Moral Rationalization and the Integration of Situational Factors and Psychological Processes in Immoral Behavior

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Moral rationalization is an individual's ability to reinterpret his or her immoral actions as, in fact, moral. It arises out of a conflict of motivations and a need to see the self as moral. This article presents a model of evil behavior demonstrating how situational factors that obscure moral relevance can interact with moral rationalization and lead to a violation of moral principles. Concepts such as cognitive dissonance and self-affirmation are used to explain the processes underlying moral rationalization, and different possible methods of moral rationalization are described. Also, research on moral rationalization and its prevention is reviewed.

Religious scholars, philosophers, and laypeople alike have been puzzled for centuries over the problem of evil. When horrendous atrocities such as the Holocaust occur, people scramble for explanations, but they seem to raise more questions than answers. How could a group like the Nazis get away with such extreme immorality? Why did entire societies seem to close their eyes to the evil around them? How can we act to prevent such moral monstrosities in the future?

To answer these questions, people often turn to dispositional explanations to describe the origin of evil behavior (see Darley, 1992, for an extended discussion of naive theories of evil). Laypeople often posit that pathology or character flaws cause evil individuals to disregard moral standards and commit evil. Psychologists have long stated that moral standards are important in bringing control and order into our relations with others and to society as a whole (e.g., Freud, 1930). These standards are learned early in life so that by the time most individuals become adults, they have internalized what Bandura (1990, 1991) termed "moral self-sanctions," what Freud labeled the "superego," and what is called in everyday language our "conscience."

Whatever the name given to these internalized moral principles, it is clear that morality is so ingrained in people that they are not easily ignored (Bandura, 1991). But how does one explain, then, the prevalence of crime throughout all societies? A dispositional approach might focus on the idea that because of certain psychopathologies, some people have failed to internalize the moral standards of society and thus perform evil deeds with impunity. Or at the very least, immoral individuals have certain personality characteristics that predispose them to psychological processes that make it easier to act immorally (e.g., Post, 1990). In other words, evil actions come from evil people.

In contrast, much current research has begun to move away from an exclusively dispositional model of the pathological evil actor to more interactional explanations of evil. Rather than originating from a few evil people, evil arises from a combination of situational (e.g., Darley, 1992; Zimbardo, 1995) and psychological factors present in the majority of individuals (Bandura, 1999). For example, certain situational and psychological factors can prevent people from realizing how their behavior violates their moral principles. Evil in this case arises from our failure to activate our moral standards. This social psychological explanation claims that all of us have the potential to commit evil actions, given the right circumstances. Once individuals realize the moral ramifications of their actions, they can work actively to convince themselves and others that their evil behavior falls within moral standards.

I call this psychological phenomenon *moral rationalization*: the cognitive process that individuals use to convince themselves that their behavior does not violate their moral standards. The occurrence of moral rationalization is a normal and prevalent psychological phenomenon and can be involved in small unethical acts, such as cheating on taxes, as well as large atrocities such as the Holocaust. An explanation of evil that incorporates moral rationalization posits that people can violate their moral standards because they have convinced themselves that their behavior is not immoral at all. When moral rationalization interacts with certain situational variables, extreme evil can result.

In this article, I attempt to show how both situational and rationalization factors are important concepts in understanding evil. I present a model that illustrates how these two factors contribute to immoral behavior. I also use psychological theories such as moral disengagement, cognitive dissonance, and self-affirmation to explain why individuals might feel the need to rationalize immoral behavior. Once researchers are familiar with the different methods of moral rationalization and the processes behind

them, they can work to short-circuit the cycle of evil, leading the actor to behave morally instead of immorally. To illustrate these points, I rely heavily on examples from the Holocaust of World War II, one of the epitomes of extreme evil in contemporary society.

Precursors to Moral Rationalization: Values, Perceptions, and Motivations

Figure 1 illustrates a model of moral rationalization and evil behavior. (The terms *evil*, *immoral*, and *unethical* are used interchangeably in this article to refer to any behavior that objectively violates the actor's moral principles.) In this model, the individual is faced with the choice of either upholding moral principles or engaging in moral rationalization to justify a potentially immoral behavior, allowing him or her to violate moral principles but still preserve the semblance of being moral. The first assumption of the model is that morality is valued by the individual. Second, the individual needs to perceive that moral principles are relevant to the particular situation. Certain structures present in the situation, such as an obedience-induced
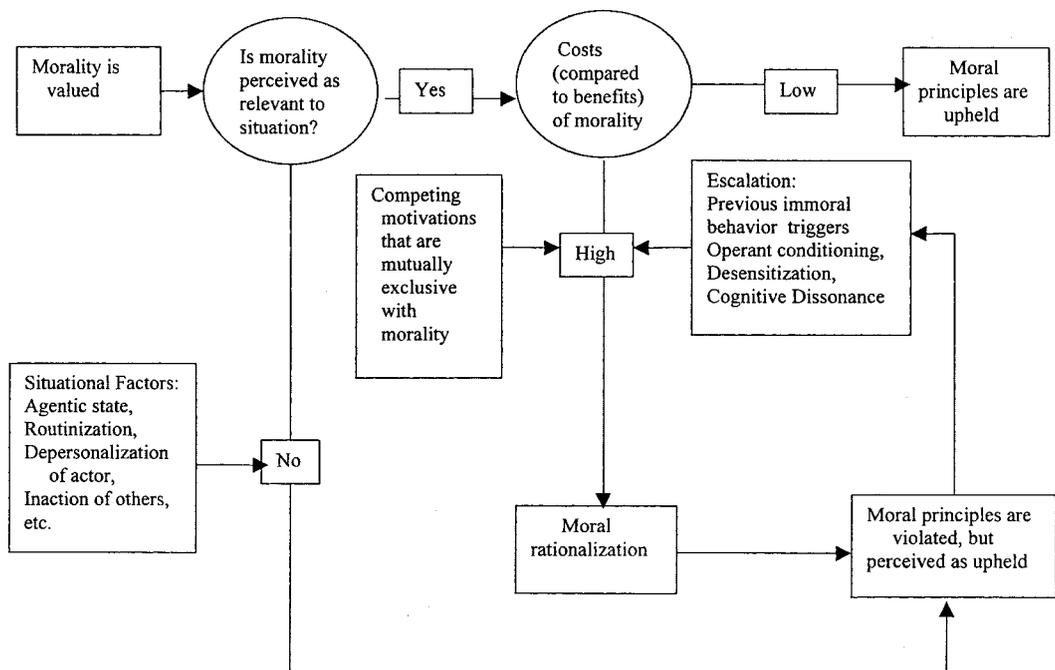

Figure 1.   Model of moral rationalization and evil behavior.

agentic state, or routinization, can prevent morality from becoming salient. Third, once morality is salient, the individual weighs the costs and benefits of acting morally versus choosing a potentially immoral behavior. Acting to uphold moral principles can be a benefit, in that the individual can receive praise from the self and perhaps others. However, if that person has other motivations that compete with morality, and if the goals of these motivations are mutually exclusive with moral goals, then behaving morally will carry the cost of forfeiting the goals of the competing motivations.

Acting on competing motives carries its own cost, that of self-condemnation for engaging in immoral behavior. If the ratio of costs to benefits of acting morally is high, then instead of choosing to uphold moral principles, the individual may instead engage in moral rationalization and reconstrue potentially immoral behavior as being moral or at least irrelevant to morality. This lowers the cost of acting immorally by reconstruing the act as being in fact moral. If moral rationalization and evil action occurs, this sets the stage for escalation: the increased likelihood and intensity of further evil behavior. These steps leading to moral rationalization and evil action are affected by different factors. I look at the factors that affect an individual's decision at each point in this moral decision-making process.

The Universal Value of Morality

Ironically, rationalization of immoral behavior begins with the high value that individuals place on moral standards. If people did not care about upholding moral standards, there would be no need to rationalize immoral behavior into being moral. Morality itself emerges out of the social nature of human beings. Society develops in part because an individual who works in concert with others can reach goals that cannot be reached alone. Yet, along with these social benefits come conflicts arising from people's competing goals. Because of this, in every gathering of individuals there arise moral principles that govern people's interactions with one another. Thus, some form of morality is present in and valued by all societies (Nowell-Smith, 1967). Within each society, individuals are raised with a specific set of moral codes that are given almost sacred importance. Well-social-

ized people from any culture should hence strive to be moral or at least make efforts to refrain from being seen as immoral.

Because the majority of individuals place such a high value on upholding moral standards, they cannot simply violate their moral principles when they wish to reach goals in conflict with morality. Instead, individuals rationalize to themselves that their actions still fall within moral standards. But before this rationalization occurs, the individual has to perceive that moral principles are relevant to the situation at hand. These perceptions of the situation are the second step on the road to moral rationalization.

Perceptions of the Situation

Certain elements present in the situation can obscure the moral relevance of one's evil actions. These situational factors represent the first potential cause of evil behavior. At this point, the individual is not aware that his or her behavior violates moral principles and therefore has yet to engage in moral rationalization. These situational factors that can conceal moral relevance include obedience, roles, deindividuation, routinization, norms, and the inaction of others. In addition, the specific context of evil organizations brings together a number of these situational factors, increasing the potential for immoral behavior.

Obedience to authority and the agentic state. Milgram's (1974) classic obedience studies are prime examples of the strong effect situational factors can have on moral behavior. In these studies, a naive participant was ordered by an experimenter to shock a confederate. When Milgram originally asked other psychologists to predict the outcome of this experiment, the vast majority of them hypothesized that only a pathological few would obey the experimenter's commands to incrementally increase the shock to dangerous levels. The prediction of knowledgeable researchers was, in fact, a dispositional one: The obedient person who obeys evil commands is sadistic and ill. In running the experiment, Milgram quickly discovered the strength of the experimental situation over disposition, as about 65% of participants in the original studies obeyed orders to shock a confederate the maximum 450 volts. In the interviews following the experiment, many participants claimed that, though they themselves dis-

liked shocking the other person, they felt obliged by the experimenter's orders to continue. Rather than perceiving their actions as immoral, these participants pointed to the situation as the cause of their harmful behavior.

Milgram (1974) explained the participants' obedient behavior in terms of an "agentic state." He believed that the individual in an obedience situation moves from an autonomous state of acting on his or her own initiative to an agentic state that he described as "the condition a person is in when he sees himself as an agent for carrying out another person's wishes" (Milgram, 1974, p. 133). Similarly, Bandura (1999) pointed out that many individuals in an obedience situation have a shift in attention from their responsibility as moral agents to their duty as obedient subordinates. Rather than being completely agentless, "good" obedient individuals feel a strong duty to carry out their orders well. Because they are focusing on the importance of obedience, these individuals might not realize their own part in evil behavior.

So circumstances requiring obedience can cause an individual to perceive a situation as one in which moral questions do not need to be asked, at least not by the actor. Rather than focusing on the moral ramification of actions, the individual focuses on the duty to obey and interprets the situation in terms of how well he or she is following orders. If the obedient individual does not perceive his or her actions in terms of moral principles, there is no need for rationalization; it is instead the responsibility of the person in authority to sort through the moral issues.

This shift of attention from moral values to the duty to obey can be seen in some of the qualifications given by Eichmann of his guilt in the Holocaust. He claimed that "what he had done was a crime only in retrospect, and he had always been a law-abiding citizen, because Hitler's orders, which he had certainly executed to the best of his ability, had possessed the 'force of the law' in the Third Reich" (Arendt, 1963, p. 24). Eichmann asserted that, at the time, his role in the Holocaust did not seem to contradict moral principles. Rather, the situation called for him to be an obedient soldier, which he was to an extreme.

The effect of roles. One of the reasons why individuals in an authority situation may not realize the moral relevance of their actions is that they focus on their role as an obedient subordinate (Kelman & Hamilton, 1989). Blumenthal (1999) theorized that a focus on roles is an important contributor to immoral behavior. If a given role includes aggressive or unethical behavior, individuals may engage in that behavior without realizing that it violates their moral principles. Ordinary people who are given roles of oppressive power over others will begin to display pathologically aggressive behavior against the powerless (Staub, 1989).

Haney, Banks, and Zimbardo (1973) demonstrated the powerful effects of roles in their Stanford prison experiment. They randomly assigned normal, well-adjusted male college students to be either prisoners or guards in a simulated prison. They found marked differences in attitudes and behaviors between the two groups. "Guards" became increasingly aggressive toward the "prisoners" as the study progressed. The majority of their interactions with the prisoners took the form of commands, threats, and punishments. Those guards who were not aggressive did nothing to speak out against the aggression of their peers. In contrast, the prisoners became increasingly passive with time. A few prisoners, though judged as emotionally stable before the study began, displayed severe emotional breakdowns and had to be released early from the study. Prisoners fell into their role from the beginning, obeying intrusive and degrading commands from the guards, whereas the guards quickly became facile in their role of controlling the prisoners. Although there were a few weak effects of personality, the authors concluded that the biggest influence on participants' behavior was the role assignment. The Stanford prison experiment is a stunning example of how roles can influence behavior and alter moral perceptions in a situation.

Kelman and Hamilton (1989) argued that an interaction between personality characteristics and roles contributes to immoral behavior. Specifically, they believed that individual differences in political orientation could predict people's behavior in obedience situations. An individual with a *rule orientation* complies with society's laws and customs to garner reward and avoid punishment. People with a rule orientation are obedient to authority only when the authority has direct influence over their reinforcement. On the other extreme, an individual with a *values orientation* has internalized the

values and moral principles of society. The obedience of those with a values orientation is conditional on whether orders from authority are consistent with their internalized values. An individual can also have a *role orientation*, identifying with a particular role within society, such as the role of a good citizen. Those with a role orientation are the most obedient to authority: They do not need direct rewards or punishments to comply with orders, and they are less likely to question the orders' morality. Individuals with strong role orientations might not even perceive the immorality of an evil order from authority; their focus would instead be on their moral roles as obedient subjects. According to Kelman and Hamilton (1989), these individual differences in political orientation can affect people's sensitivity to roles in a given situation, leading to more or less obedience to unethical orders.

Roles may have partially influenced Nazi concentration camp guards. Although many guards may have been self-selected (Staub, 1989), it is also possible that merely being placed in a position of power caused some nonpathological individuals to display the aggressive behaviors that came with their role as a guard. Many Nazis may have had a role orientation, causing them to pay less attention to the moral ramifications of their actions and more attention to their role as good Nazi party members in the killing of Jewish people. In this way, individuals' roles in a situation can reduce the salience of relevant moral principles and aid in immoral behavior.

Deindividuation. The concept of deindividuation is another example of how situational factors can obscure moral relevance. Certain aspects of a situation can cause people to lose their sense of individual identity, allowing them to engage in behavior that is discrepant with their internal standards. For instance, individuals in a crowd of onlookers obscured by darkness have been known to encourage suicidal people to jump to their death (Mann, 1981). However, with smaller crowds in daylight, jeering is less likely to occur. In the Stanford prison experiment, the guards were given identical uniforms with reflecting sunglasses to promote deindividuation (Haney et al., 1973). Zimbardo (1995) explained deindividuation by stating that an increase in anonymity increases immoral behavior by reducing cues for social evaluation

and self-evaluation. However, when the situation changes to make individuals more self-aware, they are less likely to engage in the same behavior (Diener, 1980). In this way, the deindividuating structure of the situation can serve to disguise divergences between behavior and moral standards or, instead, make discrepancies salient.

Routinization. Circumstances that are task oriented and routine can also obscure the relevance of moral principles. Kelman and Hamilton (1989) described how tasks become routinized when actions are so structured that there is no chance to question the morality of the situation. People see themselves as small cogs in a huge machine. Routinization causes individuals to avoid the implications of what they do by encouraging them to focus on the details of the job rather than the meaning of the tasks. The situation is then transformed from one of moral right and wrong to a focus on the process and performance of a specific assignment.

Examples of routinization can be found in Eichmann's description of being sent to Bratislava to discuss mass evacuations of Jewish people (Arendt, 1963). Rather than focusing on his memory of the arrangements that were made between him and his superiors there, Eichmann instead recalled such details as bowling with Sano Mach and hearing of the assassination of Heydrich. Not until he was further probed did Eichmann even remember that he had been sent to Bratislava to organize evacuations. Arendt (1963) speculated as to why Eichmann focused on what he did: "To evacuate and deport Jews had become routine business; what stuck in his mind was bowling" (p. 82). For Eichmann and others, making arrangements to eliminate the Jews was just a routine task.

Todorov (1996), in his discussion of morality in the concentration camps, commented on Eichmann's routinization of his duties: "Eichmann focuses his attention exclusively on the methods of execution, never on what is at stake in the action itself" (p. 174). Although the routinization inherent in Eichmann's tasks may have prevented him from realizing the immorality of his actions, it is likely that after his capture, when he was being charged with war crimes, Eichmann also strategically portrayed his actions as routinized to rationalize his behavior to himself and to the people putting him on trial. Routinization can thus be used as a

rationalization for purposefully immoral behavior, but it first serves to hinder perceptions of moral relevance.

Euphemisms—sanitized words or phrases—can contribute to routinization (Kelman & Hamilton, 1989). If wrongful behavior is called something less thought provoking, then actors can view their tasks as just part of their jobs. The labeling of the Holocaust as "the final solution to the Jewish problem" allowed many Nazis to routinize their actions by focusing on solving the "problem," taking the focus off of the moral implications of their actions.

Depersonalization of the actor. Other aspects of the situation can cause individuals to feel depersonalized and take away their feelings of moral agency. Todorov (1996) combined the ideas of obedience, routinization, and deindividuation and applied them to concentration camp guards in his description of depersonalization of perpetrators. He stated that actors became depersonalized when they were converted into a means to another end. Similar to Milgram (1974), Todorov claimed that the very act of obedience or focus on a particular task without consideration of its implications leads to depersonalization: "Someone who only follows orders is no longer a person" (1996, p. 166). He then pointed out that the totalitarian governments under which concentration camps functioned held up submission and obedience as virtues. Because of this emphasis on obedience, concentration camp guards were reduced to a means to another end, and the question of moral choice no longer existed for them. Todorov stated that when depersonalization occurs, perpetrators of evil no longer see themselves as thinking, breathing human beings with worth of their own. Instead, as with routinization, actors see themselves as cogs in the bigger machine of the political movement. For example, because many members of the Nazi party felt as if they were tools for a greater cause, they felt stripped of volition to choose between good and evil and no longer saw themselves as responsible for their actions, moral or otherwise.

Depersonalization is also related to deindividuation, in that factors such as the arousal that comes with wartime, the feelings of transcendence and anonymity from being a member of an organization such as the Nazis, and the diffusion of responsibility inherent in the concentration camp system could have deindividuated

people by obscuring cognitions of discrepancies and responsibility, making it harder for individuals to interpret the situation as morally relevant. However, although deindividuation is something imposed on the individual through the situation, Todorov (1996) characterized depersonalization as something individuals directly seek out. In other words, people have an active role in their own depersonalization. For instance, because submission was highly valued in the Nazi party, Nazis would strive to fulfill their duties of obedience, actively seeking to become depersonalized. In this way, individuals can interact with the situation to obscure the moral relevance of evil action.

The inaction of others. The reactions of victims, bystanders, and other perpetrators in a given situation can also affect one's perception of moral relevance. For example, if victims do not protest harm done to them, the actor might assume that the victims are willing to be harmed or that his or her behavior is not even harmful. In contrast, cries of injustice or protest from victims can make moral principles salient to the perpetrators, curbing their immoral actions (Staub, 1989). Bystander inaction can also work to keep moral principles from being salient. Latané and Darley's (1970) concept of pluralistic ignorance asserts that the inaction of bystanders can prevent others from perceiving an emergency. This inaction could also work to prevent people from perceiving moral relevance in a situation. In turn, bystander protest in the face of immoral action can serve to bring moral principles to the fore (Staub, 1989). Finally, when perpetrators are seen to commit crimes without apparent remorse, they serve as models, teaching people that these acts are acceptable. Other potential actors then accept the morality of the perpetrator's action without question. In contrast, if a perpetrator is seen as remorseful or as suffering punishment as a result of the immoral action, others might be more likely to realize the relevance of morality in the situation. In this way, the actions of other people in the situation can affect the salience of moral principles.

Evil organizations. One avenue through which these situational factors become implemented is "evil organizations." Darley (1992, 1996) described how structures imposed on a situation by an institution such as a corrupted corporation or military can propel individuals

unknowingly into a spiral of immoral actions. These institutions have situational factors such as obedience and routinization already in place, obscuring the moral ramifications of unethical actions. It is not until some disaster occurs, and the individual is made aware of the immorality of his or her actions, that the need for rationalization arises. Darley stated that at this point of initial awareness, if the individual chooses the path of rationalization and cover-up, he or she is transformed into an evildoer. The Nazi government in Germany can be seen in terms of an evil organization. It constructed euphemisms and elaborate systems of routinization and obedience to disguise the nature of the "final solution." Yet, although some members of the Nazi party may have started out oblivious to the relevance of morality in the Holocaust, because of the extremely immoral nature of this event it is probable that almost all perpetrators eventually became aware of the violation of moral principles. This set the stage for rationalization among the Nazis, transforming many normal, law-abiding citizens into agents of evil.

Despite factors that can work to obscure the relevance of moral principles, oftentimes morality does become salient. What affects what an individual will do once he or she reaches this awareness of moral relevance? Once moral principles are salient, the presence of other motivations will be influential in determining whether one chooses to uphold morality or to rationalize away moral principles.

Motivations

The conflict between morality and other, equally strong motivations creates the need for moral rationalization. If an individual has no strong motivations that come into conflict with moral principles, then moral action is less costly, and she or he will be more likely to act morally. Yet, there are often motivations present that compete with moral motivations. Selfishness or even sympathy might then lead an individual to do something that violates moral principles (Batson, Klein, Highberger, & Shaw, 1995; Batson, Kobrynowicz, Dinnerstein, Kampf, & Wilson, 1997). In this section, I first discuss the nature of moral motivation and then describe other motivations that can conflict with morality.

Components of morality. Certain characteristics of an individual's moral motivation might make that person more prone to rationalize away morality in favor of another motivation. An individual's moral motivations can differ along four possible dimensions: (a) a focus on consequences versus intentions, (b) whether the motivation toward morality is instrumental to another goal or an ultimate goal in itself, (c) whether the moral motivation is conceived as an "ought" or a "want," and (d) the direction of the moral motivation (a person might be motivated to be moral or to not be immoral).

Philosophers make a distinction between morality based on consequences (utilitarianism) and morality based on intentions (deontological ethics). Utilitarianism, in its most basic form, posits that morality depends on the nature of the outcome: The outcome that benefits the most people is the most moral alternative (Smart, 1967). Robin Hood, who stole from a few rich people to redistribute wealth across many poor people, would be considered moral by utilitarian standards. In contrast, according to a deontological ethic, moral rules are independent of outcomes (Olson, 1972). Rather than focusing on consequences, deontological ethics focus on the intention to uphold universal laws of morality. Deontological ethics would posit that Robin Hood acted immorally, in that the act of stealing is morally wrong and cannot be willed a universal law.

The Western conception of morality has been influenced by both deontological (Kant, 1788/1898) and utilitarian (Bentham, 1829/1983; Mill, 1861/1957) ethics. The balance between the two can be seen in instances in which consequences are discrepant with intentions. For instance, the United States still carries a penalty for manslaughter; the consequence, the death of others, is serious, and even though the guilty individual did not intend for people to die, he or she still has to be punished for their deaths. However, manslaughter, with its lack of intention to kill, also carries a lesser punishment than premeditated murder, wherein the individual both intends to kill and brings forth the consequence of another's death.

It is useful to know the extent to which a particular individual's conception of morality is based on intentions or consequences, because an action leading to a breach of moral principles based on utilitarianism could still uphold deon-

tological moral principles, and vice versa. Knowing the components of an individual's or culture's morality would allow us to know when a person might perceive a violation of moral standards.

Whether morality is an instrumental or ultimate goal also has important ramifications for moral action and rationalization. Someone might be motivated to uphold moral principles as a means to another end, for example, to receive social and self-rewards or avoid punishments (Bandura, 1986; Nowell-Smith, 1967). In contrast, another person might consider morality an ultimate goal, upholding moral principles as an end in itself (Nowell-Smith, 1967). This distinction is potentially useful because it could help predict whether or not an individual will uphold moral principles in varying situations. Specifically, in the case of a person motivated toward morality as a means to another end, if there arises another, less costly opportunity to reach the goal of appearing moral, that alternative will be taken in place of upholding moral principles (Batson et al., 1997). However, if the individual holds a strong moral motivation as an ultimate goal, an opportunity to appear moral without upholding moral principles will not be taken.

Heider (1958) made a distinction between "ought" and "want," and this distinction can be applied specifically to moral motivation. According to Heider, when a person *wants* something, this desire is centered around the self. However, when the individual believes that he or she *ought* to do something, this motivation is independent of the individual's personal desires. In addition, although a person might want one thing at one time and a different thing at another, what someone ought to do is invariant across time in similar situations. Finally, although "wants" can be particular to specific individuals, "oughts" are universal and apply to all people (Heider, 1958).

Although moral motivations are by definition "oughts," it is also possible that an individual's personal preference is for morality: The "ought" is also a "want." The combination of "ought" and "want" would help an individual both universally apply moral principles and be motivated to personally uphold them. Therefore, knowledge of Heider's concepts of "ought" and "want" can be useful in predicting moral rationalization: When only feelings of "ought" are

present, the motivation to act morally may be weak and moral rationalization might be more likely to occur, whereas a combination of "ought" and "want" might lead an individual toward moral action.

In a similar manner, an individual's moral motivations might belong to differing self-domains (Higgins, 1987). The motivation to be a moral person might be a part of one's *ideal* self, which includes one's hopes and aspirations, or it might be a part of one's *ought* self, which includes one's duties and obligations. Whereas moral motivations might normally be categorized with one's ought self, there may be times when the individual views morality as part of his or her ideal self. In general, characteristics associated with the ideal self are related to the presence or absence of positive outcomes, whereas characteristics associated with the ought self are related to the presence or absence of negative outcomes (Roney, Higgins, & Shah, 1995). Roney et al. (1995) found that the type of feedback that individuals were given during a task affected their motivation and subsequent performance: Participants who were given feedback about negative outcomes ("You didn't miss that one"), which is related to the ought self, were less motivated and performed worse on an anagram task than participants who were given feedback about positive outcomes ("You got that right"), which is related to the ideal self. In the same way, individuals with a moral ought self might focus on negative outcomes and be less motivated to act morally than individuals with a moral ideal self, and thus they would be more likely to engage in moral rationalization.

Individuals may also possess different types of moral goals. Diversity in moral goals can be related to Higgins's (1997) theory of regulatory focus. This theory distinguishes between a promotion focus, in which the individual strives toward positive outcomes and is focused on accomplishments and aspirations, and a prevention focus, in which the individual avoids negative outcomes and is focused on safety, duty, and responsibility. Self-regulation related to the ideal self is tied to a promotion focus, whereas self-regulation related to the ought self is tied to a prevention focus. These differences in regulatory focus are related to the differential use of goal-promoting strategies: Individuals with a promotion focus tend to approach matches to desired end states, whereas individuals with a

prevention focus tend to avoid mismatches to desired end states.

In terms of moral motivation, individuals with a promotion focus, who view morality as an aspiration, would be motivated to approach matches to morality. Their goal is to be moral. This motivation might manifest itself in actions such as giving all of one's belongings to the poor or dedicating one's life to civil rights activism. This promotion-focused moral motivation may apply to only a select few, such as Mahatma Gandhi or Mother Teresa. On the other hand, individuals with a prevention focus, who view morality as an obligation or responsibility, would be motivated to avoid mismatches to immorality. Their goal is to not be immoral. All the prevention-focused person has to do is refrain from breaking certain prohibitive standards, for example, not stealing, not murdering, and not breaking the law. Because a wider number of behaviors fit into the category of not being immoral than fit into the category of being moral, it is much easier to not be immoral than it is to be moral. It is therefore most likely the former that individuals would hold as a goal. Because individuals have more latitude in which to move when their moral motivation is preventative, rationalization would be made easier.

Bandura (1999) drew a parallel distinction between inhibitive and proactive moral agency. Inhibitive moral agency occurs when an individual refrains from immoral action. In contrast, proactive moral agency, although including abstention from immorality, also consists of actively engaging in humane behavior, even at great personal costs. The type of moral agency that an individual possesses may make it more or less likely that he or she will use moral rationalization.

Some evidence for the importance of the motivation to "not be immoral" can be found in Baron's (1995) studies on the motive to "do no harm." When acting on a "do no harm" principle, individuals become concerned with not taking any action that might end up hurting someone who would not have been harmed if the action had not been taken, even if, overall, the action benefits more people than it harms. In other words, crimes of commission are seen as more detrimental than crimes of omission. Thus, in certain circumstances, individuals believe that they are acting morally as long as they do not actively cause harm, whereas failing to act morally, an act of omission, is more tolerable and many times not even seen as immoral.

Alternative motivations. These different characteristics of moral motivation are brought into the moral decision-making process and make it more or less difficult to rationalize around moral principles. In addition, many variables can affect the motivations that are competing with morality. One powerful factor that can influence motivation is the presence of difficult life conditions. Staub (1989) proposed that difficult life conditions affect people's hierarchy of motives, causing them to focus on their own psychological needs and making a society more conducive to genocide. He believed that conditions such as war, crime, political violence, and even economic insecurity can lead to an intense need within a population for a coherent, positive self-concept. This would be especially likely in societies with cultural self-concepts that contain a sense of superiority or collective self-doubt.

The needs triggered by harsh circumstances lead to self-protective motives that find their outlet in aggression against others for the purposes of building a positive social identity and providing a scapegoat for the difficult life conditions. Although the forming of groups to satisfy psychological needs and goals stemming from difficult life conditions does not necessitate the additional formation of hostility toward another group, certain factors facilitate intergroup aggression: differentiation of the in-group and out-group along with a devaluation of the out-group, respect for authority, a monolithic society, and a history of aggression. Certain ideologies can shift a population's tendencies and make it more prone to these processes (Staub, 1993).

Staub (1989) applied this model of genocide to the period before the Holocaust. Germany's difficult life conditions took the form of the Treaty of Versailles, imposed after the country lost the war in 1918. The strict stipulations in the treaty, as well as the loss of the war, were experienced as great humiliations to Germans and were discrepant with their cultural self-concept of superiority. Economic difficulties stemming from the treaty and from a worldwide depression also added to difficult life conditions in Germany. These combined factors led to additional political instability and violence. All of these difficult life conditions made the German

people particularly receptive to Hitler, who promised to restore economic stability and a powerful Germany and provided a scapegoat in the Jewish people.

According to Staub's personal goal theory, motivations competing with morality take the form of extreme needs arising out of extraordinary conditions or rampant nationalism. His theory does not take into account the presence of everyday motivations and how they might compete with morality. What role do normal, mundane motivations such as egoism play in moral conflict and rationalization?

Bandura's (1990, 1991) theory of moral disengagement can be applied to both everyday and extraordinary motivations that conflict with morality. Bandura stated that when competing motivations—be they simple self-interest or more complex needs linked to difficult life conditions—become sufficiently strong, individuals seek to violate their moral principles and fulfill these other goals. However, because people in a society have been raised with certain moral self-sanctions that keep them in adherence to moral principles in the absence of external reinforcements, they cannot simply behave immorally. Instead, they need to disengage their moral self-sanctions to engage in nonmoral behaviors without the self-condemnation that the sanctions would normally bring. Therefore, according to the theory of moral disengagement, (a) people can be motivated to engage in actions that violate moral principles, and (b) moral self-sanctions need to be short-circuited to enable individuals to act immorally. Bandura labeled this short-circuiting of self-sanctions "moral disengagement," and it is akin to what I have been calling "moral rationalization."

Along with difficult life conditions and everyday self-interest, obedience is another motivation that might come into conflict with moral principles. Milgram (1974) explicitly characterized obedience as a motive that competes with moral standards in an authority situation. For some individuals, a shift to the agentic state is complete, and other moral principles do not come into play. Yet, for many others, the agentic state is only partially achieved. These individuals may then experience acute conflict between the duty to obey and competing moral motives such as the motivation not to hurt an innocent person. Individuals can engage in different techniques to release the strain associated with this conflict of motivations, the most difficult of which is to disobey the authority, effectively choosing moral motivations over obedience motivations.

These are only a few examples of motivations that can potentially compete with moral motivations. Any motivation that would lead to the violation of an individual's valued moral principles can conflict with moral motivations and lead to moral rationalization.

Dynamics of Moral Rationalization

In summary, there are a number of steps leading to the decision to rationalize evil. Initially, the individual internalizes the society's moral standards. Certain aspects of the situation may obscure the relevance of morality and cause people to engage in evil behavior without rationalization. Yet, at some point many individuals do realize that their behavior violates their moral principles. When the moral relevance of their behavior becomes salient, individuals are faced with motivational conflict. One can choose to behave in line with one's moral principles, but often moral action is costly and one's competing motivations may be strong. However, violating moral principles is also costly. It is at this point that the individual can reduce the cost of acting immorally by engaging in moral rationalization. In this section, I examine how motivated reasoning underlies the process of moral rationalization. I also explore why individuals would have the need for moral rationalization and outline the different methods people can use to rationalize their immoral behavior.

Motivated Reasoning: The Mechanics of Moral Rationalization

Moral rationalization allows people to convince themselves that their preferred unethical choice is consistent with moral standards. Kunda's (1990) theory of motivated reasoning can be used to explain the cognitive component of moral rationalization. According to this theory, when individuals approach a situation with a preference toward a particular solution, this preference distorts their cognitions in the direction of the desired decision or interpretation. As

Kunda (1990) put it, "people motivated to arrive at a particular conclusion attempt to be rational and to construct a justification of their desired conclusion that would persuade a dispassionate observer" (p. 482). Individuals are motivated not only to justify themselves to others but to convince themselves of the rationality of their conclusion. Because motivated reasoning will not work if the individual blatantly distorts information, the motivation toward a predetermined outcome and its effects on the decision-making process are largely unconscious (Kunda, 1990). Baumeister and Newman (1994) characterized individuals using this preference-driven process as "intuitive lawyers," in contrast to the more objective, accuracy-driven approach of "intuitive scientists."

Applying the theory of motivated reasoning to morality, people about to engage in moral rationalization have a preference for seeing their desired immoral behavior as still consistent with moral principles. If individuals can then proceed as "intuitive lawyers" and conclude that a certain behavior does not in fact make them immoral, then they can have their proverbial cake and eat it too. They approach the decision with a preference toward any plausible interpretation of events that would allow them to appear moral and still choose the immoral action.

But why engage in motivated reasoning to begin with? What drives individuals to perceive themselves as moral? Although the theory of motivated reasoning can describe how moral rationalization works, it does not explain the motivation behind rationalization.

Why Rationalize?

A major assumption of moral rationalization is that people need to perceive that their actions are consistent with their valued moral standards. Theories such as moral disengagement, cognitive dissonance, and self-affirmation address different aspects of the motivation to avoid the appearance of immorality.

Moral disengagement. According to Bandura's (1991, 1999) theory of moral disengagement, an individual, through social learning, internalizes moral principles as self-sanctions that bring self-worth when they are upheld and self-condemnation when they are violated. Before a person can engage in behaviors that violate moral principles, he or she has to disengage moral self-sanctions to avoid self-condemnation. From this perspective, moral rationalization is motivated by guilt avoidance.

Bandura and his colleagues have found limited support for moral disengagement. Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, and Pastorelli (1996) had juvenile delinquents complete a pencil-and-paper measure of moral disengagement asking them whether they agreed or disagreed with statements about their use of different mechanisms of disengagement such as dehumanization of the victim and displacement of responsibility. They then correlated these scales with teacher observations of delinquent behavior in participants. They found that participants used various methods of moral disengagement but relied more heavily on moral justification and dehumanization of victims. In addition, path analyses showed that methods of moral disengagement facilitated delinquent behavior through reduction of prosocial motivation and anticipated guilt while promoting aggression-related cognitions and affect.

Although Bandura et al.'s (1996) study demonstrated that individuals have many different methods of moral disengagement at their disposal, it did not rule out the presence of other motivations in addition to guilt avoidance. Because self-report measures were used for such variables as moral disengagement and anticipation of guilt, this study gives us the knowledge of individuals' stated motivations for their actions but still leaves open the possibility of other motivations that may remain unconscious to participants. For instance, individuals engaging in moral decision making might also experience a drive toward consistency between the cognition of a moral self and their behaviors. In this case, the methods of moral disengagement outlined by Bandura (1991, 1999) could serve to rationalize these cognitions into being consistent while also warding off guilt.

Cognitive dissonance. The need for consistency between a valuing of morality and the moral perceptions of one's behavior can be explained through the theory of cognitive dissonance. Festinger (1957) stated that two cognitions are in a dissonant relationship when the opposite of one cognition arises from another cognition. A cognitive dissonance perspective would be that dissonance arises in moral situations because of socialization: Individuals have learned the value of moral principles and thus

possess the need to see themselves as good and moral. Whenever something occurs that is inconsistent with an individual's moral self-concept or violates valued moral principles, the individual experiences dissonance. Moral rationalization would then be the individual's attempt to eliminate this dissonance by adding cognitions and reconstruing the immoral act as, in fact, moral.

The fact that morality is universally valued makes the theory of cognitive dissonance particularly relevant. E. Aronson (1969) stated that at the center of dissonance theory were "situations in which the self-concept or other firm expectancies are involved—and in which most people share the same self-concepts or other firm expectancies" (p. 29). Because most people in a given society share similar moral self-concepts but experience many other motivations that compete with moral ones, there is great potential for individuals to feel dissonance in the realm of morality.

Dissonance may first arise when an individual is contemplating engaging in a behavior that might violate his or her moral principles. This would take the form of what Festinger (1964) called anticipated dissonance: If the individual chooses to be moral, then there will be dissonance between wanting to do something immoral and choosing not to; if the individual chooses the immoral option, then there will be dissonance in seeing the self as moral but acting immorally. Although Festinger (1957) first stated that it is the postdecision period that is characterized by dissonance, whereas the predecision period is characterized by conflict, he later allowed the possibility of anticipated dissonance (Festinger, 1964). He outlined two possible ways of reducing anticipated dissonance: The individual can decide that the decision is of little importance, or he or she can avoid making the decision altogether. An experiment conducted by Braden and Walster (1964) showed that individuals will, in some cases, attempt to reduce anticipated dissonance by avoiding the decision.

A tendency to avoid moral action was present in many bystanders during the Holocaust. A great number of people living in Nazi-occupied countries in Europe felt morally opposed to handing over their Jewish citizens to be killed. Yet, if they had openly protested or even covertly hindered the Nazis, their lives would

have been in great danger. On the other hand, failure to protest was dissonant with the cognition that one thought the Nazis' treatment of the Jews was wrong. It is possible that individuals who wanted to remain safe and avoid protesting against the Nazis anticipated dissonance because of their opposition to killing Jews. Instead of facing this anticipated dissonance directly, many people did nothing; they neither openly supported the Nazis nor protested the deportation of the Jews. Similarly, an individual in this situation might have also resolved anticipated dissonance by reducing the importance of the decision, pointing to diffusion of responsibility: "I am only one person, I cannot make a difference, so it doesn't matter what I decide." But are avoiding the decision and reducing its importance the only two options available in the cognitive dissonance paradigm?

Festinger (1964) described the predecision period as a time of objective weighing of two equally attractive options. This might be the reason why he predicted only two ways to resolve anticipated dissonance. In his characterization of the predecision period, Festinger determined that "the information gathering and evaluative activities with respect to the alternatives are impartial and objective" (p. 8), that the individual is not biased in favor of one alternative or the other. If the individual is in favor of a particular alternative, he or she can be said to have already made the decision. Thus, Festinger made a clear distinction between the predecision period and the postdecision period; it is only after the decision is made that a difference of preference for one alternative over the other should be seen. This assumes that the individual approaches the situation as an "intuitive scientist," with the motivation to make the objectively best choice possible between two alternatives.

But if we reframe the situation in terms of Baumeister and Newman's (1994) "intuitive lawyer," there emerges the possibility of the individual being predisposed toward a particular outcome before he or she has consciously made a decision as to whether to engage in a behavior. If this specific behavior toward which the individual is motivated happens to violate moral principles, this may cause dissonance between the individual's cognition of a moral self and the fact that an immoral behavior is instead desired. According to Baumeister and Newman,

the individual will not blatantly distort the decision process to pursue an immoral action; instead, he or she will resolve the dissonance by engaging in subtle moral rationalizations so as to behave immorally but still appear moral. In this way, a dissonance-driven desire to restore consistency by appearing moral can act as a motivator in the motivated reasoning of moral rationalization.

Thus, cognitive dissonance can instigate moral rationalization in the period before any immoral action has been taken. In addition, consistency motivations might also be relevant in circumstances wherein individuals realize that behaviors in which they are currently engaged violate moral standards. In this scenario, situational factors have prevented moral principles from being salient, and the individual acts immorally without realizing that he or she is violating those principles. However, at a certain point the individual realizes the inappropriateness of the action, and cognitive dissonance is triggered.

Cognitive dissonance is classically discussed as a phenomenon that occurs after an action has been taken. When an individual has violated moral principles, the fact that he or she acted immorally is dissonant with his or her self-concept of being a good and moral person (E. Aronson, 1969). Alternatively, the individual can experience dissonance from the fact that he or she values particular moral principles but is not acting consistently with those principles. Faced with these inconsistent cognitions, the individual then has to find a way to reduce this dissonance. In the traditional dissonance paradigm (Festinger, 1957), the individual can change the action, change the situation, or add cognitive elements that are consonant with the most resistant cognition.

In the moral domain, changing the action may manifest itself as a choice to act morally. Although the individual may not be able to undo the past immoral behavior, he or she can decide to no longer engage in that behavior. For example, Nazis stationed in Denmark had the moral ramifications of their actions made salient to them by the opposition of Danish citizens. They then potentially resolved their dissonance by disobeying orders to deport Jews under their jurisdiction (Arendt, 1963). Although changing one's action may be the most moral option, it is not always the easiest one. The immoral behav-ior may be one that is rewarding for the individual in some way, or, conversely, changing the action might carry with it grave consequences. For instance, many individuals who helped hide Jews were caught and killed for their actions. It was widely known among the German ranks that "anyone who had seriously protested or done anything against the killing unit would have been arrested within twenty-four hours and would have disappeared" (Arendt, 1963, p. 232). In cases such as these, people might choose other options for reducing dissonance, such as changing their cognitions. When individuals change their cognitions to resolve dissonance in a moral context, they are essentially engaging in moral rationalization.

One of the first dissonance-related experiments was indirectly associated with moral rationalization. Festinger and Carlsmith (1959) found that when participants were given $1 to lie about how interesting a boring task was, they changed their attitudes toward the task and found it more interesting than participants who were paid $20 to lie or participants who did not lie at all. Participants who were paid only $1 to lie about the task experienced cognitive dissonance between the cognition that the task was actually boring and a second cognition that they told someone else that the task was interesting. Whereas those who were paid $20 for lying had sufficient justification for lying, individuals who were paid only $1 did not have a good reason for lying and had to resolve their dissonance by changing their attitudes toward the task. In terms of moral rationalization, participants in the $1 condition rationalized their unethical behavior—lying to another participant without sufficient justification—by telling themselves that the task was not really that boring, and hence they were not really lying. In this way, Festinger and Carlsmith's study can be interpreted as supporting the role of cognitive dissonance in moral rationalization.

Self-affirmation. The theory of self-affirmation is another possible explanation for moral rationalization. Steele (1988) presented self-affirmation as an alternative explanation to cognitive dissonance. He explained that when individuals are faced with dissonant cognitions, tension is produced not because of the lack of consistency between the cognitions but because people's intelligence and goodness are called into question (e.g., "I just said that a boring task

was interesting, I must be a liar" or "I'm smoking and I know it's bad for me, I must be stupid or lack self-control"). Individuals are then motivated to reaffirm themselves as good. Therefore, rather than positing a consistency motive, self-affirmation posits that, within the dissonance paradigm, inconsistency serves as a threat to self-integrity. Whereas cognitive dissonance relates the moral motivation to a drive evoked by inconsistencies between cognitions, self-affirmation presupposes the goal of maintaining a positive self-concept.

Unlike E. Aronson's (1969) proposition that the clearest predictions in dissonance can be made in relation to behaviors that are inconsistent with an individual's self-concept, Steele's conception of self-affirmation does not deal with inconsistency at all. Instead, self-affirmation is a motivation to globally view the self as good. It follows that when addressing a threat to the self, an individual can reaffirm the self in ways that would not resolve the apparent "inconsistency." For example, the smoker might say "I may be smoking, but I'm an excellent worker"; this has nothing to do with the inconsistency between health and smoking, but it does counteract the feelings of badness that may stem from doing something that is unhealthy.

When individuals discover that their behaviors have violated their moral principles, self-affirmation would predict that this realization would prompt them to reaffirm their own goodness. This might be done in a manner consistent with the predictions of cognitive dissonance: The immoral behavior can be stopped or the situation redefined as amoral, for example. However, according to self-affirmation, because people are motivated by self-integrity rather than self-consistency, they have more options than these; they can even affirm parts of their selves that are irrelevant to the immoral behavior. For instance, individuals who discover that they have done something immoral might assert their intelligence to make up for their lack of morality. A self-affirmation explanation for why we rationalize would then be broader than a dissonance explanation of moral rationalization. Moral rationalizers motivated by cognitive dissonance would have to rationalize immoral behavior into being moral, whereas rationalizers motivated by self-affirmation could admit the wrongness of their behavior if they affirmed another equally valuable part of the self.

Several studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of self-affirmation opportunities in attenuating dissonance-reduction behaviors. For example, Steele and Liu (1983) placed individuals in a "forced-compliance" situation in which they freely chose to write a counterattitudinal essay. In traditional dissonance studies, researchers have found that participants who freely choose to write an essay that is inconsistent with their own personal opinions will resolve their dissonance by later changing their opinions to match the essay. Steele and Liu found that when participants were allowed to fill out a self-relevant value scale after writing a counterattitudinal essay, they showed less opinion change than both participants who did not fill out the scale and those for whom the scale was not self-relevant. Self-affirmation, in the form of filling out a self-relevant value scale, decreased attitude change, suggesting that resolving dissonance is less related to consistency motivations and more related to the need to see the self as good and moral.

Dissonance versus self-affirmation. Applying the theory of self-affirmation to moral rationalization underscores the importance of moral self-concept in the moral rationalization process. However, because the theory of self-affirmation cannot completely account for all cognitive dissonance phenomena, self-affirmation is not the best explanation for moral rationalization. It is beyond the scope of this article to outline all of the evidence in favor of consistency motivations, but I present a few examples of research showing that cognitive dissonance does exist independently of self-affirmation. For instance, Simon, Greenberg, and Brehm (1995) demonstrated that the mechanisms behind cognitive dissonance are indeed consistency related. In their experiments, participants were exposed to issues that were not important to them but were important in general. Simon et al. found that this served to reduce dissonance and thus attenuate attitude change after participants wrote a counterattitudinal essay. Their studies suggest that self-affirmation may actually be a method of dissonance reduction that allows an individual to reduce the importance of the inconsistent relationship by making other, more important values salient, a method they labeled "trivialization." Simon et al. (1995) concluded that self-

affirmation results are in fact related to cognitive consistency.

Whereas Steele (1988) emphasized how focusing on self-relevant values can work to affirm the self and remove threats presented by inconsistency, J. Aronson, Blanton, and Cooper (1995) posited that self-focus can both reduce threat and increase it. They pointed out that, in self-affirmation studies such as that of Steele and Liu (1983), participants were allowed to self-affirm in a realm unrelated to their inconsistent behavior. They predicted that if participants were made to focus instead on values closely related to their inconsistent action, this would serve to increase threat rather than decrease it, functioning as a self-discrepancy rather than self-affirmation.

Their studies showed that, when given a choice, participants who engaged in counterattitudinal behaviors did not affirm aspects of the self that were related to their inconsistent behavior. Instead, they affirmed aspects of the self that were unrelated to the inconsistency, but even this affirmation of unrelated traits did not keep participants from changing their attitude in the typical counterattitudinal direction. In other words, participants were addressing their cognitive inconsistencies, even when given opportunities to self-affirm. Because participants chose to focus on traits unrelated to their inconsistent behaviors and reduce the importance of traits related to the inconsistency, Aronson et al.'s (1995) results are similar to Simon et al.'s (1995) findings on trivialization. Therefore, rather than self-affirmation, the primary motivation in counterattitudinal situations seems to be that of resolving inconsistencies.

Likewise, the motivation behind moral rationalization is unlikely to be primarily self-affirmation. However, exploring self-affirmation predictions regarding rationalization helps to underscore the fact that inconsistencies that might cause individuals to rationalize are intimately related to the self-concept.

The most viable candidates for the motivation behind moral rationalization are moral self-sanctions and cognitive dissonance. Most likely a combination of these motivations is acting within the individual when he or she is making a moral decision. Individuals may be simultaneously motivated to avoid self-condemnation and garner praise, as well as perceive themselves as acting consistently with valued moral principles. Ultimately, the question of which theory best explains moral rationalization is open to empirical investigation.

How Do We Rationalize? Methods of Moral Rationalization

What, then, are the specific methods of moral rationalization that people can use to reduce the costs of immoral actions? In what ways can individuals' motivations cause them to recruit cognitions that make them appear moral? Bandura's (1991, 1999) theory of moral disengagement identifies four different categories of rationalization that can lead to moral disengagement: reconstruing conduct, obscuring personal agency, disregarding negative consequences, and blaming and dehumanizing victims. In addition to these mechanisms, individuals can rationalize by focusing on the actions of others and by fragmenting their identity. These methods of moral rationalization function to change individuals' perceptions of the behavior as falling within moral standards.

Reconstruing Conduct

Moral justification. Individuals can rationalize by directly addressing the nature of their immoral actions, reconstruing their conduct to make potentially immoral behavior appear positive (Bandura, 1991, 1999). This can be accomplished in a number of ways. The method of moral justification reconstrues conduct by portraying it as being in the service of a valued social or moral purpose. For example, the Nazi government of Germany made use of moral justification in representing the genocide of Jewish people not as murder but as "the 'holiest human right and . . . obligation,' which is 'to see to it that the blood is preserved pure and, by preserving the best humanity, to create the possibility of a nobler development of these beings'" (Lifton, 1986, p. 431). For the Nazis, the murder of innocent people was transformed in their minds into an almost sacred duty.

Euphemistic language. Immoral actions can also be rationalized to be morally acceptable through the use of carefully selected words and phrases that depict immoral actions as harmless and individuals as less causally linked to their actions (Bandura, 1991, 1999). The Na-

zis had knowledge of the power of euphemisms, and Arendt (1963) described them as constructing elaborate "language rules" that dictated the avoidance of words such as *extermination*, *liquidation*, and *killing* in reference to the Holocaust; instead, the terms *final solution*, *evacuation*, and *special treatment* were to be used. The term *concentration camp* itself was a euphemism; it referred to the camp's function in concentrating the Jewish people in one area but made no mention of the horrors that occurred there. Yet, apparently this euphemism was not good enough for the Nazis, because concentration camps such as Auschwitz were labeled "charitable foundations for institutional care" (Arendt, 1963, p. 109). These language rules were used not to keep people ignorant of the massacres but to "prevent them from equating [the massacres] with their old, 'normal' knowledge of murder and lies" (p. 86); if the deeds were given a cleaner name, individuals could rationalize the immorality out of their actions.

Euphemistic language might already be in place when an individual enters a particular situation. In that case, euphemisms would work to affect the individual's perceptions of moral relevance as well as serve as tools for rationalization. However, the original instigation of euphemistic language will have been for the purposes of active rationalization.

Advantageous comparison. Individuals can also rationalize their evil behavior by comparing their own immoral actions with something worse (Bandura, 1991, 1999). Nazi doctors who gave lethal injections to Jewish prisoners in concentration camps could have used advantageous comparison by comparing their method of killing with the more painful method of execution by shooting. In this way, they could have reinterpreted their actions as "mercy killings" rather than cold-blooded killings.

Obscuring Personal Causal Agency

Not only can immoral behavior be rationalized by reconstruing it into something positive, but the individual can also preserve his or her moral self-concept by separating the self from the immoral action (Bandura, 1991, 1999). If the individual does not feel personally responsible for evil actions, then he or she need not experience discomfort about the violation of moral principles that those actions might entail. People can obscure

personal causal agency through displacement and diffusion of responsibility.

Displacement of responsibility. The obscuring of causal agency can occur in displacement of responsibility, when an individual is ordered or feels compelled to perform a particular activity. Rather than blaming the self, the individual blames those who gave the orders. Milgram's (1974) obedience studies, used earlier to demonstrate how obedience situations can conceal the moral relevance of a situation, also show how people might experience moral conflict in a situation and displace responsibility so as to rationalize their immoral behavior. For instance, Milgram described how many of his participants would show obvious signs of psychological distress during the experiment, such as sweating, shaking, and even laughing hysterically. From these behaviors, one can infer that these particular participants clearly believed that what they were doing was wrong; yet, when asked why they continued to shock the confederate, many of these same participants would rationalize their behavior by pointing out that they were not responsible for harming the confederate: It was the experimenter, the person in authority, who held the responsibility.

Because obedience was highly valued within Nazi ideology, displacement of responsibility became an effective means of rationalization for perpetrators in the Holocaust. In his own defense, Eichmann stated that he was simply obeying Hitler's orders, which had the force of the law (Arendt, 1963). His lawyer claimed that he was only carrying out "'acts of the state,' what had happened to him might happen in the future to anyone" (p. 247). Eichmann may have been strategically using displacement of responsibility to rationalize his behavior to both himself and those judging him.

Diffusion of responsibility. Individuals can also deny their part of the responsibility for a negative consequence that resulted from combined action. Whereas displacement of responsibility is related to obedience to authority, diffusion of responsibility occurs when there is a division of labor, with different members performing separate parts of a task (Darley, 1996). Diffusion of responsibility can also occur in the absence of a division of labor, with the mere presence of other actors enough to deflect responsibility onto others and away from the self. For example, group decision making can lead to

diffusion of responsibility, each single individual believing that the group, not himself or herself, is responsible for a poor decision. In addition, diffusion of responsibility can be facilitated by group action. When harm is done by the group, immorality can be attributed to others, or to the group, and not the self. As with displacement of responsibility, diffusion of responsibility can serve to keep people from perceiving moral relevance as well as function as an active rationalization for immoral conduct. An individual, motivated to rationalize an immoral action, may point out that he or she was only one of many perpetrators and therefore is not the one responsible.

The Holocaust was set up as a group action, allowing diffusion of responsibility to serve as a rationalization for individual perpetrators. Thus, Eichmann was able to state:

> With the killing of Jews I had nothing to do. I never killed a Jew, or a non-Jew, for that matter—I never killed any human being. I never gave an order to kill either a Jew or a non-Jew; I just did not do it. (Arendt, 1963, p. 22)

The nature of the Nazi killing machine enabled Eichmann to make this claim; the labor was in fact divided up, and he never really did have to kill anyone with his own hands or give direct orders to kill. Instead, he gave orders for shipments of Jews to be moved to concentration camps, where, although death was certain, he was not the one who directly caused the death. In fact, the work was divided up such that the individuals directly involved in killing were Jewish prisoners themselves. Bandura (1999) pointed out that those in the middle level of a hierarchy of authority, who neither make decisions nor directly witness the consequences of evil behavior, have the easiest time rationalizing their role in evil. In this way, people such as Eichmann can convince themselves that they are not responsible for actions that violate moral principles.

Eichmann also pointed to diffusion of responsibility from group decision making in defending his actions. This was apparent when he described being at the Wannsee conference, where he first got word of the "final solution" of killing the Jews. Because no one spoke out against this violent action, Eichmann felt as if the blame for these murders would no longer be his: "Here now, during this conference, the most prominent people had spoken, the Popes of the Third Reich. . . . At that moment, I sensed a kind of Pontius Pilate feeling, for I felt free of guilt. Who was he to judge?" (Arendt, 1963, p. 114).

Disregarding or Distorting the Consequences of an Action

Individuals can also disregard or distort the consequences of immoral actions to preserve their moral self-concept. Bandura (1991, 1999) delineated two ways in which consequences can be disregarded or distorted. First, an individual can use selective inattention and cognitive avoidance of the effects, basically not facing the harm caused or actively trying to minimize that harm. This was apparent in the previously mentioned structure of the concentration camps, with Jewish prisoners the ones who were forced to place the gas pellets into the gas chambers. Then Nazi soldiers did not have to actually see people dying or hear their screams. Another way consequences can be distorted is for individuals to engage in active efforts to discredit evidence of harm. Even today, many neo-Nazis claim that the statistics of people who died in the Holocaust are greatly inflated or that the Holocaust did not actually happen at all.

Blaming and Dehumanizing Victims

Dehumanization. Another way to preserve one's sense of morality while still behaving immorally is by dehumanizing victims (Bandura, 1991, 1999). When individuals dehumanize victims, they take away the victims' human qualities or give them animal-like ones. The victims are then seen as subhuman, without the same feelings or hopes as the perpetrators, and thus one can rationalize that normal moral principles do not apply. During World War II in Germany, the Nazi government enacted the Nuremberg laws to dehumanize Jews before the Holocaust. These laws took away political rights from Jewish people in Germany; for instance, they were no longer considered citizens, but they were still members of the German state. Sexual intercourse between Jews and Germans was also prohibited, as were mixed marriages, and no German woman under the age of 45 years was to be employed in a Jewish home. The Nuremberg laws functioned to make

official the separation and dehumanization that Jews suffered in Germany preceding the Holocaust and allowed other Germans to see Jews as subhuman.

Consistent with a theory of moral rationalization, Todorov (1996) characterized dehumanization of the victim as a technique that Nazi soldiers used to cope with the fact that they were committing such evil acts. Todorov illustrated the imposed transformation that the Nazis inflicted on the Jewish prisoners: how they forced them to live in their own filth, become scavengers because of starvation, and strip naked before being killed. These things made the prisoners seem more like animals than human beings, making it easier for guards to then kill them; yet, it was the guards themselves who exacted these alterations in the first place.

Large numbers contributed to the dehumanization of the Jews and the rationalization of their massacre. Because of the huge amount of people being killed, Nazi soldiers saw their prisoners as masses of flesh, no longer individual people. Therefore, even though the large-scale murder in the Holocaust made it all the more atrocious, the fact that a huge amount of people were killed actually made it easier to carry out.

Todorov explained how the Nazis also dehumanized Jews by incorporating them into abstract categories. Hitler, by classifying Jewish people as dangerous "enemies of the people," was better able to elicit cooperation from German citizens in mistreating Jews. The victims were no longer human beings but members of an abstract entity of "enemy."

The minimal face-to-face interaction between guards and victims in the concentration camps also served to dehumanize the Jews. When guards did not have much contact with their prisoners, there was less chance for the humanness of the prisoners to bring the guards to compassion.

Euphemistic language can be important in the process of dehumanization. Todorov (1996) gave examples of how the Nazis referred to the Jews as "pieces" or "items" but never "people" (p. 160). These innocuous words made it easier for the Nazis to think of the Jews as subhuman, placing them outside the realm of normal human morality.

As was the case for euphemistic language, dehumanization can be present both before moral relevance is perceived and afterward. An individual might enter a situation in which victims are already dehumanized, and this could work to keep him or her from perceiving the relevance of moral principles in the situation. However, early use of dehumanization in a situation will take the form of active rationalizations for potentially immoral behavior. Dehumanization is used by the first actors in a situation as a rationalization, affecting the perceptions of morality of later actors.

Attributions of blame. Perpetrators of evil can also rationalize their actions by shifting attributions of blame (Bandura, 1991, 1999). For instance, perpetrators can shift the blame from themselves to their victims (Lerner, 1980), as when the Nazis claimed that Jewish people deserved to be killed. Alternately, perpetrators can blame the circumstances around them for their crimes. Actors might feel controlled by other people or by the situation and feel that they are faultless, helpless victims. For instance, many Nazi doctors who participated in forced experiments and killings in concentration camps felt morally opposed to these actions. Yet, they continued to engage in these acts because they believed that if they disobeyed orders, they would be killed (Lifton, 1986). Therefore, they were able to justify their actions by assigning responsibility to their circumstances and not to themselves.

Moral exclusion. Dehumanizing and blaming victims can aid moral rationalization by excluding victims from the moral field. Moral exclusion occurs when individuals define a particular group as outside the realm of morality (Opotow, 1990; Staub, 1989). Deutsch (1990) captured the rationalizing nature of moral exclusion: "Excluding the 'they' from one's moral community permits one to consider oneself as a moral person even while one engages in what would normally be considered depraved actions" (p. 24). Deutsch posited that moral exclusion was a psychological need that arose in certain individuals. In normal development, an individual learns to integrate good and bad aspects of the self and other people.

However, factors such as harsh circumstances, an authoritarian family, or an ethnocentric culture may cause certain people to continue to separate good and bad. These individuals would be more prone to moral exclusion because of the tendency to project bad aspects of the self onto out-groups. Along with disposi-

tional differences in moral exclusion, Deutsch described different social conditions that might facilitate moral exclusion: difficult life conditions, an unstable government, authoritarian social institutions, claims of superiority (racial, religious, and so forth), culturally sanctioned and salient violence, remoteness of victims, and no objecting observers of the violence. These different social factors may make it easier for individuals to use moral exclusion as a rationalization for violence.

The Actions of Others

The actions of victims, bystanders, and other perpetrators can all be used as rationalizations for immoral deeds. For example, perpetrators might point to lack of protest from victims as a way to rationalize immoral behavior into something benign. However, simply because the victim does not protest does not mean that he or she desires to be victimized. During the Holocaust, many Jewish organizations encouraged Jews to be passive, believing that Jewish cooperation would prevent Nazi actions from worsening. Thus, there was a lack of protest from the Jewish community, but by no means did the Jews consent to what was being done to them. Instead, they saw passivity as their only option in a situation in which the Nazi government had support from much of the German population (Staub, 1989).

Just as actions of bystanders affect individuals' perceptions of moral relevance, they can be used to rationalize behavior. If bystanders do not react to the actor's behavior, or if they in fact show their support for the actor, then the actor can rationalize that his or her harmful behavior is moral. Arendt (1963) illustrated how the inaction of bystanders allowed Eichmann to rationalize his duties: "As Eichmann told it, the most potent factor in the soothing of his own conscience was the simple fact that he could see no one, no one at all, who actually was against the Final Solution" (p. 116). Because there is no outright protest, the actor can assume that bystanders agree and assuage the guilt he or she may be feeling over immoral behaviors. On the other hand, when there is bystander action, this often causes perpetrators to change their behavior: Their avenues of rationalization severely restricted, perpetrators are faced with the fact that their actions are im-

moral, leading to a possible change in behavior. For instance, when Nazi soldiers stationed in Denmark during World War II were faced with strong Danish opposition to the mistreatment of Jewish people, they themselves began to disobey orders from Germany and resisted the deportation of the Jews under their jurisdiction (Arendt, 1963).

Finally, reactions of other perpetrators can also be used to rationalize immorality. A perpetrator of evil actions can point to the actions of fellow wrongdoers, adding consonant cognitions to resolve dissonance over his or her own immoral behavior (a la Festinger, Riecken, & Schachter, 1956). Use of the inaction of both bystanders and perpetrators as a rationalization points to the importance of social support in rationalization; it may be easier to convince oneself that one's potentially immoral actions are in fact moral if there are others present who are also trying to rationalize the action's morality.

Fragmentation

Not only can people look to others to rationalize their own immoral behavior, but they can fragment their own identity to preserve a moral self-concept. Todorov (1996) characterized fragmentation as a way that a perpetrator of evil can separate the bad identity—the part of the individual that is committing evil acts—from the good identity. Fragmentation can manifest itself in a number of ways. Todorov illustrated how many of the concentration camp guards showed discontinuity, a form of fragmentation characterized by unpredictable behavior (e.g., being compassionate one minute and evil the next). In addition, the guards exhibited discontinuities in terms of their interests, showing themselves to be cultured in literature or music, tastes that seemed to clash with their sadistic behaviors toward the prisoners.

Perpetrators of the Holocaust were also fragmented in terms of their private and public lives. Todorov (1996) described citizens of a totalitarian government: "By deciding to submit 'only' in their outward behavior, in their public words and gestures, they would console themselves with the thought that they remain masters of their consciences, faithful to themselves in their private lives" (p. 129). Therefore, individuals are able to rationalize acceptance or perpe-

tration of immoral behaviors as long as they do not privately agree with those actions, the "comforting illusion that in their innermost selves they remain honorable and pure" (Todorov, 1996, p. 129). In compartmentalizing their public and private lives, individuals can then claim that, even though they are publicly behaving in evil ways, their real, private identities are as loving spouses or caring parents. Thus, concentration camp guards might write heart-felt letters home, inquiring about their children and wives. In doing this, they hoped that "their admirable private lives might serve as a counterweight, at least in their own minds, for the things that may have troubled them about their professional activities" (Todorov, 1996, p. 147).

Fragmentation as a method of moral rationalization can be better understood in light of self-affirmation theory. In this view, participating in the immorality of the concentration camps would have threatened the soldiers' view of themselves as intelligent and good. By then stating that, for instance, they were good fathers, they were able to restore a global sense of self-worth. Examples from Todorov's own descriptions provide support for a self-affirmation interpretation. Todorov cited Lifton's (1986) interview with Eduard Wirths, the head doctor at Auschwitz:

> In Wirths's mind, his love for his family seemed to make up for the drawbacks of his professional life. . . . The faster the selections succeeded one another, the more he filled his letters with questions about the children's first teeth and with commentaries on the photographs she had sent him. (Lifton, 1986, as cited in Todorov, 1996, p. 146)

One of the jobs of the Nazi doctors was to make the selections, meaning they had to look over the Jewish prisoners directly after they stepped off of the trains, choose those who were fit to work, and send the others off to be executed. As the selections elevated, Wirths's self-concept as a good and moral person was increasingly threatened. Here we see a relationship between an increase in selections and Wirths's affirmation of himself as a good and loving husband and father. Although Todorov described fragmentation of one's identity as having "two non-communicating compartments," a self-affirmation perspective would view fragmentation not in terms of different "parts" but in terms of the need to affirm one's global self as good.

Wirths's letters home were an attempt to affirm the morality of his overall character. Moral rationalization is reached not through separating into a "good" and "bad" identity but by affirming the entire self as good and moral. The theory of self-affirmation is thus especially relevant to fragmentation as a form of moral rationalization.

To summarize, while making the decision of whether to engage in moral versus immoral action, individuals may use specific methods of moral rationalization. These rationalizations aid in the process of motivated reasoning, allowing people to conclude that the desired immoral behavior is actually moral. They are then able to violate their moral principles while still maintaining a moral self-concept. Moral rationalization allows normal individuals to engage in sometimes horrific behaviors. Yet, the process does not end here. Once an individual uses moral rationalization to make evil behavior seem acceptable, a process of escalation can begin wherein the individual is led into further violations of moral standards so that small unethical acts incrementally increase into enormous acts of evil.

Escalation

Moral rationalization not only allows individuals to preserve their moral self-concept when committing immoral behavior; it also has the grave consequence of allowing evil to continue. If people do not realize the evil in their actions, they can continue their behavior or even increase it while posing little threat to their moral self-concept. In addition, the commission of immoral behavior makes it more costly to act morally in the future, increasing the likelihood of further evil. Many theories that stress the contribution of situational factors to evil behavior emphasize this step-by-step escalation into atrocity. Individuals begin with small, unethical acts, but their behavior can quickly increase to alarmingly immoral actions.

For instance, Staub (1989) explained that even if all of the conditions are present for genocide or mass killings, these events do not occur instantly but are eased into through a "continuum of destruction" (p. 17). When small acts of harm are committed, perpetrators dehumanize their victims to rationalize their harmful behavior. This dehumanization further obscures

the relevance of morality, paving the way for more intense harm and, finally, genocide. Small unethical acts might also feel rewarding; for example, stealing without getting caught brings psychological reinforcement of euphoria and a sense of power, along with material reinforcement of acquiring stolen property. The individual feels positively reinforced for immorality and begins to seek further rewards in more extreme behavior.

Blumenthal (1999) described an incremental praxis of evil in which situational factors such as deindividuation and psychological factors such as rationalization allow individuals to engage in small unethical actions. When perpetrators realize they can engage in unethical behavior without punishment, they incrementally escalate their immoral behavior. Blumenthal used the Holocaust to illustrate the idea of incremental praxis, noting that the Nazis began with discrimination against the Jews and moved to persecution, imprisonment, and, finally, systematic extermination. With each incremental increase, people were desensitized to the level of immoral action, until the idea of concentration camps seemed reasonable and morally tolerable.

Milgram's (1974) studies on obedience provide good illustrations of escalation. Probably, few of Milgram's participants would have consented at the onset of the study to shocking someone at 450 volts. Instead, the experimenter instructed them to begin at the lowest shock level, 15 volts, and move up at 15-volt increments for each incorrect answer the victim gave. Milgram termed this the "sequential nature of the action." He believed that the sequential set-up of the shocks facilitated increases in evil behavior by making it difficult for the participant to disobey the experimenter. This occurred because, if participants chose to stop the shocks, they had to admit that many of the shocks that led up to their disobedience were also wrong and that they had therefore acted immorally. As a result of this, Milgram believed that many participants might have continued with the shocks as a way to rationalize to themselves that what they had done in the past was right because they continued to do it. He stated succinctly: "Earlier actions give rise to discomforts, which are neutralized by later ones. And the subject is implicated into the destructive behavior in a piecemeal fashion" (Milgram,

1974, p. 149). Milgram also mentioned that once the sequence of obedient events has been initiated, the individual can passively continue to obey immoral orders, whereas disobedience entails a much more difficult active break with authority.

Cognitive dissonance can help explain the effects of escalation on immoral behavior. Once an individual has engaged in a particular behavior, he or she is committed to it: Admitting that the behavior is wrong and needs to be changed is dissonant with the fact that one has engaged in the behavior in the past and views oneself as a moral person. To resolve this dissonance, an individual may continue to engage in evil behavior while rationalizing that the behavior is moral.

The Nazis used escalation during World War II to gain national acceptance of their plans for the annihilation of the Jews. Eichmann described how a proposed plan to ship Jewish people to Madagascar was not serious but served to familiarize

> all concerned with the preliminary notion that nothing less than complete evacuation from Europe would do . . . when, a year later, the Madagascar project was declared to have become "obsolete," everybody was psychologically, or rather, logically, prepared for the next step: since there existed no territory to which one could "evacuate," the only "solution" was extermination. (Arendt, 1963, p. 77)

The proposal to deport Jewish people to Madagascar thus functioned to desensitize people to violations in moral standards, preparing them for the next step in the escalation of evil.

Darley (1992, 1996) stressed the step-by-step nature of evil behavior in organizations. He described the process of escalation:

> People move toward these disasters in small steps, and the later steps seem no different from the earlier ones. When one faces the realization that something ethically untoward is going on, one seems somehow committed to allowing and assisting in its continuance, because of commitments generated by previous actions. (Darley, 1996, p. 33)

Darley believed not only that rationalization led to escalation of immoral actions but that the act of rationalizing evil behavior transformed the person into an evil individual who would be more likely to commit evil actions in the future.

Thus, escalation can lead to increased immoral behavior through the various processes of operant conditioning, desensitization, and cog-

nitive dissonance. Although these factors can lead to escalation of immoral behavior, moral behavior might also be facilitated through escalation. Milgram (1974) described the steps that many participants in his studies took toward disobeying the experimenter. He noted that the voicing of dissent often served as a stepping stone toward other behaviors that gradually led to a break with authority. As he stated, "The initial expression of disagreement, however tentatively phrased, provides a higher plateau from which to launch the next point of disagreement" (Milgram, 1974, p. 163). Not only did dissent facilitate disobedience within the participants themselves, but dissent by peers greatly assisted disobedience among participants. Thus, moral as well as immoral behavior is subject to escalation.

Empirical Evidence for Moral Rationalization

Research relevant to moral rationalization can be categorized into three groups: research on situational factors in harmful or immoral behavior, research looking specifically at different methods of moral rationalization, and research on the prevention of moral rationalization and evil. Taken together, this research demonstrates the importance of both situational and everyday psychological factors in the commission and persistence of evil behavior.

Situational Factors

Much research has been done looking at how situational factors affect immoral behavior. Although it is beyond the breadth of this article to list all relevant research, I provide a few examples of studies that illustrate how situational factors may be involved in setting the stage for moral rationalization. For instance, Milgram's (1974) study of obedience and the Stanford prison experiment (Haney et al., 1973) demonstrated how a particular situation can elicit immoral behavior from participants. The situational factors in these studies not only prevented moral standards from becoming salient to participants but provided moral rationalizations for individuals to use once they realized they were violating their moral principles: "I was only following orders" and "It was my job as a prison guard to keep the prisoners in line."

Other studies have used experimental manipulations of a situation to alter people's moral behavior. For example, Kilham and Mann (1974) varied Milgram's (1974) procedure to include a transmitter role in addition to the teacher (executant) role. As in Milgram's original experiment, the executant shocked the learner. However, it was the transmitter who monitored the answers of the learner and gave the executant the order to shock. The transmitter was therefore not directly responsible for harming the learner but played an essential role in the process. Kilham and Mann found that participants were significantly more obedient in the transmitter role than in the executant role, showing the importance of diffusion of responsibility in obedience. Individuals in the transmitter role could claim that they were not violating their moral principles because they were not directly harming the learner.

Bandura, Underwood, and Fromson (1975) found that when situational factors that affected diffusion of responsibility and dehumanization were in place, participants behaved more punitively toward a victim than when responsibility was personalized and the victim was humanized. In addition, participants faced with a dehumanized victim were more likely to exonerate themselves from their aggressive behavior, a rough indication of moral rationalization.

Moral Rationalization

Whereas the studies just mentioned did not directly posit mechanisms of moral rationalization in the relationship between a given situation and immoral behavior, other studies have examined the role of specific rationalizations in immoral actions. Similar to Bandura et al. (1975), Diener, Dineen, Endresen, Beaman, and Fraser (1975) found that altered responsibility increased aggressive behavior in the laboratory, as did witnessing an aggressive model. Relevant to moral rationalization, Diener et al. also found that a manipulation of cognitive set increased aggression: Those participants who were told that the activity they were about to engage in was "like a game" acted more aggressively than participants who were told that the activity was about aggression. Possibly, the participants who were told that the activity was a game used this euphemism to mask the aggressive nature of their behavior to themselves.

Bandura et al. (1996) measured the effect of different methods of moral disengagement on delinquent behavior. They found that frequency of endorsement of moral disengagement influenced delinquent behavior through mediators such as lowered prosocialness, lessened anticipatory guilt, and higher proneness to aggression.

These studies demonstrate how situational factors, along with individual differences in moral rationalization, can affect moral behavior. Not only can Nazis commit evil, but normal people in everyday situations have the potential to violate their moral standards.

Prevention of Moral Rationalization

The study of moral rationalization and evil can seem pessimistic and bleak, but there exists a positive counterpoint: In understanding the variables that affect rationalization, researchers are also uncovering factors that can encourage moral behavior. Although the research just described demonstrates how certain aspects of the individual and the situation can make moral behavior less likely, it also suggests that other situational and psychological factors might make moral rationalization more difficult and moral behavior more prevalent.

Some studies relevant to the prevention of moral rationalization include situational manipulations that make it more difficult to use certain forms of moral rationalizations. Although moral rationalization was not measured in these studies, it is possible that the changes in moral actions found were related to lessened rationalization. Milgram (1974) conducted a number of variations of his obedience study and found several factors that lessened obedience in his participants. For example, obedience significantly decreased as a function of the feedback received from the learner. Physical absence of the experimenter also affected obedience, with fewer participants obeying the experimenter when he gave his commands over the telephone rather than in person. In addition, participants were less likely to follow commands given by another participant rather than the experimenter, especially if the experimenter was the one being shocked. Moreover, they were less likely to obey orders when confederate peers also defied the experimenter's orders.

These variables of increased feedback from the victim, characteristics of the authority, and the presence of defiant others were thus important factors that could prevent immoral behavior that originated from obedience. These situational factors may have affected the availability of different moral rationalizations such as denial of consequences, displacement of responsibility, and the actions of others. With increasing salience of the victim, it would have been more difficult for participants to deny the harmful consequences of the shocks they were administering. With the experimenter physically absent or replaced by another participant, it becomes harder to shift responsibility to the absent or less credible authority. And when peers defy the experimenter, it again becomes harder to displace responsibility to others or point to others' harmful actions as a justification for what one is doing. In these ways, the different situational factors that were varied in Milgram's studies may have changed the effectiveness of different moral rationalizations, making it harder to harm the victim without perceived violations of moral standards and more likely that participants would defy authority.

Tilker (1970) used a variant of Milgram's procedure, with the participant acting as an observer of the teacher and learner interactions. He found that when participants were made to feel more responsible for the welfare of the learner and when they had maximum feedback regarding the harm that was being done, they were more likely to stop the experiment and to stop it earlier. This study illustrates that certain aspects of the situation that make it more difficult to displace responsibility or deny consequences will encourage moral rather than immoral behavior.

Staub (e.g., 1998, 2000) stressed the theoretical importance of bystander action in the halting of genocidal violence. In terms of moral rationalization, bystanders can work to make moral principles more salient or to refute perpetrators' rationalizations. Staub also suggested addressing the difficult life conditions that instigated genocide, which would alleviate the need to act immorally before rationalization processes began.

Additional research has attempted to measure more directly the mechanisms of moral rationalization and their effects. McAlister, Ama, Barroso, Peters, and Kelder (2000) examined an

intervention program that promoted racial tolerance and reduction of moral rationalization. They used a method called "behavioral journalism," which presented high school students with articles written by their peers about positive experiences with interracial friendships and dating and refuted ideas about violence that could be used as moral justification for intergroup conflict. After the behavioral journalism intervention, students had more positive attitudes toward interracial friendships and dating, higher perceived value similarity, and less perceived racial superiority than they had before the intervention and also in comparison with students from a nearby school who did not experience an intervention. In addition, these students provided less endorsement for violent moral justifications. Students also reported fewer experiences of verbal racial aggression after the intervention. This study showed that it is possible to design a successful intervention that inhibits at least some forms of moral rationalization for intergroup conflict.

Bersoff (1999) studied the occurrence of unethical behavior in the laboratory, examining how situational changes affected the ease with which individuals could rationalize their immoral behavior. His dependent variable was whether participants spontaneously mentioned that they were overpaid for an experiment. In the first condition, the person reimbursing the participant directly asked the participant whether the payment was correct, making it harder for participants to use rationalizations of denial of responsibility when taking an overpayment. In another condition, the experiment was headed by a graduate student rather than a faceless organization. This condition varied the rationalizations of dehumanization as well as the distortion of consequences ("It wouldn't hurt a big corporation if they paid me a few extra dollars"). In further conditions, Bersoff tested a method called "inoculation" by having participants criticize a subject in a scenario for committing a similar unethical action. These conditions made overall moral rationalization more difficult for participants.

The results of this experiment showed that each of these "anti-neutralization" (or anti-rationalization) techniques increased the amount of ethical behavior exhibited by participants. In addition, Bersoff found that multiple anti-rationalizations had additive effects. This study demonstrated not only that individuals use different methods of moral rationalization but that aspects of the situation can be changed to make rationalization more difficult, stymieing unethical behavior.

The aforementioned study conducted by Bandura et al. (1975) can also be cited as an example of situational factors working to inhibit moral rationalization. When individuals find themselves in a situation in which they are clearly responsible for their actions, and victims are humanized, they will be less likely to engage in aggressive behavior that violates moral standards.

Although situational factors might play an important part in preventing moral rationalization, it is also fruitful to examine the existence of individual differences in the propensity for moral rationalization. Bandura, Caprara, Barbaranelli, Pastorelli, and Regalia (2001) found that perceived social and regulatory self-efficacy in adolescents was related to a decrease in transgressive behavior through lowering moral rationalization and increasing prosocialness. Children who felt positively about their ability to maintain interpersonal relationships and resist peer pressure were less likely to endorse different methods of moral rationalization and more likely to value helping others; also, they reported less antisocial activity both initially and 2 years later. These results raise the possibility that interventions that increase children's self-efficacy might help curb mechanisms of moral rationalization that contribute to delinquent behavior.

Conclusion

Hence, the explanation of evil resides not simply in evil situations or evil people but in a complex interplay between situational factors and normal psychological processes. Moral rationalization plays an important role in allowing an individual to autonomously engage in immoral behavior while still seeing the self as moral. The individual then engages in more and more extreme behavior, until small unethical acts escalate into large atrocities. Because of moral rationalization, large-scale evil and small breaches of morality are, on a certain level, qualitatively similar.

I have endeavored in this article to present a model of evil behavior that integrates different

situational and intrapsychic factors, placing a special emphasis on the role of moral rationalization in evil. Knowledge of the processes behind moral rationalization and evil behavior will not only help researchers explain the occurrence of such events as the Holocaust but also will allow us to find variables that can attenuate rationalization and halt evil behavior. An understanding of moral rationalization might help us know not only when and why people act immorally but also when they will uphold moral principles.

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