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Morality, religion, spirituality - the value of saintliness

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Morality, Religion, Spirituality—the value of saintliness

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ABSTRACT   *This article discusses William James's notion, propounded in his* Varieties of Religious Experience *(1902), that authentic religious experience should be evidenced in mature moral functioning—"the value of saintliness". Support for this and his other ideas relevant to the intersection of morality and religion was adduced from a review of current research, which examined the following topics: the faith commitments of actual moral exemplars; the religious reasoning of people in handling moral problems; the personality profiles ascribed to moral, religious and spiritual exemplars; the asymmetrical relationships evidenced across the moral, religious and spiritual domains; and the different dimensions evident in people's typologies of these domains. This analysis led to the conclusion that James has made a significant contribution to the psychology of moral development by arguing for the importance of religious experience in moral functioning.*

This article provides an empirical exploration of the value of saintliness—particularly the relationships among morality, religion, and spirituality—as expounded by William James (1902) in his seminal and still significant contribution to the psychology of religion, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (VRE). In contrast to most theorists in the history of psychology (over the last century and including the present), James made the fundamental assumption of the authenticity of religious experience. He proffered three criteria for judging the authenticity of religious experience: (a) immediate luminousness, (b) philosophical reasonableness and (c) moral helpfulness (VRE, p. 18; for a similar interpretation of these criteria, see Smith, 1985, p. xxiv). The focus of this article will be on his "empiricist criterion" (VRE, p. 20) of *moral helpfulness*; I leave it to scholars from other disciplines to analyse the validity of his criterion of individuals' experience of the divine and to scrutinise his philosophical considerations.

Authenticity of Religious Experience

James explained his criterion of moral helpfulness by alluding to the scriptural admonition, "By their fruits ye shall know them" (Matthew 7:20); and he stated unequivocally that the authenticity of religious life should be judged on the basis of

its results—its moral helpfulness (VRE, pp. 20–21). On the other hand, James was clear not to conflate morality and religion, arguing that personal religion contains some elements that morality simply does not (VRE, p. 40). While he acknowledged both the swings of opinion regarding the value of religion and the sometimes maladaptive aspects of the expression of religiosity, James believed that, in general, religious experience is evinced by "the best things history has to show" (VRE, p. 259). This article will review some psychological research relevant to James's notions regarding the value of "saintliness", especially as discussed in his VRE Lectures XI–XV on the topic. James accorded more attention to the value of saintliness than to any other topic in the VRE. In Lectures XI–XIII, James expounded the features of saintliness that he believed to be evident universally among those with a mature spirituality, including: the conviction of the existence of a higher power, a sense in one's own life of connection with that ideal power, an abandonment of self (freedom), and the shifting of one's emotional centre to love and compassion (pp. 271–274). In Lectures XIV–XV, James explored the practical consequences of such saintliness as it should be evidenced in a range of moral virtues.

My basic argument advanced here is that, although James did argue convincingly and thoroughly that authentic religious experience should be evidenced, in part, by mature moral functioning (and did present some anecdotal evidence in that regard), the field of moral psychology has nevertheless generally disregarded the significance of religion and spirituality in morality. The review of the research which follows examines the validity of James's notions regarding the interconnections between morality and religion, not so much to "prove" his claims but rather as a heuristic prompt for moral psychology.

Within the discipline of psychology, the study of religion and spirituality has been considered anathema on a fairly consistent basis, either by a blanket denial of their importance in the daily lives of the vast majority of people or by a univocal focus on their negative manifestations. This secular skew has remained relatively unchanged, despite the now abundant findings that religious commitment and participation consistently emerge as positive contributors to quality-of-life indicators (Koenig, 1998; for a helpful discussion of this issue, see Emmons, 1999). Kohlberg (1967) perpetuated that alienation within moral psychology and education by his early claim that the moral and religious domains were independent of each other, a claim that was based perhaps on the perceived need to establish the legitimacy of his enterprise in the antagonistic academic climate of the 1960s and 1970s that favoured secular humanism and because the American doctrine of the separation of church and state precluded religious "contamination" of school-based moral education programs. Kohlberg (1981) later softened his position by postulating a quasi-mystical moral Stage 7 that was held to justify Stage 6 principles of justice through appeals to meta-ethical and religious epistemologies. Unfortunately, with the eventual retrenchment of Stage 6 from Kohlberg's scoring system (Colby & Kohlberg, 1987) and the resulting difficulty in adducing any empirical evidence for that stage, interest in the even more illusory Stage 7 waned completely.

Psychological Functioning in the Moral and Religious Domains

From an empirical perspective, however, evidence is now beginning to emerge regarding the potential significance of religion and spirituality in moral functioning. One particularly noteworthy study was reported by Colby and Damon (1992), who conducted a case-study analysis of a small sample of 23 people who were identified as leading lives of extraordinary moral commitment and action. These moral exemplars were identified on the basis of the nominations of a panel of ethical experts, who had formulated a set of criteria for moral excellence:

1. a sustained commitment to moral ideals or principles that include a generalized respect for humanity; or a sustained evidence of moral virtue;
2. a disposition to act in accord with one's moral ideals or principles …;
3. a willingness to risk one's self-interest for the sake of one's moral values;
4. a tendency to be inspiring to others and thereby to move them to moral action; and
5. a sense of realistic humility about one's own importance (Colby & Damon, 1992, p. 29)

Their qualitative analysis suggested several significant processes in the development and maintenance of moral exemplarity, but one finding was particularly unexpected and provocative—that almost 80% of their sample of exemplars attributed the value commitments underlying their moral action to their religious faith. This finding was particularly surprising in that the nominating criteria reflected nothing that was overtly religious or spiritual in nature. It was truly a serendipitous finding and one that served to galvanise my interest in the relationship between morality and religion or spirituality. It is important to clarify that the religious affiliations of these exemplars and the substance of their faith both were quite varied, but Colby and Damon did venture a generalisation that at least among their exemplars there was a common "intimation of transcendence: a faith in something above and beyond the self" (p. 311).

Despite the heuristic value of Colby and Damon's case-study analysis, it remains limited by its small and highly select sample, lack of a comparison group and lack of objective methodology. These concerns were addressed to some extent in a recent study by Matsuba and Walker (in press), who examined the psychological functioning of a sample of young-adult moral exemplars. These young adults were nominated on the basis of their extraordinary moral commitment toward various social service organisations. A comparison group was also recruited for participation, matched individually on the basis of several demographic variables (gender, ethnicity, age and education level). Participants responded to a series of questionnaires and participated in a semi-structured interview.

Among the various constructs tapped by these measures was faith development, which was examined in the context of the individual interview. The assessment of faith development was based on Fowler's (1981) model that proposes stages of faith (for a discussion of the relationship between stages of faith and moral development,

see Snarey, 1991). These stages of faith reflect individuals' process of meaning-making in life and their relatedness to a transcendent centre, rather than either religiosity or religious affiliation. The stages of faith are labelled: (1) intuitive–projective, (2) mythical–literal, (3) synthetic–conventional, (4) individuative–reflective, (5) conjunctive and (6) universalising. If the exemplar group's exceptional prosocial actions reflect their centring values, then such values may form the core of a more complex framework of faith than would be evident among comparison individuals, who do not have the same prosocial commitment.

Indeed, Matsuba and Walker found that the moral exemplars in their study had attained a significantly higher level of faith development than did the people in the comparison group, despite the careful matching on demographic variables. (Interestingly, no significant differences in faith development were found between exemplars who identified with a religious tradition and those who did not, consistent with Fowler's claim that his model taps meaning-making but transcends religion.) As noted above, this study assessed various aspects of psychological functioning, not just faith development; and so a subsequent descriptive discriminant analysis was conducted to determine the relative contribution of each of these constructs to the discrimination of the exemplar and comparison groups. Among the other variables assessed in this study, and included in this analysis, were personality traits, level of moral reasoning, ego identity status and adult attachment dimensions. A compelling conceptual case can be made for the relevance of each of these constructs for moral action, and indeed all were found to contribute to the discriminant function; however, the one that surfaced as the strongest predictor of group membership was faith development. This finding is clearly consistent with James's claim that the validity of religious experience is evidenced in moral behaviour.

The research by Colby and Damon (1992) and Matsuba and Walker (in press) illustrates one empirical approach to examining the value of saintliness: the study of the faith commitments (and other aspects of the psychological functioning) of actual moral exemplars. But in our research (Walker *et al.*, 1995), we have found that religion and spirituality also figure prominently in the moral reasoning of many ordinary people. Certainly, the common finding within the context of Kohlberg's model and measure, for example, is that people rarely express religious themes in response to his hypothetical moral dilemmas. This should not be surprising, given how the dilemmas have been preconstructed, with particular values in conflict that primarily reference a societal morality, in contrast to the personal morality that is more to the core of most religious traditions. Furthermore, Kohlberg's coding manual is bereft of criterion judgements that allow the assessment of moral reasoning with religious connotations.

In several studies now over the last two decades, my colleagues and I have relied on people's recall of significant real-life dilemmas from their personal experience to access their moral reasoning. These actual dilemmas have the obvious disadvantage of being idiosyncratic; but this methodology has many countervailing advantages, including that it ensures that participants regard the problem as a moral one and one relevant to their lives and that it allows a broader range of considerations to be voiced regarding the issue. Because of this latter point, we discovered that many

people do rely on notions of religion, faith, and spirituality in resolving real-life moral conflicts.

For example, in the Walker *et al.* (1995) study, 80 adults of various ages were prompted to recall and discuss two real-life moral dilemmas from their own experience: (a) a recent (and presumably somewhat typical) conflict and (b) the most difficult one they had ever confronted. A frequent theme in people's handling of these moral problems was their reliance on explicitly religious and spiritual values. For some participants, their religion simply provided a reasonable system of morality, which they had found more or less convenient or appropriate to adopt. For others, however, their moral framework was firmly embedded in their faith. For these people, morality and spirituality were not really separate and distinct domains, rather their morality was governed and structured by their faith—the choice of their values and goals, the handling of conflicts and the determination of appropriate social behaviours and relationships were all based on their religious beliefs and faith commitments. Fernhout (1989) has similarly argued the position that, for many people, morality only acquires its meaning within the context of religion. In our study, the content and complexity of participants' religious rationales for their moral choices and values ranged considerably, from fear of eternal damnation or anticipation of heavenly rewards, to the importance of a community of fellow believers, to rather principled notions of *agapé* love and forgiveness.

Conceptions of the Moral and Religious Domains

One approach, then, to understanding the relation between the moral and religious domains is to examine the faith commitments of actual moral exemplars and the religious reasoning of ordinary people as they handle moral problems; an alternate approach is to examine people's conceptions of the moral and religious domains. Presumably, the findings regarding individuals' psychological functioning and individuals' conceptual understandings will provide different but convergent lenses on the intersection of morality and religion. Ordinary people's naïve conceptions can contribute to scientific and philosophical frameworks for understanding phenomena (Fletcher, 1995). Such ordinary conceptions are important to examine not only because they are operative and influential in everyday life, but also because they provide a check on the conceptual skewing that is inherent in philosophical perspectives. Flanagan (1991), for example, has argued that ethical theories need to be constrained by an empirically informed account of how people understand morality as well as by the psychological processes involved in moral functioning.

One such study that examined people's conceptions was reported by Walker *et al.* (1995) who, as part of a larger project, asked participants to name two people they regarded as highly moral and to justify their choices. Nominations were not restricted by any preset criteria or other constraints, and thus nominees could be historical figures or someone known personally. A content analysis of the types of moral exemplars named was most telling. Of course, some categories of exemplars were predictable, such as humanitarians (e.g. Mother Teresa), revolutionaries (e.g. Nelson Mandela), activists (e.g. Andrei Sakharov) and politicians (e.g. Winston

Churchill); but the most frequent categories were family members and friends (42%), people who were not public figures but whose character was known intimately. What was additionally surprising was that the next most frequent category (18%) was comprised of a range of religious leaders and founders (e.g. Jesus, Mohammed, a chaplain), despite the explicit instructions to nominate *moral* exemplars. This is probably an underestimate given that many explicitly religious luminaries who were named (e.g. Mother Teresa, Jean Vanier, Desmond Tutu, Thomas More, Martin Luther King, Jr) were classified into other categories because of the nature of participants' rationales for their nomination.

Another content analysis was conducted of the characteristics attributed to these moral exemplars and used to justify their nominations. Consistent with the findings above, the identification of many moral exemplars was based on their religious and spiritual attributes, suggesting that for many people the moral and religious domains are overlapping and interdependent. More systematic examination of their interrelationships is warranted, as James urged over a century ago. Comparing the perceived psychological characteristics of exemplars across these domains would help to delineate more clearly their unique and shared aspects.

In assessing people's conceptions of the moral, religious and spiritual domains, one template by which to understand the ascribed characteristics is the Five-Factor Model, which represents what is now accepted generally to be the fundamental dimensions of personality (Wiggins & Trapnell, 1997). Personality can be described in different ways and at different levels, of course, but the Five-Factor Model has emerged in contemporary psychology as the preferred framework by which to characterise personality. The model organises personality traits in terms of five basic and ubiquitous factors which are relatively independent of each other and hence provide non-redundant information. The broad scope of these factors and the traits they encompass allow for a comprehensive assessment of personality attributions. These five factors each represent bipolar dimensions (with both desirable and undesirable traits): extroversion (agentic or instrumental interpersonal traits), agreeableness (interpersonal traits reflecting communal positive emotionality), conscientiousness (traits reflecting task-related behaviour and impulse control), emotional stability (traits reflecting autonomous and calm confidence) and openness to experience (traits reflecting the quality and complexity of one's mental and experiential life).

Walker (1999) examined people's implicit personality theory regarding functioning in the moral, religious and spiritual domains by using the Five-Factor Model to discern the similarities and contrasts in personality attributions. Participants (120 adults; 81% with some religious affiliation and 19% having none) were asked to generate descriptors for three person-concepts (a highly moral person, a highly religious person and a highly spiritual person). This, then, was simply a free-listing task which prompted participants to write down the characteristics and attributes of exemplars in each domain. The assumption was that meaningful and valid personality-relevant information can be distilled from such free descriptions. In total, almost 4000 attributes were generated. The attributes, generated by participants, were classified according to which personality factor(s) each represented, using a com-

puter program which matches text to a standard lexicon that defines the personality-factor membership for all trait terms in the language. This analysis of ascribed traits yielded a personality profile for each type of exemplar, and they were found to differ in some interesting and provocative ways.

The moral exemplar's personality was characterised primarily in terms of positive traits, reflecting the factors of conscientiousness and agreeableness, what are known as the classic dimensions of character. The conscientiousness of the moral exemplar was expressed in trait terms associated with dependability and integrity, and agreeableness was expressed largely in terms of prosocial traits. The small number of negative attributes were ones that tended to be "moralistic" in tone (e.g. *critical, stubborn, rigid*).

The religious exemplar was ascribed a somewhat divergent personality profile. Although conscientiousness was again a dominant personality dimension, in this case it was expressed more in terms of faithfulness, devotion and commitment (rather than integrity and dependability). The religious exemplar also was described in trait terms that reflected the agreeableness factor—not only in positive attributes reflecting prosocial emotionality, but also with a substantial number of "disagreeable" negative attributes (e.g. *authoritarian, self-righteous*). And finally, the highly religious person was predominantly characterised by the negative attributes associated with the openness-to-experience factor (e.g. *rigid, narrow-minded*).

The traits ascribed to the spiritual exemplar presented a considerably different personality profile from that of the religious exemplar, which was somewhat surprising given the extent of their shared meaning. The attributions regarding the spiritual exemplar's personality were made especially in terms of the positive traits associated with the agreeableness and openness-to-experience factors, whereas the religious exemplar had a significant proportion of negative traits on these two factors. The spiritual exemplar was also characterised by conscientiousness and by both the positive and negative aspects of extroversion (i.e. extroversion and introversion). The extroversion dimension is the least evaluative of these five personality factors. The findings here indicate a complex understanding of the spiritual exemplar in this regard with both extroversion traits (e.g. *joyful, leader, active*) and introversion ones (e.g. *humble, quiet, solitary*) being common.

Walker's (1999) study revealed that people's conceptions of the psychological profiles for exemplars in the moral, religious and spiritual domains differed in some meaningful and informative ways; however, other empirical approaches can illuminate further the nature of their interrelationship and James's notions regarding the value of saintliness.

Walker and Pitts (1998, Study 2) more explicitly explored the relations among these concepts within the framework of prototype theory (Rosch, 1978), an approach to social cognition which holds that mental categories are best represented in terms of examples or prototypes identifying the core of the category. Thus, inferences about categories are based primarily on central attributes rather than on definitional boundaries (the classical definition of concepts). For this study, the attributes of moral, religious and spiritual exemplars generated by participants in Walker's (1999) study were distilled into non-redundant descriptor lists for each,

using a set of standard judgement rules to group synonymous responses and to eliminate idiosyncratic ones. Then, the participants in Walker and Pitts's (1998) study (120 adults; 69% stating some religious affiliation and 31% with none) were asked to rate the prototypicality (i.e. accuracy) of attributes on each descriptor list in characterising each type of exemplar.

The critical feature of the three descriptor lists for the present analysis is that, across lists, some attributes were unique, whereas others were shared. Prototype theory holds that the pattern of participants' ratings for unique versus shared attributes can inform the relations among these domains. Even a simple listing of the unique and shared attributes provides some indication of the particular and shared meanings across these domains: there were 42 unique descriptors for the moral exemplar (e.g. *just*), 50 for religious exemplar (e.g. *traditional*) and 55 for the spiritual exemplar (e.g. *peaceful*); there were 17 descriptors that were shared by the moral and religious exemplars (e.g. *hard-working*), 12 shared by the moral and spiritual exemplars (e.g. *accepting*) and 23 shared by the religious and spiritual exemplars (e.g. *dedicated*); and 20 descriptors were common to all (e.g. *caring*). Obviously, these domains are not identical (as each has a sizeable number of unique attributes), nor are these domains completely independent (as they share a sizeable number of attributes).

Participants' ratings of the unique and shared attributes indicated that these domains are somewhat related, albeit in an asymmetrical pattern. The unique attributes for the moral exemplar received higher ratings, on average, than did the attributes shared with either the religious or spiritual exemplar. This indicates that the core moral virtues are relatively independent of religious and spiritual ones; that is, to be a highly moral person one need not manifest characteristics that are regarded as central to religion and spirituality. On the other hand, for both the religious and spiritual exemplars, their shared attributes (the ones shared with the moral exemplar) received higher ratings than did their unique attributes. This indicates that the manifestation of moral character is indeed central to what it means to be a highly religious or spiritual person (and reflecting the observation that moral guidelines for conduct have always been a primary component of religious teachings). These findings regarding people's ordinary conceptions of these domains certainly agree with James's empiricist criterion that authentic religious life should be characterised by a range of moral virtues.

There is one final datum to report from this study: the mutually shared attributes of the religious and spiritual exemplars were rated more highly than their unique attributes, indicating that these two domains are strongly related. Although the core meaning and content of the two domains are closely associated (Bergin, 1991), nuanced distinctions in psychological profiles have, of course, also been shown (Walker, 1999). However, further research is warranted to clarify these domains and to examine James's (VRE, p. 334) distinctions in this regard.

Walker and Pitts (1998, Study 2) examined the interrelationships among the moral, religious and spiritual domains by comparing ratings for unique and shared attributes. Another way to make sense of these domains is to examine the items on the descriptor lists themselves to identify themes; however, each list contained about

100 descriptors, which certainly presents a challenge in terms of telling a coherent story. Thus, Walker and Pitts (1998, Study 3) undertook a subsequent study to discern the underlying dimensions in people's understanding of these domains. Participants (180 university students; 49% reporting some religious affiliation and 51%, none) were asked to sort the most prototypic attributes for each of the three types of exemplar (moral, religious and spiritual). This similarity-sort task simply prompted people to group the attributes that they believed belonged together; they were completely free to form as many or as few groups with as many or as few attributes per group as they believed appropriate. The data-reduction technique of multi-dimensional scaling was then used to reveal the latent structure in people's understandings of these three domains. Multi-dimensional scaling arranges points representing attributes along orthogonal dimensions such that the distance between any two points reflects the frequency with which the items co-occur. The interpretive process attempts to identify the structure (i.e. the dimensional axes) that participants imposed on the attributes in their sorting.

For the moral exemplar, a two-dimensional solution was found to be optimal. Multi-dimensional scaling can indicate the relative importance of each dimension in people's understanding (by providing dimensional weights). The primary dimension here was labelled a *self–other* dimension wherein themes of agency were balanced by, or perhaps in tension with, themes of communion. This dimension was anchored at the "self" end by attributes such as *confident* and *self-assured* (reflecting personal agency in moral functioning) and was anchored at the "other" end by attributes such as *caring* and *thoughtful* (reflecting a moral focus on others). This dimension arises consistently as fundamental in understandings of interpersonal functioning (Wiggins & Trapnell, 1997). The secondary dimension was labelled an *external–internal* dimension, indicating the tension in moral functioning between reference to external moral guidelines and reliance on personal strength and conscience. This dimension was anchored at the "external" end by attributes such as *tries to obey the Ten Commandments* and *law-abiding* (an orientation to external standards) and at the "internal" end by attributes such as *self-confident* and *conscientious* (an orientation to more internalised values). Certainly, this analysis highlights two fundamental themes and tensions in moral functioning: between agency and communion, and between community moral standards and individual moral autonomy.

For the religious exemplar, the primary dimension was labelled the *divine–other* dimension reflecting the vertical–horizontal tension or the dual obligation in religious life between a focus on the divine (as evidenced by attributes such as *dependent on God* and *active in church life*) and a focus on sensitivity to others (as indicated by attributes such as *caring* and *helpful*). The other (and secondary) dimension was a *devout–authoritarian* dimension, anchored at the "devout" end by attributes such as *prayerful* and *worshipful* (reflecting a personal religiosity) and at the "authoritarian" end by attributes such as *strict*, *opinionated* and *rule-bound*. This "authoritarian" end of the dimension reflects the negative aspects of the personality profile attributed to the religious exemplar in Walker's (1999) study, particularly the undesirable pole of the agreeableness and openness-to-experience factors. These findings certainly substantiate James's acute observation that "the fruits of

religion … are, like all human products, liable to corruption by excess" (VRE, p. 339). Indeed, history shows that religious fanaticism can lead to significant moral failures when fidelity to certain ideals is out of proper balance; as James noted, "a saint can be even more objectionable and damnable than a superficial carnal man [sic] would be in the same situation" (VRE, p. 370).

For the spiritual exemplar, the primary dimension was labelled a *divine–inner* dimension reflecting, on one hand, a focus on the divine (e.g. *trusts in God*, *close to God* and *God-centred*) and, on the other hand, an emphasis on an inner awareness (e.g. *introspective*, *deep* and *reflective*). It is this inner awareness that is particular to the spiritual exemplar and largely lacking in the religious exemplar. The secondary dimension for the spiritual exemplar was labelled the *divine–other* dimension, notably the same as the primary dimension for the religious exemplar. It was anchored at the "divine" end by attributes such as *has a relationship with God*, *God-centred* and *worshipful*; and at the "other" end by interpersonal attributes such as *kind*, *sympathetic* and *helpful*.

It is often difficult to distinguish appropriately the religious and spiritual domains because of their shared meaning and content. However, the findings of these two studies (Walker & Pitts, 1998, Study 3; Walker, 1999) suggest that spirituality is characterised more typically as some kind of personal affirmation of the transcendent, whereas religion is viewed more typically as the creedal and ritual expression of spirituality associated with the institutional church, and an aspect of human functioning that is more prone to distortion. These observations resonate with James's insistence on the importance of the distinction "between religion as an individual personal function, and religion as an institutional, corporate, or tribal product" (VRE, p. 334) in judging the validity of religious phenomena, and his focus on the type of religious experience "which lives itself out within the private breast" (VRE, p. 335).

Conclusions

This article has provided an exploration of the value of saintliness, particularly as relevant to William James's empirical criterion for the authenticity of religious life in terms of its moral manifestations. James's starting-point assumption, which he justified extensively and vigorously, referenced the authenticity of religious experience, in contrast to the perhaps prevalent view (then and now) that it is epiphenomenal. My intent here was simply to put some empirical flesh on the conceptual bones that James described a century ago in his Gifford Lectures at the University of Edinburgh and published subsequently in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*.

Considerable evidence, adduced to be consistent with James's claims, was reviewed regarding the interconnections among morality, religion and spirituality. For example, religion and spirituality are evidently foundational, at least for some people, for their exceptional moral action and for their everyday processes of moral decision-making. Other research, taking a complementary empirical approach to the same issue, revealed a complex pattern of understandings in people's conceptions of the moral, religious and spiritual domains. Here, different profiles of personality

attributions were evident across domains; as well, different dimensions were found to characterise people's structuring of the attributes inherent in each domain, illustrating some of the underlying tensions in moral, religious and spiritual functioning. Although these attributions were generally positive, some maladaptive or morally questionable aspects were noted, particularly for the religious exemplar. Research in this area needs to remain mindful of the fact that most virtues can be distorted, be taken to excess or lead to an unbalanced state. The field would be well served by a careful empirical exploration of how various core virtues interact in actual human functioning. Certainly, a simple listing of virtues represents an amalgamation that would be impossible for even a saint to embody.

Particularly informative among the findings was the prototype-based research which suggested that the moral, religious and spiritual domains are related but in an asymmetrical pattern: moral exemplarity does not seem to require, in most people's understanding, the characteristics that are central to religion and spirituality; whereas, in contrast, religious or spiritual excellence does require the manifestation of core moral virtues. Stated more simply and directly, people believe that it is more likely that someone can be highly moral but irreligious than it is that someone can be authentically religious but largely immoral.

Finally, the relation between morality and religion may be culturally and historically variable. The research of Shweder and colleagues (1997), for example, suggest three ethical frameworks: autonomy, community and divinity. An ethic of autonomy references notions of freedom, harm, rights and justice; an ethic of community references notions of duty, hierarchy and interdependence; and an ethic of divinity references notions of natural and sacred order, tradition, sin and sanctity. Shweder has found that the ethic of autonomy best characterises moral thinking in America but that the ethics of community and divinity are more prevalent in India. These different ethical frameworks do suggest that the relationship between morality and religion may be structured differently across various contexts.

It has been acknowledged widely that William James has made a powerful and enduring contribution to the psychology of religion in his monumental *Varieties of Religious Experience*; it is now similarly apparent that his insights should similarly inform the psychology of moral development.

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