Chapter 20

Moral Amplification and the Emotions That Attach Us to Saints and Demons

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...and God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night.

—GENESIS, 1: 4–5

When love and hate are both absent everything becomes clear and undisguised. Make the smallest distinction, however, and heaven and earth are set infinitely far apart. If you wish to see the truth then hold no opinions for or against anything. To set up what you like against what you dislike is the disease of the mind.

—BUDDHA, The Dhammapada

Eastern and Western religions point to the act of separating opposites as the beginning of the drama of life. Whether these opposites are night and day, man and woman, or good and evil, it is commonly thought that one cannot exist without the other. In the Bible, the act of separation is a wondrous act, done by God in order to create the physical world. But Hindu and Buddhist scriptures more frequently discuss the acts of separation that we all do in our daily lives and warn that such separations blind us to truth and bind us to the material world and its passions.

In this chapter we examine this separation of good and evil from a psychological perspective. We suggest that an important part of social cognition is the separation and amplification of good and evil in our judgments of others. People seem to want to live in a world full of saints and demons. They want their saints saintly and their demons demonic. However, one of the most basic lessons of social psychology is that good and bad behaviors do not spring entirely, or even primarily, from the goodness or badness of individuals. In the
first part of this chapter we explore a few of the mechanisms that underlie moral appraisals and their amplifications. Next, we suggest that moral appraisals can be partially understood by positing three dimensions of social cognition, including a vertical dimension running from divinity/purity/goodness above to animality/pollution/evil below. In the third part of the chapter we examine a few of the emotions that play out along these dimensions: disgust and anger toward demons and villains and elevation and admiration toward saints and heroes. Throughout the chapter we suggest that the exaggerated separation of good and evil—what Buddha called “the disease of the mind”—is one of the ways that people find meaning in life and solidarity with others.

**MORAL AMPLIFICATION**

In the wake of the September 11 terrorist attacks, Americans quickly developed a kind of moral bipolar condition. The first-order effect was a separation of the many people involved into heros and villains, or saints and demons. This first separation was straightforward: 19 men had killed thousands of innocent people, including hundreds of firefighters and other rescue workers who died trying to save innocent lives. For Americans, as for most people in other countries, the terrorists were bad and the rescue workers were good. But as time went on it became clear that these separations were driven not just by appraisals of the facts, but by a hunger for purity: the perfect separation of good and evil, such that the villains ended up with only evil traits and motives while the heroes ended up with only good traits and motives. President Bush declared that the terrorists were “cowards” who acted because they “hate our freedom.” Because freedom is a foundational moral good for Americans, anyone who would sacrifice his or her life to strike at a moral good must be monumentally evil. Conversely, firefighters all over America were lionized and showered with flowers and money.

But the second-order moral effects were more interesting. Americans did not just want a perfect separation of good and evil; they reacted angrily to anyone who questioned the purity of the separation. For example, the comedian Bill Maher pointed out that the word “coward” did not apply to the terrorists. Agreeing with a comment from a guest on his television talk show, he said: “We have been the cowards. Lobbing cruise missiles from two thousand miles away. That’s cowardly. Staying in the airplane when it hits the building, say what you want about it, not cowardly.” An uproar ensued, and many stations stopped broadcasting Maher’s program. Maher’s use of the word “coward” was certainly more semantically correct than Bush’s, but Maher had violated both halves of the moral purity process: America was not perfectly virtuous, and the terrorists were not perfectly craven. Similar condemnation was heaped on anyone else who suggested that American foreign policy played some role in causing the attacks. This second-order process—punishing people who fail to vilify consensually shared demons, or who impugn the perfect motives of consensually shared saints—is sometimes seen in other contexts in which groups come together to fight what they see as evil. Whether the villain is homosexuals or homophobes, African Americans or racists, once a group or movement is formed, any acknowledgment of virtue in the enemy is seen as a kind of treason.

*Moral amplification* can be defined as *the motivated separation and exaggeration of good and evil in the explanation of behavior*. Moral amplification is a way of stating in psychological terms what was known in history as the doctrine of Manichaeism: the belief that the visible world is a product of an eternal struggle between the forces of good/God/light
and the forces of evil/Satan/darkness. Humanity and the material world were created when the forces of darkness penetrated the world of light. People are therefore a mixture of good and evil, and their goal in life should be to work to purify themselves and the world, restoring the perfect separation of good and evil that was the original state of the universe (Wilson, 1967). Manichaeism emanated from Babylonia in the third century and spread widely in the ancient world. While it was eventually ruled to be a heresy in Christianity, it attracted many Christians, including St. Augustine. Part of its appeal, like that of later dualist doctrines in Christianity, was that it helped to reconcile the belief in a just and loving God with the obvious existence of evil in the world. Evil is not God's fault, it is the Devil's, and God needs our help (Russell, 1988).

Moral amplification clearly involves several well-known social–cognitive mechanisms. For example, the fundamental attribution error (Ross, 1977) states that people overscribe both good and bad behaviors of other people to traits rather than taking situational constraints into account. This bias on its own would be sufficient to make people see an illusory Manichaean world full of good and bad people. We can add to this the problem of "naive realism" (Robinson, Keltner, Ward, & Ross, 1995), in which people underestimate the difficulty and ambiguity of the construal process. People believe that they see the facts of a situation as they truly are and have based their judgments on those facts. If the facts are so obvious, then it follows that the other side in a dispute must see the same set of facts, and their disagreement must reflect a radically different and frightening set of values (e.g., a rejection of the value of life, or of autonomy, in the abortion debate). The result is that small differences between groups get amplified into the perception of major and unbridgeable differences.

Once a disagreement is seen as a fight between opposing worldviews, people have a motivation to engage in motivated reasoning (Kunda, 1990; Pyszczynski & Greenberg, 1987). People have already chosen the conclusion they wish to reach, and they search only for evidence that will support that conclusion. Haidt (2001) has recently argued that nearly all moral reasoning is motivated reasoning—at least, in real-life situations in which one cares about the outcome, in contrast to the disembodied hypothetical cases that have been used to elicit moral reasoning in research studies. Thus once a disagreement becomes a moral disagreement, reasoning becomes part of the "war effort," devoted to supporting both the defense (of one's own side) and the offense (criticism of the other side).

The process of purifying good and evil has been described in perhaps the greatest detail by Roy Baumeister. Baumeister (1997) analyzed portrayals of evil in literature and movies, and in laypeople's conceptions, and integrated them all into what he called "the myth of pure evil." The myth has several parts to it, but the three most important parts for our purposes are (1) denying the motivations of the "evildoer"—that is, people resist seeing any coherent reasons for the perpetrators action, beyond sadism (the enjoyment of doing evil things) and greed (the desire for money and power); (2) denying the participation of the victim—that is, people see evil as falling out of the sky onto innocent victims, and they resist the idea that the victims shared any portion of blame; (3) evil is the outsider—that is, the conflict of good versus evil is assimilated to a perceived conflict of ingroup versus outgroup. Cartoon villains, for example, often speak with a foreign accent.

Baumeister's analysis of portrayals of evil fits with his own empirical findings. Baumeister, Stillwell, and Wotman (1990) collected "micronarratives" of real-life conflicts, including both those in which the participant was a victim and those in which the same participant had been the perpetrator of harm. The accounts differed in many ways that can help us to understand the origins and escalations of conflicts. For example, perpetrators were
likely to report mitigating circumstances and reasons for having committed the harm, even though they often acknowledged that they were not fully justified. Victims were much less likely to talk about such factors, if they even knew of them in the first place. Conversely, victims were more likely to describe a string of provocations, the last of which was the trigger for an emotional outburst. Perpetrators, however, saw shorter histories, and often saw the victims reactions as overreactions.

It is interesting to note that Americans and the Muslim minority that supported the September 11 attacks use differing time perspectives that allow each to claim the morally righteous role of victim. For Americans the story begins on September 11 when evil fell, literally, out of a clear blue sky onto 3,000 innocent victims. The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq are, for some Americans, the justified responses to those attacks. For those who sympathize with al Qaeda, however, the story begins long ago, with a series of Western provocations and humiliations of Arab peoples. The September 11 attacks are framed as David finally and heroically standing up to Goliath. (Note: Because of the moral amplification processes still operating in the United States, the authors feel compelled to state that they themselves do not endorse al Qaeda’s framing of the attacks.) There are many differences between secular Western morality and fundamentalist Islam, but those differences appear much larger than they are when both sides use the myth of pure evil to view the events of September 11.

WHY AMPLIFY?

Why do people systematically misunderstand their social worlds, amplifying small differences into large ones? Why do people seem to like the myth of pure evil? It is obvious that victims benefit from the “myth” because it frees them from blame, while amplifying the call to arms from potential allies in the struggle against the perpetrator. But it is more difficult to explain why people are drawn to the myth to explain other people’s misfortunes. After all, the existence of free-floating evil preying on perfectly innocent victims is an unsettling threat to people’s belief in a just world (Lerner & Miller, 1978). Furthermore, listening to the exaggerated claims of others may lead us astray and decrease our chances of forming relationships with ethical people. Perhaps there are other psychological or material benefits to employing the myth of pure evil and exaggerating the separation of good and evil?

The Intuitive Theologian

Tetlock, Kristel, Elson, Green, and Lerner (2000) examined two functionalist frameworks that people are often said to adopt in the judgment and choice literature: the framework of the intuitive scientist, striving to maximize accuracy, and the framework of the intuitive economist, striving to maximize utility. In a series of studies he and his colleagues have demonstrated that these two utilitarian frameworks cannot account for a variety of phenomena in which people seem to be working to satisfy more existential needs. He argues that we sometimes work within the social-functionalist framework of the intuitive theologian, which strives to protect sacred values against secular encroachment. For example, Tetlock et al. (2000) asked people to contemplate policies that would create legal commercial markets for body parts, sex, orphans, and other things that are thought by most Americans to be off limits for purchase. Not surprisingly, most people were against such policies. More interestingly, people (particularly political liberals) reported that they would feel high levels of moral outrage toward anyone who favored such policies, or who even contemplated making
such “taboo trade-offs.” Similarly, Tetlock et al. (2000) showed that religious Christians resisted even considering a set of “heretical counterfactuals,” such as “what if Joseph had not believed that Mary was pregnant via the holy ghost and had therefore abandoned her. Jesus would then have grown up in a single-parent household, and would have turned out differently.” And across several studies, participants who were forced by the experiment simply to contemplate taboo trade-offs or heretical counterfactuals were more likely to avail themselves of opportunities for “moral cleansing,” such as volunteering for organizations dedicated to defending the challenged values.

Tetlock organizes his findings in terms of the “sacred value protection model,” which posits that people respond with outrage, disgust, harsh attributions, and enthusiastic support for punishment toward people who are willing even to entertain thoughts that challenge or threaten the collective conscience. In other words, not only do people easily separate the world into a battle of good versus evil, but they readily judge others in terms of whether they are right-thinking or wrong-thinking people. But this is not a final answer, as we can still ask: Why do we need to protect sacred values?

**Terror Management Theory**

Terror management theory (TMT; see Solomon, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski, Chapter 2, this volume) draws on the work of Becker (1973) to explain the motivation behind moral amplification. Because people know that they will die, they have a continual need ward off or repress a ubiquitous fear of death and insignificance. People do this in part by creating and clinging to heroic narratives. By believing that one is part of a team fighting for virtue and against evil, one attains both a meaningful worldview and a valued place within that worldview. Becker drew on the Freudian notion of transference to explain our attachment to heroes. In transference, a patient transfers the feelings she had toward her parents as a child onto the therapist. She blows the therapist up larger than life to create a powerful figure on whom she can become dependent. Becker suggests that we do the same thing with heroes, all in an attempt to avoid the existential threats of mortality and insignificance. Becker goes further, suggesting that negative or “hate transference” helps to explain our attachment to villains as well:

> It helps us to fix ourselves in the world, to create a target for our own feelings even though those feelings are destructive. We can establish our basic organicism footing with hate as well as by submission. In fact, hate enlivens us more, which is why we see more intense hate in the weaker ego states. The only thing is that hate, too, blows the other person up larger than he deserves. (1973, p. 144)

By continually projecting our childhood feelings of love and hate onto people in our adult world, we can create a rich Manichaean world in which our lives are bound to have meaning.

Whatever one thinks of the psychoanalytic emphasis on childhood, Becker’s general claim that fear of death leads to both love and hate has received strong empirical support. The original empirical finding of TMT was in fact moral amplification: After thinking about their own death, participants were more critical of people who violated cultural norms or who were outgroup members, while being more praising of people who upheld group norms (Rosenblatt, Greenberg, Solomon, Pyszczynski, & Lyon, 1989). Even more to the point, Greenberg et al. (1990; extpt. 3) found that mortality salience amplified Americans’ liking
and disliking of people who wrote essays for and against the American system. TMT works particularly well in understanding the moral amplification that occurred after September 11, when Americans were forced to confront their own vulnerability to death on a scale never before seen so directly (see Pyszczynski, Solomon, & Greenberg, 2003).

DIMENSIONS OF SOCIAL COGNITION: HIERARCHY, SOLIDARITY, AND DIVINITY

The theories just described can help us understand the ubiquitous phenomenon of moral amplification. People seem to want to live in a world of saints and demons, but because moral reality is so muddy they resort to a variety of mechanisms to separate the light from the darkness and amplify the difference between good and bad. In this section we propose an additional mechanism that complements those described so far. We suggest that human social cognition is designed to view the social world as being spread out along at least three dimensions of social space, one of which is a specifically moral dimension.

As people interact with each other, they effortlessly and automatically make several absolute appraisals about each other, such as the sex and race of the person. But several other appraisals are relative appraisals, about where the other stands in relation to the self. Social theorists have most often talked about two such dimensions (Brown & Gilman, 1960; Hamilton & Sanders, 1981; Sahlin, 1965), each of which is clearly visible in the lives of other primates (de Waal, 1996). The first is a horizontal dimension sometimes labeled "solidarity" or "closeness," which refers to the fact that in any group, some people are felt to be closer or more allied to the self than are others. Friendship and alliance seem to be universally present features of human and chimpanzee life (Brown, 1991; de Waal, 1996). The second dimension is variously labeled "hierarchy" or "status," and it refers to the fact that individuals in a society usually vary on power or rank. Human societies are quite variable on this dimension, ranging from rigidly structured military orders and caste-based cultures through adamantly egalitarian bands of hunter-gatherers. However, even among egalitarians, there is a cognitive preparedness for life in hierarchies, which is only held in abeyance by chronic vigilance against those who would seize power (Boehm, 1999). The societies of other primates are also quite variable but also generally hierarchically structured (de Waal, 1996; Boehm, 1999).

The human mind seems therefore to be designed to play out its social life along these two dimensions, which can be crossed to create a Cartesian space (see Figure 20.1). As Brown and Gilman (1960) showed, many languages (such as French and German) encode both of these dimensions into their forms of address (e.g., tu versus vous to connote both familiarity and lower status of the addressee). More interestingly, even in languages such as English, which lack such explicit pronoun coding, speakers find ways to mark the same two dimensions (e.g., using first name, as opposed to title plus last name, to connote both familiarity and lower status of the addressee). These dimensions also correspond to the two dimensions of valence and power that Osgood (1962) found were used in most forms of human appraisal. However there are reasons to believe that there is (at least) one more dimension at work.

Haidt (2000, 2003b) argued that in many cultures people and other social entities are arranged along a vertical dimension that runs from Gods, angels, and saints above down through animals and demons below. This dimension may be labeled "elevation" versus "degradation," "purity" versus "pollution," or, most generally, "divinity" versus
“animality.” Such a scala naturae or “chain of being” was originally formulated by Plato and Aristotle as a description of the degree of perfection of everything in creation, running from God at the top down through spirits, man, the lower animals, plants, rocks, and finally formless matter. The scala naturae was not exactly a moral dimension, for rocks and dirt are not less good than plants and butterflies. But Aristotle’s other writings reveal an explicitly vertical moral dimension in which human beings occupy the middle ground between the gods above and the brutes below. He cites the contemporary idea that “an excess of virtue can change a man into a god” (Nicomachean Ethics, Bk. VI, 1145a) and he discusses numerous examples of “brutish” behavior found particularly among barbarians. For example:

... the female who is said to rip open pregnant women and devour the infants; or what is related about some of the savage tribes near the black sea, that they delight in eating raw meat of human flesh, and that some of them lend each other their children for a feast. (Bk. VI, 1148b)

It is noteworthy that Aristotle chose examples that blended two types of disgust—physical and moral. The idea that people of “lower” races and castes are polluted both by their physical activities and by their lack of ethics has been found in many parts of the world (e.g., in Nazi attitudes about Jews and in American segregationist attitudes about blacks). In both cases the response by the “superior” group was separation (to guard physical, sexual, and moral purity) and cruelty (justified by the “inhuman” conduct of the “lower” group).

As Christianity grew in the ancient world it brought with it ideas from the Near East about evil and the devil. In the new cosmology, some of the angels on high had sinned and “fallen” down below, converting the scala naturae into a truly moral dimension with perfect goodness at the top (the Greek gods had never been perfectly good), and perfect evil at the bottom (Russell, 1988). Human beings were again seen to inhabit a middle region, and to contain elements of both good and evil.

In Hinduism and Buddhism a similar idea appears: that all beings can be placed onto a great vertical line, and that, at least for human beings in the middle regions of this line, one rises and falls based on the virtue of one’s deeds (karma) in this life. Doing good works in this life adds to one’s karmic bank account, and one comes back at a higher position in the next life. Doing bad deeds subtracts from one’s account, making one come back as a lower being the next time around. Hindu conceptions of this vertical dimension differ in important
ways from Christian conceptions—for example, the ultimate goal in Hinduism is not to make it to the top but to get off of the line by breaking all attachments, including attachments to good and evil (Klostermaier, 1989). Yet despite these differences, the frequency with which cultures equate up with moral goodness and down with vice or badness suggests that the human mind is predisposed to take verticality as a source domain in our physical embodiment and then use it as a metaphor to structure our social and moral embodiment (Lakoff, 1987). There is even a recent finding that people are quicker to judge the valence of words when good words are presented at the top of a computer screen and bad words on the bottom than when they are presented in reversed positions (Meier & Robinson, in press).

Hinduism also draws our attention to an aspect of verticality that is clear in many world religions: the equation of up with physical purity and down with physical pollution. The daily practice of Hinduism requires great attention to the regulation of one’s bodily purity. Events such as defecating, menstruating, or having sex taint a person with a physical essence of corporeality that is seen to be incompatible with approaching God (Fuller, 1992). Hinduism (like Islam, Judaism, and many other religions) prescribes methods of cleansing and purifying the body before one should approach God in prayer or by physically entering holy places. The link between divinity and physical purity may sound odd to modern Christians, who are not required to bathe before entering a church. But in earlier times Cotton Mather’s idea that “cleanliness is next to Godliness” may have sounded like a self-evident truth. Even into the 20th century a language of purity and pollution was quite common in Christian writings. For example, one author of advice books for young men (Stall, 1904) urged his readers to bear in mind that “God gave him a moral sense and a spiritual nature, and these elevate him immeasurably above all other creatures of God’s hand” (p. 29). To be worthy of this elevated position, Stall urged his readers to guard their personal purity by avoiding polluting practices such as masturbation, eating pork, and reading novels.

Haidt (2003b) has argued that this linkage of divinity, morality, and physical purity is an easy one for human beings to develop because we are all built with a pair of related emotions—disgust and elevation—which will be described in detail later. For now the important point is that people, or cultures, seem predisposed (though not pre-ordained) to interpret their social worlds in terms of a vertical dimension in which divinity, virtue, and physical purity are up, and bestiality, vice, and physical pollution are down.

THE EMOTIONS THAT TELL US ABOUT SAINTS AND DEMONS

Many approaches to emotion have focused on the valenced appraisals that trigger subsequent changes in cognition, motivation, and behavior (Frijda, 1986; Schwarz & Clore, 1996). If we limit ourselves to those appraisals that judge a person’s actions against standards or expectations, we can create a 2 x 2 table, crossing positive versus negative evaluation with evaluation of self versus other. Table 1 shows these four cells, with the principal emotions labeled in each cell (following Ortony, Clore, & Collins, 1988, with some updates from Haidt, 2003a). The numbers after each emotion show the number of records found in a PsycInfo search on that term, limited to the title and key phrase fields of all references posted as of March 2003.

Table 20.1 shows a severe imbalance, with far more research done on the negative or blaming emotions than on the positive or praising emotions. Table 20.1 also shows that there has been a moderate amount of work on the “self-praising” emotions such as pride,
but that there has been very little work on the “other-praising” emotions, that is, the positive emotions that people feel when other people do good things. In our own research (Algoe & Haidt, 2003) we have begun studying these emotions by asking people to tell us stories about times when they have seen everyday saints and demons. We asked the following specific questions to elicit these stories:

1. Please think of a specific time when you saw someone demonstrating humanity’s higher or better nature. Please pick a situation in which you were not the beneficiary, that is, you saw someone doing something good, honorable, or charitable for someone else.

2. Please think of a specific time when you saw someone demonstrating humanity’s lower or worse nature. Please pick a situation in which you were not the victim, that is, you saw someone do something bad, dishonorable, or sleazy to someone else.

We then asked participants to write out their stories and to answer a series of open-ended and rating questions designed to measure the various components of the emotions they remembered feeling, if any. As a control group, we asked a third group of participants to write about a situation we expected to elicit simple happiness. Specifically, we asked people to tell us about a time when “a really good thing happened to you. Please pick a situation in which something that you had really been hoping for, or wanting to happen, finally happened.” We used happiness as a comparison because it is the “standard” positive emotion, and we wanted to determine whether responses to good deeds were anything other than simple happiness.

Table 20.2 shows a summary of some of the main findings. As expected, in the Good Event condition people reported feeling happy, wanting to celebrate, and wanting to tell others about their good fortune, or good feelings. In the Good Deed condition, the most commonly reported word is also happiness, but we do not believe participants here are reporting the same kind of happiness as in the Good Event condition. In fact, we believe it is a different positive emotion, which we call elevation. Elevation is a member of the broader emotion family of awe, specifically, awe at a display of moral beauty (Haidt, 2003b; Keltner & Haidt, 2003). The motivations reported in the Good Deed condition suggest the operation of a moral emotion, that is, an emotion that makes people care about the state of the social world, and makes them want to do something to improve it (Haidt, 2003a). Participants reported wanting to do good deeds themselves and wanting to tell other people about the good-deed doer.

Conversely, the Bad Deed condition produced a mix of self-labeled anger and disgust, with motivations that were generally the opposite of the Good Deed condition: to tell others
TABLE 20.2. Summary of Recall Study of Good and Bad Deeds

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elicitor</th>
<th>Good event (something positive happens to you)</th>
<th>Good deed (Someone does something good for another)</th>
<th>Bad deed (someone does something bad to another)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reported emotion word*</td>
<td>• Happy (84%)</td>
<td>• Happy (40%)</td>
<td>• Anger (32%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Awe/admiration (20%)</td>
<td>• Disgust (21%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivations</td>
<td>• Celebrate</td>
<td>• Tell others about good person</td>
<td>• Tell others about bad person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Tell others about positive feelings</td>
<td>• Praise good person</td>
<td>• Chastise bad person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship considerations</td>
<td>• Wanted to spend time with the person who made them feel good</td>
<td>• Gained respect and appreciation for other</td>
<td>• Lost respect and appreciation for other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Emphasized strengthening/stronger relationship with other</td>
<td>• Emphasized weakening or distancing selves from relationship with other</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The five emotion word clusters listed represent all word clusters that were listed by at least 10% of the sample, and they account for over 60% of participant responses. There were many other idiosyncratic emotion and nonemotion words.

about the bad person and to directly chastise or criticize the person. It is interesting to note that participants in these two conditions often reported updating their degree of respect, admiration, or appreciation for the people in their social worlds. Our hypothesized vertical dimension of divinity is all about maintaining a running balance or scorecard about the virtue of other people. The good and bad deeds that people do cause us to change their scores on this dimension, and each time we make a change, we feel something. These feelings are a kind of information (Schwarz & Clore, 1996) that helps us modify our desires for interaction. For example, when asked if the action changed how the participant felt toward the other, two participants in the Good Deed condition said:

"Yes, it did change the way I think about him. Before this, he was my best friend but after that I even looked up to him as someone with qualities worth emulating."

"The act was completely selfless. The act made me feel very good about human nature for that one instant and I looked up to my classmate as a role model."

In the Bad Deed condition, two participants said:

"I thought he was even more of a weasel."

"The actions of his mother represent the basest nature of man because she was his mother and refused to protect him like a mother should."

Importantly, people experiencing these emotions did their part to amplify the distinctions between good and bad through their behaviors and motivations. Not only did they want to praise or vilify the other publically, they thought about their relationships with the others in new ways. Good deeds often gave rise to a desire for stronger relationships with the virtuous other, while bad deeds did the opposite. If we assume that people sometimes do act on these motivations, at least by gossiping, then we can see how emotions such as elevation, admiration, disgust, and anger help to churn the waters of social relationships, encour-
aging those who did not witness the original act to choose sides and update their moral registers for the people involved.

These findings fit with an earlier study by Rozin, Lowery, Imada, and Haidt (1999) on the “CAD triad hypothesis.” The CAD hypothesis states that the three “other-critical” emotions of contempt, anger, and disgust are linked to the ethics of community, autonomy, and divinity proposed by Shweder, Much, Mahapatra, and Park (1997). These three ethics can be thought of as clusters of moral concerns or goals that vary in strength across cultures. Descriptions of the three ethics that were actually given to participants by Rozin et al. (1999) are as follows:

1. (The ethics of Autonomy). Individual freedom/rights violations. In these cases an action is wrong because it directly hurts another person, or infringes upon his/her rights or freedoms as an individual. To decide if an action is wrong, you think about things like harm, rights, justice, freedom fairness, individualism, and the importance of individual choice and liberty.

2. (The ethics of Community). Community/hierarchy violations. In these cases an action is wrong because a person fails to carry out his or her duties within a community, or to the social hierarchy within the community. To decide if an action is wrong, you think about things like duty, role-obligation, respect for authority, loyalty, group honor, interdependence, and the preservation of the community.

3. (The ethics of Divinity). Divinity/Purity Violations. In these cases a person disrespects the sacredness of God, or causes impurity or degradation to himself/herself, or to others. To decide if an action is wrong, you think about things like sin, the natural order of things, sanctity, and the protection of the soul or the world from degradation and spiritual defilement. (pp. 575-576)

Rozin et al. generated a corpus of 27 situations that were a priori violations of one of the three ethics and then asked participants in the United States and Japan to match the situations to the emotion words “contempt,” “anger,” and “disgust” (Study 1a); photographs of people making facial expressions of contempt, anger, and disgust (Study 1b); and descriptions of the three ethics, as given previously (Study 2). In an additional study participants were asked to create the facial expression they would make if they actually saw each of the 27 situations occurring. Across all studies and both cultures, a strong relationship was found: violations of the ethics of community were linked with contempt, violations of the ethics of autonomy were linked with anger, and violations of the ethics of divinity were linked with disgust. (The odds of achieving such a neat match of first letters, when no etymological roots are shared, is less than 1 in 10,000.)

The CAD study demonstrates that there is emotional order in the moral world, and that the emotions of contempt, anger, and disgust are common responses to certain classes of violations. Both the CAD study and the Algoe and Haidt study show that anger is the most common emotional response to everyday violations of rights, but that disgust is often triggered in a subclass of cases where people’s actions are perceived to be degrading or sleazy.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR THE EXISTENTIAL PSYCHOLOGY OF MORALITY

The creation of a moral world, full of saints and demons, heros and villains, seems to be an important part of the human reaction to existential concerns. Processes such as moral amplification may help to give people a sense that they are part of a larger cosmic struggle, and that they have an important role to play. Morality may therefore be an important area for
the future of experimental existential psychology. While work in TMT has already begun to demonstrate both prosocial (Jonas, Schimel, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski, 2003) and antisocial effects of mortality salience (McGregor et al., 1998), we suggest that existential psychology might profitably look to two new sources for inspiration and hypotheses.

First, just as Freud looked to the myths and practices of other cultures, existential psychology should forge links with cultural psychology and psychological anthropology. Mental processes are more clear, vivid, and available for inspection in some cultures than in others. For example, processes related to purity and pollution, hierarchy, and caste divisions (which are based on hierarchy as well as purity) have been extensively described by anthropologists in India, and these psychosocial facts seem to play an important role in providing Indians with a sense of meaning and belonging. Yet many of the same processes seem to be at work in modern Western cultures, although people have much more difficulty talking about them because such issues are politically unacceptable in a democratic society. For example, the emergence of “cooties” (invisible contagion from children of the opposite sex, or from unpopular children) among American children in elementary school seems quite puzzling, unless one views cooties as the emergence of the mental machinery of purity and pollution, which is then left relatively unsupported by a somewhat egalitarian culture (Haidt, 2001).

Second, just as psychology is currently experiencing a (re)birth of positive psychology, existential psychologists might profitably think about whether there is such a thing as existential positive psychology. The origins of existential psychology in the work of Freud and Becker guarantees that constructs such as fear of death, anxiety, isolation, and the search for meaning in an intrinsically meaningless world will be at the heart of the field. But experimental existential psychologists should be careful about automatically assuming that the positive parts of life (e.g., love, parenting, altruism, creativity, and productive work) are always driven by or reactions to fear, loneliness, and alienation. As humanistic psychology argued (Maslow, 1970), there may be some more thoroughly positive and growth oriented processes and motives at work as well. The positive emotions, such as elevation and awe, offer one possible starting point (Fredrickson, 1998; Keltner & Haidt, 2003). Existential psychology and positive psychology may each help the other to avoid lying down in a Procrustean bed.

William James (1902/1961) said “Mankind’s common instinct for reality... has always held the world to be essentially a theater for heroism” (quoted by Becker, 1973, p. 1). If so, then moral amplification and moral emotions such as elevation and disgust help set the stage.

REFERENCES


