

Moral Hypocrisy, Moral Inconsistency,
and the Struggle for Moral Integrity

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If future archaeologists unearthed an untitled social psychology textbook, its cover eaten by discerning worms, they would have to figure out what social psychologists studied from the papers they most prominently featured and the topics that recurrently received the field's attention. One reasonable hypothesis might be that ours was the *science of moral hypocrisy*. Social psychologists are suspicious of actors' self-reported motives, in part because people are surprisingly unaware of their real motives (Nisbett & Wilson, 1977), but also because two central features of the social psychological model of human behavior, that people care deeply about making a good impression on others (e.g. Schlenker, 1980) and also wish to hold positive views of themselves (e.g., Greenwald, 1980), contribute to their claiming purer moral intentions than they actually have. More than any other social scientists, social psychologists make a living by showing that proclaimed moral intentions cannot be taken at face value.

Distinguishing Moral Hypocrisy and Moral Inconsistency

Hypocrisy is often defined in social psychology as not “practicing what you preach” (e.g., Stone & Fernandez, 2008), “saying one thing and doing another” (e.g., Barden, Rucker, & Petty, 2005), or publicly upholding moral norms, especially for others to follow, but personally violating them in private (e.g., Lammers, Stapel, & Galinsky, in press). Although this has been a

useful working definition and one that has yielded many valuable insights and research findings, we propose to expand the definition of moral hypocrisy beyond behavioral inconsistency.

How can hypocrisy not require inconsistency? The etymology of the term is traced back to the Greek, where it referred to playing a part on a stage. The Oxford English Dictionary defines hypocrisy as “the assuming of a false appearance of virtue or goodness, with dissimulation of real character or inclinations, esp. in respect of religious life or beliefs; hence in general sense, dissimulation, pretence, sham.” First, the phrase “moral hypocrisy” is thus somewhat redundant: Hypocrisy, by definition, refers to virtue or goodness, and it is used in other domains only by extension. In fact, even when used to refer to deception in a non-moral domain, hypocrisy is still ethically problematic because it involves dishonesty.

Second, note that hypocrisy does not necessarily refer to failing to practice what you preach. Although that particular behavioral inconsistency is a classic cue for hypocrisy, this is so only because it signals that a speaker may not have believed what he or she was preaching at the time. The central issue is preaching in bad faith, not the failure to practice per se. Table 1 illustrates the disjunction between moral hypocrisy and moral consistency, and provides a rough outline for the rest of this chapter. In each of the four cells, we will review studies looking at hypocritical actors (e.g., Do people practice what they preach? What are the psychological consequences of moral hypocrisy?), and ones in which the focus was reactions to hypocrisy (e.g., When do people perceive inconsistency as hypocrisy?).

Not Practicing What One Preaches: Moral Hypocrisy as Behavioral Inconsistency

This first version of hypocrisy is exemplified in the New Testament, when Jesus says of the “scribes and Pharisees,” whom he calls “hypocrites” : “Therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say things and do not do them”

(Matthew 23:3). Not practicing what one preaches has served as the working definition of moral hypocrisy in many social psychological investigations, which we now turn to.

Moral Posturing Without Paying the Price

We argued that demonstrations of moral hypocrisy are plentiful in the social psychological literature, replete as it is with demonstrations of attitude-behavior inconsistencies, rationalizations of problematic behavior, and psychological cover-ups of illicit intentions. One of the consistent contributors to this long tradition, Daniel Batson, defines moral hypocrisy as “morality [being] extolled—even enacted—not with an eye to producing a good and right outcome but in order to appear moral yet still benefit oneself” (Batson, Kobrynowicz, Dinnerstein, Kampf, & Wilson, 1997, p.1335; see also Batson, Thompson, Seufferling, Whitney, & Strongman, 1999, and Batson, Thompson, & Chen, 2002). Batson and his colleagues asked participants to assign experimental tasks to themselves and an unknown participant, knowing that one task was more fun and rewarding than the other. Participants were given an opportunity to flip a coin while alone to make the decision, but it was made clear that this was not required. In a typical study (Batson, Kobrynowicz, Dinnerstein, Kampf, & Wilson, 1997, Study 2), half of the participants decided to flip the coin and declared it the most fair way to allocate roles, but the biased proportion of flippers who claimed to obtain the better result for themselves by chance (90%) was the same as the proportion of non-flippers who just grabbed the better task for themselves. Although the deception involved in this second maneuver is striking, the choice to flip a coin when it was not required (knowing it was going to lead to deception, if necessary) is just as surprising, and speaks to the desire to appear fair and just, even when one may not be planning to pay the consequences. Hypocritical participants preached fairness but fudged their

coin-toss results to make sure that they, and not another unsuspecting participant, got the better of the two tasks.

Ascribing Hypocrisy to Others Who Do Not Practice What They Preach

Another productive line of research has documented factors contributing to judgments of hypocrisy by observers. For example, an individual who makes grand claims about the importance of morality and is then found cheating is seen as hypocritical (Gilbert & Jones, 1986), as is someone who publicly commits to diet and exercise and is subsequently found to be a junk-food-eating slouch (Barden, Rucker, & Petty, 2005). Hypocrisy also wipes out the positive effects of prior good deeds, which would otherwise make even blatant violations in the same domain seem more acceptable in the eyes of observers – as they do when hypocrisy is controlled for, proving that hypocrisy undoes the licensing effect of prior good deeds (Effron & Monin, 2010).

The Consequences of Not Practicing What One Preaches

What are the consequences of hypocrisy for the self? Early cognitive dissonance researchers (Festinger & Carlsmith, 1959; Mills, 1958) showed that lying and cheating are uncomfortable and that people attempt to alleviate this discomfort. One of the early members of the initial dissonance research group, Elliot Aronson, later looked directly at hypocrisy, defined as not practicing what one preaches (Aronson, Fried, & Stone, 1991; for a review see Stone & Fernandez, 2008). Whereas early dissonance research had focused on the darker side of rationalization, Aronson and his student Jeff Stone aimed to harness dissonance for positive change by inducing a feeling of hypocrisy. For example, individuals who both publicly advocated safe sex and were later reminded of past failures to use condoms were more than twice as likely to buy condoms for future use (Stone, Aronson, Crain, Winslow, & Fried, 1994) than

were various control groups establishing the need for both advocacy and failure reminders. The need to directly resolve this hypocrisy was demonstrated by showing that, when given the choice, individuals preferred to engage in behavior that matched “what they preached” even over actions that they otherwise cared more about, such as donating to a good cause (Stone, Wiegand, Cooper, & Aronson, 1997).

Although this first definition of moral hypocrisy as behavioral inconsistency has inspired some important research, there are also cases, which we address next, in which hypocrisy occurs in the absence of behavioral inconsistency.

Bad Faith and Ulterior Motives: Moral Hypocrisy Without Behavioral Inconsistency

The reason why behavioral inconsistency is a convenient proxy for hypocrisy is that it suggests disingenuousness at the time of the “preaching.” As the dictionary definition of hypocrisy (the “false appearance of virtue”) reminds us, however, it is disingenuousness that is the main issue, not the “practice” itself. We therefore propose to broaden the study of moral hypocrisy to include any claiming of morality for ulterior (non-moral), self-serving motives. Batson et al.’s (1997) coin-flippers happen to have been exposed by the departure of their outcomes from mathematical odds, which is how we know that they did not practice what they preached, but their hypocrisy lay in claiming the moral high road with little resolve to follow through. Moral hypocrisy was thus exposed *within subjects* – the paradigmatic case of not practicing what one preaches, or behavioral inconsistency. In the cases reviewed in this section, the hypocrisy is often exposed *between subjects* in that moral judgments and intentions are influenced by situational manipulations demonstrating the opportunistic, self-serving use of morality, or moral hypocrisy in the absence of behavioral inconsistency.

Moral Hypocrisy as Double Standards

One way to pursue this approach is to show that individuals hold themselves and others to different moral standards. In a paradigm inspired by Batson et al.'s task-allocation studies, Vadesolo and DeSteno (2007) showed that participants rated other participants who assigned themselves the better task as significantly less fair than they rated themselves when they did the same thing. A similar double standard applied when judging an outgroup member rather than an ingroup member. Moreover, this difference disappeared under a cognitive load, suggesting that the double standard involves effortful rationalization when the self is involved (Vadesolo & DeSteno, 2008), and it was enhanced when individuals imagined themselves in high-power roles (Lammers, Stapel, & Galinsky, in press). Note that, within participants, these results would have been cases of not practicing what one preaches, but because self-other comparisons were always between participants (some participants judged their own behavior, whereas others judged the same choice made by others), the moral hypocrisy exposed across experimental conditions did not involve behavioral inconsistency. Instead, what strikes readers as hypocritical is the fact that individuals do not seem to be objective or in good faith in their application of ethical standards, and let self-interest affect their judgments of fairness, even expending cognitive effort to do so.

Strategic Moralization: Moral Hypocrisy as Jealousy With a Halo

Another form of moral bad faith and standard-shifting involves moral indignation that does not come from a sincere concern for ethical principles, but instead serves to make a person feel better about another form of inadequacy. If I follow silly rules, abide by nonsensical norms, or agree to do undeserved favors, I might feel a sting to my sense of being a rational, independent person when I see someone else acting in more self-interested ways. Whereas I might have admired this rebellion in the abstract, the threat to my self-worth may lead me to moralize my conformity and condemn the rule-breaker for the expedient results he or she

obtained and that I wish I had. In the words of H. G. Wells, this kind of moral indignation boils down to “jealousy with a halo.” The “assuming of a false appearance of virtue” serves a very real self-protective function of compensating for felt inferiority on another dimension. Here hypocrisy does not result from an inherent lack of virtue; it is just that the claim to virtue comes from an unsavory place.

Jordan and Monin (2008) showed that when individuals agreed to perform a tedious task as a favor to an experimenter, and then discovered that another participant refused to do the same thing, they rated themselves as more moral and the other as less moral than when they simply witnessed the refusal without doing the task themselves, or did the task without observing the refusal. Furthermore, this “sucker-to-saint” compensation effect disappeared when participants were first self-affirmed (Steele, 1988; Sherman & Cohen, 2006) by reflecting on one of their important traits or values, suggesting that the function of moralization was indeed to shore up a threatened ego. This strategic moralization is a case of moral hypocrisy without inconsistency; the moral calculus seems to be based on self-serving considerations, but it is not a case of not practicing what one preaches.

Strategic Demoralization: Moral Hypocrisy as the Denial of Virtue

Another case of hypocrisy without inconsistency involves the bad-faith denial of virtue. The same exemplary behavior that is recognized as morally superior by uninvolved observers is received with considerable less respect from individuals whose self-image is threatened by comparison. Participants in Monin, Sawyer, and Marquez (2008, Study 2) discovered that the peer whose responses they were to evaluate had refused to complete a task because he considered it offensively racist (the obvious culprit in a whodunit was the sole Black suspect). As expected, observers rated this rebel as more moral than an obedient control. Moral hypocrisy

came into play when participants had themselves completed the task beforehand: Having overwhelmingly accused the Black suspect, they now denied the morality of the rebel's stance, and in fact liked and respected him less than an obedient control. As with moralization, the self-protective nature of demoralization was demonstrated by the fact that self-affirmed individuals readily acknowledged the greater morality (and agency) of rebels, and also liked them more (Monin et al., 2008, Study 4). In both phenomena, judgments of morality (high or low) seemed less based on real moral convictions, and more based on the situational expediency of self-defense.

Suspicion and the Ascription of Bad Faith and Ulterior Motives to Others

We have seen how individuals who do not practice what they preach are taxed with hypocrisy. It is not necessary, however, to exhibit such behavioral inconsistencies to be deemed a hypocrite. Suspicion about virtuous motives is easily elicited (Fein, Hilton, & Miller, 1990), and moral behavior is spontaneously chalked up to situational demands instead of real dispositions (Ybarra, 2002), so any moral behavior exposes one to the charge of moral hypocrisy, especially if it makes others feel less morally adequate (Monin, 2007). Wiltermuth, Monin, and Chow (2010) found that the willingness to give moral credit to individuals who engage in proactive moral behavior (e.g., volunteering) is unrelated to the general tendency to condemn immoral behavior. Many cynical respondents were quite condemning of moral violations, but saw little evidence of morality in even the most exemplary civic-minded behavior, suggesting that moral displays can be taken with a grain of salt even by people who care deeply about morality.

Furthermore, the importance given to holding "appropriate" mental states congruent with one's public behavior, it turns out, depends on cultural frameworks such as religion. Cohen and

Rozin (2001) found that American Protestants were significantly more likely than Jews, for example, to attribute hypocrisy to an actor who treats his parents well despite not liking them, which the authors relate to the importance given by Protestants to thoughts in moral evaluation (Jimmy Carter's famous "I have committed adultery in my heart"), and their belief that thoughts are controllable. Thus hypocrisy can be ascribed to actors even if they do not show the classic sequence of not practicing what they preach. Individuals grant morality to others only reluctantly, and readily attribute moral hypocrisy, bad faith, and ulterior motives when they encounter putative moral behavior.

The Complexities of Moral Life: Inconsistency Without Hypocrisy

We have discussed hypocrisy without inconsistency, to contrast it with the more classic case of not practicing what one preaches. But when people do act inconsistently, does hypocrisy necessarily follow? We suggest that there are many situations in which people act in opposition to their moral values without feeling threatened by hypocrisy: when preaching may have intrinsic value whether or not the preacher adheres to his or her own guidelines, when people behave badly but had the best of intentions, when good deeds license bad ones by balancing them out, and when inconsistency occurs across differing construal levels.

Is It Always Wrong to Preach Without Practicing?

The self-evident wrongness of not practicing what one preaches deserves a second look. If someone endorses a given course of action but is unable to follow through with it, does that necessarily invalidate the appropriateness of that course of action and make the preaching worthless? Note that in Jesus's admonition to do as the Pharisees say but not as they do, he still advises to follow their edicts: As experts of the law, they should indeed be turned to for

guidance. Would it be better then if, knowing they could not follow through in their works, they stayed quiet and offered no prescriptions to avoid the charge of hypocrisy?

The utilitarian philosopher Peter Singer presents an interesting case; following utilitarianism to its ultimate conclusions, and taking into account marginal utility, he has argued (e.g., 1972) that it would be more ethical for citizens of the developed world to spend the vast sums of money they spend keeping their parents alive in old age on children in developing countries, where that wealth would have a much greater effect. When Singer came to the United States to take a position at Princeton University, much was made of the fact (e.g., Specter, 1999; Berkowitz, 2000) that he was spending considerable funds tending to his sick mother, in apparent violation of his own edicts. Likewise, Al Gore was famously criticized for owning several energy-guzzling houses despite having preached the “inconvenient truth” of global warming. As with the Pharisees, do these apparent lacks of follow-through make Peter Singer or Al Gore wrong for arguing as they did? Assuming they knew that their own behavior would not change, was it better for the world if they keep their theories to themselves, avoiding the charge of hypocrisy, or if they preached long and loud, hoping to affect other people’s behavior?

We argue that there is great value in Singer working through the complex ethical arguments that would produce a clear utilitarian prescription suitable to contemporary readers, even if he does not always follow his own prescriptions. Otherwise, it would be like faulting an ice-skating judge for not being able to perform a triple Salchow, or dismissing a physician’s recommendation to stop smoking because his or her breath smells of tobacco. When one can make inherently valuable recommendations, it might be one’s moral duty to preach – even if one is not always practicing. We view this as a case of inconsistency without hypocrisy.

Weakness of the Will and Unrealistic Intentions

A common explanation for inconsistency between one's stated intention and one's subsequent behavior is a simple inability to follow through, for lack of ability, resources, or willpower. This differs from hypocrisy in that the intentions may have been stated in good faith while overestimating one's ability to implement them. Rest (1984), in his four-step model of moral behavior, incorporated follow-through or implementation as Step 4, after (1) interpreting the situation, (2) identifying the morally ideal course of action, and (3) intending to try to fulfill one's moral ideal. Here the vast literature on self-regulation provides an abundance of models (e.g., Fishbach, Zhang, & Koo, 2009; Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Muraven, & Tice, 1998) explaining why individuals do not always follow through on their laudable intentions. The important point for our purposes is not *why* people suffer from weakness of the will, but rather that this type of behavior-intention inconsistency does not seem as problematic for people as preaching one thing and practicing another. Falling short of good intentions does not feel hypocritical because the intentions were not expressed in bad faith; instead, the inconsistency results from weakness of the will, what philosophers call "incontinence" or *akrasia* (see also Monin, Pizarro, & Beer, 2007).

Talk is cheap compared to actual moral action, which explains why statements of intentions may not always be implemented. Part of this disjunction may be due to a common planning fallacy – people generally overestimate the time and resources available in the future, and underestimate other practical demands (Lieberman & Trope, 1998). For example, Epley and Dunning (2000) showed that students overestimated their likelihood of donating to a fraternity fundraiser and the amount they would donate. One ambiguity with asking respondents to indicate their likelihood of performing desirable behaviors is that it confounds two separate questions: asking them how much they care about the cause (and what they would want to do in an ideal

world) and asking them to generate realistic predictions about their own behavior. When Tanner and Carlson (2008) specifically separated these two questions by asking a group of participants both what they would do in an ideal world and what they were realistically going to do, they found that ideal answers were very much in line with what participants reported when simply asked to state their intentions. However, after the “ideal world” question, participants’ predictions about their future behavior were much less rosy and more in line with what they predicted for others. Liberman and Trope (1998) suggest that one reason for the mismatch between present intentions and future behavior involves level of construal: Whereas donating in the future relates mostly to the kind of person one wants to be and is therefore free of reality constraints, being asked to donate in the present involves whether one has time, ready cash, other demands on one’s attention, etc., and is therefore likely to yield a very different result. These factors can lead people not to follow through on their intentions despite being in perfectly good faith when they formulated them.

Giving More Weight to One’s Moral Intentions

The very fact of holding laudable intentions may allow some people to feel they have already done their share, paradoxically relaxing the need to implement these intentions. In some surveys, individuals readily report gaps between their moral concerns and their moral behavior. White and Plous (1995) found both that a large majority of respondents reported caring about issues such as homelessness or animal protection more than average, and that the majority also reported doing less than average on these same issues. Respondents seemed unbothered by this apparent failure to practice what they preached; in fact, they generally said that the public was not worried enough about these issues but that they personally showed the right level of concern.

How do people manage to acknowledge such inconsistencies without feeling hypocritical? One factor seems to be the greater weight they place on their intentions than on their actions when evaluating their own morality, but not when evaluating others. In one study, participants estimated how long they would hold their hand in painfully cold water when experimenters pledged to donate 50 cents to a charity of their choice for every minute (Kruger & Gilovich, 2004). When they actually had to submerge their hands in the icy water, many fell short of their altruistic intentions. However, participants' estimates of their own altruism were driven by their intentions, not by the time they actually held their hand in the water. Observers, by contrast, assessed the participants' altruism based on submersion time alone and did not place much weight on intentions. This egocentric bias is compounded by a difference in availability; we know a great deal about our own intentions and know how genuine they are, but often know little about others' intentions, and nothing about their good faith.

Redemption and the Possibility of Change

Another case in which behavioral inconsistency is not necessarily hypocritical is when there is a possibility of personal change or redemption between one's practicing and one's preaching. Indeed, the order in which someone practices and preaches determines whether observers judge the person as hypocritical. As we have seen, if a target first makes a statement about a personal standard (e.g., promoting a get-fit campaign) and then engages in behavior that goes against that standard (e.g., sitting on the couch and eating junk food for the next week), the person will be judged a hypocrite – but much less so if he or she commits to the standard only after violating it, because observers interpret this inconsistency as “turning a new leaf” (Barden, Rucker, & Petty, 2005). The fact that this behavioral inconsistency (not practicing and then preaching) is not encoded as moral hypocrisy reveals once more that the real issue when one fails

to practice what one preaches is not the behavioral inconsistency but instead the good faith of the preaching. Given that the redemption template assumes good faith despite previous failings, inconsistency is unimportant in determining hypocrisy.

This analysis of the temporal sequence of preaching and practicing casts a new light on Stone et al.'s (1994, 1997) induced hypocrisy studies mentioned earlier. In these studies, participants were made aware that they had acted inconsistently – for example, by first promoting condom use to prevent AIDS but then recalling that they had had unprotected sex in the past. Because these failures preceded the preaching, they might have raised doubts about the participants' good faith when promoting safe sex, but without quite invalidating it yet. In fact, by subsequently choosing to buy condoms, participants replaced a potential hypocrisy narrative with a narrative of redemption. They saw the error of their ways, and were now acting in line with what they preached.

Moral Licensing, Moral Credits, and Moral Balance

Inconsistency may also avoid being viewed as hypocrisy if good and bad deeds are perceived as balancing each other. For example, someone who cares about being healthy could reasonably work out vigorously in the morning (a “good” deed) and eat a big piece of chocolate cake in the afternoon (a “bad” deed) without feeling hypocritical. The actions are inconsistent, but because they balance each other out, they do not interfere too much with the higher-level goal of being healthy. In the moral domain, Nisan (1991) argued that people are just concerned with maintaining some “good enough” level of morality, and will balance good and bad deeds to remain at that baseline. In a sense, this “moral balance” model works like a bank account – one earns moral credits by acting morally and can make withdrawals through immoral actions as long as the balance does not drop below baseline. People who remember their past moral behavior

feel less compelled to give for a good cause, as if they had already done enough good deeds for the day (Sachdeva, Iliev, & Medin, 2009; see also Jordan, Mullen, & Murnighan, 2010). In the eyes of observers, moral credits need to be accrued in a different moral domain, or they will be seen as hypocritical and therefore ineffective at licensing a blatant transgression (Effron & Monin, 2010). For example, a person renowned for promoting ethnic diversity in the workplace was judged more leniently when accused of blatant sexual harassment, but was not helped in a case of blatant racial discrimination.

Behavioral Inconsistency and Construal Levels

Behavioral inconsistency can also result from differing levels of construal. Behaviors can be construed at various level of abstraction, with greater distance (spatial or temporal) leading to higher-level construal (Liberman & Trope, 1998). Psychological distance increases when an event or behavior is farther away in time, does not directly affect the self, or is conceptualized in terms of its abstract, higher-order qualities (Ledgerwood, Trope, & Liberman, in press), and people are more likely to reflect their underlying ideology when the event or behavior is psychologically distant rather than near (Ledgerwood, Trope, & Chaiken, in press).

As a result, individuals are more value-driven about the future than about the present (Liberman & Trope, 1998). In one study, people evaluated offensive but harmless transgressions (e.g, eating the family dog after it got run over by a car) as less wrong when they were supposedly going to occur tomorrow (low construal level) than when they were going to occur next year (high, or abstract, construal level) (Eyal, Liberman, & Trope, 2008). To the extent that preaching (future) and practicing (present) tap into different level of construal, inconsistency is thus to be expected even in the absence of bad faith.

Construal level also moderates inconsistency concerns when two behaviors that on the surface appear inconsistent can be framed as serving the same higher-level moral goal, as in the case of confessing one's bad deeds. Listing one's failures after claiming good intentions supposedly elicits hypocrisy (Stone et al., 1994), so people should want to avoid listing many failures to avoid feeling more hypocritical; yet participants who advocated safe sex listed more instances of failure to use condoms than those who did not take a public stand (Aronson et al., 1991). How can we resolve this apparent inconsistency? The key may be that stating one's values elevates the level of construal, highlighting the value-consistency of the act of confessing over the inconsistency of the specific behaviors being confessed.

Consistent with this prediction, Merritt and Monin (2010) found that people listed more environmentally unfriendly behaviors (by either themselves or a peer) after writing about why they cared about the environment than after writing about their "green" habits, or about a control topic. Presumably, people who wrote about their abstract concern for the environment construed confession at a higher level and were motivated to list environmentally-harmful behaviors to show their commitment, and to demonstrate their vigilance and low tolerance for harmful behavior. By contrast, people who wrote about their environmentally-friendly behaviors may have felt that subsequently listing environmentally-harmful behaviors would make them appear hypocritical, since good and bad environmental behaviors were at the same low level of construal and thus readily comparable – and indeed, in contrast to the effect of writing why they cared, listing green habits only affected the number of harmful behaviors listed for the self, but not for a peer.

The Struggle for Moral Integrity

We stressed the difference between moral inconsistency and moral hypocrisy, highlighting the novel cases of hypocrisy without inconsistency and inconsistency without hypocrisy. The fourth cell in Table 1 represents the ideal of moral integrity, where moral intentions are pure and based solely on noble and just considerations, and moral behavior is consistent, in line with one's public pronouncements and best intentions.

Confidence in one's moral integrity can license one to engage in otherwise problematic behavior without appearing or feeling inconsistent, because one has demonstrated one's moral credentials (Merrit, Effron, & Monin, 2010; Effron, Cameron, & Monin, 2009; Monin & Miller, 2001). In a study by Effron and Monin (2010), observers judged a target who had an established record of fostering diversity at his firm. When he later failed to promote African American employees and a leaked email revealed that he thought their race made them unsuitable for management (a blatant transgression), raters viewed him as a hypocrite and gave him no credit for his prior good deeds. When the transgression was ambiguous, however – he claimed the African American employees had not performed as well as others and he denied discrimination – then his past good deeds caused judges to rate him more positively than a control who did not have credentials, and this was mediated by a change in their perception of the potential transgression. They did not say it was acceptable for him to discriminate (as a “moral balance” model would) but they construed the behavior differently, as not being a case of discrimination in the first place. Thus in a top-down fashion, the perception of integrity takes inconsistency off the table. Individuals seem to be using a similar logic when deciding if their own past behavior licenses them to make seemingly inconsistent choices (Efron, Cameron, & Monin, 2009; Monin & Miller, 2001).

Another factor that contributes to less opportunistic or self-serving uses of morality, and therefore fosters moral integrity, is whether individuals feel secure that they are good, effective people, as they do when they are self-affirmed by reflecting on values or traits that are important to them (Steele, 1988). Sherman and Cohen (2006) emphasized the role of shoring up personal integrity in self-affirmation manipulations, allowing individuals to be less defensive in the face of ego-threats. We have described above how, in two experimental paradigms that elicit moral hypocrisy – strategic moralization or the sucker-to-saint effect (Jordan & Monin, 2008) and strategic de-moralization or the denial of virtue (Monin, Sawyer, & Marquez, 2008) – the simple addition of a self-affirming essay was enough to wipe out moral hypocrisy. Thus to the extent that moral hypocrisy often serves self-protective functions, buttressing the integrity of the self seems a promising avenue to greater moral integrity.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have attempted to deconstruct the notion of “not practicing what one preaches,” which is a common working definition of moral hypocrisy, as a way of questioning the link between hypocrisy and inconsistency, and as a framework for reviewing recent work bearing on this issue. This strategy gave us license to analyze the two novel categories of hypocrisy without inconsistency, and inconsistency without hypocrisy. The first, hypocrisy without inconsistency, broadens the scope of moral hypocrisy research to encompass the bad-faith invocation of moral claims by actors whose real motivation is self-serving, or the toning down of moral concerns when they threaten the self. The second category, inconsistency without hypocrisy, drew our attention to the complexity of moral life, and the fact that individuals constantly face moral inconsistency without necessarily feeling like a hypocrite or being perceived as one by other people.

In general, moral hypocrisy involves claiming to be moral for non-moral reasons. Although we began by arguing that moral hypocrisy was central to social psychology, at the same time social psychology finds itself in an awkward position to comment on moral hypocrisy. Even if a person displayed perfect good-faith moral integrity, psychologists, depending on their leaning, would want to dissect the motivating, status-earning, self-actualizing, evolutionarily adaptive, death-threat-resolving, etc., functions of such a mental state. In other words, for a deterministic, descriptive scientist, there will always be a non-moral intention prior to a moral intention, even if it is one that people are unaware of. In their everyday lives, social psychologists need to reconcile their knowledge that moral judgments are shaped by situational factors and self-serving biases with the hope that good intentions can be trusted, and accept that individuals are often in good faith even when they erroneously believe that their intentions are moral.

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Table 1

Mapping Moral Hypocrisy and Behavioral Inconsistency

	No Behavioral Inconsistency	Behavioral Inconsistency
No Hypocrisy	Moral Integrity, Credentials	Weakness of Will, Overweighing Intentions, Balancing, Confession
Hypocrisy	Bad Faith – Ulterior Motives, Double Standards, Strategic (De)Moralization	Not Practicing What One Preaches