While running for the US presidency in 2012, Mitt Romney made numerous promises. To various audiences, he accumulated at least 15 major pledges of what he would accomplish on his first day in office, should he be elected. These included approving an oil pipeline, repealing Obamacare, sanctioning China for unfair trading, submitting five bills to congress, increasing oil drilling, and meeting with Democrat leaders. By any realistic account, this collection of pledges was unfeasible for a single day. Romney’s ambitious avowals raise the question: Is such unrealistic over-promising out of the ordinary? Perhaps Romney’s promises are revealing of the situational pressures that politicians face when trying to appeal to voters. More broadly, perhaps most people—politicians and the populus alike—regularly feign a desirable exterior to garner social approval.

Then again, perhaps Romney’s campaign vows are also revealing of something specific about Romney’s personality. When characterizing Romney’s policies after the primary elections, his advisor commented, “Everything changes. It’s almost like an Etch-A-Sketch. You kind of shake it up and restart all over again” (Cohen 2012). In other words, Romney’s team did not see his pledges as necessitating congruent actions. Perhaps some people, like Romney, are more duplicitous than other people.

In this chapter, we present a case for both possibilities: that feigning a moral self is the norm and that some people do it more than others. We begin by reviewing an apparent paradox, that most people claim to be prosocial yet behave selfishly. We interpret this inconsistency as evidence that humans have two distinct motives: (a) the desire to appear prosocial to others (appearance motives) and (b) the desire to behave in a way that benefits the self (behavioral motives). Self-report inventories thus paint an unrealistically rosy impression of human nature; this divergence has likely contributed to a widespread skepticism about self-reports in the social sciences.

The overarching goal of this chapter is to discuss recent efforts to develop a more subtle motivation measure that accesses private behavioral motives—in a sense, a “metal detector of the soul.” This new measure relies on the projective hypothesis: a person’s spontaneously produced words are revealing of their inner psychological world. Projective methods have the potential to circumvent certain biases endemic to self-reports, augment the prediction of behavior, and detect novel and morally significant individual differences. We describe recent efforts to make projective methods less subjective and more expedient. And we conclude by exploring how these new efforts may open up new areas of moral psychology research.

Selfish or moral? A paradox

A quick glance at the news headlines or textbooks on evolution, economics, or social psychology gives the impression that humans are primarily selfish (Haidt 2007). The view that human nature is primarily selfish has been popular among scholars throughout history (e.g., Hobbes, Spinoza, Adam Smith, and Ayn Rand). Empirical research has largely been supportive of this theory. As but one illustration within the social sciences, consider the dictator game wherein one person has a fixed amount of money to unilaterally and anonymously divide between the self and a partner. In reviewing studies on the dictator game, Engel (2011) found that most people take more for themselves than they give to their partner (see Figure 2.1). As a rough, first estimate of human nature, much theory and evidence suggest that selfishness is the rule.

This broad impression of human nature as selfish generalizes to behaviors in many contexts. However, it does not manifest when people describe themselves. Self-descriptions tend to be more prosocial than selfish. To illustrate this, we examined three of the more prevalent self-report inventory measures that tap
By conventional standards, effect sizes are in the large or very large ranges. Most people claim to be more prosocial than selfish.

The general impression from the social sciences (e.g., from the dictator game)—that people are selfish—appears to contradict the general impression from personality psychology—that people claim to be moral. We will make a case that this apparent paradox is in fact revealing of a complexity (to put it nicely) or a hypocrisy (to put it bluntly) built in to human nature: a desire to appear prosocial while behaving selfishly.

### Moral hypocrisy

How do these disparate motives play out in human interaction? Daniel Batson’s coin-flipping experiments provide a compelling account of how, for most people, morality is primarily for show (Batson et al. 1997). Research participants were asked to choose one of two tasks to complete. One task offered participants a chance to win money; the second was boring and worthless. Individuals were told that the next participant would have to complete whichever task they did not choose. However, this participant would remain unaware of the assignment process.

The experimenter described the situation facing participants as a kind of moral dilemma, and explained that most people think the fair way to decide is by flipping a coin. However, participants were not required to flip the coin, nor were they required to adhere to the coin toss results should they choose to flip the coin. Participants were then left alone in a room with a coin and a decision to make. This set up a zero-sum situation in which one person’s benefit meant another person’s loss (essentially a variation of the dictator game). Moreover, the situation was effectively anonymous, with reputational forces stripped away. What would participants do?

As we might expect from Figure 2.1, unapologetic selfishness was common in these studies. Roughly half of participants never bothered to toss the coin. Almost all (90%) of these participants immediately assigned themselves to the favorable task. The other half of the sample, however, submitted to the fair procedure of tossing a coin. Probabilistically speaking, about 50 percent of these participants would have won the coin toss and assigned themselves to the favorable task. However, 90 percent of participants who tossed a coin assigned
themselves to the favorable task, a full 40 percent more than probability odds would predict.

Given the anonymity of their decision, participants who lost the coin toss found themselves in a bind. They were caught between the desire to act upon the result of the fair procedure and the desire to win some money. In the end, most (80%) of the people who lost the coin toss ignored the results and assigned themselves to the favorable task. Batson interpreted these data to suggest that among the corpus of human motives are distinct desires to behave selfishly and appear moral.

Flipping a coin to fairly adjudicate the assignment of unequal tasks is a display of the desire to appear moral. Not only do we try to convince others of our good nature, we try to convince ourselves too by internalized and generalized self-beliefs. In the Batson studies, participants completed a self-report measure of their moral responsibility. The measure predicted whether participants would flip the coin, but it did not predict how they actually behaved, meaning that participants' self-proclamations were more closely linked to how they wanted others to see them than they were to private behavior (viz., assigning the task).

Having discussed the majority of participants in Batson's studies who exhibited moral hypocrisy or unabashed selfish behavior, we are left with the few laudable participants who assigned the other person to the good task, either with or without a coin toss. With no one watching, this important minority gave of themselves to benefit another person. Introducing these "givers" into iterated economic games directly benefits fellow players (in terms of payouts) and encourages generosity from them to one another (Weber and Murnighan 2008). Whereas these givers may appear to be self-sacrificial, over time, they tend to reap rewards for their generosity. What sets them apart from the selfish and the hypocrites is that their self-interest is intertwined with the interests of those around them.

Givers are probably the sort of people one would prefer as a babysitter, colleague, or government representative, given their honorable behavior. Society would benefit from an efficient means of detecting this minority of the population, which would also raise the likelihood of catching hypocrisy, thus making prosocial behavior more attractive to would-be hypocrites. We next explore whether and how moral psychology might develop a personality tool that detects these honorable individuals.

Moral is as moral does?

The protagonist of the 1995 film, Forrest Gump, played by Tom Hanks, was not a bright man. He had an IQ of 75. He was inarticulate and had a poor grasp of social rules, cues, and expectations. Yet his behavior was mysteriously brilliant. To name a few of his accomplishments, he was a football star, taught Elvis Presley to dance, was a Vietnam war hero, started a multimillion dollar company, and met three US presidents. Was Forrest smart? Or was he stupid, as his IQ and peers suggested? When asked directly, Forrest retorted, "Stupid is as stupid does." In other words, behavior—not thoughts or words—is the true measure of a person.

Forrest's ontological stance coincides with the general feeling in social psychology: the best way to know a person is by observing their actions, not their words. A person is as a person does, not as he/she claims. This assertion may be grounded in the notion that people have poor insight about the causes of their own behavior (Nisbett and Wilson 1977). The self-congratulatory impression emerging from self-reports (see Figure 2.2) in conjunction with self-serving behavior in economic games (see Figure 2.1) might seem to add to the skepticism.

We believe that this degree of skepticism about the validity and utility of self-reports in understanding behavior is overly dismissive. Reports from the person (self-report inventories and projective measures, combined) can offer a reasonably accurate picture of human nature and improve predictions of behavior. The key to prediction is to expand the toolset beyond inventories.

Limitations of self-report inventories

I (the first author) came to psychology after completing a degree in engineering physics, wherein the tools of the trade were sophisticated machines housed in metal boxes with names like "oscilloscope." I anticipated that psychology had its own raft of sophisticated measurement devices, which it does. However, most tools for measuring the person are astonishingly simple. The most common personality measure involves self-reporting one's traits (e.g., extraversion) by ticking boxes on a Likert scale. This seemed imprecise, biased
by self-presentation demands, and missing what felt to me to be the essence of a person (e.g., a person's history, aspirations, fears, and desires). Sixty years earlier, Allport (1937) arrived at a related sentiment: "Nor can motives ever be studied apart from their personal settings, they represent always the striving of the total organism toward its objective" (p. 18). Self-report inventories do have their benefits; indeed, no one has more information about any particular person than that person him/herself. Nevertheless, these self-reports seem untrustworthy, especially if one end of a Likert scale represents something socially desirable, such as prosocial motivation.

An alternative means of knowing a person is through the words that he/she spontaneously speaks. Premising this approach is the projective hypothesis, which essentially states that the more a person cares about something, the more the person will speak about that thing. Projective methods usually begin in an interview, either about some ambiguous picture (e.g., Rorschach inkblots, Thematic Apperception Test) or one's own life. After recording and transcribing the interview, trained researchers code each story for the presence of absence of a particular theme (e.g., power, achievement, or intimacy). The scores from this coding process tend to be highly predictive of behavior. Why then do mainstream empirical researchers tend to avoid studying projective methods? We propose two pragmatic reasons.

Objectivity

Researchers may be weary of projective methods because science demands objective, replicable measurements with researcher bias minimized. The moment an interview begins, an avalanche of conflating factors compromise the validity of the data. Among these are the interviewer's personal views, preferences, and knowledge of the status of the individual.

Expedience

Conversely, researchers may be attracted to self-report methods owing to expedience. Self-report measures require few resources, can be collected online or from groups of participants at the same time, and can be analyzed the same day. In the current era, expedience is a prerequisite to feasibility. In contrast, interviewing, transcribing, and coding require a significant resource investment.

The revealing nature of the spoken word

Both expedience and objectivity are important concerns, but so is prediction. We suggest that neither of the two pragmatic reasons are sufficient grounds for neglecting the richness of projective methods, especially in the twenty-first century. Technological advances of recent years have opened new opportunities to using spoken and written words, expediently and objectively. Later in this chapter, we describe our current efforts to develop a new projective measure to better understand a person's moral character. But first, we briefly outline the traditional projective method.

Analyzing spoken words is founded on the projective hypothesis: when trying to make sense of a stimulus that has no clear meaning, people create meaning, thereby projecting the thoughts that are chronically accessible in their mind. Rorschach inkblots and the ambiguous picture scenes of the Thematic Apperception Test were early tests built upon the projective hypothesis (Frank 1939). Respondents were asked to make sense of what they saw; in doing so, they projected motives such as achievement, power, or intimacy to tell a story about the stimuli. Complex scoring systems (Exner 1993; McClelland 1975) detailed how coders should assign scores based on the respondent's answers.

Dan McAdams (2001) adapted and expanded upon these scoring systems to empirically study personal life stories. In an interview context, participants describe various life events, such as earliest memories or a turning point event wherein some major life change takes place. Later, the interviews are transcribed and each event is coded for the presence or absence of various themes, and then tallied to form a narrative metric. Among the menu of available coding themes are (a) affective tone, ranging from optimistic to pessimistic; (b) redemption, wherein a negative event gives rise to a positive one; (c) contamination, wherein a positive event gives rise to a negative one; (d) agency, which includes themes of power, achievement, and empowerment; and (e) communion, which includes themes of help, love, and friendship.

A foundling premise of the projective method is that data garnered from spontaneous words are non-reducible to scale/inventory data. Personal stories contain ideographic information, structure, and meaning that—qualitatively—scales cannot capture. Knowing that a person is highly extraverted or emotionally stable does not tell you which stories they will share about their
earlier life, or what meaning those stories hold in the present. Additionally, personal stories contain important quantifiable information that is not accessible via self-report questionnaires.

To illustrate this point in the moral domain, we consider whether personality measures can distinguish bona fide moral heroes from the general population. Walker and Frimer (2007) studied the personalities of 25 recipients of the Caring Canadian Award, a national award for sustained prosocial engagement. The authors also recruited a set of demographically matched comparison individuals, drawn from the community. All participants completed a battery of measures including inventories of self-reported traits (Wiggins 1995) and a projective measure—an individual Life Story Interview (McAdams 1995). The interview includes questions about high point events, low point events, turning point events, and so on. Common among the variety of stories that people told were weddings, the birth of children, the death or illness of friends or family, and work transitions. Awardees scored higher than comparisons on many of the measures, both inventory and projective. As we will show next, projective measures were more distinguishing of exemplars from comparisons than were inventories.

Imagine reviewing the personality scores of the participants without knowing whether each participant was an awardee or comparison individual. The first line, for example, would contain an array of numbers representing the scores of a particular individual, say “Joe.” How accurately could you guess whether Joe is a moral exemplar or a comparison subject, based on the data at hand? To find out, we performed a logistic regression on the original data set, predicting group status (exemplar or comparison). With no predictors, correct classification was at chance levels—specifically, 50 percent. In the first step of the regression, we entered self-report personality data (the Big 5) for all participants. Correct classification improved from 50 percent to 72 percent, a significant increase above chance, $\Delta \text{Nagelkerke } R^2 = 0.27, p = 0.04$. In the second step, we added the projective data listed above. Figure 2.3 shows how correct classification increased to near perfection (72% to 94%) with the addition of projective data, a further significant increase, $\Delta \text{Nagelkerke } R^2 = 0.55, p < 0.001$.

We tested which of inventory or projective data is a more powerful predictor by entering the variables in the reverse order (projective then inventory). In the first step, projective data increased prediction above chance, from 50 percent to 88 percent, a significant increase, $\Delta \text{Nagelkerke } R^2 = 0.74, p < 0.001$. In the second step, inventory data did not significantly augment the differentiation of exemplars from comparisons (88% to 94%), $\Delta \text{Nagelkerke } R^2 = 0.08, p = 0.19$.

By knowing a person’s self-report inventory scores and projective scores (and nothing else), one could correctly guess whether or not Joe was a moral exemplar, 19 times out of 20. Projective data, if anything, is the more powerful predictor of moral behavior.

Telling a story is inherently different than making global attributions about oneself. For starters, telling a story is an ambiguously defined task. Even if a particular episode is specified (e.g., a turning point), one still needs to select a particular memory, determine a starting point, and then build a coherent story from there forward. The result is that each person tells a rather unique story. Consider one of the comparison participants in Walker and Frimer’s (2007) study. In response to a question about a high point event in his life, this
comparison participant began his story by describing how he had prepared for a vacation to Europe:

I was going on a vacation to Italy. I invested around $4000 for the whole tour and whatnot. . . . Getting the Canadian passport was easy enough because I had one before, and it only took two weeks . . .

Surprisingly, this was not leading to fond memories of vineyards, beaches, friends and family, sunshine, relaxation, or traditional foods. The story quickly turned sour as the participant revealed that he had lost his passport. The story became labored, as he told of his struggles with government institutions and officials to try to recover his passport in time for his vacation. Several minutes later, he continued:

. . . I went down, I showed them my income tax forms, and . . . that I'd paid my taxes, and this, that, and the other. And if you could speak to a Canadian government guy, and he could get you on the computer and talk to you just like you and I, it makes sense. But there's no sense. You're talking to a number . . . .

The sob story continued for roughly 10 minutes. Eventually the interviewer interjected, asking the participant to return to the high point of his story by asking whether he had received his passport in time for his vacation. His “high point” event ended in disappointment.

No. . . . I didn't want to go to no doctor and, you know, have to lie about being sick and all that. . . . As far as I was concerned, the holiday was over. You know, I'd spent that money. That was it.

This comparison participant's “high point” story is of a tragic form. It had a contaminating tone, wherein a positive event (vacation) gave rise to a negative outcome (a lost passport and lost money); the affective tone was pessimistic; it was nearly devoid of prosocial communion themes; and most of the characters were antagonistic “villains.” This kind of story was common in the comparison group, but not in the exemplar group.

The high points of moral exemplars were the kinds of generative stories that one would expect. As an example, one moral exemplar described a touching story in which a disadvantaged child savored a Christmas gift:

Christmas Eve one year . . . [my wife and I] looked at all the gifts under our tree . . . . It was a true mass of gifts to be opened. And yet we still looked at each other, and asked, sincerely, “Is there enough for the kids . . . to be happy?” We realized how fortunate our kids were, and how fortunate we were, that regardless of how the impact was going to be, or how minimal or how large it was going to be, we were going to start a program the following year. . . . It evolved very, very slowly from going to local stores asking for a hockey stick and a baseball glove, to donated wrapping paper . . . Six hundred and fifty gifts, the first year . . . evolving to literally 80,000 gifts one year . . . . [We would take the gifts] into these small communities . . . . Very isolated, and exceedingly poor . . . . I can remember this one little girl . . . sat on Santa's knee . . . . She was nervous. We provided her with a gift, which I knew was a doll from the shape of it . . . [I was] quite anxious for her to open the gift. I wanted to see her reaction. But she didn't . . . . After all the kids had received their gifts, I took one of the people from the community aside, and I said, “I was quite anxious for this one young girl to open her gift, but she didn't.” I said . . . . “I wonder if she felt embarrassed, or if she felt awkward, or maybe she doesn't understand the tradition of Christmas . . . .” And they said, “No, she fully understands, but this is December 22nd. That will be the only gift that she has. She will wait until Christmas morning to open that gift . . . .” And [that's] the true essence of what that program is all about.

The contrast between these two stories (about the lost passport vs. the disadvantaged child receiving a cherished gift) illustrates both the profound richness and also the predictive utility of spoken words. Personal stories reveal a great deal about a person.

Motives in stories

Having discussed broader issues concerning how self-report traits and specific life stories add to our understanding of the person, we now retain this distinction and return to specific questions about moral motivation. How can traits and spoken words help us understand the role of selfishness and morality in human functioning?

One way of measuring a person's moral motivation from their stories is by examining how often themes of agency and communion arise (Bakan 1966). A story with much agency (power, achievement) conveys a tone of selfishness. Conversely, a story rich in communal themes (benevolence, care, universalism) communicates prosociality. Given that prosociality is more socially desirable
than selfishness, one would expect themes of communion to be more prevalent than themes of agency in most self-proclamations. This is the case with self-report inventories (see Figure 2.2). However, the opposite is found with spoken words; when people speak about their lives, they communicate selfishness. For example, when college students tell stories about peak experiences and earliest memories, agentic themes are more than twice as prevalent as communal themes (McAdams et al. 1996, Study 1). And both ordinary adults and moral exemplars have more than twice as many themes of agency (than communion) in their stories (Frimer et al. 2011).

The relative strength of selfish agency and moral communion depends on the kind of measure used (viz., self-report endorsements vs. projected narratives), and may be revealing of differences in the psychological processes they each measure. Most people claim to be more communal than they are agentic on self-report measures of the importance of goals, values, and the description of traits (see Figure 2.2). Yet, these same people tell stories that are primarily about money, achievement, status, and recognition (agency), and less often about taking care of friends and family members, or contributing to the greater good (communion). In striking contradistinction to self-report measures, the themes emergent from narratives are primarily selfish. In other words, the impression arising from projective methods—that people are selfish—coincides with the predominant view (and corroborating evidence) that began this chapter. Why?

One possible reason for this disparity between responses from inventories and projective measures is the frame of reference. Perhaps responding to self-report inventories prompts the respondent to take a third-person perspective—the Jamesian (1890) “me-self”—to examine what the self is like from the perspective of another. Thus, reports reveal socially desirable features that are for public viewing, which tend to be moral. In contrast, narrating requires taking a first-person perspective—the Jamesian “I-self”—to assemble memories and construct a coherent story from “the driver’s seat.” Thus, personality assessments derived from narratives are revealing of the agent’s private desires, which tend to be selfish.

Perhaps the rarity of communion in life stories is not a fair test of whether people are innately selfish. The quantity (or frequency) of motives may not be an appropriate metric. Perhaps quality is what really matters. To project a prosocial persona, perhaps people communicate (in one way or another) that the ultimate purpose for their agentic strivings is some communal end. Societal leaders may be particularly adept at explaining how numerous, proximal agentic goals (e.g., changing laws) serve a more distal, singular communal purpose (e.g., advancing the greater good).

To test whether iconic leaders thus frame agency as a means to an end of communion, or simply dwell on agency, Frimer et al. (2012) examined speeches and interviews of some of the most influential figures of the past century, as identified in Time magazine’s lists (“Time 100,” 1998, 1999). In Study 1, experts—social science professors at Canadian universities—rated the moral character of each target to identify highly moral and less-moral leaders. Among the top 15 moral leaders were Nelson Mandela, Mohandas Gandhi, Aung San Suu Kyi, The Dalai Lama, Mother Teresa, and Martin Luther King, Jr. The bottom 15 less-moral leaders included Kim Jong Il, Eliot Spitzer, Vladimir Putin, Donald Rumsfeld, Mel Gibson, George W. Bush, and Adolf Hitler.

In Study 2, trained coders examined each influential individual’s speeches and interviews, ascertaining both the implied means (agency or communion) and ends (agency or communion) of each speech or interview. Unsurprisingly, Gandhi and the other moral leaders treated agency as a means to an end of communion. Perhaps these icons garnered such public approval, in part, because of their ability to connect pragmatic agency with communal purpose. However, not all leaders did this. The speeches and interviews of Hitler and the other less-moral leaders were of a primarily agentic nature, with agency as a means to more agency. Agency and communion may be distinct, mentally segregated motives early in the life span, with the integration of agency and communion being a developmental achievement. Moreover, some people, such as moral exemplars, may be more likely to realize integration (Frimer and Walker 2009).

These findings that words are revealing of the moral character of leaders contradicts the common-sense notion that the public words of leaders are a means of social persuasion—the product of the calculating minds of advisors and ghostwriters. This common sense seems to be overly dismissive of the wealth of information that spoken words communicate. We suggest that most people cannot help but project their own deeply held motives when speaking.
What is needed is an expedient, objective measure for detecting these inner motives, and then experimentally testing if and when people can fake high levels of prosociality.

How to spot a hypocrite: Toward an expedient, objective measure

We conclude this chapter by describing ongoing efforts in our lab to concentrate the "active ingredients" of the projective hypothesis into "pill form"—an expedient, objective projective measure. The new projective measure assesses the density of agentic and communal words in texts that people produce, using computer software such as Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC; Pennebaker et al. 2007). LIWC is a transparent, well-validated computer program (available from http://liwc.net) that counts all the words within a text file that matches the words in a specified dictionary. LIWC is expedient—it processes texts in seconds—and objective—no human coders are involved.

Frismer and Oakes (2013) created agency and communion dictionaries for LIWC, and validated them against human coding. Using these dictionaries, LIWC produces density scores for agency and communion from a given text. These scores are then corrected to account for different dictionary sizes, and then used to calculate moral motivation scores. Moral motivation is calculated as follows: \( \text{Moral Motivation} = \text{Communion} - \text{Agency} \). Positive moral motivation scores imply that a text is richer in communal words than it is in agentic words.

Along with the usual reliability and validity concerns, we expect that the successful moral motivation measure will predict human behavior. For this objective to succeed, at least two specific hypotheses concerning general tendency and individual differences will need to be supported.

Hypothesis 1: Projected moral motives reveal selfish general tendency

We predict that the projective measure will characterize human nature as selfish. To do so, projected moral motivation should be negative in the population. This criterion assumes that the theory of human nature is selfish and the results from economics, biology, and social psychology—that people tend to behave selfishly—are accurate.

Which content—agentic or communal—emerges most frequently when people speak about topics that matter to them? We predict that agentic content will be more common than communal content. Preliminary findings are confirming hypothesis 1: when describing important goals, people produce more agentic content than communal content (Frismer and Oakes 2013). This effect is not attributable to base rates of agency and communion in the dictionaries or typical English. When people talk about what matters to them, they selectively use more agentic words than communal words, communicating/revealing a selfish lifestyle.

This selfish portrait emergent from the projective measure was the opposite of the impression emerging from a comparable endorsement inventory. Participants also rated the importance of their goals using the Aspiration Index (Grouzet et al. 2005), a standard self-report inventory of goals. The effect reversed: participants now rated their communal goals as more important than their agentic goals. These results support a dualistic theory of motivation. Results from the projective measure coincide with the general conclusion that people are selfish; results from the endorsement measure suggest the opposite, and may tap socially desirable appearance motives.

In Batson's studies, hypocrisy existed between two opposing behaviors (moral coin-tossing vs. selfish task assignment), with self-deception keeping the two at bay. In the present study, people demonstrated the coming apart of their own motives by acknowledging the primacy of their own selfish goals on a projective measure, then declaring their moral goals as most important while endorsing items on a goal inventory. On self-report inventories, people tend to present a moral self (see Figure 2.2); on projective measures, they tend to reveal their selfishness. Thus, the first criterion of a successful projective measure is supported: mean-level estimates from projective methods coincide with the general interdisciplinary conclusion that people are selfish.

Hypothesis 2: Projected moral motives predict moral behavior

One of the limitations of the Batson studies is their limited utility in an applied setting. For example, the coin-flipping task could not realistically be used to screen prospective employees. One of the benefits of the projective measure
is adaptability and unobtrusiveness—it could be used in a variety of contexts. To be useful as such, however, the measure would need to meet a second criterion—predicting moral behavior.

Lending initial support, the moral motivations found in the Nobel Peace Prize lectures are positive (viz., prosocial; Frimer and Oakes 2013). In contrast, the Nobel Literature Prize lectures scored neutrally (viz., equally prosocial and self-interested). These findings replicated with a variety of interviews and speeches of moral exemplars like Gandhi and leaders with the opposite moral reputation like Rumsfeld, Putin, and Hitler (from Frimer et al. 2012). Preliminary evidence is thus far supportive of the claim that the projective measure of moral motivation predicts moral behavior, and functions somewhat like a metal detector for private intentions.

Conclusion

Projective measures have the potential to augment our understanding of human motives and enhance our ability to detect moral character in the real world. Individual differences in the strategies of pursuing selfishness remain of the utmost concern to building civil society. If the projective hypothesis is as useful as we are supposing, the possibilities for predicting prosocial behavior naturalistically are virtually endless. Remaining to be seen is whether this tool could have predicted the unscrupulous behaviors of the likes of Tiger Woods, Lance Armstrong, and Bernard Madoff, and the progressive thinking of the Dalai Lama, Aung San Suu Kyi, and Bono.

Notes

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1 Regardless of whether voters interpreted his commitments literally or figuratively (as general indicators of his intentions), Romney’s pledges illustrate the wiggle room that often exists between specific proclamations and their corresponding behavior.

2 For goals, we compared means for community (prosocial) against the average of financial success, appearance, and social recognition (selfish). For values, we contrasted an aggregate of benevolence and universalism (prosocial) against an aggregate of achievement, power, and face (selfish). For traits, we contrasted nurturance for both genders (prosocial) against the orthogonal assertiveness for both genders (selfish).

References


Is the Glass of Kindness Half Full or Half Empty? Positive and Negative Reactions to Others’ Expressions of Virtue

Gabriela Pavarini and Simone Schnall*

Mahatma Gandhi is one of the world’s most famous and influential symbols of peace. His philosophy of nonviolence has moved, transformed, and inspired individuals and communities. Yet, he was accused of racism (e.g., Singh 2004), and was never awarded a Nobel Peace Prize, despite having been nominated five times. Mother Teresa, an equally remarkable symbol of compassion and altruism, dedicated her life to helping the poor and the dying in over a hundred countries. Her funeral procession in Calcutta brought together thousands of people who lined the route in expression of admiration and respect. Yet, the entry “Mother Teresa was a fraud” returns 65,300 results on Google. Indisputably, people are strongly affected by witnessing the good deeds or heroic actions of exceptional individuals, but at the same time, such actions invoke sentiments that vary from appreciation and warmth to cynicism and bitterness.

The central goal of this chapter is to address this paradox: Under what conditions does the kindness of others inspire and move individuals to tears, or invoke envy and a desire to derogate the other person’s intentions? We review what is known about both reactions and present a functional analysis, suggesting that assimilative and contrastive reactions to virtuous others serve distinct purposes: whereas feeling moved or uplifted binds individuals together in cooperative contexts and communities, contrastive responses serve to regulate one’s own social status within a group.
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