A Relational Approach to Moral Development in Societies, Organizations and Individuals

Michael F. Mascolo, Allison DiBianca Fasoli, David Greenway

Abstract: Discussions of morality in businesses and organizations tend to center around the rights and freedoms of organizations and/or customers, or around the importance of socially responsible business practice. Rights-based deliberations are often invoked to justify the pursuit of self-interest, either by the business or customer. Calls for socially responsible practices function to constrain the self-interest of organizations, or otherwise prompt businesses to “give back” to the communities they serve. In either case, genuinely moral motives are often seen as secondary to what is assumed to be the primary goal of business – the pursuit of profit. We reject the common sense view that business and moral practice operate as separate spheres of activity. In so doing, we offer a relationalist conception of morality and moral development in everyday life. From a relationalist view, moral standards arise not from nature, God, the mind, or society. They emerge in embodied relational activity that occurs between people. Moral relationalism embraces neither moral universalism nor relativism, but instead views moral standards as a continuously emergent but constrained properties of discursive action that occurs between people as they negotiate and negotiate questions of “what ought to be” in physical and socio-cultural contexts. In this paper, we first show how the full range of moral standards arise in different forms of social relations between people. We then apply the moral relationalist framework to an analysis of the inescapable role of moral judgment in all business practices. In so doing, we suggest that business decision-making should be continuously informed by the tensions that arise between and among at least three moral frameworks: rights, virtue and care. We illustrate the moral relationalist approach to business through in-depth analyses of the moral mindsets of three entrepreneurs who integrate moral concerns into their business practices in different ways.

Keywords: Care, moral development, moral relationalism, rights, virtue.

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Introduction

In what follows, we elaborate a relationalist approach to morality and moral development. From a relational perspective, moral values are neither universal properties of a fixed biological, social or spiritual world (O’Manique, 1990; Porter, 2014), nor are they relativistic constructions that are local to particular individuals, cultures, social groups, or historical epochs (Lukes, 2008). Instead, moral values, norms and frameworks are emergent products of relations between people that evolve historically within socio-cultural contexts; morality consists of fidelity to the demands of human relationships. Moral values and systems emerge as social agents identify, consolidate and promulgate moral goods that have their evaluative bases in human relational experience. From this view, morality is not simply something that arises in response to extraordinary life issues (e.g., life and death), but is instead a continuously emergent property of everyday social engagement. In what follows, we first elaborate upon the moral relational perspective. In so doing, we show how different moral categories emerge within different modes of relational activity between and among humans. We then elaborate the approach through analyses of how moral systems mediate social relations among adults in business and organizational contexts. In so doing, we describe how the moral relationalist framework provides a window into understanding how moral categories emerge and function in everyday life – and particularly in a domain of activity (business) often viewed as lacking a central moral dimension.

The Road to Relationalism

Despite the vast literature on moral development that has grown in the past fifty years, much of this work fails to consider the relational origins and development of morality. First, although moral life involves the rich interpenetration of judgment, emotions, experience, and values as they are organized within socio-cultural contexts, much of the literature has focused on moral reasoning and moral decisions – the cognitive aspects of morality (Kohlberg, 1969; Turiel, 2002). Second, much thinking on the nature of morality development tends to treat morality as a matter of extraordinary rather than ordinary life. In this regard, morality operates as a domain of functioning that is separate and distinct from everyday thinking, feeling and action. Third, moral principles and values are often seen as universal rules or standards that transcend time and place. Such a view runs the risk of viewing moral values as fixed and unchanging evaluative principles. From a moral relationalist view, moral values emerge through the very process of human relating over time. They are systems of strong evaluation (Taylor, 1989) that arise as humans seek answers to questions about the proper ways we should respond to the demands of social relationships (Donahue, 1977). If this so, the search for universal moral principles is likely to obscure the formation of an understanding the very process by which moral values are created. Below we examine these issues, and link them to specific research traditions in moral psychology. In so doing, we highlight problems in much existing theory that create a need for a theory of morality grounded in human relationships.

From Moral Cognition to Moral Integration

Much research in moral psychology addresses questions related to moral judgment or moral thinking. This focus traces to the cognitive-developmental tradition of Piaget (1932), Kohlberg (1969) and the suite of social domain theorists who have reacted to and built upon their work
In his seminal *The Moral Judgment of the Child* (1932), Piaget focused on children’s conceptions of the nature of morality. He produced evidence suggesting that the structure of children’s moral thinking moves from heteronomous conception of morality (i.e., morality consists of fixed, external rules, handed down) to autonomous conception of morality (i.e., rules are seen as changeable subject to the mutual agreement of those involved in a given social encounter).

Kohlberg’s (1981, 1984) constructivist model of moral development built on Piaget’s insight that moral development could be understood in terms of structural changes in an individual’s thinking about moral issues. Kohlberg argued that children initially confuse morality with authority and with social conventions and norms. Children move from incomplete and confused conceptions of morality to progressively more integrated and differentiated (and hence more mature) conceptions. These changes are reflected in the ways that children and adolescents justify and reason about their stances on moral dilemmas. Subsequent scholars challenged the claim that children’s initial conceptions are mistaken and undifferentiated. Forming what would eventually be known as the Social Domain Approach, these scholars produced evidence demonstrating that children as young as 2 ½ could discriminate between moral violations and violations of social conventions (Turiel & Nucci, 1979). Nonetheless, the Social Domain theorists maintained a focus on moral reasoning.

This focus on moral thinking makes sense, as moral concerns are matters of evaluative judgment. However, thinking about moral life as primarily a matter of moral judgment runs the risk of understanding moral life as something that is encapsulated within the cognitive sphere of functioning. As such, the focus on moral reasoning was noteworthy for what it left out of the study of moral functioning. In particular, traditional concerns about moral character (Hartshorne & May, 1928), virtue (Hamm, 1977) and conscience (Kochanska, Koenig, Kim & Yoon, 2010) were ignored and even disparaged (e.g., Kohlberg, 1981). The focus on moral reasoning raised difficult questions about the gap between moral thinking and moral action (Blasi, 1980). Still further, the study of moral development neglected the role of emotion in the organization of moral thinking and action — a process long viewed as central in the genesis of moral systems (Hume, 1751). In the past decades, these neglected issues have resurfaced as central aspects of moral development research (Miller, 2014; Nucci, 2018; Prinz, 2007; Svetlova, Nichols & Brownell, 2010; Tangney, 1987; Thompson, 2014; Walker, 2014). Developmental scholars have worked to develop increasingly integrative accounts of moral functioning and its development (Blasi, 2004; Cushman, Young & Green, 2010; Haidt & Kesebir, 2010; Kaplan 2017; Lapsley & Narvaez, 2005; Walker). Moral life is increasingly understood not merely as a matter of cognition, but in terms of the ways in which action is mediated by evaluative systems that arise at the intersection of bodily (Decety & Cowell, 2018; Liao, 2016), cognitive (Baird, 2018), motivational (Kaplan, 2017; Walker, 2014), emotional (Malti & Dys, 2015), experiential (Sherblom, 2015), linguistic (Tappan, 1997), identity-related (Stets & Carter, 2012) and socio-cultural (Ichiyanagi 2014; Miller, 2015) processes.

**From Separable Domains to Socially Embedded Activity**

Much of the cognitive-developmental tradition, reviewed above, aims to constitute morality as a distinct sphere of psychological functioning, in that the nature of moral evaluation is unique and hence qualitatively different from non-moral evaluations. In this way, morality can be fixed,
defined by a set of features that is stable and constant, and would hold, for example, across cultures, contexts, and relationships. Nowhere is this aim more apparent than in the Social Domain Approach (Turiel, 2002). The Social Domain Approach proposes that there are different domains of social functioning – the moral, social conventional, and the personal (Smetana, Jambon, Ball, 2014) – distinguishable on the basis of unique formal criteria. The three domains differ formally, for example, on the source of legitimate regulation of actions. A distinctive feature of the moral domain is that it encompasses social actions that are perceived as “intrinsically” or “naturally” right or wrong. While these actions may be legitimately regulated by rules, laws, punishments, or social sanctions, the obligation to perform or to avoid performing such actions exists independently of these social regulations. By contrast, the social conventional domain includes social actions that are deemed obligatory precisely because they are regulated by rules, laws, or social norms. Social conventions include forms of address, uniforms, and other rules and norms designed to promote the smooth functioning and coordination of social groups and institutions. The personal domain encompasses social actions that are regulated by the individual actor, rather than intrinsically or socially (Nucci, 1981, p. 115; Nucci & Weber, 1995). These actions are taken to be up to individual discretion (Nucci & Smetana 1996, 2014).

For example, moral rules identify prescriptions against the theft of personal property. Social conventions identify more-or-less arbitrary agreements about where one typically stores one’s personal possessions (e.g., clothing is typically placed in a dresser or closet; dishes in a kitchen cabinet). Beyond these spheres lies a personal sphere action of autonomy and personal choice. In one’s own room, one is free to place one’s dresser, desk, and lamp anywhere one pleases. From the standpoint of domain theory, these domains of thought have their own structure and, while they can overlap in any given act, develop in ways that are largely distinct from one another. Additionally, the use of these issues that we presented in order to exemplify and contrast each domain should be taken as only examples. The specific issues that comprise any given domain might vary (e.g., across cultures, contexts). It is the form of the domain that remains fixed, with its own internally complete and discrete structure.

Thus, according to the social domain approach, moral rules are those that are taken to be (a) universalizable in the sense that they are binding for people in other cultures; (b) unalterable in the sense that if there were no rule against the infraction it would still be wrong; (c) non-contingent in the sense that if an authority were to indicate that an infraction were acceptable it would still be wrong; and (d) serious, in the sense that someone engaging in the infraction would be subject to sanction even if the infraction did not violate existing conventional rules. Finally, moral rules are those that involve matters of justice, welfare, and rights.

In recent years, scholars have questioned the merits of the moral/conventional distinction (Kelly & Stich, 2007; Lourenço, 2014; Machery, 2012). They have argued and empirically demonstrated that the formal criteria do not always cohere in ways predicted by social domain theory (Shweder, Much, Mahapatra & Park, 1987; cf. Jensen, 2008). For example, some researchers (Kelly et al., 2007; Stich, Fessler & Kelly, 2009) have observed that participants across studies sometimes regard norms involving rights, justice and welfare as local rather than generalizable and as dependent upon authority. Additionally, beyond these conceptual and empirical questions, researchers have also suggested that there are social groups in which people do not make a moral/conventional distinction at all (Levine, Rottman, Davis, O'Neill, Stich & Machery, in press).
and that the distinction is itself a product of a particular conception of morality and moral worldview (Shweder et al., 1987).

A related issue concerns the types of evaluative content that can be seen as definitive of a moral judgment. Haidt & Kesibir (2010) have described what they gave called the “great narrowing” of the concept of morality in Western psychology. In the past fifty or so years, psychologists have tended to limit the class of moral concerns to those organized around rights, justice and welfare (Kohlberg, 1980; Turiel, 2015). Such concerns, of course, are largely reflective of the individualist frameworks within which psychological scientists have typically operated. In recent years, this situation has begun to change. Psychologists have begun to expand their conceptions of morality. Psychologists have resurrected an interest in traditional categories of morality, which include issues related to virtue and character; the good and the worthy; compassion and care; in- and out-group loyalty; authority and duty; higher and lower; the sacred and divine; the pure and the polluted (Berniūnas, Dranseika & Sousa, 2016; Graham, Nosek, Haidt, Ier, Koleva & Ditto, 2013). While the debate over whether these concerns can be considered “truly moral” continues, we argue below why they should be, from a moral relationalist perspective. More broadly, below we outline our theory of moral relationalism, showing how moral concerns are not fixed but relative to relational experience, which in turn provides the grounding for a diverse and broad range of potential moral concerns. Before doing so, we trace the intellectual roots of moral relationalism.

Moral Relationalism

Moral relationalism holds that moral concerns emerge from and are legitimized in terms of the goods that arise from human relational experience. In this regard, perhaps paradoxically, moral relationalism harks back to Piaget’s (1928/1965) relationalist conception of human development. Piaget’s (1965) relationalist approach has its origins in the classic debate between individualist and holistic conceptions of sociological facts. The individualist approach maintains that society is merely an aggregate of individual persons. From this view, social knowledge is the result of the mere summation of the knowledge across individuals (i.e., “the whole is equal to the sum of its parts”). In contrast, Durkheim championed the holistic conception of emergent sociologism. From this view, social facts are irreducible wholes in the sense that they exhibit properties that do not exist in their base constituents (individual persons). Further, in his version of emergence, novel sociological wholes exist “exclusively in the very society itself” and thus are “external to individual consciousness” (p. xx, cited in Kitchener, 1991); they exist, for example, at the level of collective rather than individual consciousness.

Piaget rejected both extremes of the individualism-holism debate. For Piaget, social knowledge can neither be reduced to the activity of individual minds nor does it correspond to novel sociological wholes that operate somehow independent of their constituents (see Mascolo & Kallio, 2019). Instead, social knowledge (e.g., rationality, reason, social and moral norms) are products of relations between individuals. Piaget called this approach sociological relativism or relationalism. For Piaget, social wholes indeed show emergent properties, they do not form novel entities that are in some way independent of or “hover over” their parts. Instead, “social facts” arise from interactions (relations) between individuals which are consolidated into rules, values and shared signs. For Piaget, shared values have their origins in the personal desires (and values) of individual actors. When people interact, they exchange values, which then become consolidated...
into larger and more equilibrated systems of rules and meanings. In this way, the norm of reciprocity arises in social interaction as (a) the action of one person results in some (b) satisfaction of desire in another. As a result, a (c) debt or obligation to repay is incurred by the second person as a result of the action of her partner; this debt or obligation can be (d) repaid at some other time. The consolidation of the emergent meanings created by this pattern of interaction forms the basis of reciprocity norms.

Piaget’s example of reciprocity illustrates the ways in which evaluative and moral concerns emerge from the structure of social relations. However, the example of reciprocity runs the risk of under-representing the full extent of the intersubjective nature of human interaction (Mascolo & Kallio, 2020). In the example of reciprocity, it is easy to think of interacting individuals as self-encased actors whose experiential worlds operate largely independent of one another. From this view, humans begin life as separate and independent individuals who become social only when they come into contact with other individuals. While novel forms of social knowledge may arise from relational activity, individual persons precede social relations. From a relational point of view, persons are relational rather than merely individual beings. Persons are both separate and connected, individual and social, distinct but nonetheless mutually-constituting (Gergen, 2009; Mascolo, 2013; Raeff, 2006, Shotter, 2017). Humans are not self-encased beings who come into the world cut off from the experience of others. Instead, humans enter the world with a primordial capacity for intersubjectivity – that is, an ability to share, coordinate and mutually incorporate experience between self and other (Di Paolo & De Jaegher, 2015). The development of a moral sense builds upon the primacy of intersubjective experience (Bråten & Trevarthen, 2007; Trevarthen, 1993) and the demands of relationships (Donahue, 1977).

This relational view of moral development is reflected in the seminal work of Emmanuel Levinas (1961/1987), a French philosophy of Lithuanian heritage who, as a Jew, spent time in concentration camp during World War II. Levinas’ conception of moral action has its origins in his experiences in the Nazi death camps in World War II. The need to treat humans with moral dignity is often justified on the basis of appeals to a common sense of humanity. He noted that any attempt to include individuals under a common conception of humanity was limited by the nature of one’s conception of the human itself. Levinas (1961/1987) warned against the dangers of totalization – the tendency to assimilate the Other to one’s own conception of what it means to be human. Noting the ease with which some groups of people can be defined as other than human, Levinas turned this conception on its head. Instead of anchoring morality in a totalizing conception of humanity, Levinas grounds moral life in terms of one’s open-ended relation to the other – a spontaneous agent who is a continuous source of novelty. For Levinas, there is an infinity of meaning that lines behind and shines through “the face of the other” (Hendley, 2000; Waldenfels, 2002). My encounter with the other always brings forth the possibility of novel forms of meaning. The other is a constant source of potential novelty, always calling upon me to reconsider or revise my existing understandings of the world. I am thus never complete; the other always provides the possibility of novelty that calls for new forms of responsiveness from me to the other. I act as a moral agent each time I accept to the call to be responsive to the other and to the infinity that the other provides.

For Levinas, morality thus emerges from the very structure of relational life (Hendley, 2000). One’s sense of responsibility to the other operates at a pre-reflective level within the very structure
of interpersonal relating itself. In any social encounter, the other speaks to me and calls out a response from me. I am called upon not simply to respond to the other, but to be responsive to the plea of the other. It is in my very responsiveness that my responsibility toward the other emerges and evolves. It is my responsivity to the other that provides the grounding for ethical or moral life. Morality is defined in terms of the proper demands of being in relation to others. From a moral relationalist perspective, a moral framework is a symbolic system of strong evaluation that has its origins in relations between people and is justified with reference to diverse goods that arise within intersubjective experience. In what follows, we elaborate upon the meaning and implications of each element of this definition.

Symbolism and the Construction of “Nots,” “Oughts” and “Ought Nots”

In his famous Definition of Man [sic], Kenneth Burke (1969) defines the human as a symbol-using animal. Symbols are representational vehicles through which persons can make one thing (e.g., a word, symbol, image) stand for something else (e.g., a meaning, object or sentiment.). The importance of this capacity cannot be overstated. According to Burke (1966), persons are not typically aware of “just how overwhelmingly much of what we mean by ‘reality’ has been built up for us through nothing but our symbol-systems” (p. 5). It is through the symbol that humans are able to extend awareness “beyond the information given” in direct sensorimotor experience (Bruner, 1972). We look and “see” a button affixed to a shirt. While the button appears on the retina in the shape of an ellipse, we are nonetheless aware that it is round. In this way, our representation of the object as a button bestows meaning beyond the registration of sensory patterns. Our knowledge of that which is “not there” structures our perception of present experience. Our expectations of what is typically “there” orients our attention to deviations from those expectations. For example, we might observe a person’s shirt and notice the absence of a button. Our sense of the button’s absence is noticed rather than seen, as we cannot see absence; we cannot see what is not there.

Humans live in the world of the negative. Our worlds are mediated by the not there whenever we notice a missing button; imagine what we will have for lunch; seek to live up to standards of worth defined by our communities, or long for a peaceful world. Of course, while we live in the world of the negative, “there are no negatives in nature” (Burke, 1969, p. 498). All that exists in the “natural world” is the positive – that which is there. Our sense of the negative is a produce of our capacity for symbolic representation. It is only a few short steps from the capacity to represent the not there to the capacity to represent what is typically “there” and, still further, to represent what ought to be there. When we enter the world of the “ought,” we enter the world of moral judgment (Burke, 1966; de Waal, 2014; Tse, 2008). Moral judgments are judgments of what ought or ought not to be. It is but a few steps from the capacity to represent what is not present to the capacity to construct representations of what could be to the representation of shared standards for what should and should not be. The concept of ought implies the capacity to compare the present state and some absent, imagined or idealized state. To say, “Don’t steal the cookies!” involves an act of comparing some possible state of affairs (e.g., Madge hitting her sister) to some representation of a more valued state – a state that is seen as right, good, worthy or otherwise valued (e.g., inhibiting the impulse to take what is wanted). When we act on the basis of what ought to be, we act within a word mediated by symbolically represented systems of right and wrong, good and bad, or worthy and unworthy.
Moral Judgment as Strong Evaluation

People are evaluating beings. Persons act on the basis of the evaluative significance of their circumstances. Moral judgments are forms of what Charles Taylor (1985, 1998) calls strong evaluation. Distinguishing between strong and weak forms of evaluation, Taylor (1989) defines weak evaluations are those directly involved in a person’s pre-reflective wants, desires and interests. In contrast, strong evaluations emerge as people reflect upon the worth of one’s wants, desires and interests. In weak evaluation, a person directly experiences the sweetness of the candy bar or the strain of physical exertion. In strong evaluation, one reflects upon the worthiness of sweets and exercise. Is it good that I eat so much candy? Is it good that I avoid the pain of exercise? Weak evaluations are direct and pre-reflective first-order evaluations. Strong evaluations are second-order reflections upon first-order evaluations. In strong evaluation, I reflect upon the worthiness of my first-order wants, desires, interests and actions. From this perspective, a wanton is an individual whose psychological processes are mediated by weak evaluation; a person is one who is able to make choices mediated by systems of strong evaluation.

The Relational Development of Moral Values and Frameworks

Drawing on these ideas, we elaborate upon five interconnected processes in the historical-relational construction of moral values in both societies and individuals.

1. First-order evaluations emerge within different forms of human relational experience. Social relations occur when at least two people come into contact with each other. Table 1 provides a description of the relational origins of different moral values as they arise with 10 basic forms of human relational engagement. For each of these 10 forms, Table 1 describes (a) the structure form of relating; (b) socio-moral questions raised by the form of social relating in question; (c) the basic modes of evaluative experience (i.e., “goods” and “harms”) that emerge within each mode of relating, and (d) moral values, rules and emotions that that have their emergent basis in these various modes of relating. Moral values and systems arise as ways of resolving the problems that arise within different forms of relating. The forms of relating that motivate and constrain the construction of moral values are emergent processes. While some forms of relating are likely to arise in virtually all cultures and all times (e.g., care and protection), other forms of relating can arise only within particular social and cultural circumstances (e.g., concerns about property rights require the emergence of societies that raise questions about the control over land and resources).
Table 1. The Emergence of Moral Values in Diverse Forms of Relating

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relational Form</th>
<th>Form of Social Interaction</th>
<th>Basic Experience of Good and Bad</th>
<th>Emergent Moral Values and Emotions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Basic Verbal and Nonverbal Communication.</strong> How do I respond in communication?</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Communicative Responsivity" /></td>
<td>Contingent responsiveness vs. distress over non-responsive, non-contingent.</td>
<td>Responsiveness (Satisfaction vs. Frustration, Anger)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. Boundaries vs. Intrusion.</strong> What is me/mine vs. you/yours?</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Boundaries vs. Intrusion" /></td>
<td>Satisfaction of intimacy vs. pain, distress and anger over unwanted intrusion.</td>
<td>Respect for Boundaries and Personal Identity; Mine versus Yours; Ownership (Anger, Moral Outrage)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3. Acting and Restricting.</strong> What are the limits of my agency?</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Acting and Restricting" /></td>
<td>Freedom and joy of agency vs. pain, distress, anger and frustration of restriction.</td>
<td>Autonomy/Rights vs. Oppression (Anger, Moral Outrage)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4. Distributing Resources.</strong> How do we divide goods?</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Distributing Resources" /></td>
<td>Satisfaction of want/need in context of scarce resources; pain of inequity or lack of access to resource</td>
<td>Justice, Fairness, Equality, Merit (Anger, Envy, Jealousy, Pride)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5. Giving and Receiving.</strong> How do we respond to debt?</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Giving and Receiving" /></td>
<td>Satisfaction and joy of giving and receiving; pain of lacking goods, debt or failure of reciprocation.</td>
<td>Reciprocity, Duty/Obligation (Gratitude, Entitlement, Anger, Vengeance)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>6. Responding to Need.</strong> How do I respond to your pain and need?</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Responding to Need" /></td>
<td>Empathic pain for the other; joy in advancing well-being of other</td>
<td>Morality of Care (Compassion, Empathy, Love, Sympathy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>7. Social Evaluation Relative to the Good.</strong> What is a “good” or “bad” person?</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Social Evaluation Relative to the Good" /></td>
<td>Pleasure in recognition of value of self; pain of social devaluation</td>
<td>Vice and Virtue; Good vs. Bad Character; Honor (Pride, Shame, Guilt, Embarrassment, humiliation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>8. Group Decision Making.</strong> Who can make decisions in a group?</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Group Decision Making" /></td>
<td>Satisfaction of order and beneficial leadership vs. distress of uncertainty and disorder</td>
<td>Authority, Hierarchy, Piety, Obedience vs. Subversion, Disobedience and Chaos (Fear, Respect, Security)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>9. Group Integrity.</strong> How do we protect group integrity?</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Group Integrity" /></td>
<td>Safety and security of group belonging vs. fear and isolation</td>
<td>Group Loyalty vs. Betrayal; Group Identity (Loyalty, Patriotism, Affiliation vs. Fear, Shame)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>10. Relating to the Divine.</strong> How do I relate to the cosmos?</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Relating to the Divine" /></td>
<td>Fear and awe in the order, power and beauty of the world; satisfaction of understanding, safety, certainty, guidance</td>
<td>Sanctity vs. Blasphemy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
All forms of social relation are organized around some form of interpersonal **responsiveness**. There can be no social interaction unless social partners are responsive to each other’s actions. Being responsive means more than simply responding to another person. Responsivity requires that social partners act with reference to the meaning of each other’s actions and states. In development, perhaps the most basic form of responsivity consists of the relationship between the developing infant and a caregiver (Meltzoff & Brooks, 2007; Scholl 2013; Trevarthen, 1993). The infant comes into the world fully dependent upon the care of others. An infant who cries “calls out” some sort of response from her caregivers (Shotter, 2017). The infant’s cries are immediately recognized as a signal of some form of need. The failure to meet the needs of the infant would bring about **harm** and **pain**; being responsive to those needs is thus **good** – not only for the infant but also the caregiver and the community at large. In this way, first-order goods and harms emerge in the very structure of infant-caregiver interaction.

2. **First-order evaluations are intersubjectively identified, corroborated and verified within symbolic exchanges that occur between people.** First-order goods and harms are experienced directly within the emergent flow of social relations. However, even though they are experienced directly, as pre-reflective aspects of experience, they are not necessarily **intelligible** to either self or other. The most obvious case of the unintelligibility of direct experience occurs in infancy. While young infants experience states such as hunger, fatigue and distress directly, they do not know that it is “hunger,” “fatigue” or “distress” that are experiencing. While infants may be able to experience another person’s expressions of care, anger or love, they are not necessarily aware that it is “care,” “anger” or “love” that the other person is expressing. The capacity to make experience intelligible to both self and other develop over time through the capacity for intersubjective engagement with others (Bråten & Trevarthen, 2007). Within social interaction, infants and caregivers adjust their actions and experiences to the ongoing and anticipated actions of their social partners (Fogel, 1993). In so doing, infants and caregiver create and express novel forms of experience in relation to each other. In those interactions, caregivers use words to identify the experiences expressed by their infants, by other people and by caregivers themselves. Words are the repositories of already-existing meanings that have their origins in long histories of social relations. When a child learns to use the psychological lexicon of her community, she becomes able to represent experience – both her own and that of others – in socially sharable ways (Carpendale & Racine, 2011; Moore & Barresi, 2010; Vygotsky, 1978). As such, although children experience their psychological states directly, it is only through the use of language that they make those experiences into intelligible objects of shared social reflection (Cippolletti, Mascolo & Procter, in press; Martin, Sokol & Elfers 2008; Moore & Barresi, 2010).

It is thus through discursive interactions that first-order goods and harms are identified and made intelligible for objects of public reflection (McNamee, 2015). In infant-caregiver interaction, this occurs when a caregiver uses words to identify valenced aspects of an infant’s experience-in-action. In everyday practical activity, when socialization agents use phrases like, “Are you **hungry**?” “Is it the teddy bear you **want**?” “Does that taste **yukky**?” “You don’t **like** it when Daddy takes your bottle?” “Did that hurt?” “You **love** mommy,” their words function as symbolic vehicles that parse the flow an infant’s personal and relational experience (Carpendale & Racine, 2011; Rochat, 2015). In so doing, caregivers draw on culturally-shared symbolic meanings to provide the child with symbolic means for representing the goods and harms that emerge in everyday experience (Bråten & Trevarthen 2007; Carpendale & Racine, 2011; Moore, C., & Barresi, 2010).
Interpersonally, the capacity to use symbol systems to make relational experience intelligible provides caregivers with the means not only to identify goods and harms that exist in ongoing relational experience, it also allows parents and children to reflect upon and discuss goods and harms that are not currently present, but which could, should or should not exist (Martin, Sokol & Elfers 2008). At the social level of the community or society, the capacity to identify and reflect upon first-order goods and harms is necessary in order to identify second-order moral goods and harms – that is, shared strong evaluations of what should or should not exist in social relationships.

3. Moral values, rules and norms are intersubjectively created within symbolic exchanges in which people reflect upon first-order evaluations and coordinate them into shared, second-order strong evaluations. Moral evaluations are types of strong evaluation – second-order evaluations of first-order evaluative states (Rochat, 2015). Strong evaluations are reflections on first-order goods and harms. In a community, moral values, rules and norms emerge as cultural agents reflect upon, coordinate and consolidate representations of first-order goods and harms into shared (and contested) second-order representations of what ought and ought not to be (Tappan, 1997; Tomasello, 2011; Tse, 2008). The relationship between first- and second-order evaluations is neither obvious nor direct. First-order goods often come to be understood as second-order harms (Agonito, 1976). For example, while experiences such as sweetness and relaxation may function as first-order pleasures, we quickly become aware that too much of either can produce obesity. While physical pain and effort may be experienced as first-order pains, when they accompany physical exercise, pain and effort function as often experienced as second-order goods. It is in this sense that moral character can be understood as the cultivation of a proper attitude toward pleasure and pain (Aristotle, 1999; Cain, 2005; Wielenberg, 2002). If pleasure and pain consist of first-order evaluations, moral character emerges as the stable capacity to bring action into correspondence with second-order strong evaluations of first-order experiences.

Questions about the proper status of first-order goods and harms are ubiquitous. To the extent that different first-order goods and harms arise within different form of relational experience, questions about their proper status and roles in social life are ubiquitous. Each form of relational experience identified in Table 1 yields questions about the proper status and relations among different first-order goods and harms. Within any given form of relating, there are multiple possible answers to these questions. For example, social interactions naturally raise questions about boundaries and intrusion (relational form 2 in Table 1). It is likely that the differentiation of the physical body from its surrounds provides the experiential basis for higher-order conceptions of self and other. At a basic level, the boundaries of an individual person might be understood in terms of what can be considered within or outside of the skin. When a pinprick intrudes upon the skin, it causes pain – a first-order harm. The experience of such pains raises questions about the legitimacy of forms of intrusion on the self. While a pinprick may be seen to bring about first-order pain, the meaning of pain becomes transformed when the physical intrusion takes the form of a physician’s needle. A strong evaluation such as “infants should be inoculated” arises as communities reflect upon, identify and seek to reconcile diverse goods and harms. Because it functions in the service of a larger good, the intrusion of the needle into the body takes precedence over the pain of the needle. However, this is but one way to resolve questions about the nature and legitimacy of boundaries between self and other. Circumcision is a practice the produces pain. How does the pain and removal of a body part comport with the cultural and spiritual meanings in which such acts are played out? There is no single answer to these questions. Instead, the moral
status of these acts is established as communities seek to represent and reconcile diverse goods and harms in relation to each other.

4. Moral rules and values are legitimized (grounded) with reference to the first-order goods on which they are based and the extent to which they function to meet other higher-order moral goods. In the absence of any single standard against which to judge the moral correctness of a given action, it might be tempting to classify moral relationalism as a form of relativism. A common use of the concept of relativism states that, in the absence any objectively identifiable system of universal moral rules, moral values, rules and norms are relative in the sense that they are only valid under particular contextualized frameworks (Lukes, 2008; Slife & Richardson, 2011). Relativism is often justified on the basis of different moral or conceptual systems are based on qualitatively different presuppositions and thus are often incommensurable with each other. The validity of moral rules can thus be seen as relative to particular individuals, social groups or cultures as they function within particular times, places and social contexts. Moral relationalism rejects this view. While moral systems embraced by different individuals and cultures are often based on vastly different axiological foundations, relativistic views often fail to appreciate the diversity and conflict among moral values that exist within particular individuals, cultures and time periods (Wainryb, 2006; Wong, 2009). Neither cultures, individuals or time periods are monolithic structures (Hermans, 2001). The idea that moral beliefs are relative to culture implies a monolithic or homogeneous conception of culture. However, cultures are not singular unified entities. They are always organized with reference to multiple forms of both shared and contested values (Bhatia & Ram, 2001; Jensen, 2011; Wainryb, 2006). Moral values conflict both within and between cultures. As a result, cultures are not separate and discrete entities in relation to which moral values can be relative.

There is one sense, however, in which moral relationalism embraces a form of relativism. If moral values, rules and norms are relative, they are relative to human relational experience. Moral values and norms not only emerge within diverse forms of social relations, their legitimacy is grounded with reference to (a) the seriousness of those goods and harms, (b) the mutual constraints that emergent goods and harms place on each other, and (c) the extent to which such goods and harms lend themselves to intersubjective verification as good or bad. For example, perhaps the most salient moral good is the value of life itself. As a second-order moral good, the sanctity of life has its origins in a suite of embodied first-order experiences. These include experiences of the goodness of breathing, of maintaining bodily integrity, of satisfying bodily needs, of being free of pain and so forth. The fear of pain, of suffocation, of starvation and death are palpable ones. The value of life as a moral good arises from and is justified in terms of (a) the experiential seriousness and salience of these first-order goods and harms; (b) the ways in which patterns of these goods and harms – experiences like breathing, pain and the anticipation of death – cohere together and thus constrain the construction of representations of moral value, (c) and the extent to which the value of such experiences lend themselves to intersubjective corroboration between and among people. The capacity to corroborate experiences of the goodness of life, the harm of pain and the fear of death between provides the first-order foundation for the creating and justifying shared higher-order values such as the sanctity of life. The capacity to establish (and re-establish) intersubjectivity about the ubiquity and seriousness of such first-order goods and harms provides the foundation for the construction and justification of moral norms. To the extent experiences of good and harm can be intersubjectively corroborated as goods and harms, they are more likely to
be generalized or universalized as moral norms – that is, norms that hold not just for me and you, but for increasingly encompassing groups of “us.”

5. **Moral systems develop in within and between both individuals and societies.** Moral universalism maintains that a common framework of morality exists that has universal applicability across time and place. In refuting the existence of any form of universalizing standards, moral relativism maintains that moral values are relative to particular times, contexts and cultures. Both views are largely non-developmental. In understanding morality as an emergent product of lived relational experience, moral relationalism offers an alternative – namely that, moral systems themselves develop as humans grapple with enduring and emergent evaluative questions in real, developmental and historical time (Schinkel & Ruyter, 2017); moral progress (Hermann, 2019; Moody-Adams, 1999) is possible. Moral relationalism differs from relativism in the importance it places on the other in the dialectical development of moral systems. As expressed by Levinas (Waldenfels, 2002), encounters with the other offer the continuous possibility of novelty. Our engagements with others introduce us to novel ways of knowing, feeling, evaluating and being – ways that often conflict with or contradict those embraced by the self (Turiel, 2002). There are, of course, many ways to respond to the experience of relational conflict. One could close off the self from conflict, thus preserving the current integrity of self the while rejecting the contradiction of the other. Alternatively, one could give oneself over to the other, and act that would eliminate the conflict but destroy the integrity of the self. A third option is to approach conflict as an opportunity to resolve conflict dialectically – that is, to develop novel and more powerful shared beliefs through the integration of opposites.

Frimer and Walker’s (2012) reconciliation model of moral developmental show how moral identities develop in individuals through the dialectical integration of opposites. As shown in the left panel of Figure 1, in their model, children enter the world capable of acting on both on the basis of self-interest and concern for others. Early in development, self-interest and concern for others develop along separate and largely independent lines. Self-interest is evident whenever a child seeks to satisfy personal need or desire; concern for others can identified in the empathic responses of young infants, and in the desire for older infants to assist other in the context of clearly expressed needs. Young children tend to exhibit self-interest and concern for others in different contexts. Over the course of development, the motives for self-interest and concern for others inevitably come into conflict. A child may want a toy for herself, but nonetheless notice (or have her attention called to) her playmate’s distress upon not having access to the toy. In mid-childhood, children tend to have difficulty resolving such socio-affective conflicts. For Frimer and Walker, adolescence provides a choice point in the development of moral identity. During his period, adolescents seek novel ways to reconcile the conflict between self-interest and concern for others. In addressing this conflict, a developing individual may address the conflict by privileging self-interest over concern for others, or vice-versa. A genuinely moral identity develops when individual reconcile self-interest with concern for others. In so doing, they can begin to forge a moral identity around the idea that “it is in my self-interest to meet your needs” – or – at a perhaps higher level, “I will make the goal of meeting your needs part of that which defines my self-interest”. While unmitigated self-interest is incompatible with care for the other, Frimer and Walker’s model show how self-interest and concern for the other are transformed through the developmental integration of opposites.
Frimer and Walker’s (2012) reconciliation model illustrates several features of moral development. First, it shows how higher-order moral identifications develop through the constructive integration of *self-interest* and *care for the other*. In so doing, it shows how moral selves develop through relations that occur between people. Third, it shows how self-interest can be transformed through the process of relating to the other. The moral adult is not selfless. However, what it means to be a self becomes defined with reference to the moral demands of being in relation to others. Fourth, the model shows how different values – in this case, self-interest and concern for the other – become organized within a broader socio-moral system of beliefs over the course of development. A person’s moral beliefs are not defined by any single moral orientation or domain, but instead by the dynamic coordination of multiple moral values in relation to each other. Each moral value constrains the other in the dynamic process of moral development. Still further, while Frimer and Walker’s (2012) model was conceived with the development of individuals in mind, it is easily extended to understand the development of morality and moral beliefs beyond the individual. Moral beliefs develop as social agents – whether they be individuals or larger collectives – seek to adapt their actions and beliefs to the moral demands of relating to others. To the extent that individuals and groups are genuinely willing to *engage* rather than *dismiss* the concerns of the moral Other – it is possible to construct novel moral systems through the process of integrating opposing beliefs. Such a process would require the cultivation of a mutual willingness to identify “kernels of truth” in the opposing beliefs of the other. A relational approach holds out the hope that novel, higher-order and hybrid systems of shared moral belief can develop as people(s) seek to create novel forms of shared belief through the successive differentiation and integration of opposing systems of value. We have examined the dialectical construction of novel forms of individual and shared belief is discussed in several recent papers (Basseches & Mascolo, 2010; Mascolo, 2017, in press; Mascolo & DiBianca Fasoli, in press; and Marginean, LaTorre, Derien & Mascolo, 2019). The discussion now turns to an analysis of the ways in which adults construct moral frameworks for reconciling self-interest and concern for others in the context of a mode of interaction that is often seen to lack a moral dimension – owning or running a business.
Beyond Self-Interest: The Relational Construction of Morality in Business

If there is an arena that lends itself to an analysis of moral functioning in adulthood, it is the realm of business and economic life. The question of whether business and organizational activity can move beyond the monolithic and unquestioned principles of self-interest, individual rights, and the freedom of markets is hardly new. However, the search for a new social and economic framework that includes care for the other, society, and our natural resources has never been more relevant or urgent.

Evolutionary scholars have acknowledged that our species has flourished largely based upon our ability to collaborate and form communities for our mutual benefit and survival (Pirson, 2017). Indeed, organizations are “social structures created by individuals to support the collaborative pursuit of specified goals” (Scott & Davis, 2007, p. 11). But the modern day corporation is far from Smith’s (1776) view of human beings as rational and self-interested but moderated by prudent evaluation. Friedman’s (1970) assertion that profit is the singular purpose of corporations ignited an unbridled self-interest in contemporary economic life. The combustible combination of individualism – with a focus in economic gain, and market principles – within a culture that promotes growth without limits or harm (Boulding, 1966) brought on a half-century of shareholder primacy in the growth of business organizations.

A consequence of the growth, power and influence of organizations was the separation of the decision-makers and from those which are materially affected by the organizations (Beets, 2011). Before the mid-1800’s, economic and social ‘rules’ were the province of individuals, families, or communities. With the advent of the industrial revolution, economic organizations grew to become the predominant canvas on which our ways of relating and being played out (Boulding, 1953; Stern & Barley, 1996). In the last half-century, however, membership in social, religious, and labor organizations has decreased sharply. It is against the backdrop of a ‘go it alone’ ethos of self-sufficiency that Putnam (2001) invoked metaphor of “bowling alone” to illuminate the collapse of community in contemporary American culture. This shift elevated the formal economic organization (i.e., corporations) as the dominate feature of our interpersonal relationships, our moral behavior, and in our relation to the natural world (Davis, 2006). However, these changes are far from a recent phenomenon, rather, they have “crept upon us silently. It is something we accept as natural almost without thinking. And yet, the whole movement raises problems with which we are ill equipped to deal” (Boulding, 1953, p. 4).

The ‘winner’ in this evolutionary race was the modern-day corporation, with “features that make it larger, more powerful, and more permanent than any individual human being” (Carroll, et.al. 2012, p. 11). Scott and Davis (2007) observe that even though these legal entities represent a small portion of the economic system in terms of number of entities, they have a disproportionate amount of social influence and economic power. This power is in part attributable to the corporation’s rights as an artificial person which have continued to increase – rivaling those of the human person. Corporations as “artificial legal person” has enabled the accumulation of “previously unimaginable sums of money” (Carroll, et.al. 2012. p. 11). With this economic and legal power, Stoll (2005, p. 261) argued that corporate rights and free speech would “undermine the moral rationale and practical feasibility of guaranteeing rights of civil free speech to
individuals.” The imbalance of power and extended legal reach would likely lead to the “privatization of functions that have historically been the mandate of local, state, and federal governments” (Barley, 2007, p. 204).

A primary casualty of this imbalance of power is the what Becker & Ostrom (2003) refer to as the Tragedy of the Commons. The Commons, as proposed by Hardin (1968), includes ecological resources such as air, water, minerals, and other inputs into the economic systems that are available and equally entitled to all members of society. The Commons cannot be excluded nor can they be subtracted from the costs and impact of the organization’s activity (Becker & Ostrom, 2003). For organizations, these resources are necessary means of production, however their extraction, usage, and disposal has far-reaching consequences on the environment as well as the dignity and well-being of the individual. The Commons have been disproportionately under the care and at the disposal of the largest economic entities.

How we care for and protect the Commons, as well as how we establish priorities and make decisions regarding social, economic, and natural resources extends beyond logic of free market principles. Market principles fail to live up to their promise when stakeholders are excluded from the evaluation of the exchange. The 1984 Union Carbide gas leak in Bhopal India is an example where the basic human right to safety was exchanged for a promise of future economic development (Jennings, 2012). Sandel (2012) speaks of the current tendency to view social problems as little more than a market inefficiency that can be solved with robust economic analysis and an appeal to the profit motive. He writes: “We have fallen in love with the idea of free market solutions to all manner of societal ills. And in doing so, it seems we have handed much of this judgment back to the markets, and by extension to corporations” (Sandel, 2012). He goes on to say: “The most fateful change that unfolded during the past three decades was not an increase in greed. It was the reach of markets, and of market values, into spheres of life traditionally governed by nonmarket norms” (Sandel, 2012).

**Contemporary Movement Toward a Moral Marketplace**

The ubiquity of these large formal and powerful organizations (corporations) has arguably improved the quality of life for large portions of the global population. However, economic inequality and the readily observable diminished living standards of much of the world’s population stands in sharp contrast to record-breaking corporate profits and the increase in wealth of the top 1% of the populations (Adler, 2019). As the rights and influence of corporations have grown, the need for corresponding responsibilities has been brought into sharp review. As the rights of corporations have led to increasing power and influence, the need for corresponding responsibilities has been brought into sharp review.

The practice of corporate social responsibility (CSR) has emerged in part to counter the excess of corporate power and influence by shifting existing business practices toward more sustainable ways of working. However, as Adler (1999) points out, many CSR-related efforts serve only to reduce the rate and magnitude of harms to social and environmental resources but often fall short of wholly sustainable practices. Newer innovative business forms such as Benefit Corporations (BCorps) acknowledge the tensions between rights and responsibilities and are chartered with social and moral imperatives. BCorps fill a needed void by working to solve “society’s most
challenging problems cannot be solved by government and nonprofits alone” (About B Corps | Certified B Corporation, n.d.). These organizations eschew Friedman’s profit imperative and are “obligated to pursue public benefit in addition to the responsibility to return profits to shareholders” (Hiller, 2013, p. 287). Noteworthy BCorps such as Patagonia, Greystone Bakery, and New Belgium Brewing operate in a sustainable manner both responding to and helping shape stakeholder values “toward more sustainable forms of consumption” (Painter et al., 2018, p. 88) and acknowledging the responsibilities borne by all stakeholders.

**Moral Thinking in the Organization of Business**

Business is often juxtaposed to morality. It is common to hear people contrast “from a business perspective…” with “from a moral perspective.” From a moral relational approach, all human action takes place against the backdrop of inescapable moral frameworks. This includes business activity as well. To speak from “a business perspective” is not to adopt a non-moral stance; it is to act from the standpoint of “what is good for the business” – where “the business” refers typically to the survival and economic well-being of the organization. To invoke what is “good for a business is to adopt a moral stance – a stance that maintains that survival and the making of a profit is in some sense a good thing. The moment we do this, we have entered into a moral discussion. The moment we are aware that we are acting out of some form of self-interest (either at the level of the individual self or the business as a whole), there is no exit from the moral implications of our actions. While we may ignore the moral implications of our actions, they are nonetheless there. This is not to say that there are no moral justifications for acting on the basis of the interest of the business or the interest of the self. Would anyone suggest that individuals are not morally justified to act in ways that support their individual or group survival? There are thus justifications for acting in the interest of the self or business. However, if there are reasons that justify self-interest, there are also reasons that limit it and that direct us to attend to other moral implications of our actions in relation to others. It becomes necessary to understand self-interest as it functions within the broader context of human relationships. In business, as in life, we must act with fidelity to the proper demands of relationships (Donahue, 1977).

In what follows, we illustrate the ways in which business operations are and can be organized around moral values that extend far the principle of self-interest. In so doing, we describe the structure of moral thinking as by a series of business owners or managers in the context of open-ended interviews. Three individuals are described here. The first is the owner and operator of a successful dentist office in a small town in New England (USA). The second is senior chef employed by a major hotel in a major American city. The third is the owner of a marketing firm that represents select clients in major industries judged to make important contributions to the public good. The two business owners are responsible for all aspects of the operation of their business; the chef is responsible for all local matters involving in the running of the hotel...
restaurant. This includes ordering food, setting prices, training, hiring and firing, and managing expenses.

We analyzed the interviews by constructing interpretive themes suggested by the content of the interviewee’s statements as they may or may not have related to the moral themes described in Table 1. We organized interpreted themes and verbatim statements into a two-dimensional socio-moral space. Drawing on MacMurray (1962), the horizontal dimension spans meanings from fear/concern for the self on the left and concern for the other on the right. The vertical dimension distinguishes between the extent to which statements refer to groups (top) or to individual persons (bottom). Each owner or managers’ statements were organized within the resulting socio-moral space; relations among the various statements were identified wherever they could be grounded in the expressed content of their interview. Each socio-moral space displays the structure of the moral thinking that organizes the owner/manager’s expressed approach to running the business.

The moral thinking expressed by each manager was both rich and variegated. The structure of each manager’s thinking was organized around complex relations among multiple moral values that were tied to different forms of relationships involved in the running of the business. While the types of moral values expressed by the three managers revealed some similarities, they were organized around different moral principles. The dentist’s moral thinking was organized around the idea of business as instrument for sustaining livelihoods; the chef’s thinking was organized around the principle of virtuous personhood and ethical exchange; the marketing professional’s thinking was organized around the idea of business as a collaborative social project rather than a means for making profit. In what follows, we describe the structure of each individual’s thinking in more detail.

**The Dentist: Business as a Means for Creating Livelihoods**

_I am using helping people with their teeth as a conduit to operate a business that gives people a livelihood. However, just because I take a fee for something doesn’t mean I don’t care for that person. The desire to help people with their health is a motivating force behind my business._

At the center of the dentist’s moral structure is the notion that his business, like any business, exists to “give people a livelihood.” First and foremost, businesses help people by providing them with jobs. Jobs help families because they pay well and also because they initiate a relationship between employee and employer that is ongoing, where the employer is sensitive and responsive to individual employee needs. In this context, familial needs of employees can be met through additional exchange relationships. For example, paying for child-care for an employee also helps that employee return to work, which helps the business. As shown in Figure 2, the bottom line is maintaining the business so that it can continue to provide this kind of livelihood for its employees. Hence, (1) “profit is a 100% necessity” Ultimately, it is (9) the responsibility of the owners to ensure that there is a profit, so that the business can continue to achieve these ends. Profit is imagined not only in terms of the survival of the business as a means to livelihood. It is also imagined as a motivating force. Profit as motivating applies to each individual within the company. As a business owner, the dentist is motivated by profit (2) and for employees, bonus systems incentivize employees (11), while salaries – where the “profit” is fixed – disincentivizes employees (10).
At the same time, profit is motivating not only on account of having additional money. Profit is also motivating, the dentist says, because it is an index of “how much I am helping people.” He continues, “When I look at how much dentistry came through my office last year, I am not thinking, man I made a lot of money, but rather man we did a lot of work. That’s a lot of people we helped.” Profit is a concrete symbol of the care for customers (13). In this sense, care for customers is a central motivating force that is not “mutually exclusive” with profit. As the dentist urges, “just because I take a fee for something, doesn’t mean I don’t care for that person.” Finally, profit indexes not only help for customers, but also help for employees. The dentist concludes this thought saying that profit means a successful business, which is one “that people really like working for.” For the dentist, then, considerations of the business and care for individuals involved in and with the business are all wrapped into one.

Fairness is conceptualized as exchange that is freely entered into. When the dentist speaks of discounts, these discounts are not determined on the basis of the moral qualities of the customer’s character, but rather on the qualities of the work that constitutes the exchange. When the amount of work – in terms of quality or quantity – does not represent the agreed-upon fee, the dentist will discount that fee, either “not charg[ing] or charg[ing] less.” Prices are fair when they are willingly agreed upon and when they are proportional to the work conducted.

What underlies this conception is a deep notion of individual freedom that involves agency and personal choice. It comes into play when determining when and which customers to discount (12), it comes into play when determining whether and to which organizations to donate goods, services, and time (3), and it comes into play when determining when to give employees additional benefits. In all cases, there is a wide sphere where owners can decide how to relate to others in the context...
of their activities. This is perhaps most apparent when it comes to donating time and services to organizations and to individuals served by those organizations, such as the free clinic that the dentist is involved in each week. This involvement involves virtues that are tied to the business. These involve gratitude, in acknowledging the role of the community in the success of the business (5) and having a good reputation that will bring more people to the business (6 and 7). As such, these activities can be indirectly linked to the success of the business and to the livelihood it creates.

**The Chef: Virtuous Personhood and Ethical Exchange**

*I would rather hire a good person who can learn how to cook than hire a good cook and try to teach him how to be a good person.*

In his interview, the chef described his approach to managing his kitchen around concerns for *care, virtue* and what might be called and ethos of *ethical exchange*. Throughout the discussion, the chef made repeated reference to the concept of “a good person” – that is, the need for the manager to act a good person, to hire “good people” – in the moral sense, and for the company itself to act as if it were a “good person.” From the chef’s standpoint, a “good company” is one that is:

- *transparent* in their cost. They [are] easy to deal with – *purposefully* – not just easy because it’s an easy thing but purposes. Let's let me *go out of my way* to make your life easier. You're spending money. I'm going to give you that service – that's part of *my service*. *Fair* to their employees and workers. *Fair* and *responsible* to environment. *Fair* and *responsible* to their neighborhood area. All of those would speak to me saying this is a *good company* (emphasis added).

As shown in Figure 3, in elaborating this conception, the chef described his approach to managing his kitchen in terms of the need to create a (1) “*good place*” where “people like working” in order to support “longevity” among employees (“not a revolving door”). In so doing, the chef contrasted his orientation to that of a co-worker who, expecting workers to be motivated for continuous advancement, expressed criticism that some workers had been working the same position for over 30 years (i.e., “Why are they still doing the same job?”). The chef identified the goal of fostering an environment to create “stable, happy people” as an important objective – one in which “some people move up quickly, some people move up slowly”, but also with “people [who] are taking care of their families, doing what they need to do.” In this regard, the chef talked at considerable length about his attempts to (2) *nurture the development of employees*. For the chef, nurturing employees was not simply a matter of teaching them kitchen skills. Instead, the chef spontaneously described several examples of his willingness to “find somebody who has the ability to get out of [bad life situations] and succeed”, indicating that, “if I can help them with that I would.” In this regard, the chef continuously invoked the moral value of *care* for his employees, not simply to as employees of a business, but as people with needs and concerns of their own.
At the same time, while care figured prominently in the chef’s discourse, he also pointed out the ways in which care for his employees helped the business itself. This is indicated at point (3) in a structure we have called the virtue triad. Here, invoking some standard for being a virtuous person or business, chef explained how invoking some standard of virtue motivates acts of care which also function to support the economic interests of the business. For example, he chef (3) described that “I take care of my team and my staff (virtue) in a way that helps them (act of care) as much as it helps me in the business (self-interest). This type of triadic structure occurred several times in the chef’s narrative (see below). In this regard, the chef also made reference to the desire to care for employees out of (4) a need to attract and retain skilled workers (self-interest). He observed, “the lower unemployment rate is not wonderful for employers. It makes it difficult to find people.” The chef also invoked “self-interest” in explaining the role of (5) profit in his approach to management. He said, “ultimately a business exists to make profit. The rest of that stuff (moral values such as virtue, care, etc.) falls under that or in between that, because if we make, if we're making money and have the ability to pay our people better and maybe put more people so they don’t have to work so hard.” Note here, however, that as soon as the chef invokes the concept of profit, he links it explicitly to his sense of the purpose of profit: that is, profit is needed to pursue some sort of good – in this case, the pay employees more or make their jobs easier. These sentiments show how, as implied in the structure of the (3) virtue triad, the chef organizes his thinking around different moral values that interpenetrate each other. The chef refers to this directly in his statement that “in my mind all of that rolls into the same. I think that's something that's not at all exclusive of the other definition.”

The chef is charged with establishing pricing for large banquets housed at the hotel. In response to the question, “how do you price? Do you price for different people?” the chef replied “I don't. I don't price higher for certain people. Ever. So, mom and pop, an HVAC company comes for a
party, their price is the same.” In expressing this sentiment, the chef expressed his concern for (7) 
fairness in the treatment of different groups. At the same time, he acknowledged that (8) pricing 
differentials were fair in some situations. For example, in setting rates for hotel rooms, he 
suggested that it was acceptable to modify rates for rooms as a function of when reservations were 
made. Rooms rented well in advance could be charged at a lower rate than rooms rented within 
weeks of intended occupancy; rooms rented on the day of occupancy could be lower still, in order 
to ensure the room does not remain vacant. At the same time, the chef expressed distaste with the 
practice of taking advantage of customers during in the context of a seller’s market, that is, the 
“attitude of ‘they’re coming anyway, let’s squeeze them for all we can.’” In so doing, he expressed 
a desire for fairness both the customers and to the self-interest of the company. Further, the chef 
noted his willingness to give discounts for banquets for groups finances was demonstrably limited. 
However, he expressed a deep unwillingness to provide discounts to companies that he perceived 
had the means to pay listed prices. He explains his distaste, however, not simply in terms of fairness 
but instead in terms the ethics of relationship. In responding to companies of means that ask for 
deep discounts, the chef explains, “[We have] published pricing. And you want to come to business 
with us and you have shit tons of money. What makes you think or who do you think you are to 
then squeeze us?... you may only want to spend that [amount], but I’m almost like ‘how dare you 
ask me for that kind of discount consideration?’” Here, the chef appears to experience the 
aggressive actions of a company of means not in terms of an abstract concept of fairness, but in 
terms of a lack of care or consideration in the relationship between the chef (and his company) and 
the client.

A final issue involves the chef’s spontaneously expressed commitment to community issues as 
part of his conception of a virtuous business. Invoking (8) a sense of responsibility to the 
environment, the chef made reference to his rigorous desire to limit waste in the kitchen, for the 
purpose of ensuring “clean water, clean air and healthy people.” When asked, “why should you 
care about that as a business? [Isn’t that] kind of something ‘over there’?” the chef responded, 
“No I think more business owners and business managers need to. You cannot ‘if it doesn't bother 
me because I live in this part of town away from the dump.’ It still bothers my town or my state, 
my country or my world.”

The Marketer: Collaborative Social Purpose

*Morality in business is the same as morality in social interaction - full stop.*

While consumers tend to believe that marketing plays a positive role in making people aware 
of products, they also believe that marketing serves the interests of business at the expense of those 
of consumers (Barksdale & Darden, 1972; Heath & Heath, 2008; Kashif, Fernando, Altaf & Walsh, 
2018). The owner of the marketing firm was adamant that while mistrust toward marketers exists, 
moral marketing is not a contradiction in terms. Unlike both the dentist (and to a lesser extent, the 
chef), the marketer does not identify profit as the primary motive for a business. As shown in 
Figure 4, for the marketer, (1) while profit is necessary, but it is not the purpose of the business. 
The purpose of a business is to form a collaborative unit for the purpose of advancing some valued purpose:
[The purpose of my business has] always been a collaborative environment and it's never been money. When I talk to staff about that, they're inspired by that to a degree, but they want more money as an incentive...But I'm not motivated by that. I need a certain amount of money to have my satisfactory life, but I don't need to travel by helicopter and private car. So to me, it's always been about going to work and having fun each day.... And fun to me is having challenging work.... And if I have to sacrifice revenue for that, I'm cool with that.

Operating from this point of view, the marketer was explicit that (2) “morality in business is the same as morality in social interaction.” Profit is necessary in the sense that the operation “has to be profitable for it to keep going.” However, the profit exists so that the business can “have the client coming with a particular challenging situation that we're trying to fix or answer.” At the same time, (3) the companies that he works for must be those that “add to society.” The marketer indicated that he explicitly chose to work in particular industries because “these are services that I highly respect and think people need,” and that he would not represent clients – such as the alcohol industry – which he felt do not “add to society.” In this way, he is in the business of (4) providing “information that really helps [people] make good decisions.”

![Figure 4: The Marketer: Collaboration for Shared Purpose](image-url)

This statement is consistent with (5) the marketer’s conception of the nature of marketing “as a form of communication.” In elaborating this statement, the marketer noted the difference between this idea and the common notion that marketers are untrustworthy conduits of information. The interview asked whether “there are ways to market ... without duping people.” The marketer replied:
The premise of that question is … of course, you are gonna lie as a marketer, but you don't have to. It’s this whole [assumption] that marketing is inherently a lie. I think of marketing as communication. I’m communicating with you now. As an academic, you [will] communicate to your audience through this journal. [Are the] words you choose to communicate your findings [a] lie? How do you describe me? … You're making a judgment on how you articulate. That’s what marketing is – we're making a judgment about how to articulate. We could be authentic; but [6] we also want to create excitement. You do [that] too when you write that article. [If you] use the most boring terms possible, nobody's going to read your article.

The marketer indicated that he could accept the proposition that “all communication is selling” in the sense that communication requires “getting someone to pay attention.” However, to make the “selling” morally legitimate, a company must be prepared to (7) “deliver on … the brand promise.” Brand promise is the image that the company puts forth to define what it is able to deliver to the customer. If, in the context of a given transaction, a business is able to deliver on the promise made in the process of selling, then the marketing of that product has been morally legitimate. The business has made an honest promise, and has kept it. It is thus (7) delivering on brand promise and (2) invoking the ethos of everyday social interaction that (8) a business can forge a reputation as an “upstanding player” who is “really really good at what you do you.” This reputation not only functions as a reflection of the character of the company, but also (9) gives clients a reason to do business with the company, as opposed to the other companies with which the business is in competition.

**Conclusion: Morality and Moral Action as Evolving Relational Processes**

We sometimes think of human psychological activity action as *first* behavior and *then* moral evaluation. Moral frameworks are often experienced as occupying a realm that is in some sense separate from everyday behavior – something related to extraordinary rather than ordinary human relations. As such, it is often seen as something that is “added onto” what we do rather than something that is part of the very process of what we do. Nowhere do we see this view more clearly than in the domain of business. Here, people often think that self-interest (e.g., the pursuit of profit; the preservation of the business itself) is the business of business, and that morality or ethics is something that is relevant after a stable profit structure has been established.

Moral relationalism maintains that moral values are properties not of some secondary or other worldly sphere of functioning, but instead are embedded and emergent outcomes of social relations themselves. The moment we enter symbolically-mediated social relations, our actions raise inescapably moral questions and function against the backdrop of already existing albeit constantly evolving moral frameworks. Contrary to what one might think if one were to examine the history of moral psychology in the latter part of the 20th century, the moral frameworks that frame human action are highly variegated – even within particular cultures. Among Western cultures that identify themselves as democracies, the ethos of rights, freedom and equality is dominant. However, while these moral values are foundational to democracy, they neither exhaust the range of moral values that mediate social life nor are they sufficient to sustain structures that promote human flourishing.
Moral selves are mediated by the capacity to engage in strong evaluation – higher-order evaluations of what we might pre-reflectively experience as first order goods. Self-interest is a first-order good that becomes transformed through the process of relating to others. Through our social relations, we can the capacity to use the meanings represented in socially-shared symbol systems to create higher-order moral representation of who we are and who we believe we should become. In this way, our selves become transformed and continue to become transformed as long as we find ourselves immersed in novel forms of experience made possible by our relations to the social and moral other. In this way, adult development occurs within the arena of socio-moral relations to others. It is mediated in large part by the construction of increasingly powerful, integrated systems of moral belief and action that are founded in relations between and among both individuals and social groups.

References


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