumcision why it is wrong, they probably would be somewhat confused by the question and likely would respond by exclaiming, "Because it's wrong!" The "fact" that it is wrong is psychologically as self-evident to morally motivated perceivers as $2 + 2 = 4$. Consistent with this notion, research by Haidt (2001) demonstrates that when you push people to explain why incest is wrong even in circumstances where a couple used birth control and neither person was psychologically damaged, people continue to insist that incest is "wrong" even if they cannot generate a reason for it.

Autonomy versus heteronomy. The ITMC also predicts that moral convictions represent something different from, and independent of, people's concerns about being accepted or

respected by authorities or groups. Building on insights from developmental and social theories of morality, the ITMC proposes that moral motivation is more autonomous than heteronomous (e.g., Kohlberg, 1984; Piaget, 1997; Turiel, 2002, cf. Durkheim, 1925). In other words, moral motivation comes more from within, rather than from outside the person, such as from society or authorities. The authority independence hypothesis is consistent with the notion that recognition of moral wrongs may be relatively innate (e.g., de Waal, 1996) and with developmental research that indicates that even very young children (3 years of age), can distinguish morality from normative convention. For example, children say that hitting and stealing are wrong, even if a teacher says it is okay (Nucci & Turiel, 1978; Smetana, 1981, 1985). Similarly, children endorse obedience to moral requests (e.g., to stop fighting) made by any person, including other children, but they only endorse obedience to norms (e.g., seat assignments) from legitimate authorities (Laupa, 1994). Likewise, adolescents think it is appropriate to disobey immoral commands (and to lie about doing so), even when it means disobeying and lying to their parents (Perkins & Turiel, 2007). Young children's and adults' abilities to make distinctions between the moral and conventional domains replicates across a wide array of nationalities and religious groups, and even when the religiously devote are confronted with counterfactuals about God's authority (for reviews, see Smetana, 1993; Tisak, 1995; Nucci, 2001). Also intriguing is the finding that adult psychopaths and children who exhibit psychopathic tendencies do not make distinctions between the conventional and moral domains (Blair, 1995; 1997).

In sum, there are numerous examples from moral development research that support the basic premise that conceptions of morality develop very early and are relatively authority independent. Personal conceptions of morality often override the duty to obey authorities, even among quite young children and adolescents; moreover, a failure to distinguish between the

moral and conventional domains appears to be a symptom of severe mental illness. Some use this evidence in support of the notion that psychologically healthy people, including very young children, have an objective sense that some things are right and wrong, much like they can recognize the difference between furniture and their parents (e.g., Turiel, 1983; Nucci, 2001). Others use these findings to argue for the primary function of affect and responses to recognition of harm as foundational in forming moral judgments (Nichols, 2004). These results are also consistent with the proposition that people may have an innate capacity for making moral judgments (e.g., de Waal, 1996).

Motivation and emotion. The ITMC predicts that the intensity of emotion that people experience in conjunction with moral convictions (and perhaps especially related to threats to moral convictions) is stronger than the intensity of emotions people experience in association with threats to preferences or conventions (Haidt, 2001, 2003a; Kohlberg, 1984; Nucci, 2001; Shweder, 2002). Moral violations represent especially strong attacks on people's basic worldviews and sense of moral order (e.g., Tetlock, Kristel, Elson, Green, & Lerner, 2000), whereas violations of preferences or conventions do not cut quite so deep into people's core conceptions of the way the world works. Thus, although violated preferences or normative expectations may lead to disappointment or even anger, the magnitude of these reactions is likely to pale in comparison to the outrage associated with a violated or threatened sense of basic right and wrong. Consistent with this notion, some scholars differentiate between anger and righteous anger. Whereas anger arises when a goal incongruent event is caused by a responsible other (e.g., Lazarus, 1991), "righteous anger" arises when another's behavior represents a violation of moral standards (Tangney, Stuewig, & Mashek, 2007). In addition to righteous anger, responses to moral violations also include intense feelings of contempt and disgust –reactions that may not

similarly occur in response to violated preferences or conventions (e.g., Haidt, 2003b; Skoe, Eisenberg, & Cumberland, 2002). Although more research has examined reactions to actions that subvert rather than sustain the moral order, people's affective reactions in response to validated moral convictions may similarly differ from validated preferences or conventions. For example, the emotions of "elevation" and "awe" elicited in response to particularly moral actions may not be produced by actions that reflect preferences or conventions (Haidt, 2003b).

The ITMC's emphasis on moral emotion is consistent with a growing body of literature that suggests that discrete emotions function either as a source of moral judgment or as predictors of moral judgment (Haidt, 2001). For example, Haidt's (2001) social intuitionist model argues that people make moral judgments quickly and intuitively on the basis of their gut-level reactions, and that moral reasoning only comes into play when people are asked to justify their conclusions or when their intuitions conflict and thus prompt more careful reasoning. Thus, people's intuitions and emotions are a significant driving force in their moral judgments (see also Damasio, 1994; Greene & Haidt, 2002 for related neurological research).

In sum, there are theoretical and empirical suggestions that moral judgments or reactions are affectively laden and that moral emotions differ from feelings associated with non-moral preferences or conventions. Given that moral emotions provide the motivational force for people to live up to and enforce their moral standards (Kroll & Egan, 2004), we argue that moral emotions will be an especially important psychological component of people's justice reasoning, when their moral convictions are at stake.

Moral Convictions and Justice

The ITMC leads to a number of more specific predictions and hypotheses about how people reason about fairness and legitimacy when moral convictions are at stake, including the

(a) authority independence, (b) litmus test, and (c) emotion hypotheses. Although these hypotheses do not represent an exhaustive list of testable hypotheses that can be derived from the ITMC, they represent reasonable starting positions for testing the viability of the notion that people's basic concerns about morality—*independent of their concerns about material self-interest or belongingness*—have some explanatory and predictive power in the context of how people reason about fairness. We provide below detailed discussions of these hypotheses, as well as research in support of them.

The Authority Independence Hypothesis

The authority independence hypothesis asserts that people feel a weaker sense of duty or obligation to obey or accept orders, decisions, or outcomes when they believe them to be immoral, rather than simply counter to their preferences or normative expectations. Although there may be reasons at times to publicly accept immoral decisions (e.g., in totalitarian regimes in which dissent could come at the peril of one's freedom or life), doing so will come at a psychological cost (e.g., Bandura, 1990), and private acceptance should remain quite low. In short, the authority independence hypothesis predicts that perceived fairness in moral contexts is driven largely by internal moral judgments about right or wrong rather than by social rules, a compulsion to obey legitimate authorities, or non-moral factors such as due process or respectful treatment.

Although the authority independence hypothesis derives directly from the ITMC theoretical premise that moral judgments are more autonomous than non-moral judgments, this hypothesis is nonetheless at odds with a considerable amount of other justice theory and research. For example, various forms of legitimacy theory predict that when people perceive an authority system to be legitimate, neither "consent of the governed" nor "benefits received" are required to

justify obedience or acceptance (e.g., Gelpi, 2003; Tyler, 2006). Instead, legitimacy is believed to create a duty and obligation to obey that replaces even personal moral standards as a relevant guide (Kelman & Hamilton, 1989). Although people are more likely to obey and cooperate with unpopular decisions when they perceive decision making procedures to be fair and authorities to be legitimate (e.g., Brockner & Wiesenfeld, 1996; Gibson, Calderia, & Spence, 2005; Hegtvedt, Clay-Warner, & Johnson, 2003), until recently, it has been relatively unclear whether obedience to authority and decision acceptance similarly are likely to be high when people perceive a decision or outcome to violate a strong moral conviction.

Research Support for the Authority Independence Hypothesis

Support for the authority independence hypothesis comes from a number of studies that have examined people's perceptions of outcome fairness and decision acceptance as a function of whether outcomes are consistent with their personal sense of moral right and wrong. For example, one recent study tested the authority independence hypothesis in the context of *Gonzales v. the State of Oregon*, a Supreme Court challenge to Oregon's Death with Dignity Act, which legalized physician-assisted suicide (PAS) under some circumstances. Skitka (2006) assessed a national random sample of non-Oregonian's moral convictions about whether PAS should be allowed, perceptions of the procedural fairness and legitimacy of the Supreme Court, and the degree to which participants' feelings about legalizing PAS were held as moral convictions before the Supreme Court heard arguments in this case. When the Court announced its decision several months later, the same sample was surveyed again to assess their post-decision reactions, such as how fair they felt the decision was and the degree to which they accepted it as the final word on the question posed (note: the Supreme Court ruled in favor of

Oregon's right to decide to legalize PAS, and against the Bush Administration's claim that PAS procedures violated the Federal Controlled Substance Act).

People's pre-decision strength of moral conviction about PAS—but not their pre-decision perceptions of the procedural fairness and legitimacy of the Supreme Court—predicted their post-decision perceptions of outcome fairness and decision acceptance. People who morally supported PAS perceived the decision to be fair and were willing to accept the Court's decision. In contrast, people who morally opposed PAS perceived the decision to be unfair and were unwilling to accept the decision as the final word on this issue. It should also be noted that the effects for moral conviction emerged even when controlling for a host of alternative explanations, including participants' general levels of religiosity, as well as the specific degree that participants' position on PAS reflected their religious convictions. Moreover, the effect of the moral conviction on perceptions of outcome fairness and decision acceptance was equally strong regardless of whether people's pre-decision perceptions of the procedural fairness and legitimacy of the Court were low or high. Therefore, the results of the PAS study supported the authority independence hypothesis. People's willingness to see the decision in the *Gonzales v. Oregon* case as fair and to accept the Supreme Court's decision as the final word on the issue depended more on whether the decision was consistent with perceivers' moral convictions than it did on whether procedures were perceived as fair or rendered by a legitimate authority.

More controlled experiments also have found results consistent with the authority independence hypothesis. For example, Bauman and Skitka (2007a) enhanced the perceived legitimacy of policy decision making in the U.S. for half of the participants in a study by reminding them of their voice in democratic decision making and indicating that participants' survey responses would be shared with policy makers in Washington, DC (see Tyler, 1994 for a

further discussion and evidence of how voice enhances perceptions of institutional legitimacy). Following the voice manipulation, participants evaluated a hypothetical policy decision that was either consistent or inconsistent with their position about abortion. Voice enhanced perceived fairness of the policy decision when participants' reported weak but not strong moral conviction about abortion. Results also indicated that moral support for or opposition to abortion—but not voice-- predicted decision acceptance. Participants accepted policy decisions about abortion when they were consistent with their moral convictions and rejected decisions when they were inconsistent with their moral convictions.

Other studies have tested hypotheses in the context of authority relationships that may feel “closer to home,” than citizens' relationships with policy makers or the Supreme Court. For example, Bauman and Skitka (2007b) examined college students' reactions to a decision rendered by university authorities. These studies manipulated information about how the university made and communicated policy decisions (e.g., decision and treatment quality) and therefore the extent that students perceived the university authorities and their decision as legitimate. What students learned was at stake in this experiment was whether a university committee decided to use student fees to fund abortions at the student health clinic.

Consistent with the authority independence hypothesis, students who morally disagreed with the decision were prepared to petition, protest, withhold tuition and fees, and “make trouble” for the university administration, even when they perceived the decision making procedures as maximally fair. Conversely, students had no ambition to protest a decision when it was consistent with their moral beliefs, even when they had explicitly acknowledged that the procedures used to make the decision were illegitimate and unfair. In short, the results of Bauman and Skitka (2007b) demonstrated that people do not yield to authority when they

perceive their personal moral beliefs to be at stake, even in contexts that are close to home and that directly involve a salient and important social identity.

In another demonstration of the authority independence hypothesis, Skitka and Houston (2001, Study 2) found that people were willing to accept the actions of extremely illegitimate authorities (vigilantes), as long as they produced the morally right outcome. Specifically, the researchers presented participants with hypothetical news reports that depicted whether a defendant in a capital murder case appeared to be truly guilty or innocent, and whether the defendant was executed by the state following a fair trial, or killed by a family member of a victim before the trial began. Results indicated that people perceived the death of a guilty defendant to be fair, regardless of whether it was the product of a full trial and meted by the state or was an act of vigilantism. Consistent with the authority independence hypothesis, what mattered most to people's perceptions of outcome fairness was whether people perceived the outcome in the case—i.e., that the defendant was punished—was morally right if he was thought to be guilty, or morally wrong if he was thought to be innocent. Other results indicated that when defendant guilt was ambiguous, however, perceptions of outcome fairness were consistent with the predictions of theories of procedural justice. Punishment of the ambiguously guilty defendant was seen as unfair if it was a consequence of improper procedures, and fair if it was a consequence of due process (Skitka & Houston, 2001, Study 1b).

In summary, a growing body of research supports the authority independence hypothesis. Small children and adolescents do not blindly follow trusted authorities' dictates when they perceive that those dictates are inconsistent with basic beliefs about right and wrong. Moreover, perceived legitimacy and procedural fairness does not increase adults' willingness to accept authorities' decisions when those decisions are at odds with perceivers' personal moral

convictions. Instead, perceptions of outcome fairness and decision acceptance are based on whether decisions are consistent or inconsistent with perceivers' *a priori* beliefs about the degree that an outcome is morally right or wrong.

The Litmus Test Hypothesis

Research guided by the *homo economicus* and *homo socialis* metaphors has focused on two important roles that procedural information can play. People use procedural information to evaluate the likelihood that they will receive just deserts in the long run (e.g., Thibaut & Walker, 1975) and to assess their position within the group and in the eyes of authorities (e.g., Folger & Cropanzano, 1998; Lind & Tyler, 1988). In each role, procedural information provides a way for people to make goal-relevant inferences in the absence of specific information about the appropriateness of a particular outcome. In contrast, the *homo moralis* metaphor suggests that there will be situations in which people are likely to have moral certainty about what outcome authorities and procedures should deliver. Therefore, moral convictions about outcomes may act as crucial manipulation checks on procedural fairness and authority legitimacy under these circumstances, because perceivers already know the right answer. The litmus test hypothesis posits that people use outcomes they perceive to have moral implications to check whether individuals, groups, or systems responsible for decisions are fair and legitimate. "Right" answers indicate that leaders, authorities, other group representatives, and decision making procedures are appropriate and deserve their role. "Wrong" answers signal that the system is broken and that the perceiver and the group are being misled. In short, people use their sense of morality as a benchmark to assess whether leaders, authorities, procedures, or those who align themselves with the decision are valid or invalid.

Research Support for the Litmus Test Hypothesis

Support for the litmus test hypothesis comes from a host of studies that have evaluated people's reactions to authorities' public policy decisions. For example, particularly persuasive evidence comes from a longitudinal study of people's perceptions of the widely publicized Elián González custody battle (Skitka & Mullen, 2002). In November of 1999, five-year-old Elián González, his mother, and 12 others unsuccessfully attempted to cross from Cuba to the United States. Their boat capsized somewhere in the Straights of Florida, and Elián's mother and most of the others died. Elián was rescued off the Florida coast, and his father in Cuba petitioned the United States to return Elián to his custody. The Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), however, put Elián in the temporary care of Miami relatives, who in turn filed a petition to grant him political asylum in the United States. Months of court decisions and appeals culminated in a ruling that Elián would return to Cuba. After Elián's relatives and many others in the Miami community refused to comply with the court's ruling, Federal agents took Elián by force from his Miami relatives' home and eventually returned Elián to his father in Cuba.

Skitka and Mullen (2002) conducted a natural experiment by collecting data from a nationally representative sample of U.S. households to assess public reactions as the case unfolded. Judgments were collected several weeks before the Federal raid, immediately after the raid, and several weeks after Elián returned to Cuba. Results of the study were consistent with the litmus test hypothesis. For example, 83% percent of people with a moral mandate made at least one critical comment about the U.S. government, compared with only 12% of those without a moral mandate about how the case should be resolved. Analyses of open-ended comments about the case indicated that people who morally supported Elián's U.S. asylum criticized specific authorities (e.g., the INS, U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno) and the decision to use

force to remove Elián from his relatives' home. People who thought the only moral solution was to return Elián to Cuba and his father criticized authorities for taking too long to act, even though they accepted the final decision and perceived it to be fair in the end.

Analysis of closed-ended questions about people's reactions to the case similarly supported the litmus test hypothesis. Specifically, people's perceptions that the raid and the ultimate resolution of the case were procedurally fair and legitimate were determined primarily by whether the raid and decision were consistent with pre-raid levels of moral conviction people had about how the case should be resolved, and less by pre-raid perceptions of procedural fairness and legitimacy. In sum, strong moral convictions about how the Elián case should be resolved led people to be quite critical of authorities, rather than to blindly accept or reject authorities' decision. As predicted by the litmus test hypothesis, people perceived the authorities and procedures as more legitimate when the outcome of the case was consistent and more illegitimate when the outcome was inconsistent with their *a priori* moral beliefs about whether Elián should stay in the U.S. or be returned to Cuba.

Controlled laboratory studies also supported the litmus test hypothesis. For example, moral convictions about just ends affected perceptions of just means in perceptions of jury trials and verdicts (Skitka & Houston, 2001). In addition to finding support for the authority independence hypothesis, that is, that perceptions of outcome fairness and acceptance were determined more by whether outcomes matched moral standards than by the procedures used to arrive at them, Skitka and Houston (2001) found that when trial verdicts failed to match moral standards (e.g., when the guilty were acquitted, or the innocent were convicted), people derogated the legitimacy of the police investigation of the crime and the trial. People found the exact same procedures to be perfectly legitimate, however, when they yielded a verdict consistent with their moral

standards (Skitka & Houston, 2001, Study 1b; see also Mullen & Skitka, 2006b). Manipulations of whether the trials involved proper versus improper procedures only affected perceptions of the trial's procedural fairness when defendant guilt was ambiguous—in these cases, improper investigation and trial procedures were correctly perceived to be less procedurally fair than proper investigation and trial procedures.

Further support for the litmus test hypothesis comes from Skitka's (2006) PAS Supreme Court study. As discussed earlier, pre-decision perceptions of the legitimacy of the Supreme Court did not affect people's reactions to the Court's ruling in the case; instead, whether the decision matched people's morally vested outcome preferences predicted their perceptions of outcome fairness and decision acceptance. Important to the litmus test hypothesis, however, results of the PAS Supreme Court study also indicated people's perceptions of the legitimacy and procedural fairness of the Supreme Court changed as a function of whether the Court ruling was consistent or inconsistent with perceivers' *a priori* moral beliefs about the "correct" resolution of the case. People who morally supported PAS thought that the Supreme Court was more legitimate and procedurally fair, whereas those who morally opposed PAS thought that the Supreme Court was less legitimate and procedurally fair, after it made its ruling on *Gonzales v. Oregon*—a finding that was not qualified by how legitimate or fair they felt the Court had been pre-decision. In other words, people rejected the decision and the system that yielded it when the Supreme Court ruling was inconsistent with their moral convictions, even when they previously thought the Court was legitimate. Similarly, people accepted the decision and felt stronger faith in the Supreme Court when its decision was consistent with their moral convictions, even if they previously thought the system was broken and illegitimate.

Finally, other research has found behavioral support for the litmus test hypothesis. Specifically, when people were exposed to unjust laws, they were more likely to report intentions to flout other unrelated laws in the future (Nadler, 2005), presumably because their faith in the system had been eroded. Mullen and Nadler (2007) further tested the flouting hypothesis in an experiment that involved exposing people to legal decisions that supported, opposed, or were unrelated to participants' moral convictions. The experimenters distributed a pen with a post-exposure questionnaire, and asked participants to return the questionnaire and pen at end of the experimental session. Consistent with the notion that decisions, rules, and laws that violate people's moral convictions erode perceptions of the legitimacy of authority systems, participants were more likely to steal the pen after exposure to a legal decision that violated rather than supported their personal moral convictions.

Taken together, the results of several studies that used a variety of methods converge and support the litmus test hypothesis. In many situations that involve decisions about personal preferences or normative conventions, people are unsure about what would be a fair outcome. Therefore, they use fair treatment and procedures to guide their perceptions of the decision. In situations that involve their personal conceptions of right and wrong, moral and immoral, however, people *know* that one decision alternative is valid and right and other alternatives are invalid and wrong. When people have a moral investment in decision outcomes, they use whether these outcomes are achieved as an important check on the true fairness and legitimacy of leaders, authorities, and the procedures they employ.

The Emotion Hypothesis

The emotion hypothesis goes one step further than the authority independence and litmus test hypotheses and makes a prediction about at least one of the motivational underpinnings of

these other effects. Specifically, the ITMC predicts that people have stronger and perhaps different emotional reactions to decisions that involve issues about which they have strong moral convictions, and that these emotions in turn influence and color perceptions of fairness, decision acceptance, and related variables.

Research Support for the Emotion Hypothesis

Considerable research supports the notion that people's fairness reasoning will be driven by different kinds, and perhaps stronger emotions overall, when their personal moral convictions are concerned compared to when they are not. For example, Mullen and Skitka (2006a) assessed people's reactions to hypothetical jury decisions that either supported or opposed participants' moral beliefs about abortion. Rather than manipulating procedural fairness, each jury trial was described as containing both positive aspects of procedures as well as a few procedural flaws. Results revealed that when people had a moral conviction about abortion, they reacted with anger when the outcome of the case opposed their moral conviction, and anger in turn led them to devalue the fairness of the procedures and the outcome in the case. In contrast, when the outcome of the case supported or was unrelated to people's moral convictions, participants reported little anger and consequently rated both the procedures and outcome to be fair. Thus, participants rated identical procedures to be differentially fair as a function of whether the outcome supported or opposed their moral beliefs. Other results, however, indicated that emotional reactions to procedures did not mediate the influence of moral conviction on perceptions of procedural or outcome fairness. In short, anger in response to morally untenable *outcomes* colored people's subsequent perceptions of outcome and procedural fairness, but anger at the *procedures* did not (see also Mullen & Nadler, 2007).

One could argue that participants might have experienced less anger and been more willing to accept an outcome that was inconsistent with their moral beliefs had the experiment manipulated procedural fairness and included a condition that involved extremely fair procedures. To address this concern, Mullen and Nadler (2007) replicated the previous results using a strong manipulation of procedural fairness and including a measure of decision acceptance. In particular, Mullen and Nadler (2007) assessed participants' reactions to hypothetical jury decisions that either supported or opposed participants' moral beliefs and varied whether the trial procedures were exemplary or contained egregious procedural flaws. Results were consistent with Mullen and Skitka (2006a); participants reported more anger when outcomes were inconsistent with their moral convictions, and this outrage led them to judge the outcome to be less fair and to report an increased tendency to reject the decision, even in conditions when procedures were objectively fair. Further evidence indicated that anger at the outcome (but not anger at the procedures) colored people's subsequent perceptions of outcome fairness and decision acceptance.

In addition to evidence that anger about outcomes mediates the relationship between moral conviction and perceived fairness, research suggests that outrage (a blend of anger and disgust) caused by perceived moral transgressions increases intentions to protest decisions or sever ties with groups (Bauman, 2006) and willingness to engage in deviant behavior (Mullen & Nadler, 2007). For example, Bauman (2006) found that greater moral disagreement with a University decision made students more willing to protest, withhold their tuition and fees, and "make trouble" for a university administration, and this effect was mediated by the degree of outrage students reported in response to the decision. Other results indicated that outrage varied as a function of whether outcomes were consistent or inconsistent with students' moral convictions,

but not as a function of whether decision making procedures were exemplary or egregiously unfair.

The effects of procedures and outcomes, and perhaps especially moral investments in outcomes, may influence justice reasoning through two very different processes. Research suggests that under conditions of uncertainty, people carefully attempt to evaluate whether procedures are fair (e.g., Lind & van den Bos, 2002). Under conditions of certainty provided by moral conviction about the outcomes, however, people may use more intuitive and emotional processes to judge whether outcomes and procedures are fair or unfair (cf. Epstein, 1990). Consistent with this idea, attempts to explore alternative explanations for why people seem to pay less attention to features of procedures when they have moral convictions about outcomes found no difference in the amount of information that people paid attention to or processed as a function of whether they had a moral conviction at stake (Mullen & Skitka, 2006a). For example, people with and without strong moral convictions about the outcome of a decision were equally likely to remember details of the procedures used to make it. However, people with moral convictions at stake appeared to insufficiently weight procedural information when they made fairness judgments (Mullen & Skitka, 2006a). These results suggest that people's emotional reactions to violated or threatened moral convictions may engulf the perceptual field and lead them to judge the entire situation as fair or unfair, and that people fail to appropriately weight procedural information that normatively should soften the blow of receiving non-preferred outcomes.

Summary

In summary, a body of theory and research on justice has grown out of the *homo moralis* guiding metaphor. The assumption that people are predisposed to care about morality leads to

novel hypotheses about the factors that affect perceptions of fairness. Like research in other disciplines working from the same metaphor, a willingness to explore and test the implications of *homo moralis* has led to some important and surprising findings. For example, one long-standing truism in social psychology is that obedience and cooperation with legitimate authorities generally overwhelms people's personal sense of morality. Our findings, however, suggest that there are some limitations to this general conclusion. Increasing evidence indicates that people actively resist when authorities make decisions that are at odds with their core moral beliefs. Moreover, people use whether authorities make decisions consistent with their moral beliefs as an important check on procedural fairness and authority legitimacy. Even a single immoral decision appears to have the potential to undercut perceptions of authority and institutional legitimacy⁶. Other findings indicate that affect plays an especially important social psychological function or cue when perceivers have a moral investment in decision outcomes.

Broader Theoretical Implications

Guiding metaphors, such as *homo economicus*, *socialis*, and *moralis* are useful for theory generation. Each provides a possible frame for thinking how and why people might care about justice, that in turn leads to testable hypotheses. That said, each metaphor in itself is limited in scope and range. Justice research may therefore be like the poet John Godfrey Saxe's blind men of Indostan, who each examined a different part of an elephant and therefore came to different conclusions about the fundamental character of "elephantness" ("it is very like a tree," "a wall," or "a snake"). The tree, wall, and snake descriptions were each accurate but limited descriptions of an elephant (its leg, body, and trunk). Similarly, justice theory and research guided by the

⁶ Future research is needed to examine whether making subsequent "moral" decisions can re-enhance authority legitimacy, or how many times authorities are subsequently required to "get it right" to regain perceived legitimacy after they violate perceivers' moral convictions. The converse question would also be of interest (whether making a moral decision more effectively buffers authorities from subsequent backlash from other unpopular or immoral decisions).

homo economicus, *socialis*, and *moralis* metaphors have each found considerable evidence consistent with their respective predictions, but may provide limited views of the psychology of justice when viewed in isolation. What justice theory and research therefore needs is a more general theory that can help guide predictions about the contingencies when people's justice reasoning is shaped more by their bounded but rational self-interests, status concerns and the need to feel valued and belong, or by their core moral convictions.

Our approach has assumed that not everyone looks at a given situation with the same motivational priorities. Consider our example of a university's considering whether to use student fees to fund abortions at a student health clinic. One perceiver might be concerned primarily about whether her student fees are likely to increase and how this will affect her budget. Because this perceiver is taking a more *homo economicus* perspective on this issue, the criteria she uses to decide whether using student fees to fund abortions are fair may be quite different from another student, who sees the issue more in terms of his social identity as a member of the university. This other student may be more concerned about whether he has voice in the decision making process about whether to increase student fees, and whether authorities are respecting students' opinions. Yet another student may perceive the issue in terms of the fundamental morality of blocking or facilitating students' access to abortion services. All three students are viewing exactly the same reality, but from very different points of view. What they see as at stake in the decision—their self-interests, their status and standing, or basic questions of right or wrong—has considerable potential to influence the decision rules and heuristics they bring to bear on deciding whether the decision-making procedures and the decision outcome are fair.

A theory of justice that takes each of these possible perspectives into account and develops contingent predictions about how people think about fairness within each of these frames of reference has considerable promise to integrate research inspired by the three metaphors reviewed here. Moreover, a more contingent approach to justice theory would be able to handle the empirical reality that (a) people care more about due process considerations than they do about outcomes under some circumstances (e.g., see Lind & Tyler, 1988; Tyler & H. Smith, 1997 for reviews), and (b) people care more about outcomes than they do about due process under other circumstances (e.g., the research reviewed here; van den Bos, Lind, Vermunt, & Wilke, 1997), as well as a host of other contradictory findings that are otherwise difficult to explain when taking only one metaphorical perspective into account.

Just as we have taken an ideographic rather than nomothetic approach to studying whether individual perceivers see a given situation in moral terms, one could measure other motivational priorities ideographically as well. For example, other research has found some value in measuring the strength of people's social identity motivations in specific contexts. Research that has measured the relative importance of social identity concerns finds that voice and other aspects of procedural fairness are more important to people's justice judgments when people identify with decision relevant groups and authorities than when they do not (e.g., Huo, Smith, Tyler & Lind, 1996). Therefore, our moral conviction research and research on identification are complementary because they both reveal factors that affect the relative impact of a particular motive on perceptions of justice rather than assert categorically which motive always is primary. Although there has been some movement toward more contingent theories of justice reasoning (e.g., Heuer, Strossner, & Vale, 1998; Skitka, 2003), few studies have measured or manipulated more than one motivational priority within a given study to test the full implications of the notion

that people's justice reasoning may be contingent on the motivational priorities of individual perceivers. Thus, exploring contingent theories of justice reasoning is an important area of inquiry for future research.

In sum, the field could benefit from more attempts to understand multiple factors that influence how people evaluate fairness. Most research has attempted to pit theories that position one motivational priority against another in horse races in an effort to determine which one is more important. Understanding *when* different motivational priorities are salient or dominant (rather than which motivation priority is presumably more universally dominant), and how different motivational priorities might lead people to differentially weight information in their judgments or apply different definitions or criteria to a judgment of fairness or unfairness, could provide novel insight into the social side of the psychology of justice. Although understanding how individuals judge whether a given situation is fair or unfair is interesting, understanding how people socially negotiate and come to some kind of group consensus about whether fairness has been achieved in a given situation seems potentially much more important to understand. Social conflicts may often be a consequence of people interpreting the same situation from very different points of view; thus understanding what might lead to these differences in points of view, and then how people work together to resolve conflicting interpretations of fairness or what should be weighed in a fairness judgment, represent neglected and fascinating questions for future research.

In addition, our review of the research supporting the ITMC could lead one to wonder whether moral convictions should be construed as a positive or negative aspect of people's fairness reasoning and judgments. On the one hand, moral conviction seems to provide people with the necessary motivational force to stand up for what they believe in and to protest against

authorities that do not meet moral standards. Thus, moral convictions could contribute to pro-social behaviors and needed social change. On the other hand, people's moral convictions can also be viewed as leading people to make potentially biased evaluations of procedures. In a world where people's positions on politicized issues such as abortion and capital punishment are not uniform, moral convictions may serve to fuel social conflicts and lead people to endorse any "means" that justifies their morally motivated "ends". The value spin one places on whether morally motivated behavior that ignores means in favor of ends is likely to be colored by whether one shares the moral priorities of the actor. One person's terrorist is likely to be another's freedom fighter or hero.

Our work with the ITMC approach to understanding the psychology of fairness also draws much needed attention to the role of emotion in justice reasoning. Emotions have been surprisingly understudied in the justice literature. Of the studies that have investigated a relationship between justice and affect, most have examined affect as a consequence of an experience with injustice rather than as a cause of justice judgments (Mullen, 2007). However, there are considerable reasons to consider affect as a causal factor in justice reasoning and judgments. For example, there is some evidence that people's incidental affective states (i.e., their mood) can influence their fairness judgments (e.g., Van den Bos, 2003; Sinclair & Mark, 1991, 1992). In addition, research suggests that people's emotional reactions to events can occur relatively quickly and with little conscious cognitive processing (e.g., Lazarus, 1991). Thus, there may be times (perhaps particularly when moral convictions are at stake) when people's emotional reactions to events occur before their more carefully reasoned fairness judgments (Scher & Heise, 1993). If this is the case, then scholars need to consider how emotions that are

elicited during the course of a justice related encounter (i.e., integral emotional reactions) influence people's fairness reasoning and judgments.

People's emotions could influence not only their fairness judgments, but also the depth of information processing they engage in about fairness related events (Mullen, 2007). For example, emotions associated with appraisals of certainty (e.g., anger) tend to be associated with more heuristic information processing, whereas emotions associated with appraisals of uncertainty (e.g., fear) tend to be associated with more systematic processing (Tiedens & Linton, 2001). The effects of emotion on depth of information processing may help to explain why people's judgments of fairness when their moral convictions are at stake are driven more by whether outcomes are consistent or inconsistent with their moral convictions than by procedural fairness. When feeling certain, people engage in more heuristic processing. Thus, when outcomes are consistent with moral convictions people judge both the procedures and outcome to be fair without carefully weighing the fairness of the procedures. In contrast, when people are feeling uncertain they engage in more systematic information processing that includes a consideration of whether procedures were fair or unfair and not just whether outcomes were favorable or unfavorable. Thus, people's emotions in response to morally relevant events have the potential to influence not just their fairness judgments, but also the process through which they arrive at their judgments. Future research should continue to explore these possibilities.

In addition, future research should focus on both positive and negative emotional reactions to morally relevant events. Research on positive emotions in general is sparse relative to the amount of research on negative emotions (Snyder & Lopez, 2002), and very little research has addressed the role of positive affect in moral contexts. We have demonstrated that feelings of anger and disgust in response to morally untenable outcomes predict perceptions of outcome and

procedural fairness, decision acceptance, and reactions to authorities. However, we know little about the role that positive emotions such as gratitude and righteousness in response to outcomes that support moral convictions might play in people's perceptions of fairness, decision acceptance, and reactions to authorities.

Conclusion

Our current thinking about moral conviction has expanded considerably since our first publications and tests of the moral mandate hypothesis, beginning with Skitka and Houston (2001) and through our work on the value protection model in Skitka (2002) and Skitka and Mullen (2002). At that time, we focused most heavily on the notion that people's personal identities and need to defend their personal sense of moral authenticity were the primary explanatory mechanisms for why people's justice reasoning might be influenced by people's moral attachments to specific outcomes. Our subsequent work on the moral conviction and mandate construct more generally (e.g., Skitka, et al, 2005), our discovery of the important role of affect and the apparently limited role of motivated reasoning in explaining the moral mandate effect (Mullen & Skitka, 2006a), as well as integrating predictions from a variety of interdisciplinary sources, has led us to a much more nuanced theoretical understanding of moral conviction and how and why it may matter to justice reasoning. As noted above, it is not our position that moral convictions or motivations drive *all* justice reasoning or justice related behavior. We already know that a host of other concerns and motivations can influence how people think about fairness. Although future research exploring further implications of moral motivations and priorities on how people understand justice and fairness in social life will be both needed and important, in the grand scheme we feel that the real future of justice theory and research will be to develop more sophisticated and contingent theories that move beyond one-

dimensional motivational accounts of why people care about, and therefore how they reason about, fairness.

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