

Hierarchical Integration of Agency and Communion: A Study of Influential Moral Figures

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ABSTRACT The purpose of this research is to (a) identify which of recent history's influential figures did and which did not personify moral excellence, and (b) to examine the motives that drove these individuals along such divergent paths. In Study 1, 102 social scientists evaluated the moral qualities of influential figures from TIME Magazine's lists. In Study 2, we selected the 15 top ranking of these figures to comprise a moral exemplar group and the bottom 15 to comprise a comparison group of similarly influential people. We measured the motivational aspects of their personality (agency and communion) by content-analyzing extant speeches and interviews. Moral exemplars exhibited the hierarchical integration of agency and communion by treating agentic motives as a means to an end of communal motives. Comparison subjects, by contrast, personified unmitigated agency by treating motives of agency as both a means to an end and an end unto itself. These results imply that both the strength and structure of a person's motives account for moral behavior.

Social influence entails both privilege and responsibility. Those in positions of leadership have the privilege of making decisions on behalf of others. Presumably, all who wield such influence couple this prerogative with a sense of responsibility to act in the best interests of those who fall under their purview. However, history has demonstrated that not all influential figures are like this. Attaining positions of influence have often been individuals who were so concerned with gaining and maintaining power that they showed little concern for

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the welfare of the vulnerable persons around them. The likes of Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, Pol Pot, Slobodan Milošević, Saddam Hussein, Omar al-Bashir, and Muammar Gaddafi thus are among such leaders of recent history and today.

What causes some leaders to be so consumed with power that, in pursuing or defending it, they resort to violent and oppressive means against innocents? In contrast, what causes other leaders to use their influence to promote the well-being of those near and far? Our core claim is that benevolent, influential people (or moral exemplars) have achieved a motivational state that is qualitatively different from that of other kinds of influential figures. More specifically, we claim that ordinary self-interest motivates most influential people; this self-interest manifests as a thirst for power and greatness (Baumeister, 2011), which is psychologically *demarcated* from, and potentially conflicts with, the interests of others. Moral exemplars, too, are self-interested, but in a different sense. Their self-interest is “enlightened” in that their own interests are *integrated* with the interests of others (Frimer, Walker, Dunlop, Lee, & Riches, 2011). Given their personality functioning, the best way for moral exemplars to promote their own interests is by promoting the interests of others.

We test these claims by examining patterns of self-promoting and other-promoting motivations (namely, agency and communion, respectively) in the psychological functioning of morally exemplary leaders in contrast to equally influential leaders who are less virtuous. We predict that the personality profiles of moral exemplars will evidence enlightened self-interest (integrated agency and communion), whereas comparison figures will embody agency unmitigated.

Agency and Communion in Their Unmitigated and Integrated Forms

The present study explores the moral implications of agency and communion (McAdams, Hoffman, Mansfield, & Day, 1996), the basic motivational dualism that Bakan (1966) introduced. Agency is about getting ahead, dispositions that individuate and advance the self; communion is about getting along, dispositions that contribute to a social collective. When introducing agency and communion into psychology’s lexicon, Bakan (1966) minced few words in highlighting their moral significance: “The villain is unmitigated agency. The moral imperative is to try to mitigate agency with communion” (p. 14).

As thematic concepts, these constructs have filtered into the study of culture, gender, personality, social judgment, and motives/values. Within personality science, various definitions of agency and communion are extant (Paulhus & Trapnell, 2008). The dominant empirical measure of agency and communion is the Extended Personal Attributes Questionnaire (EPAQ; Spence, Helmreich, & Holahan, 1979). The EPAQ operationalizes agency, communion, unmitigated agency, and unmitigated communion as independent constructs, each tapped via self-reports on a respective set of traits. For example, items tapping unmitigated agency include “arrogant,” “greedy,” and “hostile”; items tapping agency include “independent,” “competitive,” and “never gives up.” Supporting Bakan’s (1966) claim that unmitigated agency is maladaptive, the Unmitigated Agency subscale of the EPAQ is predictive of a variety of negative outcomes, including poor health and poor coping (Helgeson & Fritz, 2000; Hoyt & Stanton, 2011), whereas agency and communion are each associated with positive outcomes, including psychological adjustment (Helgeson, 1993).

Applied to the topic of morally charged forms of leadership, the EPAQ’s framing of the constructs might unpack to predict that moral leaders are high on agency and communion, whereas nonmoral leaders are high on unmitigated agency. Implied in this framing is that the personalities of moral leaders consist of fundamentally different ingredients than the personalities of nonmoral leaders. The EPAQ approach leads to this conclusion because “unmitigated agency . . . [is] distinct from agency and communion and cannot be reduced to some combination of agency and communion” (Helgeson & Fritz, 1999, p. 133). This framing thus suggests that nonmoral leaders are radically different from moral leaders.

In contrast to this framing of leadership, we contend that moral and nonmoral leaders are, to some extent, cut from a similar cloth. Both sorts of leaders are highly agentic in their goal pursuits; they diverge, however, in their ultimate purpose. To test this claim, a reconceptualization and reoperationalization of agency and communion are needed. We see unmitigated agency, integrated agency and communion, and so forth, not as mutually independent variables but, rather, as distinct, emergent personality states. This proposal necessitates a personality science that goes beyond independent variables to observe the dynamics between variables that take place within persons. To add impetus for understanding within-person

dynamics, we first raise the overarching question that inspires this program of research.

Why Be Good?

What motivates moral behavior? More generally, what is the nature of the relationship between agency and communion, between the self's interests and concerns for the welfare of others? Virtually every theory of morality speaks to this issue (albeit often implicitly). Most commonly, moral theories pit the self's interests and the moral values in opposition. Haidt and Kesebir (2010) define moral systems as "interlocking sets of values, virtues, norms, [etc.] that work together to *suppress or regulate selfishness* and make social life possible" (p. 800, emphasis added). Similarly, in Schwartz's (1992) values circumplex, self-enhancing power and achievement values (agency) are in opposition with self-transcending values of benevolence and universalism (communion). "Acceptance of others as equals and concern for their welfare *interferes* with the pursuit of one's own relative success and dominance over others" (Schwartz, 1992, p. 15, emphasis added). To Kohlberg (1984), principled moral reasoning was necessary to overcome the self's ignoble desires. Additionally, game theory (e.g., the prisoner's dilemma) frames (short-term) self-interest against what is best for others: cooperation. These theories (and the data that support them) give credence to Bakan's (1966) claim that agency and communion comprise a duality.

A banal duality between agency and communion may explain common moral failure at the hand of short-term self-interest. However, the duality seems inept at explaining what motivates some individuals (moral exemplars) to devote their lives to promoting the welfare of others. What do these individuals have at stake in "doing the good"?

Colby and Damon (1992) interviewed moral exemplars and drew qualitative impressions; among them was the observation that moral exemplars seemed to have united their self-interest with their morality, such that acting selfishly became yoked to acting morally. A hidden, enlightened form of self-interest seemed to be responsible for their moral behavior. In this way, moral exemplars seemed to defy the duality of human existence; they are an exception to the rule.

Initial empirical investigation, however, did not confirm this intriguing suggestion. Walker and Frimer (2007) measured levels of agency and communion in the life stories of exemplary and

demographically matched comparison participants. Relying on the traditional variable approach to personality, they controlled for baseline levels and then searched for an interactive effect, only to find the null.

Revisiting basic assumptions of what it means to know a person, Frimer et al. (2011) found confirming evidence of the integration of agency and communion. To do so, they relied on Magnusson's (1999) person approach, wherein "the person is conceptualized as an integrated, hierarchically organized totality, rather than as a summation of variables" (p. 236). Specifically, Frimer et al. (2011) operationalized integration as the coactivation of variables (e.g., in the telling of a life narrative). They found that, even after controlling for baseline levels, moral exemplars preferentially yoked together their agency and communion. In contrast, the comparison group treated agency and communion independently, implying that promoting the interests of the self is a concern demarcated from promoting the interests of others. In other words, for most people, advancing their *own* interests does not necessarily involve helping others. For moral exemplars, it necessarily does. The sensitivity afforded by a within-person approach was necessary to arrive at this conclusion. What remained ambiguous in these results, however, was the issue of purpose. For moral exemplars, does agency serve communion, communion serve agency, or both equally?

From Co-occurrence to Hierarchical Integration

The present research advances personality science by introducing a hierarchical content analysis procedure: a new, more sophisticated method for measuring the relationship between agency and communion. The present method taps motives of agency and communion from any value-rich text. Moreover, the new method allows for the assessment of hierarchical directionality between themes.

To illustrate the necessity in considering the hierarchical nature of these constructs, consider the co-occurrence of earning money (agency) and helping the poor (communion). When an individual tells a story relating these two themes to one another, the method that Frimer et al. (2011) introduced detects a compatible relationship. But the two may be related in one of two ways, with agency in service to communion ("I'm earning money to help the poor") or, alternatively, communion in service to agency ("I'm helping the poor so that I can earn more money"). While both entail the coactivation

of agency and communion, in the former, communion is the ultimate concern; in the latter, agency is.

A consideration of the hierarchical organization of agency and communion allows for the distinction between several emergent personality states. When agency is in service to agency, unmitigated agency is emergent. When communion is in service to communion, unmitigated communion is emergent. When agency is in service to communion, (one kind of) hierarchical integration is emergent.

We propose that exemplars have defeated the dualism between agency and communion, integrating them hierarchically (i.e., within an instrumental–terminal structure; Rokeach, 1973). We present a new method that measures the strength of each of agency and communion treated at instrumental (viz., a means to an end) and terminal (viz., as an end in itself) levels. This method will allow us to test whether moral leaders use agency to achieve communion and whether nonmoral leaders use communion to achieve their agency or are simply unmitigated agents. Unlike with the traditional approach (viz., the EPAQ), unmitigated agency is built out of basic agency–communion ingredients.

The Present Studies

The present research comprises two studies. In the first study, experts rate the moral character of highly influential persons from the past century. In the second study, the 15 highest-scoring targets from Study 1 compose a moral exemplar group; the 15 lowest-scoring targets compose a similarly influential but morally lacking comparison group. This correlational design has the virtue of capturing an ecologically valid set of exemplars and equally influential comparison subjects. Thus, rather than relying on minor individual differences in a more banal population, we can capture the phenomena of interest in their embodied forms. Consequentially, a noteworthy vice of this approach is the lack of control over conflating variables (e.g., gender, historical age) that are free to vary between groups as they may in their naturalistic context. Hence, analyses include exploring the empirical role of these conflating variables, and the Discussion considers their importance for future research.

In Study 2, we assessed the personality of each target by content-analyzing existing speeches and interviews for themes of agency and communion, treated as instrumental means and terminal ends. Our prediction is that exemplars frame agency as a means to the end of

communion, and that influential comparisons treat agency as a means to the end of more agency, indicative of the modularity of these motives and the primacy of agency.

STUDY 1

The purpose of this study is to personify moral excellence by identifying eminent public individuals who exuded such qualities. Studies of moral exemplars (e.g., Colby & Damon, 1992; Walker & Frimer, 2007) often introduce the topic with ad hoc reference to paragons of moral excellence—Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., and Mother Teresa—but then study the functioning of more accessible, less prominent persons living extraordinarily prosocial lives (e.g., Holocaust rescuers, Carnegie Medalists). Idiosyncrasies of the specific group of exemplars make any general inferences about moral excellence tenuous. The present research explores the functioning of the paragons themselves. We introduce a new, systematic nominating procedure in which a sample of university professors rates the moral character of prominent public figures from the past century.

What characteristics should constitute moral exemplarity? To formulate criteria for moral exemplarity, Colby and Damon (1992) formed a panel of 22 ethical experts, comprising a demographically diverse set of theologians, historians, philosophers, and scholars of morality and ethics, and who also representing a broad range of ideological perspectives (including political ideologies, religious beliefs, and ethical philosophies). The diversity of this panel helped the authors avoid biasing the criteria to favor a particular political, socioeconomic, or philosophical worldview.¹ With the help of these experts, Colby and Damon (1992) proposed the following criteria:

1. *principled/virtuous*: “a sustained commitment to moral ideals or principles that include a generalized respect for humanity; or a sustained evidence of moral virtue”
2. *consistent*: “a disposition to act in accord with one’s moral ideals or principles, implying also a consistency between one’s actions and intentions and between the means and the ends of one’s actions”

1. See their Chapter 2 and Appendix A for an extensive discussion of these criteria and their derivation.

3. *brave*: “a willingness to risk one’s self-interest for the sake of one’s moral values”
4. *inspiring*: “a tendency to be inspiring to others and thereby to move them to moral action”
5. *humble*: “a sense of realistic humility about one’s own importance relative to the world at large, implying a relative lack of concern for one’s own ego.” (p. 29)

Each criterion taps a different personality construct; to typify moral exemplarity, an individual must meet all five criteria. That is, each criterion is necessary but not sufficient for a person to be a moral exemplar; together, the set of five is both necessary and sufficient.

Moral exemplarity is an emergent property of the five criteria, just as socioeconomic status is an emergent property of income, education, and social position. The present study adapts these criteria into five separate quantitative dimensions (not a single scale with five items). A sample of social scientists rated historical targets along each of the five dimensions to identify moral exemplars and comparison subjects roughly matched for general level of social influence.

Method

Participants

Participants were faculty experts sampled from all graduate-level Canadian universities. Contact information was gleaned from university Web sites for professors in disciplines that should be knowledgeable about prominent historical figures (political science, law, history, and journalism). Of the 740 professors who were invited to participate via email, 102 (14%) completed the anonymous Web-based questionnaire.

Targets

TIME Magazine publishes annual lists of the world’s most influential people—of both positive and negative impact. These lists are composed of five categories, two of which were tapped for the present study: leaders/revolutionaries and heroes/icons (“TIME 100,” 1998, 1999). The names of all 119 figures in these two categories were gathered from the first three of TIME’s lists (covering the 20th century, 2004, and 2005). Entries entailing multiple persons were split into individuals. Targets referencing an archetype (e.g., the “unknown rebel” of Tiananmen Square) were eliminated, as were those with insufficient information, leaving a total of 105 targets.

Procedure

Professors received an email invitation to complete a Web-based questionnaire, wherein they would rate the moral character of a random subset of 40 targets. Subsets of the 105 targets were created so as to not overtax participants. Approximately 40 participants (range = 39–42) had the opportunity to rate each target. Each target was displayed on its own Web page, which provided the target's name, a brief description, a portrait image, and a rating interface for the five dimensions. Descriptions and portrait images were provided to help disambiguate the targets. These descriptions were neutrally worded bylines taken from Wikipedia. For example, the description of George W. Bush was "the 43rd President of the United States from 2001 to 2009." Images were 200 × 200 pixel portraits taken from the target's Wikipedia profile or the first Google image search that produced a clear portrait image.

Professors rated targets on each of the five dimensions, presented verbatim (as in the above list), on 5-point scales ranging from -2 (*very uncharacteristic*) to 0 (*neutral*) to +2 (*very characteristic*). Participants were instructed to skip targets with whom they were unfamiliar. The questionnaire required approximately 15 minutes to complete.

Results and Discussion

To assess reliability in the expert ratings, we estimated the variance components of their ratings using five separate multilevel model analyses (one for each dimension). All 102 participants and 105 targets were entered as random effects, predicting each of the dimension scores. The proportion of variance attributable to targets indicates level of consensus among raters, and ranged from .30 to .44 for the five dimensions (see Table 1). These figures are comparable to ratings of Big Five personality factors (e.g., .39 for Extraversion; Kenny, 1994). Thus, experts in the present study showed considerable agreement in the rating of influential figures.

Expert variance, measuring the (rather uninteresting) degree to which some experts used the upper end of the scale and others the lower end, was small (ranging from .08 to .12). Residual variance encompasses three effects—relationships (interaction effects), inconsistencies, and error—and accounted for approximately half (.48–.58) of the total variance.

We summed scores from the five dimensions (possible range = -2 to +2) to form an overall index of moral exemplarity (possible range = -10 to +10; see Table 2). Mean ratings of targets ranged from

Table 1
Variance Components of Multilevel Modeling Analysis of
Historical Figures

Dimension	Variance Component		
	Target	Expert	Residual
Principled/Virtuous	.44	.08	.48
Consistent	.30	.12	.58
Brave	.38	.09	.53
Inspiring	.41	.09	.50
Humble	.41	.09	.50

Note. Target variance measures the degree to which experts agreed.

−7.3 to +9.0 (excluding a few relatively unknown individuals), spanning most of the scale. All individuals on the TIME lists were influential in some way, but diverged considerably in the degree to which they typify moral exemplarity.

Familiar exemplars (e.g., Nelson Mandela, Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., and Mother Teresa) populate the top of the list, with Rosa Parks, untarnished by controversy, garnering the premier rating. The bottom of the list is more mixed. Alongside tyrants like Adolf Hitler and Kim Jong Il are celebrity stars like David Beckham and Marilyn Monroe.

What, then, does occupying the bottom end of the list mean? The criteria we used describe moral excellence. Low scores necessarily imply that an individual is unprototypic of moral exemplarity, not necessarily that the individual exudes a particular quality such as villainy. The positive framing of the measurement tool yields heterogeneity at the low end of the scale, just as a negative framing (e.g., within clinical psychology) leads to heterogeneity in those who score low (e.g., on psychopathy).

To illustrate this heterogeneity at the low end, an efficacious tyrant might score high on certain dimensions. Hitler, perhaps the personification of evil, is a prime example: Although at the very bottom of the scale on the principled/virtuous and humble dimensions (−2.0 and −1.8, respectively), he was rated around the neutral point on the consistency, inspiring, and brave dimensions (0.4, −0.4, and −0.1, respectively). Experts in this study did not judge Hitler to

Table 2
Moral Exemplarity Ratings and Familiarity of
Influential People

Target Figure	Moral Exemplarity		Familiarity
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Rosa Parks	9.0	0.5	94%
Shirin Ebadi	8.9	0.6	33%
Nelson Mandela	8.8	0.6	98%
Mohandas Gandhi	8.5	0.8	97%
Aung San Suu Kyi	8.5	0.6	79%
The Dalai Lama	8.3	0.7	88%
Martin Luther King Jr.	8.0	0.8	95%
Andrei Sakharov	7.7	0.7	82%
Emmeline Pankhurst	7.7	0.8	57%
Eleanor Roosevelt	7.5	0.8	74%
Mother Teresa	7.4	0.9	91%
Harvey Milk	7.1	0.8	62%
Helen Keller	6.9	0.7	75%
Bill Wilson	6.8	0.8	23%
Margaret Sanger	6.4	1.2	61%
Anne Frank	6.2	0.9	75%
Lech Walesa	6.2	1.0	88%
Ayaan Hirsi Ali	5.8	1.0	41%
Jackie Robinson	5.7	0.9	58%
BKS Iyengar	5.0	1.0	13%
Stephen Lewis	4.9	1.2	85%
Pope John Paul II	4.9	1.2	94%
Tenzig Norgay	4.8	0.8	50%
Melissa Etheridge	4.7	0.8	59%
Barack Obama	4.6	1.1	93%
Franklin Roosevelt	4.5	1.1	89%
Edmund Hillary	4.5	0.8	58%
Robert Kennedy	4.4	1.1	88%
Che Guevara	4.0	1.4	87%
Evan Wolfson	3.8	1.7	7%
John Stott	3.8	1.6	13%
Mary Robinson	3.7	1.2	45%
Muhammad Ali	3.7	1.1	97%
Mikhail Gorbachev	3.5	1.0	88%

(Continued)

Table 2 (Cont.)

Target Figure	Moral Exemplarity		Familiarity
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Bernard Kouchner	3.5	1.3	33%
Pelé	3.4	0.8	63%
Queen Rania of Jordan	3.1	0.8	23%
Viktor Yushchenko	2.9	1.0	58%
Winston Churchill	2.8	1.3	96%
Ho Chi Minh	2.8	1.2	76%
Ellen MacArthur	2.7	0.7	7%
Bono	2.5	1.2	90%
Pope Benedict XVI	2.4	1.3	91%
V. I. Lenin	2.3	1.4	83%
John F. Kennedy	2.1	1.2	93%
Kofi Annan	2.0	1.2	80%
David Ben-Gurion	2.0	0.9	58%
Billy Graham	1.9	1.4	83%
Yao Ming	1.9	1.1	26%
Manmohan Singh	1.7	0.8	27%
Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva	1.7	1.0	31%
Teddy Roosevelt	1.6	1.2	68%
John Kerry	1.5	1.2	79%
Ali Sistani	1.4	1.1	24%
Bill Gates	1.4	1.1	86%
Oprah Winfrey	1.4	1.3	81%
Edward Kennedy	1.1	1.2	93%
Bruce Lee	0.9	1.0	33%
Javier Solana	0.8	1.0	31%
Margaret Thatcher	0.4	1.4	93%
Mahmoud Abbas	0.3	1.0	74%
Diana, Princess of Wales	0.2	1.3	81%
Dina Astita	0.0	0.0	3%
Mark Malloch Brown	0.0	1.5	10%
Wu Yi	0.0	1.3	5%
Lubna Olayan	—	—	0%
Hillary Clinton	-0.4	1.1	90%
Hugo Chavez	-0.5	1.3	83%
LeBron James	-0.5	0.6	28%
Gordon Brown	-0.8	1.1	80%

(Continued)

Table 2 (Cont.)

Target Figure	Moral Exemplarity		Familiarity
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Osama bin Laden	-0.9	1.6	95%
Recep Tayyip Erdogan	-1.1	1.1	25%
Michael Schumacher	-1.1	0.8	60%
Ayatullah Khomeini	-1.1	1.5	85%
Ronald Reagan	-1.3	1.3	99%
Thabo Mbeki	-1.3	1.1	60%
Lance Armstrong	-1.3	1.2	67%
Bill Clinton	-1.4	1.2	100%
Charles Lindbergh	-1.5	1.1	66%
Bill Frist	-1.6	1.1	36%
Abu al-Zarqawi	-1.6	1.6	56%
John Howard	-1.6	1.2	55%
Tiger Woods	-1.7	1.1	71%
Ariel Sharon	-1.8	1.3	96%
Condoleezza Rice	-1.8	1.2	96%
Mao Zedong	-1.9	1.5	89%
Marilyn Monroe	-2.0	1.0	79%
Arnold Schwarzenegger	-2.4	1.1	90%
Hu Jintao	-2.5	0.9	46%
Atal Behari Vajpayee	-2.6	1.1	22%
John Abizaid	-2.8	1.5	15%
Chen Shui-bian	-3.0	1.0	18%
Bill Belichick	-3.2	1.3	28%
David Beckham	-3.8	1.0	71%
Adolf Hitler	-3.9	1.6	100%
George W. Bush	-4.0	1.3	99%
Mel Gibson	-4.5	1.1	80%
Arthur Agatston	-4.5	1.1	10%
Paula Radcliffe	-4.6	1.1	12%
Donald Rumsfeld	-5.0	1.2	100%
Vladmir Putin	-5.3	1.0	79%
Eliot Spitzer	-6.3	1.0	72%
Kim Jong Il	-7.3	1.1	89%
Luisa Diogo	-8.0	0.9	3%
John Bogle	-10.0	0.0	2%

Note. Moral exemplars and comparison subjects in Study 2 are indicated by boldface.

be inconsistent, uninspiring, and cowardly. In aggregate, his overall score of moral exemplarity was -3.9 , driven low by his ratings on the principled/virtuous and humble dimensions.

In contrast, the iconic star Marilyn Monroe scored slightly below neutral (-0.2 to -0.5) on all five dimensions to receive a similarly low score (-2.0) on the aggregate measure of moral exemplarity. Just as one can *miss* a bull's-eye in a game of darts in many ways, one can be *unlike* a moral exemplar in any number of ways. Different personality profiles populate the bottom of the moral exemplarity list. But they do belong together; they represent a group of influential people, all of whom are unprototypic of moral exemplarity.

Exemplars at the top of the list reflect cultural, temporal, and gender diversity. Regardless, a shortcoming of the present study concerns bias in TIME's lists, representing a contemporary American journalistic perspective, along with a possible liberal bias in the expert ratings. Future research should explore whether and how political orientation moderates the attribution of moral excellence.

Is one political party's hero another's villain? If so, the list of exemplars and comparisons would be importantly different if it were based on ratings from conservative judges. Or perhaps the attribution of moral excellence is more so a universal phenomenon. Frimer, Biesanz, Walker, and MacKinlay (2012) found that liberal and conservative professors largely agree on the attribution of moral exemplarity to historical figures. However, future work is needed to explore this issue more fully. We tentatively assume that the present list represents a sufficiently unbiased sampling of history's moral heroes and explore the implications of this finding in Study 2.

STUDY 2

The purpose of Study 2 is to explore the motivational functioning of influential figures who were rated high in moral exemplarity relative to those figures who were comparable in influence and status, yet much lower in moral exemplarity. For expedience and clarity our approach is to select the targets with the highest and lowest scores on moral exemplarity, and then to assess agentic and communal aspects of their personalities. We also consider the role of possible conflating

variables (e.g., gender, historic age) and whether these variables moderate the findings concerning personality.

Insofar as the subjects in this study are either deceased or not available for participating in research, pragmatism requires that we study their personalities “at a distance” (Suedfeld, Guttieri, & Tetlock, 2003), by content-analyzing existing speeches and interviews. Does content-analyzing these sources provide valid assessments of subjects’ personalities? Although this method offers the benefit of being unobtrusive and ecologically valid (Suedfeld, 2010), the public nature of these speeches and interviews could have pulled for self-presentation biases. Moreover, ghostwriters may have penned many of the speeches. In spite of these possibilities, we argue that neither of these concerns invalidates the method and data.

The problem of self-presentation biases influencing the implied values spoken in public would only *counteract* the possibility of the present study detecting our hypothesized group differences. Insofar as agency in service to communion is more socially desirable than unmitigated agency, self-presentation bias would press the comparison subjects to concoct a communal purpose for their agentic pursuits (e.g., “greenwashing”).

Why do we predict that the comparison group would not have concocted a prosocial “moral of the story” in each script? The current coding procedure taps “deep” motivational structures. Akin to a lens through which we see the world, these structures are less susceptible to social desirability factors than is “shallower” content, which is more consciously malleable. Suedfeld (2010; Suedfeld et al., 2003) presents considerable evidence of consistency in psychological structure between prepared and spontaneous speeches, between public and private texts, and between documents unambiguously produced by public figures and speeches produced by their ghostwriters. In sum, we argue that speeches and interviews constitute a fair and valid personality assessment.

Our interest here is to explore two fundamental human motives—agency and communion. Our prediction (arising from a person-centered approach to personality) is that moral exemplars will have strong motives of both agency and communion in their speeches and interviews, but with agency being expressed as instrumental to communion. In contrast, we predict that comparison subjects will have agency in service to more agency, representing the unmitigated agency personality profile.

Method

Subjects

Subjects were 15 moral exemplars and 15 comparison figures (total $N = 30$). Exemplars were the 15 top-ranking targets from Study 1 who met two criteria: (a) familiar to at least 25% of the experts (see Table 2) and (b) with at least one publicly available speech or interview. Each criterion eliminated one potential exemplar. This moral “dream team,” more than half of whom were Nobel Peace Prize laureates, was composed of Rosa Parks, Shirin Ebadi, Nelson Mandela, Mohandas Gandhi, Aung San Suu Kyi, The Dalai Lama, Martin Luther King Jr., Andrei Sakharov, Emmeline Pankhurst, Eleanor Roosevelt, Mother Teresa, Harvey Milk, Helen Keller, Margaret Sanger, and Lech Walesa. The moral exemplars scored high not only on the aggregate measure of moral exemplarity ($M = +7.8$, $SD = 0.9$) but also on all five individual dimensions ($M_s = 1.1$ – 1.8 , $SD_s = 0.2$ – 0.3).

The comparison subjects were the 15 bottom-ranking targets who met both criteria. In this case, the first criterion eliminated seven unfamiliar targets (see Table 2); the second criterion eliminated none. This group was composed of prominent figures who had been judged to be uncharacteristic of moral excellence: Ariel Sharon, Condoleezza Rice, Mao Zedong, Marilyn Monroe, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Hu Jintao, Bill Belichick, David Beckham, Adolf Hitler, George W. Bush, Mel Gibson, Donald Rumsfeld, Vladimir Putin, Eliot Spitzer, and Kim Jong Il. Comparison subjects scored low on the aggregate measure of moral exemplarity ($M = -3.7$, $SD = 1.7$) and on all five individual dimensions ($M_s = -0.4$ to -1.2 , $SD_s = 0.4$ – 0.6).

Manipulation Check

The study design aimed to maximize group differences in terms of moral exemplarity while minimizing differences in terms of general influence. As a manipulation check that the groups did not differ on the latter, we created a proxy measure for influence: the familiarity ratings of the experts (see Table 2). Confirming their comparability in influence, experts were no more familiar with exemplars than they were with comparison subjects, $t(28) = 0.37$, $p = .91$, $d = +0.14$.

Conflating Variables

In this study’s design, other variables, including gender and historical age, were free to vary in their naturalistic context. Whereas the exemplar group had a gender balance (47% male), the comparison group was predominantly (87%) male, a pattern that is marginally significant, $\chi^2(1,$

$N = 30$) = 3.75, $p = .053$, $\phi = .42$. In terms of historical age, the average birth year of the exemplars was 1911 ($SD = 29$ years), 28 years earlier than the comparisons ($M = 1939$, $SD = 23$ years), $t(28) = 2.96$, $p = .006$, $d = +1.08$.

Materials

We aggregated multiple observations of personality functioning by gathering, for each subject, their four most recent interviews and speeches (two each) that were available. Toward this end, we searched the Internet, printed book databases, and archival databases including LexisNexis, Canadian Newsstand, Reader's Guide Abstracts, Proquest Historical Newspapers, Times Digital Archive, and the *Globe & Mail* newspaper. To equate the length of each transcript and because speeches and interviews often end with the "moral" of the story, we retained only the final 300 words of each source for coding. When fewer than four interviews and speeches were available, extant scripts were split into two scripts of 300 words, with the second excerpt entailing the middle 300 words of the speech/interview. Scripts were assigned a random code for identification. To keep the coder blind to the identity of the subjects (as much as possible under the circumstances), wherever the name of the subject appeared in the text, the reference was replaced with "TARGET" for coding. The coder was largely oblivious to the identity of the targets for two reasons: (a) the most recent speeches and interviews (which are rarely the most renown) were obtained for coding, rather than "cherry picking" familiar ones on an ad hoc basis, and (b) only the final 300 words were utilized in each, rather than the entire script.

Coding

Each transcript was coded using a new conceptual coding protocol that allows a rater to determine which concepts a subject treats as being instrumental (a means to an end) and as terminal (an end in itself) in an open narrative passage. Table 3 presents simplified illustrations of the distinctions between agency and communion at the instrumental and terminal levels.

The coding of scripts involves three steps for each of the terminal and instrumental levels. First, the rater identifies the number of terminal concepts—concepts that are expressed as ends unto themselves—in each script. A disjointed script, wherein the subject changes topics frequently, would have a larger number of terminal concepts than a more coherent script. On average, the scripts in this study were judged to have 2.4 ($SD = 1.2$) terminal concepts.

Table 3
Hypothetical Illustrations of Agency and Communion
Combining at the Instrumental and Terminal Levels

Terminal Level	Instrumental Level	
	Agency	Communion
Agency	“ . . . work hard in order to gain respect and power . . . ”	“ . . . protect the innocent in order to gain respect and power . . . ”
Communion	“ . . . work hard in order to protect the innocent . . . ”	“ . . . help one another in order to protect the innocent . . . ”

Second, the rater identified a stem—a few words from the script that captured the essence of each terminal concept.

Third, the rater coded the text for the single most strongly implied value using the Values Embedded in Narrative (VEiN; Frimer, Walker, & Dunlop, 2009) coding procedure. The VEiN coding procedure allows reliable coding of the Schwartz (1992) values from open narrative. The rater determines whether a value is present by matching concepts to those in the coding manual. Scripts were coded for any of the 10 universal values in Schwartz’s typology: power, achievement, hedonism, stimulation, self-direction, universalism, benevolence, tradition, conformity, or security. Agency comprises the self-promoting values of power or achievement; communion comprises the other-promoting values of universalism or benevolence.

A second iteration of this procedure was then applied to determine which concepts were instrumental (or in service) to each terminal concept. That is, the rater reread the passage and identified the number of instrumental concepts associated with each terminal goal, isolated the portion of text that best characterized each of these instrumental concepts, and coded these concepts for their primary value. On average, the terminal concepts were judged to have 1.7 ($SD = 1.4$) instrumental concepts. If any instrumental concepts were coded for agency, instrumental agency was recoded as being present; the same applied for instrumental communion.

A second rater determined inter-rater reliability by coding a random subset (25%) of the scripts. For the three steps in coding, agreement was

found to be substantial ($r = .77$; 80% agreement;² and $\kappa = .81$ with 83% agreement, respectively).

Four metrics were derived for the current analyses. At the terminal level, measuring the composition of agency and communion were proportion scores of each subject's terminal concepts that were (a) agentic or (b) communal. At the instrumental level, measuring the composition of agency and communion were proportion scores of each subject's terminal concepts that entailed a (c) agentic or (d) communal instrumental concept. For each target, scores across the four scripts were aggregated (averaged).

Analytic Strategy

Analyses explore the personality profiles of each group. Our prediction is that the exemplars will have instrumental agency in service to terminal communion, whereas the comparison group will have agency in service to more agency. We explore this question analytically with a Group (exemplars, comparisons) \times Mode (agency, communion) \times Level (instrumental, terminal) ANOVA. The predicted effects would be manifest in a three-way interaction, with group moderating the Mode \times Level interaction. In decomposing such a three-way interaction, we hypothesize a Mode \times Level interaction for the exemplars, but an unqualified main effect for mode for the comparisons (with agency > communion). Following this analysis, we use cluster analytic techniques to test for the presence and relevance of heterogeneity in the comparison group. Finally, we explore the role of conflating variables (namely, gender and historic age) in explaining group differences.

Results

Exemplar and Comparison Groups

A Group \times Mode \times Level mixed-model ANOVA yielded a powerful three-way interaction, $F(1,28) = 51.24$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .65$. The locus of this three-way interaction was determined by assessing the simple interaction effect of Mode \times Level for each group separately.

The left panel of Figure 1 shows the proportion of instrumental and terminal agency and communion for the comparison group. For this group, the Mode \times Level ANOVA yielded a main effect for mode, $F(1,14) = 72.64$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .84$,³ which was not

2. A third coder determined the reliability in the second step by judging whether the two raters had identified the same stem.

3. The omnibus analysis also produced an uninteresting main effect for level, $F(1,14) = 13.51$, $p = .002$, partial $\eta^2 = .49$, indicating that the comparison group

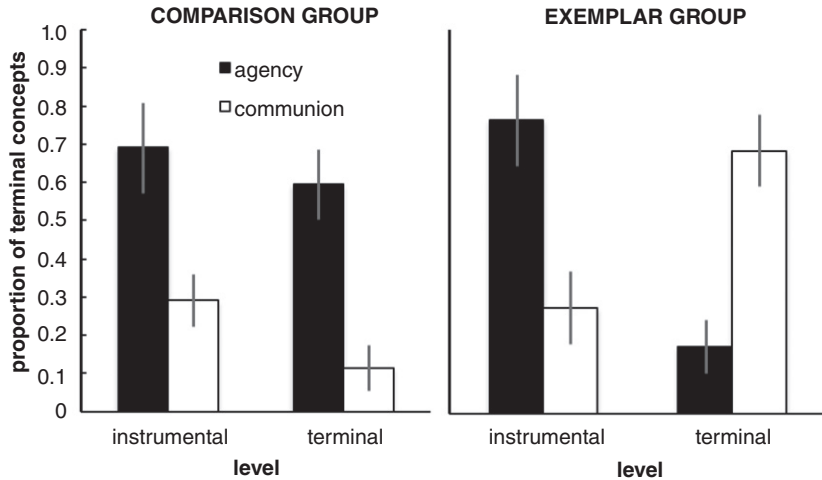


Figure 1

The proportion of instrumental and terminal agency and communion in the scripts of comparisons (left panel) and exemplars (right panel). Error bars indicate 95% CIs.

qualified by an interaction, $p = .39$. Comparison subjects had considerably more agency than communion at both the instrumental and terminal levels, $ps < .001$; $ds = +2.07$ and $+3.11$, respectively.

The right panel of Figure 1 shows the proportion of instrumental and terminal agency and communion for the exemplar group. For this group, the Mode \times Level ANOVA yielded an interaction, $F(1,14) = 66.61$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .83$. Exemplars had more agency than communion at the instrumental level, $F(1,14) = 67.69$, $p < .001$, $d = +2.60$, but more communion than agency at the terminal level, $F(1,14) = 26.33$, $p < .001$, $d = -2.55$. In sum, exemplars evidenced their agency as a means to an end of communion, whereas comparison figures showed a pattern of unmitigated agency.⁴

had more concepts (both agency and communion) at the instrumental level than at the terminal level.

4. The analysis of variance technique does not permit the deconstruction of interactions in more than one way. Qualified thus and for heuristic purposes only, we decompose the Group \times Mode \times Level interaction, relying on the level factor as the prime moderator (rather than the group factor as in the previous analysis). A Group \times Mode ANOVA at the instrumental level produced only a main effect for mode, $p < .001$, indicative of both groups having more instrumental agency

Heterogeneity in the Comparison Group

In discussing the findings of Study 1, we noted apparent heterogeneity at the bottom end of the list of influential figures (recall the contrasting examples of Adolf Hitler vs. Marilyn Monroe). Next, we empirically examine the heterogeneity in the comparison group and explore the role such variance might play in the expression of agentic and communal motivation.

To determine how many naturally occurring groups existed in the sample, we conducted a hierarchical cluster analysis, using Ward's method, with the 30 subjects in Study 2, based on their scores on the five dimensions of moral exemplarity. Using a marked jump in successive agglomeration coefficients as the stopping rule (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998), a four-cluster solution best fit the data. From the 10th down to the 3rd cluster stage, the percent changes in agglomeration coefficients were 20%, 24%, 23%, 21%, 22%, 19%, 20%, and then 35%, indicating that the agglomeration procedure should be stopped at the stage with four clusters.

Figure 2 illustrates the four clusters. Distinctly different personality profiles are evident. All 15 moral exemplars populate Cluster 1 ("exemplars"); they form a homogenous group with uniformly high ratings on all five dimensions.⁵ The remaining clusters constitute three different groups of comparison subjects. Monroe, Belichick, Beckham, Rice, Hu, Schwarzenegger, and Sharon populate Cluster 2. These "achievers" score close to the neutral point on all dimensions. Cluster 3 has particularly low ratings on the principled/virtuous and humble dimensions, but neutral ratings on the remainder. Only Mao and Hitler populate this inspiring but morally inside-out "tyrant" cluster. Putin, Kim, Bush, Spitzer, Rumsfeld, and Gibson populate Cluster 4. These "sectarians" have relatively low scores across all five

than instrumental communion. This analysis of the simple interaction effect yielded neither a main effect for group, $p = .12$, nor an interaction, $p = .35$. Exemplars and comparisons had similar motives at the instrumental level. In contrast, a Group \times Mode ANOVA at the terminal level produced an interaction, $p < .001$. Exemplars had stronger communion, but weaker agency, than comparisons, both $ps < .001$. In sum, influential figures across the moral spectrum had strong instrumental motives of agency; the group differences were restricted to the terminal level.

5. We acknowledge the minor circularity of including two distinct groups in this cluster analysis.

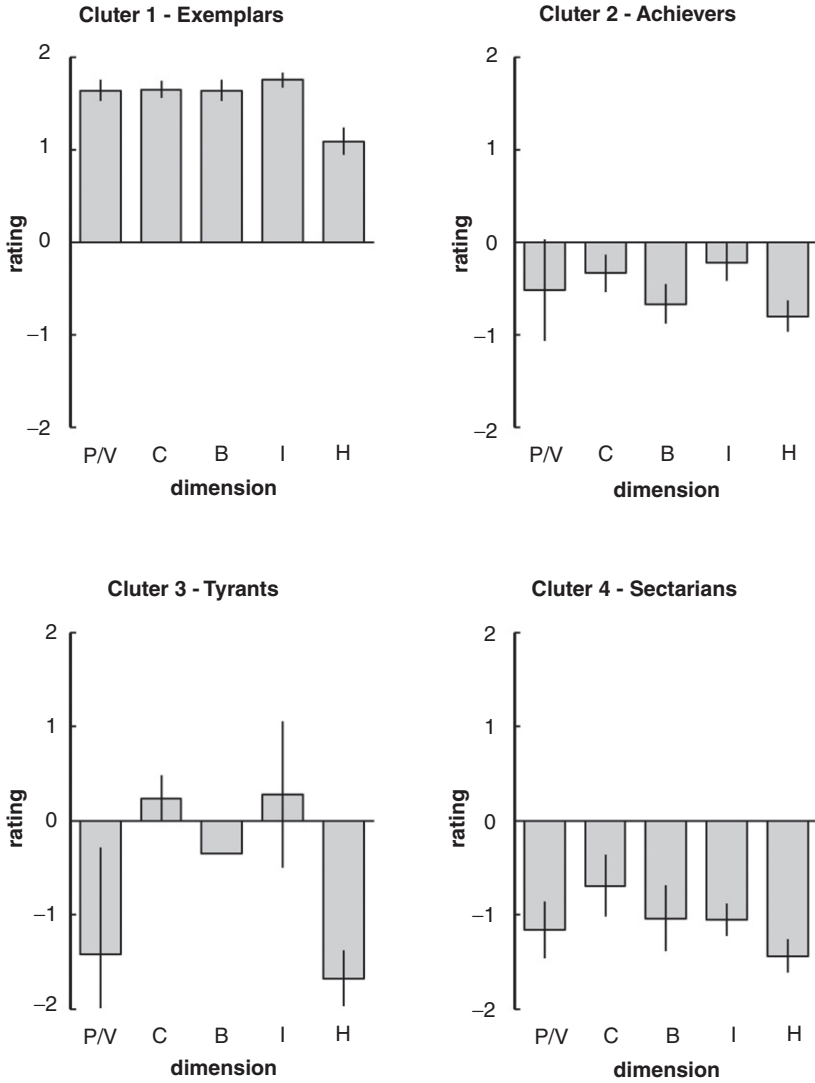


Figure 2
 Expert ratings on the five dimensions of moral exemplarity for the four cluster groups. Error bars indicate 95% CIs. P/V = principled/virtuous; C = consistent; B = brave; I = inspiring; H = humble.

moral dimensions. In summary, the comparison group in Study 2 actually comprised three different sorts of people.

Does this heterogeneity undermine (or moderate) our claim that most influential people are unmitigated agents? Did creating the comparison group amount to lumping apples with oranges? To address this question, we test whether the achieving, tyrannical, and sectarian comparison clusters were all unmitigated agents. Including only subjects from the three comparison clusters, a Cluster \times Mode \times Level mixed-model ANOVA revealed the unmitigated agency signature, a strong main effect for mode, $F(1,12) = 87.50$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .88$. This main effect was not qualified by any other effects. Of critical importance, no interactions involving the cluster factor approached significance, $ps \geq .46$, meaning that all three clusters in the comparison group were unmitigated agents.

Gender

The exemplar group was gender-balanced, whereas males dominated the comparison group. We examine whether gender moderates any of the effects in the original Group \times Mode \times Level ANOVA. A Gender \times Group \times Mode \times Level mixed-model ANOVA produced no interactions involving gender, $ps \geq .17$. Gender did not moderate the group differences between the exemplar and comparison groups.

Historical Age

Exemplars, on average, were born earlier than comparisons, calling into question whether integration or unmitigated agency are voices emerging from different historical eras. We test this by examining whether subjects' birth year moderates any of the effects in the three-way ANOVA. A Group \times Mode \times Level mixed-model ANCOVA (with birth year as the covariate) produced no interactions involving birth year, $ps \geq .21$. Like gender, historical age did not moderate the motivational differences between the exemplar and comparison groups.

Discussion

Illustrative of agency in service to communion is a speech delivered by the moral exemplar Emmeline Pankhurst, a British suffragette, on October 21, 1913, in New York City.

And so we are glad we have had the fighting experience, and we are glad to do all the fighting for all the women all over the world. All that we ask of you is to back us up. We ask you to show that although, perhaps, you may not mean to fight as we do, yet you understand the meaning of our fight; that you realize we are women fighting for a great idea; that we wish the betterment of the human race, and that we believe this betterment is coming through the emancipation and uplifting of women.

This script was conceptually coded as having a single terminal concept (stem: “betterment of the human race/emancipation of women”), which was coded as communion (universalism value). An agentic instrumental concept was coded in the quoted text⁶ (stem: “fighting for rights”; coded as power). Thus, this speech exemplifies the integration of agency and communion, with instrumental agency (fighting for rights) in service to terminal communion (betterment of the human race). Agency is understood as a tool for achieving a final communal objective.

In contrast, an illustration of unmitigated agency is an excerpt from the inaugural address, delivered on January 1, 2007, of the comparison subject Eliot Spitzer. Spitzer is the now-former governor of New York, having resigned 14 months after the speech amidst a prostitution scandal.

But throughout the history of New York, what has always united us as a people is the recognition that we are all on this journey together, and if we’re willing to catch each other during our stumbles and look out for one another during the tough times, we have it in our power to remove any obstacles in our path and walk toward that brighter day. . . . Lend your sweat, your toil and your passion to the effort of building One New York of which we can all be proud. My fellow New Yorkers, our moment is here. Day One is now. Together, let’s build that One New York. Let’s walk toward that better day.

This script was coded as having a single terminal concept (stem: “brighter day/One New York”), which was coded as agency (achieve-

6. A second instrumental concept—“back us up” (coded as benevolence)—was also identified in this excerpt.

ment value). An agentic instrumental concept was coded in the quoted text (stem: “your sweat, your toil, and your passion”; coded as achievement); a second instrumental concept—“catch each other during our stumbles”; coded as benevolence—was also identified in this excerpt. Thus, this speech exemplifies instrumental agency in service to terminal agency, our operationalization of unmitigated agency.

Communion surfaced only as instrumental to agency. That is, this speech evidenced a reverse kind of integration (wherein communion serves agency) compared to the exemplar transcripts (wherein agency serves communion). We did not, however, find group differences on this inverse form of integration. Rather, the groups differed in terms of terminal agency and terminal communion. Noteworthy in the Spitzer speech is the absence of any clear prosociality (communion) in his terminal project, which simply calls for measured improvement and greatness in some morally unspecified way. In transcripts of other comparison subjects, terminal agency was expressed starkly as desires for power, money, control over others, or status.

If social presentation biasing were the driving mechanism behind the values communicated in speeches and interviews, the comparison group would have made the prosocial implications of their mandates clearer and more pronounced. Social presentation, as an explanatory mechanism, would have made the comparison group’s speeches and interviews sound more integrated, making the likelihood of detecting group differences all the *less* likely. Yet strong group differences emerged in this study. Self-presentation and socially desirable responding thus fail to explain these data.

The study design maximized differences between exemplars and comparisons in terms of moral excellence while minimizing differences in terms of general influence. The selection criteria were parsimonious and objective, but they allowed other demographic variables to vary naturalistically. Gender and historical age varied between groups. However, post hoc analyses indicated that these conflating variables did not moderate the findings in this study. Regardless, future research should more stringently control for these variables to better isolate the relationship between motives and moral behavior.

Other variables, such as occupation, may also vary between groups. The comparison group had athletes and actors, whereas the exemplars did not. This may be an additional confound. Alternatively, it may explain how unmitigated agency develops. Perhaps

nascent unmitigated agency leads one to choose a corresponding career trajectory; and perhaps features of an unmitigated agentic career reinforce agency and inhibit communion. These are empirical questions left for future research.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

In Study 1, we derived a list of influential figures of the past century, rated by experts in terms of their moral qualities. Then, in Study 2, we assessed the personality functioning of the top- and bottom-ranking targets (moral exemplars and comparison subjects, respectively). We coded speech and interview transcripts for implicit motives of agency and communion into an instrumental–terminal structure. At the instrumental and terminal levels, we found comparison subjects to ubiquitously advance motives of agency. This group embodied unmitigated agency, what Bakan (1966) called “the villain.” In contrast, the scripts of moral exemplars embodied a more balanced set of motives, with both agency and communion strongly featured. Each motive was situated differently, however, with agency being instrumental and communion terminal.

In essence, the groups had the same tool set (agency) but were pursuing vastly different projects (agency vs. communion). Independent of their moral standing, all influential people have strong instrumental agency. The groups differ, however, at the terminal level, where exemplars have strong communion and comparisons have strong agency. These results challenge the notion that agency and communion comprise a duality for everyone; comparison subjects do function dualistically, but moral exemplars transcend the duality and integrate these motives. In other words, the *relationship* between agency and communion constitutes an important individual difference in itself.

Moral or Liberal?

Targets in the comparison group were unabashed in their expression of agency in service to agency. Returning to the issue of political bias and the relativity/universality of moral excellence, we next consider what motives conservative champions—that is, the moral exemplars of conservative judges—might express. At stake in this issue is whether the integration of agency and communion describes the functioning of moral exemplars or merely that of liberal exemplars.

Do conservative champions also integrate instrumental agency with terminal communion? They might. Liberal and conservative philosophies both concern bettering the plight of all persons in society, perhaps merely by different means. This observation suggests that conservative champions too understand agency as a means to an end of communion. On the other hand, a feature of the contemporary conservative view is the notion of the invisible hand—individuals purely serving their own interests (that is, acting as unmitigated agents) will have the natural consequence of advancing the well-being of the least well-off in society, as if by an invisible hand. While this theory itself integrates agency with communion, it prescribes an unmitigated agentic personality profile in citizenry. Adjudicating between these competing predictions is fodder for future research. A related issue for future research is the role of the political orientation of those coding the subjects' archival material or interviews.

CONCLUSION

Agency promotes the self. Getting ahead can be antisocial but more often is simply morally ambiguous. What the moral exemplars had that the comparison lacked was a clear, prosocial purpose for their agency. For the comparison subjects, agency simply begot more agency, and concerns for the well-being of others fell by the wayside. Why the comparison subjects failed to integrate agency with communion is perhaps the most intriguing finding. Our contention is that agency and communion are, for most people, modular—psychologically, one is active at any given time; their integration is the exception. What the virtuous have done that other leaders have not is reconciled the duality of human existence (Frimer & Walker, 2009). Or as Nasby and Reed (1997) so flamboyantly put it: “Agentic heroes separate to fight the dragon; only heroes on the higher, mythological level, integrating agency and communion . . . raise their swords to battle the real dragon within” (p. 976).

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