

The clean conscience at work: emotions, intuitions and morality

Simone Schnall^{a*} and Peter R. Cannon^b

^aDepartment of Psychology, University of Cambridge, Downing Street, Cambridge, CB2 3EB, UK; ^bSchool of Psychology, Massey University, Private Bag 102-904, NSMC, Auckland 0745, New Zealand

How do people decide what is right and wrong, and to what extent are their actions guided by such moral considerations? Inspired by philosophical traditions, early approaches to morality focused on rationality, and assumed that people arrive at moral standards by logical thought. More recently, however, psychologists have explored the influence of emotions and intuitions on morality, and evidence has been accumulating that moral decisions and behaviors are far from rational, but instead, are guided by intuitions and situational considerations. For example, seemingly irrelevant concerns such as keeping one's mind and spirit clean and pure can change people's moral judgment. Emotions can also influence behavior, and positive, uplifting emotions such as elevation and gratitude can be harnessed to produce beneficial outcomes for individuals and organizations alike. Furthermore, people appear to aspire to an equilibrium of moral self-worth, and engage in more or less ethical behavior depending on their currently perceived moral integrity. Thus, morality and ethical behavior is less likely to reside in the person than in the context, and thus, for the study of spirituality, it might be beneficial to focus on people's situational constraints in the workplace rather than their stable dispositions. Further, because of their potential to inspire positive action, organizations might aim to make positive moral contexts, such as gratitude, elevation, and awe part of everyday work contexts. Overall, in organizations and the workplace, the goal shifts from trying to identify the moral individual to providing the contextual conditions that appeal to spiritual concerns in order to foster moral behavior.

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In his book "*The Happiness Hypothesis*" Haidt (2006, p. 239) concludes an extensive review of insights from psychological research and works of ancient wisdom such as religious and philosophical writings with the following recommendation for the life lived well: "Just as plants need sun, water, and good soil to thrive, people need love, work, and a connection to something larger". This recommendation emphasizes the centrality of finding meaning in one's work, and because illuminating people's desire for a *connection to*

*Corresponding author. Email: ss877@cam.ac.uk

something larger has been an emerging goal across many theoretical and practical disciplines (e.g. LaPierre 1994, Zinnbauer *et al.* 1999, Hill *et al.* 2000, Elkins 2001, Emmons and Paloutzian 2003, Miller and Thoresen 2003), recently various authors have started exploring how people's spiritual experiences and religious practices relate to their work lives (e.g. Mitroff and Denton 1999, Biberman and Tischler 2008, Gotsis and Kortezi 2008, Giacalone and Jurkiewicz 2010a).

Although the lack of acknowledged definitions of spirituality and religion has been pointed out as a factor in hampering research developments (e.g. Geh and Tan 2009, Giacalone and Jurkiewicz 2010b), in scientific psychology, tremendous progress has been made in areas in which definitional issues continue to stir debate, as is the case in the field of emotion. For example, one scientific volume entitled *The Nature of Emotion: Fundamental Questions* (1994) considers basic questions relating to definitional issues, with various eminent researchers giving their very distinct and often contradictory answers. Although the eternal debates regarding definitional and other basic questions go on, in the meantime researchers seem to have decided to just "get on with it" and study emotional phenomena anyway. More problematic for a research field, however, is the lack of commonly agreed methods, which makes empirical evidence difficult to compare from study to study, therefore impeding progress, and this has been noted as a problem for the field of workplace spirituality (Gotsis and Kortezi 2008, Giacalone and Jurkiewicz 2010b). Because of the lack of grounding of the approach in theory, Giacalone and Jurkiewicz (2010b) suggest that studying workplace spirituality would greatly benefit from interdisciplinary links with research areas in which empirical progress has been made. One such area is the field of morality, which has recently seen a great resurgence in empirical interest in how emotions guide people's moral choices.

Although some argue that spiritual factors might not be open to being fully studied by traditional scientific methods (e.g. Biberman and Tischler 2008), we disagree with them. As noted by others (Miller and Thorensen 2003), many unobservable psychological phenomena have been empirically studied with established methods with great success, such as implicit cognitive processes, emotional feelings, and, as we will review, topics as elusive as what factors shape people's moral considerations.

Morality concerns how people tell right from wrong, and has been studied by philosophers for thousands of years. Recently, the study of morality has moved from the philosopher's armchair to the psychologist's laboratory. It used to be assumed that moral decisions are based only on rational thought, such that people decide based upon objective facts and logical consideration what is morally acceptable behavior. However, recent empirical findings suggest that decisions about morality and ethical behavior are far from rational, but are often guided by emotion and other intuitions. In this paper, we review some of the key findings in the emerging field of moral psychology, namely that people's emotions and intuitions can influence their judgments and behaviors, and that people generally strive to confirm their moral self-worth. We then

conclude with speculations and possible research questions applying these findings to the workplace.

Within organizations and work contexts, decisions are made and actions are taken that can have various implications regarding the ethical conduct of an individual, or the organization as a whole. Factors involved in ethical behavior on the level of organizations have been discussed in details by others (e.g. Schwepker 2001, Tenbrunsel *et al.* 2003, Treviño *et al.* 2006, Collins 2010), and ethical climates have been investigated in the context of spirituality (Parbotheeah and Cullen 2010). However, because the decision-making within an organization is generally made by individuals or small groups of individuals, the factors involved in ethical and moral decisions and behaviors that are relevant on the individual level equally apply to the organizational level, and this will be the focus of the present paper.

Studying morality: early beginnings

Questions of morality have constituted a key domain within philosophy. Of particular interest has been normative ethics, namely how one ought to act and how moral standards are formed, and the extent to which people apply such standards when judging their own and others' behaviors. Within philosophy, many thinkers have attempted to arrive at universal principles that if observed would result in exemplary moral behavior. Kant (1788/1997), for example, in his Categorical Imperative proposed that there are absolute, objective truths within the moral domain and that it is our duty to use reason to discover these truths. Other philosophers also arrived at general rules on how people should behave. Mill (1863) in his essay on utilitarianism declared that each individual must do whatever brings the greatest amount of happiness to the largest number of people. Such rational views within philosophy have been influential because they provide specific rules regarding how people *should* behave. However, it is important at this point in this discussion to observe that knowing how we should behave does not tell us how we actually *do* behave, or why. In contrast to this rational tradition, Hume (1751) proposed that because humans are sentimental beings, moral decisions cannot be purely derived through reason, and that instead, people rely on their feelings when deciding between right and wrong.

Whereas philosophy has attempted to decide between different approaches to morality based on theoretical consideration, more recently empirical psychologists have tested specific hypotheses derived from different theories. Within psychology, rational models have been highly influential, and only recently a shift has taken place to move to more sentimentally inspired models. Kohlberg's (1981) widely-cited work proposed that children progress through discrete stages of moral development as they acquire more and more advanced reasoning abilities, and that fully developed moral reasoning is so sophisticated that even many adults never reach the most advanced level of moral thought. In contrast to such rational models of morality, increasingly moral

psychologists have taken seriously Hume's early suggestion that moral decisions are guided by various feelings. The most influential such approach has been Haidt's (2001) *Social Intuitionist Model*, which proposes that moral judgments are the result of automatic intuitive responses to moral stimuli that take place largely outside of conscious awareness, with people producing rational arguments only later when trying to justify their judgments. Others (e.g. Greene 2007, Paxton and Greene 2010) have suggested that both rational and emotional considerations can play a role, and although the precise contribution of emotion in moral judgment is still under discussion (Huebner *et al.* 2009), evidence is accumulating to support the conclusion that emotions are critically involved in moral judgment.

Within the growing field of moral psychology, several findings have emerged. First, people do not always use only rational thinking when deciding whether something is right or wrong. Instead, emotions and intuitions often guide people's moral judgments. Second, moral emotions are fundamentally social, and can have profound effects on behavior. Third, people aspire to an equilibrium of moral self-worth and engage in compensatory behavior to either raise or lower their current level of moral worth. Empirical findings on which these conclusions are based will be reviewed next.

Looking up: embodied metaphors of the divine

Haidt (2006) proposes that, in general, social relationships consist of three dimensions that can be represented spatially. One dimension involves close interpersonal relationships to those who are next to us, and on the same level as us, namely friends and significant others. Another dimension concerns hierarchical relationships, for example, between a boss and an employee, or a teacher and a student. A third moral dimension can be spatially represented along the vertical, and consists of what Haidt (2006) termed the dimension of *divinity, with or without God*. This dimension concerns spiritual considerations that appear to be largely universal across different cultures, and involves the quest to look for something larger and higher than oneself. In the context of this vertical dimension, recent research findings from the newly emerging field of *embodied cognition* are very relevant.

Approaches of embodied cognition suggest that the way we function in the world with, and through, our bodies, fundamentally shapes our cognitive processes (for reviews, see Barsalou 2008, Spellman and Schnall 2009). From this perspective, metaphors are considered to have a bodily basis, because they reflect direct physical experiences (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). For example, the spatial concept of verticality is easy to understand because human beings usually function in an upright position, and it is clear what is up and what is down, relative to one's body. The notion of verticality is invoked when considering good or bad things such as emotions, and using expressions such as: "being on top of the world", vs. "being depressed" or literally feeling pushed down, or de-pressed (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). However, these metaphors

are not only used as figures of speech, but reflect underlying cognitive processes: People indeed seem to represent good things as spatially-up, and bad things as spatially-down. For example, research participants are faster to categorize positive words as “good” when they are presented in the top section of a computer screen, and negative words as “bad” when they are presented in the bottom section (Meier and Robinson 2004). Further, people relate verticality to the moral dimension, and automatically link morality and vertical space of up and down (e.g. being “high minded” vs. “underhanded”). However, moral considerations and verticality are not associated by those who lack the awareness of social and moral concern: psychopaths (Meier *et al.* 2007b). Furthermore, people not only think of all things good and moral as up, but they also think of God as up and the Devil as down, and are faster to categorize words such as Almighty or Lord if presented in an up location and Satan or Demon in a down location (Meier *et al.* 2007a). Not surprisingly, those in power are also conceptualized as being high up relative to those down below over whom they exert control (Schubert 2005). It is thus no coincidence that people in charge of companies or organizations usually have their offices on the top floor of the building rather than in the basement.

The notion of verticality that elevates people is only one embodied metaphor that has consequences for spirituality; another such metaphor concerns people’s basic physical desire to keep the body clean and pure, and free of contamination. As will be reviewed in the next section, recent research has shown that changing one’s bodily state from dirty, disgusting, and animal-like to clean, pure, and God-like is often an attempt to reaching up higher; that “cleanliness is next to Godliness” has been a well-recognized fact in many spiritual practices.

Moral foundations: emotions and other intuitions

In empirical psychology, early work on morality built on rational approaches within philosophy, and focused on concerns of preventing harm and maintaining fairness (e.g. Kohlberg 1981, Turiel 1983). However, recent work has identified five moral foundations (Haidt and Joseph 2007, Graham *et al.* 2009). Ensuring fairness and preventing harm to others are clearly important, but in addition, many societies uphold norms that do not relate to such objective standards. According to moral foundation theory, people aim to protect the rights of their own in-group. In other words, I might judge whether something is fair or harmless differently, depending on whether the person concerned is like me, or unlike me. Further, many societies have both formal and informal rules to ensure that status and hierarchy are maintained and respected. Finally, individuals aim to maintain a pure body and spirit by avoiding physical contamination. This moral intuition of purity has generated a lot of research interest, presumably because more than any other intuition, it seems especially “irrational”, and yet, has proven to be highly influential because it has the potential to link up mere lowly mortals with the sacred forces high above.

In this context, feelings of disgust constitute a threat to the desired state of physical and spiritual purity. Evolutionarily, disgust has several basic functions (Rozin *et al.* 2008). On one level, disgust is thought to have evolved as an emotion that protects from various contaminants, such as spoiled food, bad taste, and unpleasant odors, to ensure one does not take in substances that may be harmful or even deadly (Rozin *et al.* 2008). In addition to the avoidance of toxins that might be ingested by mouth, disgust also guards against the touching of contaminated substances, and of parasites and pathogens that might be harmful by contact, thus avoiding the dangers of infection and disease (Schaller and Duncan 2007). Beyond this relatively basic, body-based function, disgust responses have also been demonstrated in the social domain; *socio-moral disgust* is the term to describe the revulsion one feels when confronted with immoral behaviors of others that violate established norms (Rozin *et al.* 2008). Thus, bad people can be as disgusting as bad food.

In addition to this food-based disgust, another type of disgust has been called *animal-nature disgust* (Rozin *et al.* 2008), which describes people's emotional response of repulsion whenever it is evident that human beings are evolutionarily very similar to other non-human animals. As a consequence, human bodily functions, especially those relating to bodily wastes and reproduction, are considered animal-like and therefore disgusting. People appear to have a desire to see themselves as enjoying a special, elevated status relative to other creatures, and therefore, they go to great efforts to distinguish themselves from animals. Presumably, the main reason for the discomfort associated with reminders of human beings' animal nature is that they make salient one's ultimate mortality. Thus, disgust is a complex emotion that despite its direct physical basis has various spiritual and moral implications.

Although some have argued that using the term "disgust" when referring to moral transgressions is only metaphorical (Nabi 2002), there is reason to believe that this is not the case. For example, functional neuroimaging studies have shown that the same brain structures are implicated in the experience of physical and socio-moral disgust (Moll *et al.* 2005, Borg *et al.* 2008). Further, experimental manipulations of physical disgust have been shown to influence people's judgments of socio-moral disgust. Wheatley and Haidt (2005) used hypnotic suggestion to induce participants to experience a brief pang of disgust whenever they read the emotionally neutral word "often" (or in a different condition, "take"). Subsequent judgments of moral wrongness indicated that participants rated other people's behaviors as more wrong if the story contained that specific word, which triggered disgust. What makes such influence of emotions on judgments so difficult to control in everyday organizational contexts is the fact that people are usually not aware of this connection; in fact, research participants will often deny that they were influenced by anything other than rational consideration, and sometimes even "confabulate" when asked to give reasons for their judgments.

Further tests of the implicit connection between physical and socio-moral disgust were conducted by Schnall *et al.* (2008b). In one study, passers-by on

a university campus were asked to rate a series of stories for moral wrongness. Unbeknownst to participants, the experimenter had sprayed a commercially available “fart spray” into a nearby trash can to create an unpleasant smell. Indeed, participants who were exposed to the disgusting smell of fart spray judged various moral transgressions, such as falsifying a resume or not returning a lost wallet, to be more wrong than participants who were not exposed to the smell. Similarly, in a different study, participants who happened to sit at a disgusting table surrounded by dirty pizza boxes and used tissues made more severe moral judgments than participants sitting at the same table when it was clean and tidy (Schnall *et al.* 2008a,b). All these findings suggest that participants in the disgust conditions conflated experiences of physical and moral disgust. In other words, the sense of “that’s disgusting!” was interpreted to be indicative of moral rejection when in fact the feeling was actually based on the irrelevant bad smell or the dirty environment surrounding the person while making the judgment. Thus, a dirty work place might change the way people make moral decisions; further, it is likely that the actions of people who are typically considered disgusting (e.g. homeless people) might be judged especially harshly.

Additional findings relating physical disgust to morality come from studies examining dispositional differences regarding a person’s tendency to be easily disgusted. Jones and Fitness (2008) found that jurors in a mock trial who were high on trait disgust sensitivity were more likely to issue a guilty verdict to a defendant in a rape trial. Further, the more sensitive people are to disgust, the more negative are their attitudes toward homosexuality (Inbar *et al.* 2009). Politically conservative attitudes are predicted by high levels of trait disgust sensitivity (Inbar *et al.* 2009) and conservative people are more likely to consider disgusting (but non-harmful) behaviors as immoral (Graham *et al.* 2009).

All this research suggests that one’s own feelings of disgust can be (mis) interpreted as evidence of bad behaviors and bad people, and because such influences tend to occur outside of conscious awareness, they could negatively impact various organizational situations that require judging people’s character and abilities. In particular, with relevance to the workplace, the link between judgments about people, morality, and disgust highlights the need for objective procedures in the recruitment process, and when it comes to professional advancement within an organization, to avoid the influence of automatic disgust responses to groups such as homosexuals, the facially disfigured (Park *et al.* 2003), or the obese (Puhl and Brownell 2001).

On the flip side of disgust, additional support for the moral intuition of purity has come from studies manipulating physical purity and looking at the effect on morality, and these studies show that people somehow equate physical purity with mental and spiritual purity. The first demonstration of this was aptly termed the “Macbeth Effect” after Lady Macbeth who desperately tried to alleviate her guilty conscience by washing her hands after having committed murder. Results from several studies showed that after being reminded of the immoral deeds they had committed in the past, participants showed a greater

desire to wash themselves (Zhong and Liljenquest 2006). Such cleansing desires are specific to the modality of the offense: After speaking immoral things, people want to use mouthwash, but after typing something immoral, people want to use a hand-sanitizer (Lee and Schwarz 2010a). Further, being primed with words related to cleanliness or engaging in hand washing can change people's moral judgments, and make moral judgments less severe when they misattributed feelings of cleanliness to the transgressions under considerations (Schnall *et al.* 2008a), but less severe when the cleanliness is misattributed to the self (Zhong *et al.* 2010b). Recent findings suggest that the effects of cleansing the hands can go beyond the moral domain, and, for example, reduce the cognitive dissonance that would otherwise be experienced after having made a difficult decision (Lee and Schwarz 2010b). An intriguing possibility is that being clean is not merely the absence of disgust, but that the desire for cleanliness made possible one of the most basic behavior among conspecifics, namely social grooming (Schnall 2011). This might mean that being clean indicates to others that a person has good social relationships, and therefore is a good cooperative partner, a consideration that is critical in work contexts requiring reliability and trustworthiness.

Thus, there might be something special about keeping the body clean in order to keep the spirit clean, and some people consider this especially important. A recent meta-analysis (Saroglou 2010) of data from over 20,000 people from 19 countries concluded that the personality variable conscientiousness, which indicates a desire for order and doing things the "right way", is associated with various aspects of religiosity and spirituality, thus suggesting that cleanliness, tidiness, and order can critically relate to moral aspects of life.

Of course, disgust and cleanliness are not the only feelings that are relevant within moral contexts. Anger is typically the result of frustration because of the blocking of one's goals (e.g. Plutchik 1980). Within the moral domain, anger or moral outrage often results from witnessing immoral behaviors that result in harm to others (e.g. Gutierrez and Giner-Sorolla 2007), and experiences of anger predict condemnation of moral transgressions involving justice violations (Horberg *et al.* 2009).

Anger is an emotion that is commonly experienced in the work place (for a review, see Gibson and Callister 2010). The most frequently cited reasons for feeling anger are being treated unfairly or unjustly, such as having one's contribution overlooked or being unfairly accused of an offense, and observing others' unethical behavior such as witnessing dishonesty (Fitness 2000). How anger is perceived and whether it motivates specific action can differ as a function of the status of the person (e.g. boss vs. employee) experiencing it. Fitness (2000) found that interactions between supervisors and subordinates were situations that commonly triggered an anger response in either or both parties; within these anger-eliciting situations, supervisors were much more likely to immediately confront the subordinate than subordinates confronting supervisors. In contrast, anger-eliciting co-workers were confronted less often than subordinates, but more often than supervisors.

Although witnessing moral transgressions can elicit both feelings of disgust and anger (Gutierrez and Giner-Sorolla 2007), we have recently shown differential emotional responses as a function of the specific content of moral offenses (Cannon *et al.* 2011). We recorded the facial muscle activity relating to disgust and anger while participants considered third-person statements describing good and bad behaviors across a range of moral domains. Facial disgust was highest in response to purity violations, followed by fairness violations. In contrast, harm violations evoked anger expressions. Furthermore, the amount of facial muscle activity predicted participants' moral judgments: Perceived severity of purity and fairness transgressions correlated with facial disgust, whereas harm transgressions correlated with facial anger. These findings suggest that people automatically show a quick emotional response when exposed to moral offenses, which in turn relates to their explicit moral judgments.

Moral emotions and behavior

In addition to investigating how people decide what is right and wrong, researchers have also examined how people behave as a function of the specific moral emotions they experience. Of recent interest has been the role of positive moral emotions. Following the movement of positive psychology (e.g. Keyes and Haidt 2003), positive organizational scholarship has made it its mission to examine positive factors that make flourishing and resilience possible within organizational contexts (Cameron *et al.* 2003), and to take a more balanced view of what is positive and negative about people's behaviors (Luthans and Youssef 2007). Positive emotions have been noted to set in motion mutually beneficial processes of cooperation within workplace contexts (Sekerka and Fredrickson 2010). For example, because gratitude is a profoundly social emotion that by definition requires at least two people, it can play a critical role in the interplay of people within organizations (Emmons 2003). Further, well-being involving positive emotions in the workplace and productivity and profits are not mutually exclusive, but in fact, often go hand in hand (Harter *et al.* 2003). Thus, individuals' striving for spirituality and transcendence might not be as incompatible with organizations' goals as it might superficially appear (Ashford and Pratt 2010).

With regard to the embodied spatial metaphors mentioned above (Lakoff and Johnson 1980), some of these emotions are experienced as spiritually uplifting, elevating, and bringing people closer to higher goals. Algoe and Haidt (2009) explored the extent to which so-called "other-praising" emotions such as elevation, admiration, and gratitude are different from more generic positive emotions such as happiness or amusement. These moral emotions were indeed found to result in different experiences and cognitive appraisals than basic positive moods.

Elevation has been defined as the emotional reaction to moral excellence, that is, it is experienced when observing somebody perform a morally praise-

worthy action (Haidt 2003). One of the most critical consequences of feeling elevated and uplifted is the desire to want to become a good person, and help others (Algoe and Haidt 2009). In other words, when seeing somebody else do a good deed, people are inspired to do a good deed themselves. Freeman *et al.* (2009) showed that induced feelings of elevation increased donations to a black charity from people who are normally unlikely to contribute, namely whites scoring highly on attitudes indicative of anti-black racism.

To induce elevation, recent work used a video clip from the television program the “Oprah Winfrey Show” in which a successful musician from a disadvantaged background thanks his mentor. The video clip shows the reunion between mentor and student, and the emotional response of the mentor as he listens to the student describing how his life was changed by the support that he was given. Silvers and Haidt (2008) found that after watching this clip, mothers with young infants performed more positive social behaviors toward their infants, such as hugging and nursing, compared to mothers who watched a comedy clip that was merely entertaining. In other research using the same elevation-inducing clip, paid research participants who experienced elevation were more likely to volunteer to take part in a second unpaid study than participants who were in a neutral mood (Schnall *et al.* 2010). Further, participants who experienced elevation helped the experimenter by completing a boring math questionnaire for much longer than participants who either watched a neutral or a comedy video clip (Schnall *et al.* 2010). Findings such as these suggest that moral emotions with powerful social implications can be elicited by uplifting and inspiring content presented in regular television programs.

More specifically within organizational contexts, Vianello *et al.* (2010) showed that when leaders showed self-sacrifice for the organization and demonstrated fair behavior toward employees, this resulted in feelings of moral elevation in their subordinates, which in turn led to greater commitment to the organization on their part. Thus, feelings of elevation can set in motion a host of beneficial thoughts and behaviors, presumably because when being presented with a moral role-model, people feel inspired to live up to a high standard of moral excellence.

In contrast to elevation where the observer does not directly benefit from a benefactor’s action, gratitude occurs when one is the actual beneficiary of another person’s intentional efforts to provide a benefit. In addition to wanting to pay back the benefactor, recipients report a desire to tell others about that person’s beneficial behavior, which serves to enhance the benefactor’s reputation (Algoe and Haidt 2009). People further engage in increased helping behavior when they feel gratitude, and do so not only toward their benefactors, but also toward strangers (Bartlett and DeSteno 2006). Gratitude, however, is more than just the desire to repay one’s benefactor and reciprocate other people’s kindness and generosity, perhaps in order to get rid of possibly unpleasant feelings of indebtedness. One critical function of it appears to be the initiation and maintenance of lasting personal relationships (Algoe *et al.* 2008). In romantic relationships, feelings of gratitude were found to be predictive of

relationship quality for both recipient and benefactor (Algoe *et al.* 2010). In organizational contexts, gratitude can create lasting work relationships that are beneficial for the individuals concerned, as well as the organization as a whole (Emmons 2003). Further, spiritual people report higher levels of gratitude on a daily basis than people who do not consider themselves spiritual, presumably because they experience a relationship to something greater than themselves (McCullough *et al.* 2002).

On the side of the benefactor, expressions of gratitude compel people to engage in yet more prosocial behavior, both toward those who thanked them, but also toward others (Grant and Gino 2010). For example, fund raisers for a university who received an explicit expression of gratitude from their boss made about 50% more fund-raising calls on behalf of their university than their colleagues who had not been thanked.

Both moral elevation and gratitude have thus been found to inspire prosocial behavior. Admiration, as another positive emotion that is distinct from general positive emotions such as happiness (Algoe and Haidt 2009), occurs when one is impressed by another person's skill or ability outside the moral domain, for example, by another person's athletic or intellectual accomplishments. When feeling admiration, people describe being energized and motivated to work hard to achieve their own goals, so in contrast to elevation and gratitude that are oriented toward other people and enhancing relationships with them, admiration increases the focus on the self and one's personal goals and aspirations (Algoe and Haidt 2009).

Among the positive moral emotions, the one that stands out as being especially related to feelings of transcendence is awe, which is defined by two features: First, a feeling of being overwhelmed by the recognition that something is greater than the self, and second, a need for accommodation, that is, an attempt to comprehend a process or entity that is difficult to understand because it is so different from ordinary experience (Keltner and Haidt 2003). Experiences of awe and transcendence may have powerful effects on people's relationships with others and their personal connection to work, but to date, there has been very little empirical research on the topic, presumably because it is difficult to induce states of awe, which by definition are extraordinary, in typical experimental situations. Existing evidence (Shiota *et al.* 2007) suggests that thinking of an awe-inspiring experience from the past leads to seeing oneself as part of a greater whole, and experiencing self-diminishing emotions such as feeling small and insignificant, and feeling the presence of something greater than the self. Further research is needed to explore the benefits of this self-transcendent emotion on people's lives, both in private and work situations.

The research reviewed above in the context of positive moral emotions suggests that sometimes feelings that people are not even aware of can influence their actions. In addition to emotional factors, other incidental factors can influence people's moral behavior. Social factors influence whether people follow norms. In an office environment where people took milk for their tea or

coffee but often did not contribute to the cost, Bateson *et al.* (2006) simply put up a poster on the wall, and alternated between posters with a pair of eyes or with a control image of flowers. When exposed to the eyes, people paid more often for the milk than when exposed to the control image, presumably because on some level the eyes invoked the sense of social presence, of being watched. In contrast, people engage in more immoral behavior when they feel like nobody is watching them; participants cheated more in a poorly lit room than a brightly lit room, and behaved more selfishly when they wore sunglasses (Zhong *et al.* 2010a). This finding suggests that when feeling relatively anonymous, people feel that social norms are less binding. Finally, other environmental factors play a role: when listening to music with prosocial lyrics, people put more money in a donation box for a non-profit charity than participants listening to music with neutral lyrics (Greitemeyer 2009). Thus, as is the case for moral judgment, moral actions can be sparked by incidental factors that have very little to do with rational consideration or logical analysis.

Striving for moral equilibrium

People are keen to view themselves as morally good. Somebody who cheats on his income taxes, has the occasional extramarital affair, and never visits his ill mother in the nursing home can probably come up with plenty of reasons and justification for his behavior, and on some level may still feel like he is overall a pretty decent, morally upstanding person. Perhaps, he donates to charity on a regular basis, recycles old newspapers, and drives a hybrid car, and when questioned about his not-so ethical behaviors, he might be quick to point to his more ethical pursuits. Indeed, research evidence is accumulating to suggest that when people's positive moral self-concept is questioned, they engage in various behaviors intended to restore it, as if wanting to assure themselves that they are indeed "good" people. In contrast, when people are relatively certain about their moral integrity, they are not motivated to do any further good, a phenomenon termed "moral licensing" (Monin and Miller 2001, Sachdeva *et al.* 2009, Zhong *et al.* 2009, Merritt *et al.* 2010). In other words, in people's mind, one good deed prevents the need for another.

In one of the earliest studies on this phenomenon, Monin and Miller (2001) provided some of their participants with an opportunity to affirm their credentials as non-prejudiced people, for example, by disagreeing with sexist statements or making a hiring decision in favor of a person from a stereotyped ethnic group. In subsequent tasks, those participants exhibited more prejudicial opinions than participants who did not have the earlier opportunity of showing themselves to be unbiased. In other words, people who in one context showed that they were not prejudiced acted all the more prejudiced in a subsequent context. Further, in a study on political attitudes, participants who in a first task indicated a voting preference for Barak Obama favored Whites in a second task (Effron *et al.* 2009).

In addition to moral licensing in stereotyping, it has also been examined with respect to prosocial behavior. Sachdeva *et al.* (2009) conducted experiments that allowed participants to think of themselves in a favorable light before being provided with the opportunity to engage in helping behavior. Participants who had copied positive trait words and used them in a story about themselves indicated they would donate less to a charity and cooperate less in an environmental task than participants who wrote a story involving neutral words. Presumably, thinking about their own positive qualities confirmed participants' moral integrity, and as a consequence, reduced any desire to engage in prosocial behavior.

Monin (2007) proposed that when people witness another person's exceptional moral behavior, they engage in a process of upward social comparison, which may indicate that one's own moral actions are below standard. One response to this threat is to engage in a behavior that restores one's self-worth, such as helping somebody in need. Inspiring role models thus either motivate people to also excel or prompt them to become defensive and downplay the accomplishments of the model (e.g. Lockwood and Kunda 1997). Nelson and Norton (2005) showed that priming participants with the general category of "superhero" led to increased helping, whereas priming with the specific exemplar of "Superman" led to decreased helping. Experimental instructions were to describe the characteristics of a superhero (or of Superman), and to list behaviors and values associated with such a superhero (or Superman). Thus, in their work, being confronted with a specific person that was morally good at a level beyond what was humanly possible made people question their own moral credentials.

With respect to ethical behavior in the real world, Mazar and Zhong (2010) showed that after engaging in ethical, "green" consumerism, people sometimes make up for it later on. Participants who in a research study engaged in "green" consumer choices showed more lying and stealing in the same study (Mazar and Zhong 2010). Across time, people alternate between ethical and unethical decisions (Zhong *et al.* 2010c). MBA students were presented with moral dilemmas involving business situations, such as keeping surplus gift vouchers that are intended for company employees, or keeping quiet when a company offers you a great job because they mistakenly believe that you graduated at the top of your class. When dealing with multiple such dilemmas, ethical decisions early on led to unethical decisions later on, and vice versa. It is almost as if people use another embodied concept, namely the notion of balance, which is derived from the physical sensation of keeping one's body balanced (Lakoff and Johnson 1980) when keeping track of their own moral and immoral actions. Based on these findings on what they term *compensatory ethics*, Zhong and colleagues (2010c) note a provocative implication for the work place: Managers should refrain from praising their employees' moral standards, because this could lead to subsequent immoral action. Instead, questioning others' moral standards might compel them to engage in moral action in order to increase their moral self-worth.

Morality in the workplace: possible implications

The present paper has focused on emotional and situational factors that influence moral decisions. Of course, individual differences need to be considered as well. Not only do people differ in terms of how important being a moral person is to them (Aquino and Reed 2002), but they also differ in terms of how susceptible they are to organizational pressures to do immoral things (Comer and Vega 2011), and such dispositional factors require further research attention. We have seen that the study of moral and ethical behavior can be split into the study of what one ought to do and how one actually does it. Although it might seem intuitive that careful thought and consideration are essential to arrive at ethical decisions, such assumptions about the rational nature of how we make day-to-day moral decisions have been challenged by the mounting evidence supporting intuition-based approaches (e.g. Haidt 2001). In fact, contrary to what one might expect, having more time to deliberate before making a decision on a moral dilemma actually can lead to *less* ethical decisions than when having little time to think carefully (Zhong *et al.* 2010c).

Based upon the most recent evidence, the following conclusions can be drawn. First, moral judgments and decisions are not always guided by rational consideration, but instead, are influenced by seemingly irrelevant concerns, such as avoiding feeling disgust, and seeking out clean states of body and mind. As such, the moral domain is no different from other domains of cognitive processing, for which ample evidence suggests that much processing takes places outside of conscious awareness (cf. Wilson 2002). Second, emotions can also influence behavior, and positive moral emotions such as elevation and gratitude can be harnessed to produce beneficial outcomes for individuals and organizations alike. Third, people appear to keep track of their moral self-worth, and aspire to a certain level of moral equilibrium, and their behavior is aimed at maintaining this moral equilibrium.

What are the implications of this research for people's spiritual concerns in the workplace? Based on common sense, one might think that the best way to ensure that ethical standards are followed in an organizational context is to find people who have high moral standards, and put them in charge. Similarly, just like morality can be considered as something that resides in a person or as something that manifests itself in specific behaviors in certain contexts, spirituality can both refer to what a person *is* and what a person *does* (Giacalone and Jurkiewicz 2010b). Based on the research we reviewed, morality and ethical behavior is less likely to reside in the person than in the context, and thus, for the study of spirituality, it might be equally beneficial to focus on people's situational constraints in the workplace rather than their stable dispositions. In this context, we agree with Giacalone and Jurkiewicz's (2010b) conclusion that not separating religion and spirituality may hamper scientific progress because many stable religious beliefs and persuasions are difficult to test empirically, whereas situational concerns related to spirituality can be studied in much the same way as some of the factors involved in the

study of morality. In addition, while promoting religion in the workplace can be problematic because it might open itself up to subjective, faith-based considerations (Mitroff 2003), this is less of a concern when dealing with more transient spiritual factors.

Further, definitional problems of religion and spirituality can be overcome by operationalizing various aspects of spirituality in terms of specific values (Jurkiewicz and Giacalone 2004). They outline a list of values that are implicated in spirituality in the workplace. Such an approach has the distinct benefit of making it possible to link the existing research findings generated within experimental psychology (for a review see Maio 2010) with consideration of spirituality, thus allowing direct empirical tests. As far as morality is concerned, two specific values from Jurkiewicz and Giacalone's (2004) list that are relevant within spirituality are integrity and justice; however, as reviewed above, somewhat counterintuitive values such as purity can be highly influential as well.

The goal of work environments has to be to produce positive outcomes, ideally for the individual and the organization alike. However, sometimes because of the very pressures that come with responsibilities distributed across many people, seemingly good intentions can have disastrous consequences when individuals fail to appreciate all consequences of their actions (Adam and Balfour 1998). People not only do evil things unintentionally or due to lack of consideration, but sometimes the same evolved principles that provide the basis for moral concerns can be co-opted to produce moral evil (Graham and Haidt 2012). For example, in the same way in which identification toward one's in-group can inspire loyalty, when turned against others it can seemly justify harsh treatment of traitors, or members of the out-group. Similarly, respect for authority and tradition can form the foundation for social institutions, but equally lead to unspeakable atrocities (Graham and Haidt 2012). Organizations therefore have to take great care that group processes do not lead to the erosion of norms such that immoral actions become seemingly acceptable simply because group standards have shifted.

The conclusion that morality appears to be not so much inherent to a person, but instead emerges from situational constraints that determine a person's emotions and motivations, suggests one important take-away message, namely that while moral character and moral values are probably important (Bass and Steidlmeier 1999), there are various additional factors that reside in the situation. This may be both good news and bad news at the same time: On the one hand, this means that most people are neither extremely virtuous nor extremely evil. Thus, a company may not need to try to identify ways to find the most ethical person when it comes to hiring decisions, because on average, most people anyway have the desire to feel that they are morally upstanding individuals. On the other hand, if relatively minor factors such as one's current mood can have consequences for people's morality, it might be difficult to try to intentionally influence or control all such factors.

Given the potential of positive moral emotions to inspire positive action, it might be especially worthwhile to consider how such experiences can become

part of everyday work contexts. For example, overt displays of gratitude and appreciation can be very rewarding not just for the individual, but for the organization as a whole (Grant and Gino 2010). Further, witnessing people in power do “the right thing” leads to feelings of moral elevation, which in turn cement employees’ identification with their company (Vianello *et al.* 2010). Finally, feelings of awe and transcendence could be made part of company-level retreats, by sharing extraordinary experiences of nature, or participating jointly in special cultural events. These are just a few possibilities; if one takes seriously the notion that positive emotions create social bonds and moral commitments, many other possibilities may open up.

If emotional factors play such an important role, should attempts be made to find leaders that are high on emotional intelligence? (Mayer *et al.* 2008) Although this might be useful in some respects, Kilduff *et al.* (2010) have pointed to the “dark side” of emotional intelligence, namely the fact that people who are good at certain aspects of emotional intelligence (e.g. reading other people’s emotions or strategically modulating their own emotions) can use this ability to their own advantage in highly competitive work situations.

In general, a classic finding in social psychology is that when making sense of others’ behavior, people tend to overestimate the contribution of the person’s character (“he’s prone to anger”) relative to the contribution of the situation (“somebody insulted him”) (Jones and Harris 1967). As we have reviewed, plenty of situational factors can influence whether people consider others’ behavior moral or immoral, and whether they themselves act morally or immorally. For organizational and work contexts, an important implication is therefore that in order to facilitate moral and ethical behavior, the goal is not so much the search for the moral person who would then be an ideal leader or employee, but to provide the contextual conditions that facilitate ethical conduct. Further, because many of the factors linking spiritual and moral concerns operate on an emotional and intuitive level, stimulating relevant emotional experiences of elevation, admiration, and awe in the workplace might be more effective than trying to target people’s conscious mental strategies. Doing so might appeal directly to people’s intrinsic desire of reaching for higher meaning while keeping a clean conscience.

Notes on contributors

Simone Schnall is a university senior lecturer in social psychology at the University of Cambridge. She investigates the relationship between cognition and emotion, and is particularly interested in the role of embodiment in judgments and decisions. Her research has been funded by major awards from the NIMH, NSF, and the ESRC.

Peter Cannon is a lecturer in biological psychology at Massey University in New Zealand. He is interested in the relationship between emotion, cognition, and sensorimotor processes. In his research, he uses a variety of psychophysiological and standard experimental techniques to discover these interactions.

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