

**PHIL 480: Seminar in the History of Philosophy**  
*Building Moral Character: Neo-Confucianism and Moral Psychology*

**Spring 2013**

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**[Handout #11]**

**Roger Bergman, “Identity as Motivation: Toward a Theory of the Moral Self”**

**§ Main Goal**

1. To examine the issue of moral motivation and to defend the Moral Identity Theory
2. All developmental psychological literature on moral cognition aim to answer this question: Why be moral?

**§ The Question: *Why be moral?***

Why do we ask this question?

\_\_\_ We need to understand what motivates people to perform what they take to be a moral act.

Why?

\_\_\_ Basic assumptions:

- (i) For human beings, being moral is better than being amoral or immoral.
- (ii) We as society are interested in having more people who act morally.
- (iii) Therefore, we as society are interested in finding effective motivational power.

Separate issue: **motivation ≠ moral motivation**

Motivation for actions that are deemed moral	Moral motivation for actions that are deemed moral	
To please others (to be liked) To get rewards To avoid punishment To gain desirable reputation (to be respected) To seek peer approval To subject others to one’s manipulation To feel good about oneself Imitating others without reflection (to blend in) To avoid criticisms or societal sanction (the sense of shame) .....	<b>Rationalist:</b>	
	___ Self-conscious, after reflection or deliberation	Deontologist: ___ Originating in a sense of duty, with no consideration for one’s self-interest ___ Morality has to be autonomous – coming from one’s self regulation

	<b>The Self Model:</b>	
	___ Not necessarily self-consciously articulated or reflected upon, but is nonetheless a manifestation of one's moral identity	
	Blasi: ___ Originating in one's sense of moral identity, responsibility and self-consistency	Bergman: ___ Derived from one's determination to maintain one's sense of moral integrity

Note: Even under the moral identity model, it is acknowledged that not everyone wants to act morally – some people “may consider their morality to be central to their self-identities, whereas others may consider it to be peripheral. Some may even consider morality to be a force outside of the self, a socially imposed system of regulation that constrains or even obstructs one's pursuit of one's personal goals” (Damon 1984, 110).

#### **[Kohlberg's Extreme Internalism]**

- \_\_\_ Only a judgment that an action is right or obligatory makes the action moral.
- \_\_\_ Knowledge of the good is both necessary and sufficient to produce moral action.

#### **§ The Thought/Action Problem (Don Locke 1983)**

\_\_\_ the problem of explicating the relationship between what a person says he ought to do, or even what he thinks he ought to do, and what he actually does.

- (i) the problem of akrasia (weakness of the will)
- (ii) the problem of moral apathy
- (iii) the problem of inconsistency

**Q: How do we analyze this common phenomenon? Which theory can best solve this problem?**

#### **§ Moral Exemplars versus Ordinary People**

##### **Characteristics of Moral Exemplars (Colby & Damon)**

- (i) possessing a high degree of integration of self and morality – they regard the self as the moral center
- (ii) do not regard moral choices as self-sacrifice
- (iii) acting spontaneously, out of great certainty, with little fear, doubt or agonized reflection
- (iv) feeling as if they had no choice but to act this way
- (v) the thought/action problem is dissolved for them

**Blasi:** “Why do some people tend to choose those actions that they consider to be moral while others do not, or not with the same frequency and consistency?” (Augusto Blasi 1999)

Q: How do we get people to be spontaneous in acting morally?

**Bergman:**

1. When moral beliefs are deeply and personally owned, when moral authority becomes autonomous, the will is strengthened and the gap between belief and action is healed by the wholeness of personality.
2. It is not a matter of reason overcoming desires or temptation, because those desires or temptations simply cease to be a factor.
3. The self now has a moral center and its identifying desires are guided by moral goals.

<b>Kohlberg</b>	<b>Blasi</b>
Moral motivation comes from one's fidelity to the prescriptive nature of moral principles.	Moral motivation comes from one's moral identity.
<b>Not to act is to betray a moral principle.</b>	<b>Not to act is to betray the self.</b>

**Bergman:**

\_\_\_ Fidelity to self has a greater motivational potential than does fidelity to abstract principles. Therefore, the Self Model provides a greater motivational power than the rationalist internalist model.

### § Summary of the Self Model:

1. **The construction of a moral identity is more important than cultivating local virtues such as honesty, altruism, etc.**
2. **Moral reason and cognition come in the process of constructing moral identity. Moral understanding influence moral identity, not the other way around.**

<i>What kind of person do I want to be?</i>
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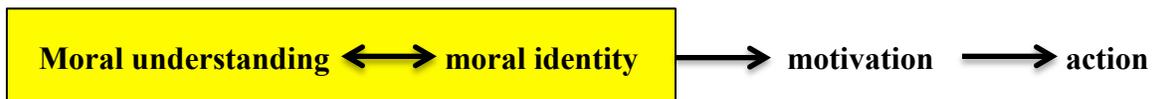
<i>What kind of person should one be or ought one to be?</i>
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3. **With the second-level question, the individual is subject to the requirement of objectivity – thereby avoiding the relativist charge.**
4. **Second-order desire and volition: Frankfurt's distinction between first and second order desire and volition**

\_\_\_ (Blasi) People not only have desires concerning objects or other people and events, they also have reflexive desires about their own desires. By reflecting and taking a stance on our natural desires, we structure our motives and desires and begin to establish our identity.

<b>Second-order desire or volition</b>	I desire that I desire x, but I don't desire that I desire y or z... <b>(reflexive and selective)</b>		<b>Objectivity</b>
<b>First-order desire</b>	Natural desire x, y, z <b>(spontaneous)</b>		<b>Subjectivity</b>

5. **Having second-order volitions seems to be the way the integration of the objective, the universally prescriptive, and the uniquely subjective take place.**
6. **The objective, the morally rational, is not imposed but rather chosen by the subject in the subject's freedom of will. By having such free choice, the subject shapes his or her own identity, in light of objective moral reality but not in simple obedience, internalization or socialization.**
7. **The objective standards needed for moral understanding are such things as justice and human welfare. Only a self that is formed from a deep caring about morality and with such objective, universal standards can be called a moral self or a moral identity.**



### § Discussion Questions for the Moral Self Model:

1. Does it aim for the exceptional few and cannot be expected from ordinary people?
2. Moral identity is used to explain the motivation for particular action, but what explains the motivation for the agent's choosing a particular moral identity?
3. How does this theory explain the moral conflicts, moral dilemmas, and all cases where the agent is not self-consistent?
4. Can the Self Model theory provide the foundation for objectivity? Can Kohlberg's theory provide the criteria for objectivity?
5. **[from Nucci]** Does this view lead to ethical egoism? Does ethics become a matter of what kind of person I want to be and what kind of life I want to lead?
6. How does the theory differentiate those who have moral deeds and those who perform violent acts, when both kinds of action stem from their moral identities?