



Good deeds and hard knocks: The effect of past suffering on praise for moral behavior[☆]

Philip Robbins^{a,*}, Fernando Alvear^a, Paul Litton^b

^a Department of Philosophy, University of Missouri, Columbia, MO, USA

^b University of Missouri School of Law, Columbia, MO, USA

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ABSTRACT

Are judgments of praise for moral behavior modulated by knowledge of an agent's past suffering at the hands of others, and if so, in what direction? Drawing on multiple lines of research in experimental social psychology, we identify three hypotheses about the psychology of praise — typecasting, handicapping, and non-historicism — each of which supports a different answer to the question above. *Typecasting* predicts that information about past suffering will augment perceived patency and thereby diminish perceived agency, making altruistic actions seem less praiseworthy; *handicapping* predicts that this information will make altruistic actions seem more effortful, and hence more praiseworthy; and *non-historicism* predicts that judgments of praise will be insensitive to information about an agent's experiential history. We report the results of two studies suggesting that altruistic behavior tends to attract more praise when the experiential history of the agent involves coping with adversity in childhood rather than enjoying prosperity (Study 1, $N = 348$, $p = .03$, $d = 0.45$; Study 2, $N = 400$, $p = .02$, $d = 0.39$), as well as the results of a third study suggesting that altruistic behavior tends to be evaluated more favorably when the experiential history of the agent includes coping with adversity than in the absence of information about the agent's past experience ($N = 226$, $p = .002$). This pattern of results, we argue, is more consistent with handicapping than typecasting or non-historicism.

Imagine reading a newspaper article about an everyday saint — someone who has devoted their entire adult life, at great personal sacrifice, to helping lift people out of poverty. Reading the opening paragraphs of the article, you are inspired by the story of this person's selfless devotion to others and impressed by the magnitude of their moral accomplishments. Reading further, you learn that they had been severely abused and neglected as a child. Would this information about their childhood experiences affect your estimate of how much praise they deserve for the good deeds they did as an adult? If so, how — and why?

The thought experiment above bears on a central area of investigation in social psychology. For example, it relates to a key question about person perception, namely, how we integrate our observations of an agent's current behavior with what we know about the agent's past behavior (Hastorf, Schneider, & Polefka, 1970). Classic research in person memory and impression formation explored the primacy of early information relative to later information (Asch, 1946; Sullivan, 2019),

the relative impact of negative and positive information (Skowronski & Carlston, 1989), and the difficulty of reconciling contradictory pieces of information (Rothbart & Park, 1986). In research on moral perception, related questions concern the inference of moral character from single or repeated behaviors (Goodwin, Piazza, & Rozin, 2015), the effect of past offenses on judgments of blame (Kliemann, Young, Scholz, & Saxe, 2008), and the reconciliation of good intentions with bad outcomes (Cushman, 2008).

The thought experiment also touches on an aspect of moral perception which is less well studied, namely, how we integrate knowledge of what happened to a person at one time (an experienced outcome) with knowledge of their behavior at another time (an intentional action). Some cases of this type are familiar. For example, when an agent's past immoral behavior is later followed by an unlucky accident befalling the agent, this reversal of fortune may give rise to a sense that justice has been served (Lerner, 1977). Conversely, an agent's immoral behavior

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* Corresponding author at: Department of Philosophy, University of Missouri, Strickland Hall 418, Columbia, MO 65211, USA.

E-mail address: robbinsp@missouri.edu (P. Robbins).

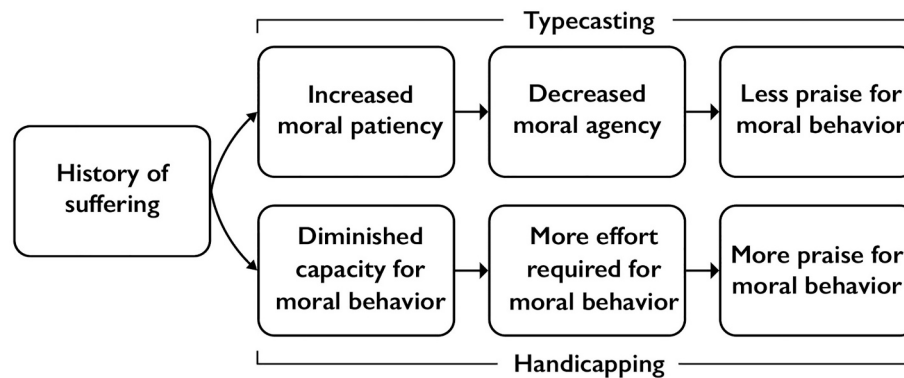


Fig. 1. Two hypotheses regarding the effect of past suffering on praise: Typecasting vs. handicapping.

may be judged less blameworthy when it occurs after the agent has suffered intentional harm (Gray & Wegner, 2009, 2011). A less familiar scenario of this type — the one described in our thought experiment — is a scenario in which a past misfortune is later followed by *positive* moral behavior, such as acts of altruism.

Few theories of moral judgment make any prediction about this case, for a couple of reasons. First, research on moral judgment has focused on blame and punishment rather than praise and reward, and evidence of systematic asymmetries between judgments of blame and praise suggest that these types of judgment are sensitive to different factors (Anderson, Crockett, & Pizarro, 2020; Bostyn & Roets, 2016; Haupt & Uske, 2012; Hindriks, 2008; Janoff-Bulman, Sheikh, & Hepp, 2009; Guglielmo & Malle, 2019; Pizarro, Uhlmann, & Salovey, 2003). Second, theories of moral judgment tend to focus on the effect of psychological factors internal to the agent, such as their intentions, capacities, and motivations, rather than historical events that might have shaped the agent's psychology (Gill & Cerce, 2017; Malle et al., 2014; Shaver, 1985; Taylor & Maranges, 2020; Weiner, 1995). Nonetheless, there are theoretical frameworks with the resources to address the question at hand, namely, how judgments of the praiseworthiness of an agent's morally positive behavior might factor in the agent's past experience of interpersonal harm.

One such framework is the theory of dyadic morality (Gray & Wegner, 2009, 2011; Gray, Young, & Waytz, 2012; Schein & Gray, 2017). According to this view, all morally significant actions are naturally seen as having a dyadic structure, with one person playing the role of moral agent and the other playing the role of moral patient. Each role is associated with a distinct suite of psychological capacities: moral agency is associated with capacities required for intentional agency, like planning and self-control, whereas moral patiency is associated with capacities implicating subjective experience, like pleasure and pain (Gray, Gray, & Wegner, 2007). The agent and patient roles are antithetical to one another, as evidenced by the phenomenon of *moral typecasting*: the more we see someone as a moral patient, the less we see them as a moral agent, and vice versa. For example, as noted above, framing someone as a victim of wrongdoing makes them seem less deserving of blame and punishment when they act immorally (Gray & Wegner, 2009, 2011). Moral typecasting is supposed to occur regardless of whether the agent is harming someone or helping them, so the same structure underlying the perception of morally negative behavior should apply to the perception of moral positive behavior. In that case, perceiving someone as a moral patient should reduce the perception of their moral agency and thereby reduce the attribution of praise when they do something good, just as it reduces the attribution of blame when they do something bad. Hence, on this view, information about the past suffering of an agent — information that augments their patiency and thereby diminishes their agency — should make their morally positive actions seem less praiseworthy, just as it makes their morally negative actions seem less blameworthy. We'll call this the *moral typecasting*

hypothesis (typecasting hypothesis, for short).

Alternative theoretical considerations, however, suggest that the moral behavior of our everyday saint might seem *more* praiseworthy if they had suffered at the hands of others in early life.¹ To get an initial sense of the rationale behind this alternative, consider the following three claims, each which seems plausible on its face. First, people tend to think of moral behavior as an achievement, that is, a type of intentional action which is difficult, effortful, and praiseworthy (Bradford, 2015). Second, people tend to think that moral behavior is more difficult for those who have suffered abuse, neglect, or other form of interpersonal harm in childhood than those who have not. In other words, as far as the capacity for moral behavior is concerned, a history of past suffering at the hands of others tends to be seen as a liability or handicap, putting the agent at a disadvantage relative to those without such a history.² Third, people tend to believe that “the individual who is able to overcome personal handicaps and avoid failure is especially worthy of praise” (Weiner & Kukla, 1970, p. 3). This belief may be what underlies the practice of handicapping in competitive sports, in which competitors perceived as having less ability are given a scoring advantage in order to level an otherwise uneven playing field. Given these assumptions, prosocial agents with a history of hardship should attract more praise for their good deeds than their more fortunate peers.

With respect to empirical research on person perception, we can initially situate this prediction within the conceptual framework introduced in Heider's (1958) theory of attribution and subsequently applied to research on achievement evaluation in educational settings (Weiner, 1972). For example, Weiner and Kukla (1970) found that participants gave larger rewards for success at a task, and smaller punishments for failure, to an imaginary group of elementary school students described as low in ability relative to students described as high in ability. An inverse effect was found for motivation, with highly motivated students receiving larger rewards and smaller punishments than their less motivated peers. Similar effects were reported by Kaplan and Swart (1973) in their study of the evaluation of college undergraduates, in which

¹ By ‘moral behavior’ we mean actions which have positive moral value and is commended, using terms like ‘right’, ‘praiseworthy’, and ‘admirable’. Its natural opposite is immoral behavior, which has negative moral value and is condemned, using terms like ‘wrong’, ‘blameworthy’, and ‘reprehensible’.

² Deeming an agent to have a diminished capacity for moral reasoning and action can have significant normative implications, such as justifying paternalism or providing a reason to excuse immoral behavior. The idea under consideration here, however, is not that a history of suffering tends to cause such a diminished capacity (though that may be the case; see footnote 13). The idea is rather that laypeople tend to *think* that a history of suffering can make it more difficult to act morally. As to why such a tendency might exist, one possibility is that a history of adversity is seen as depleting the psychological resources required for prosocial action, such as the capacity for empathic concern. We return to this point below.

participants rewarded the academic performance of low-ability and high-effort students, respectively, more than that of their high-ability and low-effort peers. Likewise, studies of performance evaluation in the workplace suggest that the tendency for employees who show improvement in their performance over time to be evaluated more positively and given greater rewards than employees with a history of consistently strong performance (Reb & Cropanzano, 2007; Reb & Greguras, 2009) is due to the fact that employees who show improvement are perceived as investing more effort and having a stronger work ethic (Soliman & Buehler, 2018). Relatedly, studies suggest that the favorability bias toward “underdogs” — that is, individuals or groups seen to be at a competitive disadvantage — stems from the perception of underdogs’ performance as more effortful (Farwell & Weiner, 1996; Vandello, Goldschmied, & Richards, 2007; Wann et al., 2002).

Recent work on the psychology of praise and blame points to parallel effects in the moral domain, with perceptions of effort modulating judgments of praise. For example, there is the duty versus desire effect, foreshadowed in Kant’s (1785/1964) account of moral value: people give more credit to an agent for acting in a morally positive way when doing so involves resisting the temptation to act otherwise, rather than acting from inclination (Janoff-Bulman et al., 2009). Likewise, the perception of effort increases the valuation of moral behavior, with agents who exert more effort in doing good deeds attracting more praise than agents for whom such behavior is effortless or natural (Bigman & Tamir, 2016).³ Further, a history of suffering interpersonal harm, especially at the hands of caregivers, may be perceived as stunting or otherwise impairing moral development, depriving agents of the ability to “freely construct” their moral character and thereby making them appear less culpable and blameworthy for their immoral actions (Gill & Cerce, 2017; Taylor & Maranges, 2020). If people associate a history of suffering with defective moral character, then such experiences are likely to be associated in people’s minds with a diminished capacity for moral behavior (impaired *prescriptive* moral functioning), just as they are associated with a greater propensity for immoral behavior (impaired *proscriptive* moral functioning). Taken together, these considerations suggest that acting morally may be seen as more difficult for agents with a history of suffering, hence more effortful, and therefore of greater moral value (Anderson et al., 2020; Nelkin, 2016).⁴ Call this the *moral handicapping hypothesis* (*handicapping hypothesis*, for short).

Note that the typecasting hypothesis and the handicapping hypothesis make the same prediction about how immoral behavior by agents with a history of hardship will be evaluated relative to agents without

³ Moral judgment seems to be sensitive to perceptions of effort in other ways as well. For example, in studies of the evaluation of decisions made in hypothetical moral dilemmas involving euthanasia, participants rated deontological choices more favorably than the consequentialist alternative, but only when the choice involved little effort: when the choice was made in an effortful way, the deontological bias was reduced or eliminated (Robinson, Page-Gould, & Plaks, 2017). Judgments of moral character may be sensitive to such considerations also, insofar as those judgments are influenced by perceptions of how quickly moral decisions are made (Critcher, Inbar, & Pizarro, 2013). In particular, faster decision making is associated with more praise for moral behavior, suggesting that the effect of perceived effort on the evaluation of moral behavior varies depending on whether the target of perception is the decision making prior to action or the action itself (Anderson et al., 2020).

⁴ It might appear that the typecasting hypothesis makes the same prediction about the effect of past suffering on how much effort and self-control is required for moral behavior, and hence the same prediction about the effect of past suffering on attributions of praise. The idea would be that since effort and self-control are paradigmatically agentic traits, if a history of past suffering were to make a person’s moral behavior seem more effortful and controlled, then it would also enhance a person’s moral agency (in virtue of the salience of their agentic traits). The problem with this line of reasoning, however, is that it conflicts with the very idea of moral typecasting, namely, that moral agency and moral patiency are inversely correlated, both at a time and across time (Gray & Wegner, 2009, 2011).

such a history. Both hypotheses predict, for different reasons, that a history of misfortune will result in less blame for moral transgressions. Where the two hypotheses diverge when it comes to the effect of past suffering on praise for moral behavior, with typecasting predicting less praise and handicapping predicting more. (See Fig. 1.)

A third possibility to consider is that moral judgment is not sensitive to an agent’s experiential history, either because biographical details of this sort have no effect on attributions of praise and blame, or because attributions of praise and blame are insensitive to biographical information in general (Gill & Cerce, 2017; Taylor & Maranges, 2020). A non-historicist perspective on blame, for example, is well represented in psychology (Alicke, 1990; Pfeffer, Maxwell, & Briggs, 2012; Stevenson, Bottoms, & Diamond, 2010; Weiner, Perry, & Magnusson, 1988). Non-historicist views also figure prominently in philosophical debates about free will and moral responsibility, for example, in the form of normative theorists’ appeals to intuitions about so-called manipulation cases (Frankfurt, 2002; McKenna, 2012). A non-historicist view of praise implies the null hypothesis that agents will get the same amount of credit for moral behavior regardless of their experiential history. Call this the *non-historicist hypothesis* (*non-historicism*, for short).

Though the three hypotheses described above — typecasting, handicapping, and non-historicism — by no means exhaust the space of possibilities, they provide a useful framework for addressing the issues raised by the thought experiment with which we began this paper. Indeed, the central question posed by our thought experiment can be recast as follows: Which of these three hypotheses makes the best prediction overall about the perceived praiseworthiness of moral behavior by agents who have suffered interpersonal harm in childhood? In what follows, we present evidence for a tentative answer to this question.

1. Overview of current research

In this paper we report results from three studies of moral perception in the context of prosocial agency. All three studies were designed to explore how a history of suffering at the hands of others might influence the evaluation of an agent’s moral behavior. First, we set out to test whether depicting someone as having suffered serious interpersonal harm early in life would make their good deeds seem less praiseworthy (as per the typecasting hypothesis) or more praiseworthy (as per the handicapping hypothesis) than the good deeds of someone more fortunate, or whether this information would have no effect (as per the non-historicist hypothesis). Second, deploying the distinction in dyadic morality theory between two types of moral patiency — being a victim of harm versus being a beneficiary of help — we set out to determine whether describing a moral actor as a beneficiary of help would reduce the perceived moral value of their behavior in the same way as describing them as a victim of interpersonal harm, as the typecasting hypothesis predicts. Finally, we tested whether good deeds would seem more difficult for an agent to perform when patiency cues were present than otherwise, as predicted by the handicapping hypothesis.

2. Study 1

In our first study, we manipulated perceptions of a prosocial actor’s life circumstances by describing their tendency to engage in moral behavior as the consequence of either an adverse childhood, a prosperous childhood, or a genetic predisposition to altruism. The genetic condition was included to test for a possible effect of non-environmental causal information on perceptions of moral agency (Robbins & Litton, 2018). In the control condition, nothing was said about the causal origin of the actor’s propensity for helping others. Perceptions of the actor’s moral agency were measured by having all participants rate the praiseworthiness of the actor’s altruistic behavior. All measures, manipulations, and exclusions in the study are reported below.

2.1. Method

2.1.1. Participants

Three hundred and forty-eight participants (46% female; mean age 39.9 years; 76.7% White, 6% Black, 7.2% Hispanic, 6.3% Asian, 2% Native American, 1.7% other or nonreporting) were recruited on Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) and paid \$0.20 to complete an online survey of attitudes about altruistic behavior. The sample size for the study was determined by an a priori power analysis indicating a required minimum of $N = 359$ to detect effects of size 0.20 at a significance level of 0.05 with 90% power (G*Power 3.1; Faul, Eelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007). No additional participants were recruited based on initial results. Eligibility for participation was limited to people living in the U.S. who had completed at least 50 MTurk tasks with an overall approval rating of at least 95%. Prior to data collection, the study was certified as exempt by the Institutional Review Board on campus.

2.1.2. Materials and procedure

Participants were assigned at random to one of three vignette conditions. Each vignette described a fictional character named Jane who regularly performed a specific altruistic action: either giving up her seat on the subway to an elderly person, helping pick up someone's fallen groceries, or helping a homeless person. Participants were then randomly assigned to one of four continuations of the vignette, all of which described Jane as having "a strong tendency to help people in need." What varied across the continuations was information about the causal history of Jane's disposition toward altruism. In the Adversity condition, it resulted from a childhood in which Jane was subjected to parental abuse and neglect; in the Prosperity condition, it was described as the effect of a childhood in which Jane was treated by her parents with love and kindness; and in the Genetic condition, her altruism resulted from a genetic predisposition. In the Control condition, no information about the causal history of Jane's altruism was provided. Participants then indicated how much praise Jane deserved for her altruistic behavior (7-point scale; 0 = no praise at all, 6 = hero-level praise). (See Appendix A for more details.)

2.2. Results

As predicted, there was a significant effect of causal information on praise judgments, $F(3, 337) = 3.40, p = .02$. There was also an effect of vignette, $F(2, 337) = 6.78, p = .001$, but no interaction effect, $p = .41$. Mean praise ratings were highest in the Adversity condition ($M = 3.96, SD = 1.17, n = 86$) and lowest in the Prosperity condition ($M = 3.36, SD = 1.35, n = 89$). Praise ratings in the Adversity condition were nearly identical to those in the Genetic condition ($M = 3.88, SD = 1.38, n = 86$), with ratings in the Control condition only slightly lower ($M = 3.72, SD = 1.49, n = 88$). Participants rated the behaviors as significantly more praiseworthy in the Adversity condition than in the Prosperity condition ($p = .03, d = 0.45$).⁵ No other significant contrasts were detected (all $ps > 0.28$). (See Fig. 2.) With respect to the vignette conditions, participants assigned the most praise in the Homeless scenario ($M = 4.07, SD = 1.26, n = 115$) and the least praise in the Groceries scenario ($M = 3.47, SD = 1.38, n = 118$), with ratings in the Subway condition only slightly higher ($M = 3.63, SD = 1.40, n = 116$). Praise ratings in the Homeless scenario were higher than in the other two scenarios (Groceries, $p = .002$; Subway, $p = .04, d = 0.33$). A sensitivity power analysis assuming $N = 348$, 90% power, and an alpha of 0.05 indicated a detectable effect size of 0.20 (G*Power 3.1; Faul et al., 2007).

⁵ In all three studies, the p -values reported for pairwise contrasts are two-tailed.

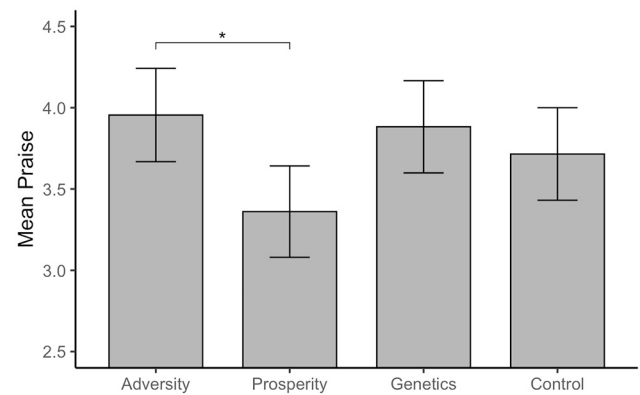


Fig. 2. Mean praise ratings by condition. Error bars indicate 95% confidence intervals. * $p < .05$.

2.3. Discussion

Results from Study 1 suggest that the evaluation of moral behavior is influenced by beliefs about the agent's early life history. In particular, altruistic actions were judged more praiseworthy when performed by a person who had undergone significant hardships in childhood than by someone from a relatively privileged background. Agents with a history of suffering, however, received the same amount of praise as agents whose experiential history was not specified.

To assess the implications of these results, it is important to distinguish between strong and weak versions of the typecasting hypothesis and the handicapping hypothesis. The strong version of typecasting predicts that agents with a history of misfortune will be praised less than agents with a history of good fortune and agents not described in experiential terms, since only agents with a history of misfortune will be seen as moral patients. The weak version of typecasting, by contrast, predicts that agents with a history of misfortune will be praised less than agents with a history of good fortune, because only in that pair of conditions is patency explicitly present in one case and explicitly absent from the other. Similarly, the strong version of handicapping predicts that agents from a disadvantaged background will be praised more than agents from a privileged background and agents whose background is left blank, since only agents from a disadvantaged background will be seen as having more difficulty acting altruistically. The weak version of handicapping predicts that agents from a disadvantaged background will be praised more than agents from a privileged background, since only in that pair of conditions is difficulty with acting morally explicitly present in one case and explicitly absent from the other. The non-historicist hypothesis, by contrast with both the strong and weak versions of typecasting and handicapping, predicts that historical information will have no effect on moral evaluation, so that agents will get the same amount of praise regardless of whether their experiential history is negative (coping with adversity), positive (enjoying prosperity), or neutral (unspecified).

Of the five hypotheses enumerated above, the results of Study 1 are consistent with just one of them, namely, the weak version of the handicapping hypothesis. As such, they provide some, albeit limited, evidence for the predictive superiority of the handicapping hypothesis vis-à-vis both of the alternative hypotheses under consideration here (i.e., typecasting and non-historicist).

3. Study 2

In Study 2 we extended the investigation begun in Study 1, refining the methodology in several ways. First, we removed the causal element of the narrative in the Adversity and Prosperity conditions. This was done in order to see whether the effect of life circumstances on moral agency depends on a causal connection between past experiences and

current agency. Second, we revised the narrative in the Prosperity and Adversity conditions, extending the character's biography into adulthood so as to strengthen the biographical cues and make them more salient. Third, we tested for a possible order effect in the presentation of the vignette and backstory, by having a condition in which adversity and prosperity cues were presented before the vignette and a condition in which they were presented afterwards. Fourth, since attributions of praiseworthiness might be more naturally directed toward patterns of behavior, we reframed the praise question in terms of an evaluation of the agent's altruistic behavior in general, rather than a specific action. This was done in order to address the possibility that attributions of praiseworthiness are more naturally directed toward patterns of behavior than single behaviors. Fifth, since the construct of prosocial moral agency might be too complex to validly measure with a single-item scale, we asked participants to rate how much admiration the agent deserved for his altruistic behavior, as well as how much praise. All measures, manipulations, and exclusions used in Study 2 are reported below.

3.1. Method

3.1.1. Participants

Four hundred participants (52% female; mean age 36.4 years; 76.5% White, 9% Black, 5% Hispanic, 7.5% Asian, 0.5% Native American, 1.5% other or nonreporting) were recruited on Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) and paid \$0.20 to complete an online survey of attitudes toward altruistic behavior. The sample size for the study was determined by an a priori power analysis indicating a required minimum of $N = 359$ to detect effects of size 0.20 at a significance level of 0.05 with 90% power (G*Power 3.1; Faul et al., 2007). No additional participants were recruited based on initial results. Eligibility for participation was limited to people living in the U.S. who had completed at least 50 MTurk tasks with an overall rating of at least 95%. Prior to data collection, the study was certified as exempt by the Institutional Review Board on campus.

3.1.2. Materials and procedure

Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions which differed in the order of presentation of vignette and backstory. Participants in the "Vignette First" condition read a brief vignette describing the behavior of a character named Tom who "always tries to help people out when he can," for example, by giving up his seat on the subway and giving directions to lost tourists. After reading the vignette, participants were randomly assigned to read one of three backstories adapted from Study 1 (Adversity, Prosperity, Genetic) or were given no information about the origin of Tom's prosocial disposition (Control). Participants in the "Backstory First" condition read an origin story first and then the vignette.

The new backstories in the Adversity and Prosperity conditions read as follows:

Tom had a wonderful [*miserable*] childhood. He was raised in a comfortable home where he felt unconditional love from warm and supportive parents [*an extremely abusive home where he never felt safe*]. His father played catch with him on the weekends [*regularly beat him with a belt while in a drunken rage*] and his mother helped him with his homework [*never showed him any affection or love*]. At school, Tom was popular with [*shunned by*] the other kids, and his teachers were attentive and kind [*inattentive and mean*] to him.

Tom's good [*bad*] fortune has continued into adulthood. He has a satisfying job [*was recently laid off from his job*], a loving family, and many close friends [*and he has no family or close friends*]. He has a happy and fulfilling [*sad and unfulfilling*] life.

To make the backstory in the Genetic condition more vivid and concrete, a color image of a segment of the human genome described as

responsible for a predisposition toward altruism was added to the narrative (Lebowitz, Tabb, & Appelbaum, 2019).

After reading the vignette and backstory (in either order), participants were then asked, in separate questions, to indicate how much praise they thought Tom deserved for performing the actions described in the vignette (10-point scale; 0 = no praise at all, 9 = hero-level praise), and how much admiration they thought he deserved (10-point scale; 0 = no admiration at all, 9 = hero-level admiration). (See Appendix A for more details.)

3.2. Results

A reliability analysis indicated that praise and admiration judgments were highly correlated (Cronbach's alpha = 0.89), so responses to these two questions were averaged to form a composite measure of moral approval. Consistent with the results of Study 1, there was a significant effect of biographical information on judgments of approval, $F(3, 392) = 3.49, p = .02$. Approval ratings were lowest in the Prosperity condition ($M = 5.90, SD = 1.73, n = 100$) and highest in the Adversity condition ($M = 6.60, SD = 1.83, n = 99$). Approval in the Prosperity condition was almost identical to approval in the Genetic condition ($M = 5.94, SD = 1.69, n = 101$) and only slightly higher in the Control condition ($M = 6.19, SD = 1.62, n = 100$). Participants were more approving of the character in the Adversity condition relative to both the Prosperity condition ($p = .02, d = 0.39$) and the Genetic condition ($p = .03, d = 0.37$), but no other contrasts were significant (all p s > 0.31). (See Fig. 3.) There was no effect of order of presentation ($p = .58$) and no interaction effect ($p = .32$). A sensitivity power analysis assuming $N = 400$, 90% power, and an alpha of 0.05 indicated a detectable effect size of 0.19 (G*Power 3.1; Faul et al., 2007).

3.3. Discussion

The results of Study 2 add further support to the idea that the evaluation of moral behavior is influenced by biographical information about the target. In particular, as in Study 1, altruistic behavior was seen as more praiseworthy and admirable when performed by someone who had experienced serious hardship than someone who led a life of relative privilege. In addition to that finding, we also detected an effect of biographical information on perceptions of agency relative to one of two baseline conditions in which biographical information was absent, namely, when the character's disposition toward altruism was described as genetic in origin. The latter effect may have been due, however, to the suppressive effect of making highly salient the biomechanical origin of the character's moral behavior by displaying an image of the genome (Aspinwall, Brown, & Tabery, 2012; Capestany & Harris, 2014). For this reason, we are inclined to discount the significance of this effect, which was not observed in Study 1, possibly because the biomechanical origin

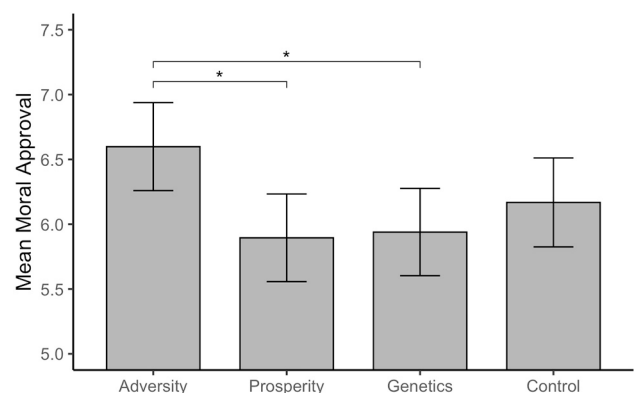


Fig. 3. Mean moral approval ratings by condition. Error bars indicate 95% confidence intervals. * $p < .05$.

of the character's altruism was described in words only, limiting its salience.

With respect to the five hypotheses delineated earlier, the results of Study 2, like those of Study 1, are consistent with the weak handicapping hypothesis only. As such, they provide further modest support for handicapping vis-à-vis both typecasting and non-historicism.

4. Study 3

Studies 1 and 2 focused on the effect of a history of adversity on the evaluation of moral behavior. The main aim of those studies was to test three competing hypotheses about judgments of praise: typecasting, handicapping, and non-historicism. Our third study was designed to extend those studies by incorporating the idea that moral patiency, like moral agency, comes in two forms (Gray & Wegner, 2009). Just as moral agents can be villains (people who harm, eliciting blame) or heroes (people who help, eliciting praise), moral patients can be victims (people who have been harmed, eliciting sympathy) or beneficiaries (people who have been harmed but who have also received help, eliciting relief).⁶ According to the typecasting hypothesis, agency and patiency are inversely correlated, regardless of what form of agency or patiency is involved. This implies that characterizing someone as a moral patient of either type, victim or beneficiary, will reduce their perceived agency, thereby making their moral behavior seem less praiseworthy than it would otherwise (i.e., in the absence of such characterization). The handicapping hypothesis, on the other hand, predicts that victims — and possibly beneficiaries as well, since they too have suffered (though in a less protracted way than victims) — will be seen as having more difficulty acting morally and hence receive more praise for moral behavior relative to agents described in experientially neutral terms. Finally, the non-historicist hypothesis predicts that attributions of praise will be unaffected by information about the agent's experiential history.

The design of Study 3 departs from that of the previous two studies in other important respects. In the earlier studies we did not measure attributions of psychological traits linked with moral agency (empathy, communication, planning, self-control) and moral patiency (pain, pleasure, joy, fear) (Gray et al., 2007). Instead, we relied solely on direct measures of moral agency, in the form of attributions of praise and admiration. To supplement these direct measures, we measured participants' attributions of agentic and experiential traits to a character before and after describing the character's good deeds. These indirect measures of moral status were included for two reasons. First, they served as a manipulation check, enabling us to test whether perceptions of the character's moral patiency varied by condition in the intended way (i.e., higher for victims and beneficiaries relative to baseline). Second, they provided an alternative means of testing for an effect of the manipulation on perceptions of the character's moral patiency. Finally, we asked participants to rate how effortful and controlled the character's altruistic behavior was. The point of adding this component to the study was to explore the idea that victims (and perhaps beneficiaries also) receive more praise for acting morally because such actions are thought to be more difficult for them to produce, as per the handicapping hypothesis.

All measures, manipulations, and exclusions used in Study 3 are reported below.

⁶ An important feature of the conceptual geography in this area is that all moral patients, whether victims or beneficiaries, are conceptualized as having suffered intentional harm (Gray & Wegner, 2009). The difference between victims and beneficiaries is that victims are described in terms of suffering only, whereas beneficiaries are described as having suffered for a time but whose suffering has been alleviated by a prosocial agent (a hero). In other words, victims are moral patients who have been harmed, whereas beneficiaries are moral patients who have been harmed for a time but then saved from further harm.

4.1. Method

4.1.1. Participants

Two hundred and twenty-seven participants (54% female; mean age 32.54 years; 66.8% White, 8.0% Black, 8.4% Hispanic, 13.7% Asian, 0.4% Native American, 2.7% other or non-reporting) were recruited on Prolific (www.prolific.co) and paid \$0.80 to complete a survey of attitudes toward altruistic behavior.⁷ The sample size for the study was determined by an a priori power analysis indicating a required minimum of $N = 207$ to detect effects of size 0.25 at a significance level of 0.05 with 90% power (G*Power 3.1; Faul et al., 2007). No additional participants were recruited based on initial results. Eligibility for participation was limited to people living in the U.S. Data from participants who failed an attention check were removed ($n = 1$), resulting in an effective sample size of 226. Prior to data collection, the study was certified as exempt by the Institutional Review Board on campus.

4.1.2. Materials and procedure

After reading a one-sentence description of a fictional character named John, "a 35-year-old man living in a large American city," participants were randomly assigned to either the Victim condition, the Beneficiary condition, or the Control condition. In the Victim and Beneficiary conditions, they read a description of John's early life; in the Control condition, no further information about John was given. The stories in the Victim and Beneficiary conditions read as follows (italized text is from the Beneficiary condition):

John's parents were killed in a car accident when he was a baby. He spent his first few years in an orphanage where he suffered both physical and emotional abuse.

At the age of five, John was adopted. Like [*Unlike*] the staff at the orphanage, his adoptive parents were physically and emotionally abusive toward him [*loving and kind to him*]. John was miserable [*happy*] in his new home.

Next, participants completed a five-item measure of moral patiency, intended as a manipulation check, and a five-item measure of moral agency. Moral patiency items included "How morally wrong do you think it would be for someone to harm John?" and "To what extent do you think John deserves to be treated with compassion and fairness?"; moral agency items included "How morally wrong do you think it would be for John to harm another person?" and "To what extent do you think John would deserve to be punished for harming another person?" (7-point scale; 1 = Not at all, 7 = Extremely). These measures of John's moral status were supplemented by measures of his psychological patiency and psychological agency, each consisting of a cluster of statements with which participants indicated their agreement or disagreement (7-point scale; 1 = Strongly disagree, 7 = Strongly agree).⁸ Statements in the patiency cluster attributed experiential traits to John (joy, fear, pleasure, pain) and statements in the agency cluster referred

⁷ Participants in Study 3 were recruited from the crowdsourcing platform Prolific, rather than MTurk, due to concerns about the quality of MTurk data which came to our attention after data from the first two studies had already been collected (Chmielewski & Kucker, 2020).

⁸ Three of our four measures — moral patiency, psychological patiency, and psychological agency — are adapted from studies reported by Khamitov et al. (2016) but labeled differently. What we call moral patiency, they call moral standing; what we call psychological patiency and psychological agency, they call patiency and agency. Our terminology reduces the risk of conflating the descriptive aspect of agency and patiency with the normative aspect.

to agentic traits (empathy, communication, self-restraint, planning).⁹ Responses to statements within each cluster were averaged to yield psychological patency and psychological agency scores for each participant.

After completing these four measures, participants were given a further piece of information about John's life, namely, that he spent his Saturdays volunteering at a homeless shelter. They then answered a series of questions about this aspect of the story: first, how much praise, reward, and credit John deserved for his volunteer work (7-point scale; 1 = None at all, 7 = A lot); second, the extent to which John's volunteer work reflected effort and self-control on his part (7-point scale; 1 = Not at all, 7 = Extremely). Responses to the praise, reward, and credit questions were averaged to form a second moral agency score for each participant. Finally, participants completed the psychological patency and psychological agency measures again, and their responses were averaged to yield a second psychological patency and psychological agency score. (See Appendix A for more details.)

4.2. Results

All measures used in Study 3 showed a high degree of reliability: moral patency, Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.84$; moral agency (pre), $\alpha = 0.84$; psychological patency (pre), $\alpha = 0.78$; psychological agency (pre), $\alpha = 0.93$; moral agency (post), $\alpha = 0.85$; psychological patency (post), $\alpha = 0.85$; and psychological agency (post), $\alpha = 0.87$. Hence, in subsequent analysis of the data we used aggregate scores on these measures rather than scores on individual items.

A one-way ANOVA showed a significant effect of condition on attributions of moral patency, $F(2,223) = 5.28, p = .004$, suggesting that the intended manipulation was effective. Participants in the Victim and Beneficiary conditions attributed more moral patency to John relative to participants in the Control condition (Victim > Control, $p = .001, d = 0.51$; Beneficiary > Control, $p = .019, d = 0.36$), but the difference between the Victim and Beneficiary conditions was not significant ($p = .396$). The same pattern of results was also observed with moral approval of John's behavior, $F(2, 223) = 6.50, p = .002$. Participants gave more praise, reward, and credit to John for volunteering at the homeless shelter when he was described as a victim or a beneficiary relative to when no information about John's early life was provided (Victim > Control, $p < .001, d = 0.53$; Beneficiary > Control, $p = .035, d = 0.31$), and the difference between patency conditions was not significant ($p = .152$). There was no effect of condition on moral condemnation of hypothetical immoral behavior, $F(2, 223) = 2.31, p = .101$.

With respect to the psychological dimension of patency, there was a significant effect of condition on the initial attribution of experiential traits to John, $F(2, 223) = 6.72, p = .001$. The pattern of contrasts, however, diverged from the pattern observed with moral patency, suggesting that the effect of moral patency on prosocial moral agency was not mediated by psychological patency.¹⁰ Participants in the Beneficiary condition initially attributed more psychological patency to John than participants in either the Victim or Control condition

⁹ Psychological patency and agency correspond to what Gray et al. (2007) refer to as Experience and Agency. While Gray et al. report that Experience is more strongly correlated with moral patency than Agency is ($r = 0.85$ vs. $r = 0.26, p < .05$), and Agency is more strongly correlated with moral agency than Experience is ($r = 0.82$ vs. $r = 0.22, p < .05$), they are careful to distinguish between the psychological (descriptive) and moral (normative) dimensions of agency and patency.

¹⁰ The fact that attributions of moral patency were not correlated with initial attributions of experiential traits is further evidence that the effect of condition on moral agency was not mediated by psychological patency, $r(224) = 0.12, p = .068$. Moral patency was correlated with the second measure of psychological patency, but only weakly, $r(224) = 0.16, p = .019$.

(Beneficiary > Victim, $p < .001, d = 0.58$; Beneficiary > Control, $p = .002, d = 0.50$), but no significant difference between the Victim and Control conditions was observed ($p = .843$). Further, there was no effect of condition on attribution of experiential traits to John when this measure was repeated, $F(2, 223) = 0.94, p = .391$. With respect to attributions of agentic traits, participants initially attributed more psychological agency to John when he was depicted as a beneficiary than when he was depicted as a victim ($p < .001, d = 0.65$), but less psychological agency to him when he was described as a victim relative to baseline ($p = .002, d = 0.51$). When this measure was repeated, however, the effect of condition disappeared, $F(2, 223) = 0.93, p = .396$.¹¹ (See Fig. 4.)

As for other potential mediators of the effect of moral patency on attributions of prosocial moral agency, a one-way ANOVA showed no effect of condition on attributions of effort, $F(2, 223) = 0.12, p = .885$. Further, though there was no overall effect of condition on attributions of self-control, $F(2, 223) = 2.81, p = .062$, participants attributed less self-control to John when he was depicted as a beneficiary relative to baseline, $p = .02, d = 0.36$. No other contrasts were significant (both $ps > 0.13$). (For means of all dependent variables, see Appendix B, Table 1.)

A mixed model ANOVA revealed a significant increase in psychological patency across measures, $F(1,223) = 28.95, p < .001$, and a parallel increase in psychological agency, $F(1, 223) = 193.01, p < .001$, as well as within-between interactions for psychological patency and condition, $F(2, 223) = 10.36, p < .001$, and psychological agency and condition, $F(2, 223) = 7.97, p < .001$. A sensitivity power analysis assuming $N = 226$, 90% power, and an alpha of 0.05 indicated a detectable effect size of 0.24 (G*Power 3.1; Faul et al., 2007).

4.3. Discussion

The results of Study 3 provide further support for the idea that a history of suffering tends to boost the perceived value of moral behavior. The main finding was that participants gave more praise, reward, and credit for acting morally to an agent characterized as a victim or as a beneficiary than an agent not characterized as a moral patient (i.e., in an experientially neutral way). Like the results of Studies 1 and 2, this result seems to fit best with the handicapping hypothesis, insofar as handicapping predicts that moral patients, especially victims, will be perceived as having more difficulty acting morally, thereby making their good deeds seem more impressive. It is less clear how to accommodate this finding with either the typecasting hypothesis, which predicts that the good deeds of moral patients will be evaluated less positively, or with non-historicism, which predicts no effect of moral patency on such evaluation. (Since both victims and beneficiaries are characterized in terms of a history of suffering, albeit to varying degrees, neither handicapping nor typecasting clearly predicts that the good deeds of victims will be evaluated differently than those of beneficiaries. In this respect, both hypotheses are predictively equivalent to non-historicism.) Contrary to the handicapping hypothesis, however, we found no evidence that the evaluative boost conferred by moral patency was driven by perceptions of how difficult it was for the agent to act morally, as indexed by perceptions of how effortful and controlled those actions were. We also found no effect of moral patency on the evaluation of hypothetical immoral behavior by the agent, contrary to both handicapping and typecasting, and consistent with non-historicism.

In previous research on moral typecasting and related phenomena, moral agency and moral patency have been measured indirectly, via psychological traits associated with intentional agency and subjective experience, respectively. Indeed, moral patency is sometimes operationalized in purely psychological terms, as a cluster of experiential

¹¹ While prosocial moral agency and psychological agency (second measure) were positively correlated, $r(224) = 0.30, p < .001$, antisocial moral agency was not correlated with either measure of psychological agency (both $ps > 0.10$).

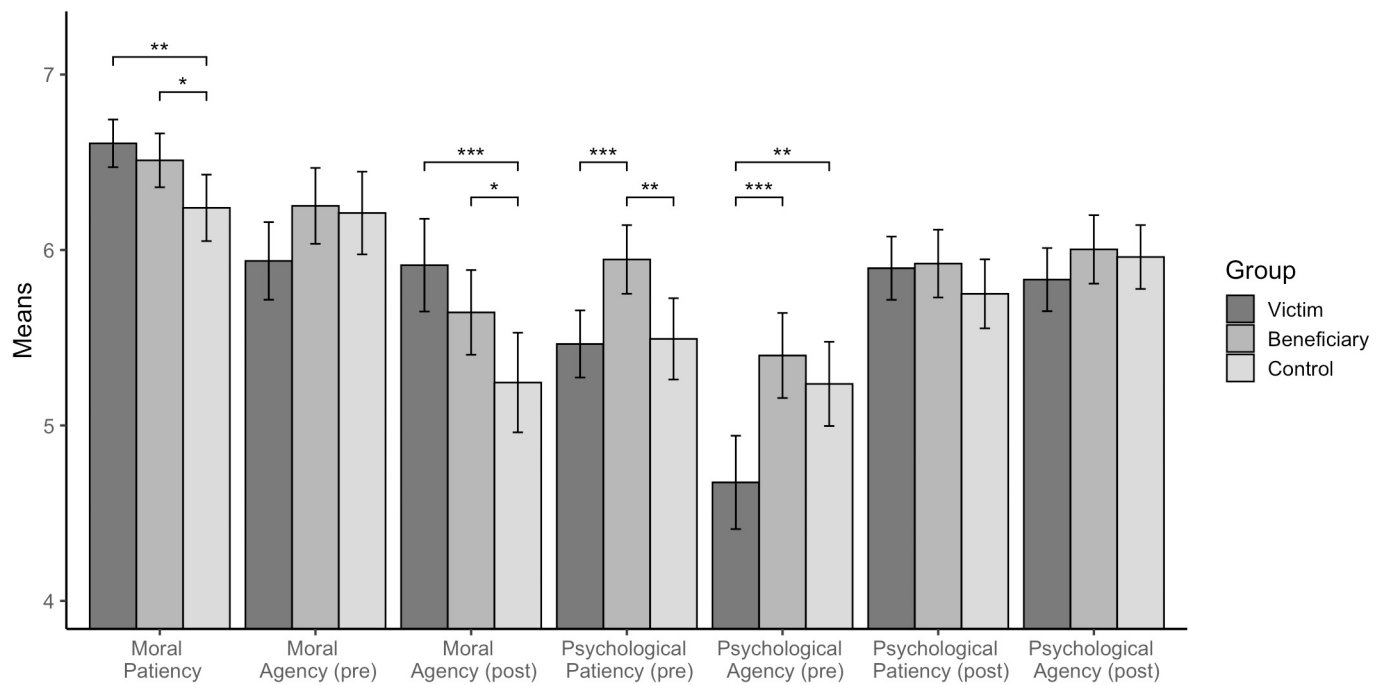


Fig. 4. Mean scores of DVs in Study 3. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$. (Note that where error bars indicate 95% confident intervals, non-overlap of error bars is sufficient, but not necessary, for a statistically significant difference between groups; see Lanzante, 2005.)

capacities (Gray & Wegner, 2009, 2011; Khamitov, Rotman, & Piazza, 2016). From a theoretical point of view, this methodology may be problematic, since moral agency and patency are two-dimensional constructs (i.e., agents can be villains or heroes, patients can be victims or beneficiaries), whereas psychological agency and patency are one-dimensional. Results from Study 3 make this worry more pressing, for two reasons. First, attributions of moral agency and moral patency patterned differently by condition than attributions of their psychological correlates. Second, correlations between moral patency and experiential traits, as well as correlations between moral agency and agentic traits, were either weak or non-significant.¹² At a minimum, these findings caution against the use of these psychological constructs as proxies for moral categories.

5. General discussion

The thought experiment with which we began this paper posed a largely open question about the psychology of praise. Are judgments of praise for moral behavior influenced by knowledge of an agent’s past suffering, and if so, in what way? Drawing on multiple lines of research in moral psychology, we identified three hypotheses about the psychology of praise — typecasting, handicapping, and non-historicism —

¹² It might be argued that the failure of alignment between indirect and direct measures of moral agency and patency was due to an experimental artifact. In both the victim and beneficiary conditions, the character was described as having certain emotions, thereby guaranteeing the attribution of greater psychological patency — but not the attribution of greater moral patency — in those conditions relative to the control. However, this explanation is unlikely to be correct, for two reasons. First, attributions of psychological patency did not pattern across conditions as suggested. Though more psychological patency was attributed to beneficiaries relative to baseline, attributions of patency to victims did not differ significantly from attributions of patency in the control condition. Second, in neither patency condition was the character ascribed traits characteristic of psychological agency. Hence, it is unclear how the non-alignment between indirect and direct measures of moral agency could be accounted for in the manner suggested above.

each of which supports a different answer to the question above. We then reported the results of two studies suggesting that moral behavior tends to attract more praise when the experiential history of the agent involves coping with adversity rather than enjoying prosperity, as well as the results of a third study suggesting that moral behavior tends to be evaluated more favorably when the experiential history of the agent includes suffering interpersonal harm than in the absence of information about the agent’s past experience. This pattern of results, we argued, is more consistent with the handicapping hypothesis (albeit a weak version thereof, in terms of the results of Studies 1 and 2) than type-casting or non-historicism.

Not all of the predictions generated by the handicapping hypothesis were borne out by the data, however. A key component of the handicapping hypothesis concerns the psychological mechanism which underlies the effect of perceived suffering on praise for moral behavior (and blame for immoral behavior). According to this hypothesis, people with a history of suffering interpersonal harm will tend to be seen as having a diminished capacity for acting morally (as well as a greater propensity for acting immorally), and their perceived handicap or disadvantage in this respect will make their moral successes seem more commendable (and their moral failures less reprehensible). Participants’ ratings of how much effort and self-control was involved in the production of an agent’s good deeds, however, did not vary as predicted by the handicapping hypothesis, suggesting that agents with a history of suffering were not seen as having more difficulty acting altruistically. Alternatively, it could be that ratings of effort and self-control are not sufficiently indicative of participants’ view of the target’s ability to act morally. The use of other measures, such as ratings of how difficult it is for the target to perform a good deed, or ratings of the target’s ability to perform such actions, might produce a pattern of data more consistent with handicapping. In future studies we plan to explore this possibility.

A second avenue for further work, closely related to the first, is this. Suppose for the moment that people do in fact tend to regard a history of suffering as reducing the capacity for moral behavior, or as presenting obstacles to the exercise of this capacity. What might explain that tendency? One possibility is that a history of suffering is perceived as depleting the psychological resources required for acting morally,

making it difficult for someone to shift attention from their own needs to the needs of others. This is suggested by the stereotype of people who have suffered hardships in early life, especially at the hands of caregivers, which includes a tendency to be socially anxious, insecure, and withdrawn — a stereotype which may have some basis in fact (Elliott, Cunningham, Linder, Colangelo, & Gross, 2005). A history of suffering, that is, might seem like an obstacle to developing the kind of social mindedness exemplified by acts of altruism and other forms of prosocial behavior, which are typically motivated by feelings of compassion or empathic concern.¹³ This is an open empirical question, worthy of investigation not just in connection with handicapping and typecasting (and historicist accounts of praise more generally) but in its own right.

Another question for further study arises from a limitation of the research reported here. In our studies, the past suffering experienced by the agent resulted from harmful actions by others (for example, parental abuse and neglect). Would a history of past suffering due to other causes have a similar effect on judgments of praise for moral behavior? Perhaps a history of past suffering due to a painful medical condition (e.g., childhood cancer), or an accidental injury, would also increase the perceived moral value of moral behavior. We suspect that it would not; it seems more likely, on our view, that the type of past suffering which

boosts the perceived praiseworthiness of moral behavior is essentially linked to the experience of interpersonal harm, since it is only experiences of that sort which are naturally thought of as impairing development of the moral self. But this too is a matter for empirical investigation.

Finally, little has been said in this paper about how our research relates to normative theorizing about moral value. Contemporary philosophical accounts of moral value, such as Arpaly's (2002) view that the praiseworthiness of an action is a function of the extent to which it is intrinsically motivated by moral concern (i.e., a desire to do the right thing for the right reason), are typically predicated on intuitions about hypothetical cases of the sort with which we began this paper. The handicapping hypothesis appears to be consistent with a psychological analogue of Arpaly's account, insofar as effort is seen as indicative of goal commitment (Bigman & Tamir, 2016) and goal commitment is linked to moral motivation. But whether judgments of praise for moral behavior are driven by perception of the degree to which an action is done for the right reasons — and further, whether a history of past suffering is associated in people's minds with a diminished capacity for morally motivated action — are also questions that remain to be explored.

Appendix A

A.1. Study 1

A.1.1. Subway

Jane rides the subway to work. Whenever she sees an elderly person standing in a crowded subway car, she offers to give up her seat.

A.1.2. Groceries

Jane walks to the grocery store to do her shopping. Whenever she sees someone accidentally drop their groceries on the street, she stops to help pick them up.

A.1.3. Homeless

Jane lives in a big city. Whenever she sees a homeless person on the street, she offers to buy them a meal.

A.1.4. Genetic

Jane was born with a combination of genes that disposes people to altruistic behavior. As a result, Jane has a strong tendency to help people in need.

A.1.5. Prosperity

Jane was raised in a warm, supportive, and comfortable home by parents who treated her with kindness and love. As a result, Jane has a strong tendency to help people in need.

A.1.6. Adversity

Jane was raised in a harsh, abusive, and unstable home by parents who treated her with cruelty and neglect. As a result, Jane has a strong tendency to help people in need.

A.1.7. Praise

On a scale of 0 to 6, where 0 = no praise at all and 6 = the amount of praise appropriate to acts of true heroism, how much praise does Jane deserve for offering to give up her seat on the subway / helping a stranger pick up their groceries / offering to buy a meal for a homeless person?

¹³ There may be some truth to this idea. Recent neuropsychological research suggests that a history of childhood trauma is strongly associated with a tendency toward violent behavior in adulthood (Bland, Lambie, & Best, 2018), as well as a permissive attitude toward the infliction of harm in hypothetical moral dilemmas (Larsen et al., 2019). The latter point is especially noteworthy in view of the association between permissive attitudes toward instrumental harm and low levels of empathic concern (Gleigerricht & Young, 2013; Jack, Robbins, Friedman, & Myers, 2014; Patil & Silani, 2014).

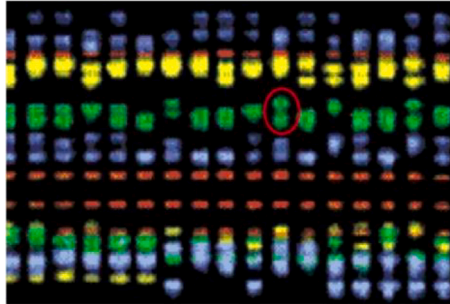
A.2. Study 2

A.2.1. Vignette

Tom always tries to help people out when he can. For example, if he sees an elderly person standing on the subway, he always offers to give up his seat. If he sees someone accidentally drop something on the street, he always picks it up and gives it back to them. If he sees a group of tourists studying a map and looking lost, he always stops and offers to give them directions.

A.2.2. Genetic

Scientists have identified a particular combination of genes that predisposes people to altruism. These genes are circled in red in the image below, which shows the DNA of a person who fits this profile. People with this genetic profile have a strong tendency to help others.



Tom was born with this combination of genes linked to altruism.

A.2.3. Prosperity

Tom is 25 years old. He had a wonderful childhood. He was raised in a comfortable home where he felt unconditional love from warm and supportive parents. His father played catch with him on the weekends, and his mother helped him with his homework. At school, Tom was popular with the other kids, and his teachers were attentive and encouraging.

Tom's good fortune has continued into adulthood. He is happily married, and he has many close friends. He enjoys his job, which provides him with a good salary. He leads a happy and fulfilling life.

A.2.4. Adversity

Tom is 25 years old. He had a miserable childhood. He was raised in an extremely abusive home where he never felt safe. His father regularly beat him with a belt while in a drunken rage, and his mother often yelled and screamed at him for no reason. At school, Tom was shunned by the other kids, and his teachers were inattentive and punitive.

Tom's misfortune has continued into adulthood. He lives alone, and he has no close friends. He dislikes his job, which provides him with only a meager salary. He leads a sad and unfulfilling life.

A.2.5. Praise

On a scale of 0 to 9, where 0 = no praise at all and 9 = the amount of praise appropriate to acts of true heroism, how much praise does Tom deserve for performing the sort of actions described in the story, such as giving up his seat on the subway?

A.2.6. Admiration

On a scale of 0 to 9, where 0 = no praise at all and 9 = the amount of admiration appropriate to acts of true heroism, how much admiration does Tom deserve for performing the sort of actions described in the story, such as giving up his seat on the subway?

A.3. Study 3

A.3.1. Initial description

John is a 35-year-old man living in a large American city.

A.3.2. Victim

John's parents were killed in a car accident when he was a baby. He spent his first few years in an orphanage where he suffered both physical and emotional abuse.

At the age of five, John was adopted. Like the staff at the orphanage, his adoptive parents were physically and emotionally abusive toward him. John was miserable in his new home.

A.3.3. Beneficiary

John's parents were killed in a car accident when he was a baby. He spent his first few years in an orphanage where he suffered both physical and emotional abuse.

At the age of five, John was adopted. Unlike the staff at the orphanage, his adoptive parents were loving and kind to him. John was happy in his new home.

A.3.4. *Vignette*

John volunteers each Saturday at a homeless shelter where he cooks, serves meals, and cleans the kitchen and dining room.

A.3.5. *Moral patiency*

- How morally wrong do you think it would be for someone to harm John?
- How morally wrong do you think it would be for someone to steal from John?
- To what extent do you think John deserves to be treated with compassion and fairness?
- If John were endangered, how important do you think it would be to protect John?
- To what extent do you think John deserves to be protected from harm?

A.3.6. *Moral agency (antisocial)*

- How morally wrong do you think it would be for John to harm another person?
- How morally wrong do you think it would be for John to steal from another person?
- To what extent do you think John would deserve to be blamed for harming another person?
- To what extent do you think John would deserve to be punished for harming another person?
- To what extent do you think John would deserve to be held responsible for harming another person?

A.3.7. *Psychological agency*

- John appears to be capable of understanding how others are feeling.
- John appears to be capable of conveying thoughts or feelings to others.
- John appears to be capable of exercising self-restraint over desires, emotions, and impulses.
- John appears to be capable of making plans and working toward goals.

A.3.8. *Psychological patiency*

- John appears to be capable of experiencing joy.
- John appears to be capable of feeling afraid or fearful.
- John appears to be capable of experiencing physical or emotional pleasure.
- John appears to be capable of experiencing physical or emotional pain.

A.3.9. *Moral agency (prosocial)*

- To what extent do you think John deserves to be praised for giving up his Saturdays to volunteer at the homeless shelter?
- To what extent do you think John deserves to be rewarded for giving up his Saturdays to volunteer at the homeless shelter?
- To what extent do you think John deserves credit for giving up his Saturdays to volunteer at the homeless shelter?

A.3.10. *Effort*

To what extent does John’s giving up his Saturdays to volunteer at the homeless shelter require an investment of effort on his part?

A.3.11. *Self-control*

To what extent does John’s giving up his Saturdays to volunteer at the homeless shelter require him to exercise self-control?

Appendix B

Table 1

Mean attributions by condition in Study 3. Figures in parentheses are standard deviations.

Attribution type	Victim (n = 77)	Beneficiary (n = 74)	Control (n = 75)
Moral Patiency	6.61 (0.60)	6.51 (0.66)	6.24 (0.82)
Moral Agency (negative/pre) [blame, punishment, responsibility]	5.94 (0.98)	6.25 (0.93)	6.21 (1.03)
Moral Agency (positive/post) [praise, reward, credit]	5.91 (1.16)	5.64 (1.04)	5.29 (1.18)
Psychological Patiency (pre) [joy, fear, pleasure, pain]	5.46 (0.84)	5.95 (0.84)	5.49 (1.01)
Psychological Agency (pre) [empathy, communication, self-restraint, planning]	4.68 (1.17)	5.40 (1.03)	5.24 (1.04)
Psychological Patiency (post) [joy, fear, pleasure, pain]	5.90 (0.79)	5.92 (0.83)	5.75 (0.86)
Psychological Agency (post) [empathy, communication, self-restraint, planning]	5.83 (0.79)	6.00 (0.84)	5.96 (0.79)
Effort	5.88 (0.97)	5.86 (1.25)	5.95 (0.94)
Self-Control	5.45 (1.17)	5.14 (1.63)	5.64 (1.10)

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