

Beyond Formalism and Altruism: The Prospects for Moral Personality

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Previously, we argued that moral development research has for too long been reliant on the moral philosophy of Immanuel Kant. The Kantian legacy forces improper restrictions on the moral domain, fails to acknowledge mature but non-Kantian moral conceptions such as eudaimonism, and isolates moral development from the development of the self. Now we respond to critical commentary from advocates of post-Kantian formalism (Helwig, Turiel, & Nucci, 1996) and post-Kantian altruism (Eisenberg, 1996). Helwig et al. deny the validity of eudaimonism as a moral perspective while asserting that it has been incorporated wholesale into a post-Kantian moral synthesis. We refute each of the arguments they present. Even if their objections to eudaimonism are completely correct, they have still not explained how anyone might develop a eudaimonistic moral conception. Eisenberg questions our definitions of altruistic and prosocial behavior; we defend them on their own terms, while showing how they are largely in accord with Eisenberg's own practice, and that of other "prosocial development" researchers. We conclude that moral personality is a legitimate object of study (despite efforts by Helwig et al. to push it out of the scientific arena) and discuss the challenges posed by taking moral personality seriously. © 1996 Academic Press, Inc.

In our target article in this issue (Campbell & Christopher, 1996), we argued that the study of moral development has for too long been dependent on assumptions derived from the philosophy of Immanuel Kant (1785/1959, 1797/1991). Kant denied that morality could be self-regarding or concerned with the good life. He drove a wedge between the universal, categorical, impersonal duties laid down by the noumenal self and the goals, values, "inclinations," or "counsels of prudence" belonging to the phenomenal self.

Our commentators do not challenge our analysis of Kant's philosophy. They do question its relevance to their own research programs. We maintained that formalism, the post-Kantian approach that seeks to generate moral norms con-

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cerning rights, welfare, and justice by passing nonmoral personal desires through a logical or dialogical filter, is prevalent in contemporary academic moral philosophy (Gewirth, 1984; Habermas, 1990; Rawls, 1971) and in the developmental theories of Kohlberg (1981) and Turiel (1983). We took formalist conceptions to task for defining the moral domain so narrowly as to exclude considerations that many people regard as moral and for denying the possibility of mature moral reasoning based on non-Kantian ways of thinking.

The other post-Kantian conception that prevails in moral development research is the altruistic one (e.g., Eisenberg, 1986). Altruism, we contended, takes its cue from Kant's (1797/1991) belief that acting for the good of others can be moral, whereas acting for one's own good cannot. We criticized research on "prosocial" development for a series of biases and confusions regarding behavior that is intended to promote the good of others. A stark example is Eisenberg's scheme (Eisenberg-Berg, 1979) for rating judgments about altruistic acts, in which reasons for helping can attain any level of moral maturity, but reasons for not helping are stuck at the most immature level.

We concluded that neither the formalist nor the altruist variants of Kantianism can provide an adequate understanding of moral development. We proposed a significant broadening of the moral domain to include self-regarding and other non-Kantian considerations. We advocated a focus on moral personality or character as what develops, rather than moral reasoning construed narrowly as a "social-cognitive competence." We suggested that the moral philosophy of human flourishing, or eudaimonism, as represented in the works of Aristotle (ca. 325 BC/1941) and contemporary Aristotelians, could guide psychological inquiry in more productive directions.

Analyses of philosophical presuppositions can go awry and are apt to be resisted even when on target. Kantian presuppositions about morality have become part of our culture; they can be readily absorbed, from multiple and varied sources, without ever studying Kant's own writings. So it is no surprise that the formalists, represented by Charles Helwig, Elliot Turiel, and Larry Nucci (1996), and the altruists, represented by Nancy Eisenberg (1996), have found a great deal to fault in our critique.

In the space allotted for this reply, a point-by-point response to our commentators is impossible. And however our inclinations might tempt us, a blow-by-blow reaction to commentaries of such length would surely try the patience of our readers. What worries us is the genuine and profound issues of substance raised by our commentators that we simply cannot address here.

There is a major divide between the conception of the self, and of self-interest, that animates eudaimonism and the conception that has predominated in Western philosophy since the 17th century. All we can do is alert our readers that there is a difference between Aristotle's conception of self-interest and the conceptions to be found in Hobbes (1651/1968), Hume (1751/1957), and Kant, as well as

presence in clinical psychology (Maslow, 1968; Branden, 1994). It has even managed to survive in the world of academic philosophy.

No one could mount a responsible critique of Kant's moral doctrines without studying his own writings and those of his major contemporary exponents. A credible response to eudaimonism requires the same level of scholarly effort. Yet neither commentary alludes to much in the way of eudaimonistic literature. While Eisenberg mostly refrains from criticizing eudaimonism, Helwig, Turiel, and Nucci are ambivalent toward it; they cannot decide whether to dismiss it or co-opt it.

Dismissing Eudaimonism

Helwig et al. make four arguments in favor of dismissal. First, they contend that eudaimonism, because it treats morality as self-regarding, grants human beings license to take advantage of others and do them harm. Such an argument presupposes a gulf between self and other and a fundamental opposition between other people's interests and one's own. Helwig et al.'s objection makes perfect sense from a Hobbesian point of view. For Hobbes (1651/1968), the self is not regulated by reasoned concern about the kind of life it is going to live; it is driven by its passions. Its passions lead it to grab power, glory, and possessions at the expense of other selves. Morality, for Hobbes, comes down to taming the ego so it will behave in other-regarding ways. Likewise for Kant and his followers. For Kant, of course, the taming is to be accomplished less by external coercion than by a special part of the self. The phenomenal self comes equipped with a noumenal self to remind it of its duties and keep it in line.

For Helwig et al. it is as plain as day that the ego needs taming. Yet eudaimonists, from Aristotle onward, have always rejected this assumption. Aristotle said of the person who "act[s] justly, temperately, or in accordance with any of the other virtues" that "such a man would seem more than the other [i.e., the one who grabs honors and chases after bodily pleasures] a lover of self" (1941, p. 1168b). Not a single argument is forthcoming in Helwig et al.'s lengthy commentary as to why a Hobbesian or Kantian conception of the self is to be preferred to an Aristotelian one.

Second, Helwig et al. follow Kohlberg (1981) in rejecting the eudaimonistic conception of the good as a jumbled "bag of virtues" without a coherent rationale to tie them together. But philosophers like Aristotle (ca. 325 BC/1941) and Rand (1964) have sought to ground the virtues as necessary means toward, or integral parts of, the good life for a human being. To sustain the "bag of virtues" charge, Helwig, Turiel, and Nucci would have to examine these efforts and show why they must fail.

Third, they contend that morality cannot be defined in terms of conceptions of the good, because such conceptions are inevitably relative to individuals, cultures, or historical periods. Therefore, they say, the moral domain must be defined in terms of something that is not subjective or relative, namely, the im-

and therefore nonmoral. Indeed, it is hard to imagine a more fundamental misreading of his work (Irwin, 1995).

Helwig, Turiel, and Nucci go on to argue that substantial portions of eudaimonism have been absorbed and *aufgehoben* into the systems of the leading post-Kantians, such as Gewirth, Rawls, and Habermas.

Careful reading of these post-Kantians shows otherwise. Gewirth (1984) flatly rejects Aristotle's moral philosophy, because he regards conceptions of human nature as subjective and relative (see Rasmussen and Den Uyl, 1991, for a rebuttal).

Habermas (1990) admits that serious difficulties arise in trying to apply universalizable categorical imperatives to specific situations. The problem arises for Habermas, however, because his strong commitment to Kantianism in the moral sphere clashes with his equally strong commitment to historical context-specificity that derives from Hegel, Marx, and hermeneutics. Eudaimonists get no comfort from his statement that "Going beyond Kant, discourse ethics extends the deontological concept of justice by including in it those structural aspects of the good life that can be distinguished from the concrete totality of specific forms of life" (Habermas, 1990, p. 203). Eudaimonists are curious to know how Habermas aims to separate the structure of the good life from its content—he never says how this would be done.

What is clear is that Habermas emphatically rejects any eudaimonistic solution to his problem. He insists that morality must be other-regarding. He denounces attempts to ground morality in a conception of human nature as "metaphysical." He will not tolerate "a separate and distinct faculty of *prudence* or judgment that would tend to undercut the universalistic claim of justificatory reason because it is tied to the parochial context of some hermeneutic starting point" (p. 206). What he wants is "*impartial* application, which is not a prudent but a moral point of view" (p. 207). Prudence and morality are antithetical for Habermas, just as they were for Kant.

Alone among the three philosophers under discussion, Rawls (1971) shows a modicum of interest in eudaimonism. But he allows considerations about the good to play only a vestigial role within his system. His "Aristotelian principle," which "states that other things equal human beings enjoy the exercise of their realized capacities (their innate or trained abilities), and that this enjoyment increases the more the capacity is realized, or the greater its complexity" (p. 414) is not a moral principle, just a fact of "empirical psychology." Prior to the decisions that the participants make in the "original position," there is room only for a "thin theory of the good," a laundry list of "primary social goods" that no one can help wanting.

The "thin theory" is much too thin to be of any value to a eudaimonist. It says nothing about the way anyone might make use of the "primary social goods." It does not include a single virtue! Yet Rawls will not allow it to be thickened until his theory of justice has been cemented into place. "In justice as fairness the

Eisenberg prefers to define altruism as “voluntary behavior that is intended to benefit another and is not motivated by the expectation of external reward.” By contrast, she defines prosocial behavior as behavior that is narrowly intended to benefit another, whatever its broader motive might be.

What is Altruistic?

How you define altruism is, more than anything else, a function of the way you think of the self and of self-interest. If your interests terminate at your epidermal layer, then virtually anything you do for friends and loved ones, let alone marginal acquaintances or strangers, qualifies as altruistic behavior. Colby and Damon (1992) classify even trivially “prosocial” acts as altruistic: “A mother vigilantly holds her child’s hand while crossing the street, a teacher cuts short her lunch break to assist a struggling student, a person tells a painful truth to a friend” (p. 302). Eisenberg’s *stated* definition would require her to agree with Colby and Damon. Her *de facto* definition of altruism is far stricter than theirs—and close to ours.

From the eudaimonic standpoint, acts of caring, kindness, benevolence, and charity, not to mention justice, are not necessarily altruistic; many, if not most, can be rooted in ideals of the good life for each individual.² On this issue, eudaimonists actually agree with those on the opposite side of the fence who rigoristically exclude self-regarding motives—those, like Kant himself, who want no trace of personal “inclination” to sully actions in accord with duty, or those, like Auguste Comte (inventor of the term “altruism”), who want no trace of concern for one’s own good to sully actions done for the good of others. For the rigorists, unlike Hume or Smith, acts of caring, benevolence, or justice cannot be given the moral stamp of approval until they pass inspection and are certified not to harbor even trace levels of self-interest.

Altruism becomes painfully real for the eudaimonist at the point where carrying out some duty, or acting out of sympathy, requires one to give up important values of one’s own. Altruism becomes painfully real for the post-Kantian rigorist at precisely the same point. That is why we defined altruism in terms of self-sacrifice; that is why we thought “prosocial” developmentalists ought to do the same.

Although it is not an ideal formulation, for discussion we will use Eisenberg’s (1996) definition of self-sacrifice as “involving significant costs to the self.” Eisenberg asserts that “just because I have studied reasoning about prosocial acts that involve some cost to the self does not mean that I view *only* such acts as altruistic.” We are not so sure. From her standpoint (Eisenberg, 1986, p. 101),

² From a eudaimonistic point of view, an act done out of sympathy would not qualify as altruistic unless the feeling of sympathy overrode one’s rational judgment about how to make the best sort of life for oneself.

development researchers to explain why the term should be used at all. What is wrong with simply referring to acts of kindness or helping or charity? Why confer on them a label that seems designed to confuse intent with benefits and to polarize human motives into self-sacrificing and other-sacrificing?

Involuntary Altruism?

Eisenberg responds to our fourth charge by reassuring us that “prosocial” developmentalists are interested only in voluntary cooperation and voluntary assistance. Such a commitment to voluntarism gains credibility, however, when it is backed by careful and responsible evaluations of political systems and cultural practices.

Eisenberg (1996) now says that “a black and white view of socialization in target societies would hinder our understanding of socialization processes.” Is any interpretation other than a “black and white view” even possible, when the single dimension on which cultures are evaluated ranges from “prosocial conduct” to “egoistic and selfish qualities” (Mussen & Eisenberg-Berg, 1977, p. 47)?

We do not accept Eisenberg’s (1996) declaration that under the Soviet system there was no connection between the “elements that an observer would view as having positive consequences, and elements that might be perceived as having negative consequences.” Was not denouncing other children to the authorities (admittedly, a negative element) considered an important way of advancing “the needs and welfare of the collective” (supposedly, a positive element) and inculcated as a virtue *for exactly that reason*?

We must conclude, then, that all of our charges against “prosocial” development research still stand, except the first one—altruistic behavior can be motivated by sympathy as well as duty. In either case, however, Eisenberg regards altruistic behavior as morally obligatory and supposes that every morally mature individual will think the same way.

Could It Be Moral Not to Help?

We argued that Eisenberg’s coding scheme for scoring moral reasoning on “prosocial” dilemmas is fatally biased because it does not allow for a morally principled refusal to behave altruistically. Eisenberg (1996) insists otherwise. On this matter, we stand by our statements in the target article. Except on the rare occasions when the duty to help conflicts with other duties, Eisenberg (1986) believes that only “nonmoral” personal motives lead people not to perform altruistic acts. Eisenberg fails to recognize a decision not to help as a moral decision. It *is* a moral decision—whether or not we think it is the *right* decision (Christopher, in press; Taylor, 1989).

MAKING SENSE OF MORAL PERSONALITY

We hope that what we have said will help our readers to understand the contention between ourselves and our commentators. But that leaves little room

ation, Batson shows that human beings have some motives that are not self-regarding in the Hobbesian sense. Eudaimonists, however, have never accepted the Hobbesian boundary between what is self-regarding and what is other-regarding. A practicing eudaimonist may stop to render aid out of sympathy for an accident victim, instead of fleeing the scene, and do this without sacrificing more important personal values. What is worse, there is no role for values, or any other enduring aspect of the person, in Batson's worldview; there is nothing but the emotions aroused at the moment and anticipations of how one might feel a few moments from now.

An account of the development of values, then, is sorely needed. And psychologists have learned the hard way what happens when the domain of *moral* values is restricted to matters of justice or rights or caring or altruism. In explaining *how moral values develop*, pluralism is no virtue—our goal as scientists should be to find the best theory. But our account of *what develops* does need to be pluralistic (Walker et al., 1995). The heuristic is plain: count any value as moral if the people you interview consider it to be moral.

Eisenberg demurs: Is the Nazi value of “cleansing the race” a genuinely moral value? It is. Such a value functions to guide and justify the subsidiary goals and the actions of those who hold it (many Nazis were not psychopaths; they thought they were abnegating themselves and doing their duty to *das Volk*). A value can function as a moral value without being good, right, beneficial, or acceptable from a normative point of view (Christopher, in press). There is pathological moral development; there are harmful and even evil systems of morality. Without getting into the messy business of distinguishing between values that function as moral and values that human beings actually ought to adopt, developmental psychology will never be able to make sense of conflicting moral views.

Study the Biography of Moral Character

In our target article we recommended that psychologists take up the “comparative biography of moral character.” Eisenberg (1996) reminds us that this is already happening. We have no space to comment on their efforts, so we will simply encourage everyone in the field of moral development to pay close heed to the contributions of Blasi and Oresick (1986) and those of Colby and Damon (1992). In addition, we recommend the work of Walker et al. (1995), particularly for its forthright rejection of narrow definitions of the moral domain and its insistence that people be allowed to express their “indigenous moral concepts.”

View Personality Dynamically

As is so often the case, it is the lack of ideas, and not lack of data, that poses the real obstacle to progress. Contemporary psychology is hard up for resources to explain personality development. And it is not just philosophers (Flanagan, 1991) who have inspected the cupboard and found it bare. Colby and Damon (1992) struggle with the question of dynamism. They find that steadfast moral

is real, that it develops, and that its development needs to become a central object of study. When “selfhood and the good, or in another way selfhood and morality turn out to be inextricably intertwined themes” (Taylor, 1989, p. 3), the universe begins to look quite different from what moral developmentalists have been accustomed to. Moral developmentalists need to come to grips with the diversity of values that animate people’s lives, form a significant part of their personalities, and define their very selves. It is not noumenal selves that develop, with their fenced-off faculties of reasoning about justice, rights, caring, and altruism. What develops is the moral values that are constitutive of real human selves.

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