4.3 Social Intuitionists Reason, in Conversation

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How easy it is to see your brother’s faults, how hard to face your own. You winnow his in the wind like chaff, but yours you hide, like a cheat covering up an unlucky throw

—Buddha (Dhammapada 67, in Byrom, 1993)

Sages have long noted how difficult it is for people to find flaws in themselves or in their own ideas. We need others to do the hard work of critique because most of us find it far easier to see the “speck” in our neighbor’s eye than the “plank” in our own (Mathew, 7:4–5). This psychological Great Truth is consistent with the social intuitionist model’s (SIM’s) claim that people rarely engage in good, unbiased, balanced moral reasoning on their own, but in conversation, where people can point out each other’s flaws and give each other reasons, good reasoning often emerges from the dyad. This psychological Great Truth is also a superb justification for a volume such as this one, where a debate between authors and commentators can help the participants to see faults they could not find for themselves. Debates can often descend into warfare when each side uses its rhetorical powers only to craft defenses of its positions and attacks on all others. But when a debate begins with a mutual appreciation of the partners’ virtues, and when criticisms are offered constructively and with nuance and moderation, the debate becomes spirited conversation, which is one of the joys of academic life. We are therefore quite fortunate that the editors have found for us two such spirited conversation partners.

Narvaez and Jacobson both begin their commentaries by granting that the SIM (Haidt, 2001; Haidt & Joseph, 2004; Haidt & Bjorklund, this volume) is largely correct in its two most basic descriptive claims: (1) moral judgments are influenced by intuitive processes to a greater degree than most previous theories acknowledged, and (2) moral judgment is a social
phenomenon, and should not be studied as the private act of a lone reasoner. Narvaez and Jacobson then each go on to express two kinds of concerns: (1) scientific concerns that we have taken these two claims further than the evidence warrants and (2) moral and philosophical concerns about the implications of the model, such as the fear that it opens the door to moral relativism and to the justification of any moral system, from rampant consumerism through Nazism.

In this round of the conversation, we’ll do two things. First, we’ll briefly address most of the scientific concerns by pointing out two ways in which we believe the SIM has been misconstrued—due in part to our own lack of clarity—and where disagreement may vanish once claims are made explicit. Next, we’ll engage Narvaez and Jacobson on three topics about which we think disagreement is more substantive. Narvaez and Jacobson both point out concerns that we think are valid and that might even get us to change (slightly) our minds and our model.

**Misconstrual 1: Moral Judgment Is the Same as Moral Decision Making**

Narvaez’s first of four points is that the SIM is limited to a “small sample” of the relevant processes of moral psychology: it is a theory about moral judgment, not moral decision making. Her second point is the related claim that when one examines moral decision making, one often find true moral deliberation—private, internal, conscious weighing of options and consequences. She offers us a snapshot of twelve such moments of deliberation that occurred to her over the course of two days. In other words, she claims, the SIM is not a good description of moral decision making.

We quite agree. The SIM was designed to capture the phenomenology and causal processes of moral judgment, not moral decision making, because in our opinion those two processes are not closely related, functionally speaking. It may be parsimonious to suppose that there exists a single moral faculty that handles both moral judgment and moral action and that plays a large role in the formation of one’s moral identity. However, we take a functionalist, evolutionary approach in which judging others and choosing actions for oneself are very different processes. Sages and scientists have long marveled at the disconnect between our righteousness and strictness in judging others and our leniency and flexibility in choosing our own actions. Psychologists since Freud have explained this disconnect with some form of modularity theory: the mind is divided into parts that sometimes conflict, and each part does not have full access to the information or motivations of the other parts. Kurzban and Aktipis
(2006) recently challenged the very idea of studying the “self” in social psychology; their review of social cognitive phenomena (such as self-deception, hypocrisy, and self-presentation) strongly suggests the operation of multiple functionally specific modules, some of which were shaped by selection pressures for accuracy, others by selection pressures for reputation management or for material gain. And we have proposed that even moral judgment involves not one but several functional systems (the “five foundations”) which evolved to make us emotionally responsive to five kinds of patterns in our social worlds.

We therefore stick to our analogy that moral judgments are like aesthetic judgments (made quickly and intuitively), but we extend the analogy to acknowledge what Narvaez is right about: moral decisions are like aesthetic decisions. When a person must choose a paint color for his kitchen, a great many factors come into play. One’s own gut feelings are quite important but one must also ask: Will the rest of my family like it? Will it match the floor color? Will this color make the kitchen look bright or sterile? What will people think of me if I pick this unusual color? There are many factors to consider besides one’s first intuitive response.

Moral and aesthetic judgments are so quick and easy because so little is usually at stake for the self: we can make a hundred judgments each day and experience them as little more than a few words of praise or blame, linked to flashes of feeling, that dart through consciousness. But moral and aesthetic decisions are different: they have real consequences for the self and others, and these consequences can only be examined by running the simulation in one’s head. “If I choose this action/color, what will happen? Oh, that would be terrible. How about that action/color? Yes, better.” Narvaez captured the process perfectly when she described her own deliberations. It is noteworthy that all 12 of Narvaez’s entries in her diary of “moral judgment” are actually deliberations about what she should do. Not a single one involves deliberations about whether another person did something right versus wrong.

We have focused our writings on moral judgment, but we have never before been explicit that the SIM as published applies only to moral judgment, not to choices about morally relevant actions. We suggest that the SIM can be altered slightly to become a model of moral choice: just make links 5 (reasoned judgment) and 6 (private reflection) into solid lines and state that “when making real behavioral choices, people often do deliberate.” They try to imagine what consequences would follow each choice, and they think about principles that would support or oppose each choice. Thus modified, the SIM still retains three advantages over a straight
rationalist approach to moral decision making: First, for most morally relevant actions, there is no deliberation; we all do the right thing most of the time without thinking about it. Even heroes who jump into rushing rivers to save people’s lives generally state, when interviewed afterwards, that they didn’t think about it; they just acted. The importance of automaticity in moral judgment can therefore be brought into moral action as well. Second, when deliberation does occur, it is often biased by desire and an uneven search for evidence. Who would deny that people are extremely good at finding reasons to do what they want to do? Third, the phenomenology of moral choice blends intuition and conscious deliberation. In Narvaez’s metaphor for her own experience, “intuition danced with conscious reasoning, taking turns doing the leading” during her attempts at “‘feeling out’ consequences of different decisions” (p. ••). We find this an apt description of moral deliberation. It is also exactly how we described the loop that results from using the private reflection link, which we described as “having an inner dialogue with oneself” in which conscious deliberation helps us to “feel our way to the best answer using a combination of conscious and unconscious, affective and ‘rational’ processes” (p. ••).

Misconstrual 2: Modularity Is Phrenology

The nineteenth-century phrenologists were spectacularly wrong—the cerebral cortex is not divided up into discrete spots that happen to map onto our psychological words (e.g., “amorousness,” “inquisitiveness,” “acquisitiveness”). In discarding phrenology, however, some twentieth-century psychologists seem to have moved to an equally extreme view of the cortex—a blank slate view in which any part of the cortex could just as well take on any function, so to the extent that there is localization of function it must be a product of childhood learning. Narvaez appears to endorse such a view, suggesting that the psychological propensities we say are innate (the five foundations of morality) are better described through “ecological contextualism” in which brain specializations arise gradually in childhood when “experience-based units . . . [form] as a result of the plasticity of the neocortex grounded within the limits and propensities of subcortical adaptations” (p. ••). We do not believe Narvaez could be proposing that the entire cerebral cortex is a blank slate, constrained only by subcortical structures. We’ll assume she means only that a substantial portion of the frontal cortex is blank in this way and that there are (therefore?) few if any innate ideas that would be relevant to moral psychology.
As we read the literature from neuroanatomy and behavioral genetics, blank-slate models of the brain are no longer tenable. Recent research on the relationship between genes and brain development (summarized in Marcus, 2004) indicates a new resolution of the nature/nurture dichotomy in which the brain is plastic yet full of innate structure. The old model was that genes are a *blueprint* for building a body (including a brain), and so parts of the mind that show variation across cultures must not have been specified in the blueprint. Furthermore, because there are so few genes (only around 20,000), they couldn’t possibly specify very much of the blueprint for the entire body and its 20-billion-neuron brain. Experience must do most of the designing. However the new understanding of the genome is that it is not at all like a blueprint; it is rather more like a *recipe* for building a person. Single genes don’t code for specific neurons, brain regions, or modular functions (just as a single line in a recipe doesn’t correspond to a spot in the final cake), yet a particular configuration of genes ends up building a brain with a particular structure, including a great deal of localized function. A single change in a single gene can have enormous transformational effects (which can’t happen with blueprints but happens easily with recipes). However—and this is crucial for our present discussion—the genes themselves remain active throughout life, and the structures they build can be modified by environmental experience.

Marcus (2004) uses the metaphor that genes create the first draft of the brain, and experience edits it: “Nature bestows upon the newborn a considerably complex brain, but one that is best seen as prewired—flexible and subject to change—rather than hardwired, fixed, and immutable” (p. 12). That is exactly the balance of nativism and empiricism we strive for in our “five foundations” theory: Evolutionary forces have “prewired” human brains to readily develop concerns about harm/care, fairness/reciprocity, in-group/loyalty, authority/respect, and purity/sanctity. This prewiring explains the otherwise uncanny similarity in cultural practices such as initiation rites, or displays of deference, or rules about purity and pollution that regulate food, sexuality, and menstruation in so many cultures. Yet at the same time our theory requires that the first draft be heavily edited by each culture, which explains how modern secular and technologically oriented societies have managed to erase or ignore some (but not all!) of their prewired purity and authority concerns, while greatly elaborating upon their ability to think about harm, rights, and justice.

We therefore think it quite appropriate and consistent with current brain science to speak of mental modules, as long as our modules are not taken to be the phrenologists’ specific spots on the brain. We use the term
“modularity” as a functional claim, not an anatomical one (Haidt & Joseph, 2004; in press). Functional modularity (the tendency to make quick, automatic moral judgments using knowledge that is partially encapsulated and not fully open to revision by other knowledge) need not be present in the brain of a newborn, but by the time the child is a competent member of society, she will have a mind full of mental modules that assist her in making rapid intuitive judgments. The psychology of moving from novice to expert, which Narvaez discusses, surely plays a role in this development. We insist only that the novice-to-expert transition does not play out on a blank slate or open neural canvas; it plays out in a mind that was prepared and prewired, by evolution, for some kinds of expertise and not others.

**Conversation Topic 1: How Broad Is the Moral Domain?**

There are so many approaches to morality in modern psychology and philosophy, but there seems to be a general working consensus that morality is about protecting and/or helping individual human beings (and occasionally animals). Utilitarianism is based directly on the maximization of welfare across people, while Kantians use a language of respect for persons. Either way, moral discussions seem always to be about drowning children, runaway trolleys, lies told to save lives, and other dilemmas that force trade-offs between the rights and welfare of individuals. The debate in moral psychology between Carol Gilligan and Lawrence Kohlberg loosely mirrored the utilitarian/Kantian debate: is morality about caring for people directly (Gilligan) or about more abstract principles of justice and rights which ultimately afford people the greatest protections (Kohlberg)? Whichever side psychologists took, everyone agreed about the borders of the moral domain and the moral entities within that domain. Elliot Turiel (1983) codified this individual-centered view of the moral domain as prescriptive judgments of justice, rights, and welfare pertaining to how people ought to relate to each other. Moral prescriptions are not relative to the social context, nor are they defined by it. Correspondingly, children’s moral judgments are not derived directly from social institutional systems but from features inherent to social relationships—including experiences involving harm to persons, violations of rights, and conflicts of competing claims. (p. 3)

From our perspective, the fields of moral psychology and philosophy both agreed long ago to limit discussion to issues related to the first two of our five intuitive foundations of morality: issues of harm and issues related to fairness (including reciprocity, justice, and rights). It is from this two-foundation perspective that Jacobson doubts that health-conscious eaters
ascribe moral superiority to themselves. He grants that a militant vegan, who is outraged by harm to animals, is taking a moral position. But he claims that the “uptown sophisticate” (p. ••) who holds burger eaters in contempt makes a judgment of taste, not morality. On the standard definition (morality = harm, rights, justice), he is right.

However, we are not interested in the standard definition, handed down to psychologists from philosophy and then applied in a top-down and Procrustean way to real people. We are moral psychologists, interested in how people in diverse societies live their lives and regulate their own behaviors and those of others. We have studied moral judgments in several nations (Brazil, India, Japan, the United States, and Sweden) and read many religious texts and ethnographies of traditional societies. Taking a bottom-up approach, we ask: what is the moral domain as people actually create it? When we examine what people care about, gossip about, legislate, regulate, prohibit, and praise, we find only one culture on earth that limits the moral domain to issues of harm, rights, and justice: well-educated secular Westerners, particularly those who are political liberals. It is no coincidence that nearly all moral philosophers and moral psychologists belong to this group. Empirical research has now documented that this group limits its moral judgments to violations of Shweder’s “ethics of autonomy,” while the moral domain is much broader among those of low social class in the United States and Brazil (Haidt, Koller, & Dias, 1993), in India (Jensen, 1998), among religious Americans (Jensen, 1997), and among political conservatives compared to political liberals (Haidt & Graham, in press-a, in press-b; Haidt & Hersh, 2001). Real people in most human cultures care about much more than the welfare of individuals: they care about the prestige, stability, and honor of their in-groups and institutions; they care about their traditions and symbols; they care about whether people are fulfilling the duties of their roles (vs. pursuing their own personal goals and need for self-expression); and they care about whether people are living in a holy and pure way, treating their bodies like temples, rather than like playgrounds. In other words, for most people in all historical eras, the moral domain is based on all five intuitive foundations, not just the first two.

From this five foundation perspective, the uptown sophisticate who looks down on those who eat junk food is in fact expressing moral concerns about purity versus pollution. She is, as we say, feeling “holier than thou.” However, those who have a two-foundation morality are unskilled at seeing purity violations and uneasy with disgust-based judgments (see Nussbaum, 2004). They therefore misunderstand the sophisticate’s judgment and dismiss it as mere snobbery, just as they misunderstand the conservative
opposition to gay marriage and dismiss it as nonmoral/immoral homophobia (see Haidt & Graham, in press-a, for a discussion of this issue). When Jacobson accuses us of having “too capacious a notion of the moral emotions” (p. ••) and of having a theory so broad that it is better described as a theory of “evaluative judgment” (p. ••) than a theory of morality, we respond by saying that our broad notions are appropriate for the breadth of the moral domain. Many emotions besides anger, guilt, and sympathy play an important role in moral judgment. Many evaluations besides those pertaining to harm, rights, and justice are moral evaluations.

We hope that Jacobson will continue his generous tendency to grant us our empirical claims (about cultural variation in descriptive accounts of the moral domain) and then engage us on normative questions such as whether the three “conservative” foundations (in-group, authority, and purity) can really be used to justify moral claims. Liberals can easily point to bad consequences that follow when societies are based on a strong sense of in-group, respect for authority, and concerns for purity. Such societies can be quite cruel to those within who are labeled as impure or dirty, and they can be aggressive and even genocidal toward neighboring groups. On the other hand, some are quite peaceful, such as Confucian China, and all are likely to provide the sort of rich cultural resources for the construction of meaning and identity that diverse modern democracies have trouble providing (see Appiah, 2005; Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985; Hunter, 2000; Taylor, 1989). The larger challenge for philosophers is to move beyond an individualist-consequentialist framework and take conservative ideas seriously. Might there be a sense in which societies, tribes, families, teams, and institutions are moral entities with a moral worth above and beyond the sum of the individuals that compose them or benefit from them? (See Muller, 1997, for such an argument.)

**Conversation Topic 2: Deliberation, Private versus Social**

Jacobson and Narvaez both claim that the SIM gives too little role to conscious moral deliberation. Jacobson points out that Hume himself wrote that before moral sentiments can be felt, “it is often necessary . . . that much reasoning should precede, that nice distinctions should be made, just conclusions drawn, distant comparisons formed. . . .” (p. ••). Jacobson further claims that in the SIM, “the role of reasoning—at least private reasoning—is both minor and, in an important sense, fraudulent” (p. ••).

Jacobson is certainly correct that one of the six links in the model—the “post hoc reasoning” link—represents a kind of reasoning that is not good
reasoning yet which we often claim as good reasoning when it is our own (but not, usually, when it is produced by someone we disagree with). It is not the reasoning that is fraudulent; it is we who are frauds in our frequent claims that bias and motivated reasoning are all around us, but not in us. The vast social psychological literature on bias agrees with the vast corpus of admonishment from the ancients about hypocrisy to support the claim that people are congenitally bad at overcoming their self-serving motivations when their interests conflict with those of others (see review in Haidt, 2006, chapter 4). We suggested that moral philosophers may be less biased (fraudulent, hypocritical) than others, but Jacobson refused to accept this exemption for his field, stating that any apparent differences between philosophers and others “go out the window when live moral and political problems are at issue” (p. ••). We believe, therefore (and Jacobson seems to agree), that in real-life judgments, where we generally care about the people and actions involved, private reasoning is better described as a post hoc search for justifications of one’s initial intuition than as an honest and open search for truth.

The post hoc reasoning link, however, is just one of six links in the SIM. Four of these links (67%!l) are reasoning links. We have already granted that the reasoned judgment link and the private reflection link may be used fairly often in the course of moral decision making, and this single admission may be enough to account for many of our critics’ insistence that they themselves deliberate more than the SIM seems to allow. However, if we restrict ourselves to moral judgments—to evaluations of the actions or character of other people—then how much of a role does deliberation play? Our answer is that moral deliberation occurs quite frequently in conversation and that moral theorists should start looking more closely at emergent properties of dyads and groups.

In a recent article Neil Levy (2006) provides a better example than we have of how rationality can emerge from a group. He takes the example of academic fields such as social psychology and points out that “the epistemological project in these areas is a community-wide enterprise” (p. 102). Individual social psychologists don’t need to work very hard to seek out challenges to their views; such challenges will be forthcoming. “Distributed cognition, in which argument takes place outside the heads of particular individuals, is much more effective at exposing weaknesses than is any kind of more isolated process, in part because it ensures that the biases to which Haidt points are canceled out” (p. 102). Of course, moral discussions within a society do not have the ruthless correctives of peer review and failed replications to weed out bad moral arguments, so we would not
expect an emergent moral consensus to be as rational (justifiable by reasons and also coherent within itself) as an emergent scientific consensus. Nonetheless, Levy suggests that the past century did involve a great deal of moral progress driven by good arguments, many produced by moral experts (e.g., philosophers and religious leaders) that filtered through populations and changed consensual views (e.g., about civil rights, women’s rights, and human rights).¹ We agree with Levy’s analysis. We add only that moral progress was probably driven more by words and images that triggered affectively laden intuitions (such as Martin Luther King’s highly metaphorical “I Have a Dream” speech, and the televised images of peaceful marchers being attacked by police dogs) than by well-reasoned arguments that convinced people to care about the violated rights of strangers to whom they had no emotional ties.

Conversation Topic 3: Implications of the SIM for Ethics

Cross-disciplinary work is always risky, and we plead guilty to the charge of recklessness in our first attempt to spell out the philosophical implications of the SIM. Narvaez and Jacobson both reject our claim that “[a] fully enculturated person is a virtuous person.” Both accuse us of dignifying conformity and moving dangerously close to a relativism that would grant moral legitimacy to whatever most members of a moral parish, even a Nazi parish, happen to believe. We are neither relativists nor emotivists (at least, not on any simple version of those positions), but we understand why our writings have let some critics think that we are. So let us try to clarify three points.

First, the SIM is about intuition more than emotion. It’s true that the title of the initial paper (Haidt, 2001) referred to the “emotional dog” rather than the “intuitive dog,” but that small victory for euphony was perhaps a defeat for clarity. Many critics have assumed that the SIM is an emotivist theory because it talks about the importance of emotions. The text of the article, however, made it clear at several points that the psychological basis of the theory was not a contrast of “cognition” versus “emotion”; it was a contrast between two types of cognition—reasoned and intuitive. Intuitions are often accompanied by affect, and all emotions include an intuitive component (the automatic appraisal which launches the emotion; see Ortony, Clore, & Collins, 1988). Yet moral judgment is still a cognitive process—cognitive in the psychological sense that it involves information processing (mostly unconscious), and cognitive in the philosophical sense that moral judgments report beliefs that can be
said to be better or worse, more or less accurate (with reference to anthropocentric truths, since there are not any transcendent or fully objective moral truths). Thus, when Jacobson says that “to put it most crudely, social intuitionism holds that we arrive at moral judgments by feeling rather than thinking” (p. ••), we protest that this portrait is indeed too crude. Social intuitionism holds that we arrive at moral judgments by intuition, which is a kind of thinking that is not reasoning, and in which emotion often plays a role.

Second, we would like to take Jacobson up on his suggestion that the SIM implies that moral truths are like the secondary quality facts of color. Jacobson writes that his main worry is “that the social part of the SIM fails to vindicate moral judgment as a form of good thinking, specifically about questions of what to do and how to live” (p. ••). He further fears that if intuition cannot reveal moral truth and ground moral knowledge in some way, then the SIM implies that “there might be no such thing as moral truth, just disparate moral judgments, all of them equally unjustified or even false” (p. ••). We understand this worry. The SIM makes the empirical claim that people are quite bad at the sort of moral reasoning upon which many moral philosophers have hung their hopes for moral justification and moral progress. The SIM makes the further claim that moral truths, to the extent that they have any kind of reality, gain this reality with respect to the “particular fabric and constitution of the human species” (p. ••) as Hume put it. The situation is analogous, as a first pass, to the reality of colors. The redness of an apple is a real property, but not a property that is fully inherent in the apple. Redness emerges only because evolutionary processes have given the human eye the ability to pick out certain wavelengths of light, and to translate those wavelengths into a certain psychological experience. Similarly, with acts of harm, unfairness, betrayal, disobedience, or impurity, the wrongness of these acts is a real property, but not a property that is somehow inherent to the acts and independent of the minds construing these acts. The wrongness emerges only because evolutionary processes have given the human mind the ability to pick out certain patterns of actions, intentions, and relationships and to translate these patterns into certain psychological experiences.

But now for the disanalogies to color. First, with color, we really can speak, as Hume did, of the particular fabric and constitution of the human species. Despite the sexiness of the original Sapir–Whorf hypothesis, it turns out that the experience of color is far more similar across cultures than cross-language differences in color terms might suggest. The first draft of the visual system provided by the genes is so little edited by cultural
experience (barring extreme environments such as being raised in a cave or closet) that we can base our theories of color perception on the “taste buds” of the visual system: the red, blue, and green responsive cones and the light-responding rods. With morality, however, the first draft provided by the genes is always edited by cultural experience (we claim), so that people in different cultures really do have a “slightly different fabric and constitution” (Haidt & Bjorklund, this volume, p. ••). Jacobson asserts that cultural differences “cannot seriously be explained” by such differences, but we challenge him to offer an alternative explanation. Does he believe that identical twins raised in radically different cultures will end up with the same minds, just as they would end up with the same color vision systems? Does he believe that cultural learning leaves no mark on the brain?

The second major disanalogy between color vision and moral vision is that moral perceptions are used (and probably evolved in order) to coordinate groups of individuals (Wilson, 2002). Much hangs on whether one’s own actions are perceived by others to be justified or unjustified, so we have a great deal of evolved and developed ability and motivation to spin our own actions, and those of others, in ways that are conducive to our self-interest (see Wright, 1994). This is simply not the case for color vision. Moral vision is therefore always more contested, more biased by self-interest, and more difficult to judge as accurate or inaccurate than is color vision. However, that does not mean that there is no truth to be found. Moral communities are created by shared moral visions and goals, woven into moral narratives that explain where the community came from and who its heroes and villains are (Smith, 2003). No one human community has the single correct narrative, but within any community it is possible to judge certain actions as right or wrong, and as deserving of praise or punishment (see Haidt & Kesebir, 2007). These narratives are built upon and constrained by the five foundations of morality, and they tend to incorporate ideas of past harms, rights trampled and regained, in-group boundaries, proper subordination to gods or leaders (or proper rejection of improper and oppressive authorities), and metaphors of purity and contamination.

A third clarification: we understand Jacobson’s and Narvaez’s fears that our moral pluralism (there are multiple valid moral worlds) opens the door to relativism and Nazism, and upon reflection we regret and retract our slogan “A fully enculturated person is a virtuous person” (p. ••). We meant that as a purely descriptive account about how people who think about morality in terms of virtues (which, we believe, is most people) then think
about moral development. And we should have been more explicit that we meant the enculturation of ideals, not of whatever the reality happens to be (e.g., in Narvaez’s example, crass consumerism). Finally, we grant Narvaez’s point that “[e]nculturation and moral development are not equivalent” (p. ••). We note, however, that the fear of conformity and the idolization of those who challenge existing power structures or create their own morality is particularly common in politically liberal parishes, which are based on just the first two intuitive foundations (Haidt & Graham, in press-a, in press-b). In the majority of human cultures, where traditions, institutions, and in-group loyalties are valued, “full enculturation” may not be so wide of the mark as a description of the virtuous person.

Conclusion

We concluded our target article with the claim that the SIM “offers a portrait of human morality that is just as flattering as that offered by rationalism, yet much more true to life” (p. ••). We never intended to flatter moral psychologists and moral philosophers, and judging by Narvaez’s and Jacobson’s comments, we succeeded. The SIM is a direct challenge to most of moral psychology. It claims that the moral psychology community has restricted itself to a small range of moral phenomena (harm, rights, and justice) and has been pursuing the wrong mechanism of judgment and development (moral reasoning). The SIM is an indirect (and not yet well-formulated) challenge to some moral philosophers—to those who believe that moral truths exist in some mind-independent or culture-independent way, and to those who place their hopes for moral progress in the human capacity for unbiased reasoning and for persuasion by reasoning that does not also involve intuitive appeals.

However, for those who do not sacralize moral reasoning, the SIM offers a hopeful portrait of human nature: we are inescapably moral beings, governed (imperfectly) by norms, and committed to working out shared evaluations of people’s actions with respect to those norms. Even if evolution followed a ruthless principle of genetic self-interest in shaping our moral nature, the ultrasocial creatures that resulted are (for the most part) cooperative, caring, and motivated to preserve or improve the moral communities in which we are embedded. As Thomas Jefferson wrote in 1814, “nature hath implanted in our breasts a love of others, a sense of duty to them, a moral instinct, in short, which prompts us irresistibly to feed and succor their distresses . . .” Jefferson was an optimist about human nature, and he surely exaggerated in suggesting that our urge to care for people is
“irresistible.” But Jefferson was right that there are such urges, and the SIM is a theory about where those urges came from and the important role that they play in our moral lives.

Note

1. Levy intends this point to be a criticism of Haidt (2001), which, he says, did not pay sufficient attention to the social side of the SIM. Whether or not that is true, our paper in this volume is more explicit about emergent rationality: “Reasoning, even good reasoning, can emerge from a dyad even when each member of the dyad is thinking intuitively and reasoning post hoc” (p. ••).