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Justification Outline Example (Gap in Knowledge Review)

Immanuel Kant (1785/1998), a deontologist, had a theory regarding how to be a moral person. He suggested that to be moral one should always perform behaviors related to perfect duties (being honest, being loyal) and one should occasionally perform behaviors pertaining to imperfect duties (being friendly, charitable, and cooperative). Research in social psychology suggests that Kant's theory aligns with how perceivers attribute traits and make judgments about other people's behavior (Trafimow & Trafimow, 1999; Trafimow, Bromgard, Finlay, & Ketelaar, 2005). That is, stronger trait attributions arise from the performance of behaviors pertaining to perfect rather than imperfect duties (Trafimow et al., 2005; Hughes & Trafimow, 2010). This has been shown for negative or immoral behaviors such that dishonest behaviors are seen as more indicative of a dishonest trait than unfriendly behaviors indicative of an unfriendly trait. However, there is less evidence that trait inferences are stronger when an actor performs a moral behavior pertaining to perfect compared to an imperfect duty. Further, it remains unclear how an actor's relationship to a target person affects trait and moral attributions, particularly for behaviors pertaining to different moral duties.

One's relationship with an interaction partner should influence the trait and moral attribution. This idea is supported by evidence that moral attributions are stronger when an actor harms a relationship partner compared to a co-worker or stranger (Hughes, Creech, & Strosser, 2016). Further, the mutualistic approach to morality (Baumard, Andre, & Sperber, 2013) suggests that it was adaptive to enact moral behaviors toward those who were selected for mutually beneficial relationships. This theory implies that there is a moral norm to treat relationship partners differently than strangers. Evidence from young children also points to the possibility of a moral norm. They behave as though they have a moral obligation to those in their ingroup but not to those in the outgroup (Rhodes & Chalik, 2013).

If moral norms exist people should treat close others differently than less close others. For example, people are honest and loyal to loved one's because they value their relationships

and desire to maintain them. Enactment of perfect duties toward strangers represent motives that are less central to one's moral character (i.e., loyalty and honesty toward strangers is not diagnostic) whereas enactment of imperfect duties toward strangers is expected to provide more information about a person's true moral character in part because it is not normative. This line of reasoning was supported in a study (Hughes, 2015) whereby a charitable behavior (i.e., giving someone money) was seen as more indicative of a charitable trait when enacted toward strangers and co-workers compared to family and friends. Further in studies involving physical harm toward a spouse versus a co-worker or stranger. In studies involving judgments about an actor, Hughes and her colleagues (2016) found that harm toward a stranger or co-worker resulted in lower moral character ratings compared to harm toward one's spouse. This indicates that harm toward close others (and harm may be thought of as a violation of a perfect duty) is more diagnostic of one's moral character than harm toward less close others.

In this literature review, the connection between attributions about moral duties, and moral attributions about close versus non-close others will be elaborated upon. Further, I will argue that this gap in the research should be explored.

References should appear on this page

Literature Review Outline:

- Discuss moral duties and the research on trait attribution. Demonstrate that perfect duties have stronger attributional weight than imperfect duties.
- Discuss research on moral behavior and moral attributions about close versus non-close interaction partners. Demonstrate with evidence that close others are treated differently and that people make stronger attributions about immorality when close interaction partners are harmed.
- Argue that additional research is needed and make suggestions for specific research directions.



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