

Moral Disengagement, Hope and Spirituality:  
Including an empirical exploration of combat veterans

Submitted by Kirk Gregory Mensch to the University of Exeter  
as a thesis for the degree of  
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## **Abstract**

Albert Bandura's construct of *moral disengagement* has been recognized as theoretically useful for the study of self-destructive behaviors and moral disengagement, and to provide a unique criterion for empirical investigation of United States combat veterans returning from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The purpose of this project is to better understand predictors related to the disengagement of moral self-sanctions in order that self-destructive behaviors related to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, such as drug and alcohol abuse, and the ultimate self-destructive behavior of suicide, might be mitigated. Charles Snyder's *hope* construct, Harold Koenig and Arndt Büssing's concept of *intrinsic religiosity* and Corey Keyes' notion of *psychological flourishing* are chosen as viable predictor variables. *Hope* and *intrinsic religiosity* are found to be significant and to be correlated with moral disengagement. Inferences regarding the results are postulated and suggestions are made for research regarding other possible predictors of moral disengagement. *Agentive moral reinforcement* is discussed and proposals offered related to increasing psychological resilience and decreasing the agent's risk associated with moral disengagement.

Keywords: moral disengagement, hope, intrinsic religiosity, human development, military, combat veterans, PTSD, self-destructive behaviors, psychological resilience, agentive moral reinforcement

## **Dedication**

For Jillian, Jacob and Ellie...

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## Definition of Key Terms

*Agentive moral reinforcement* is the developmental process of strengthening the fidelity of self-regulatory mechanisms that govern moral conduct whilst diminishing a propensity for the employment of psychosocial maneuvers licensing the activation of psychological mechanisms leading to the selective disengagement of moral self-sanctions.

*Flourishing* is the self-perceived success in areas such as relationships, self-esteem, purpose, and optimism (Diener et al., 2010).

*Hope* reflects individuals' perceptions regarding their capacities to (1) clearly conceptualize goals, (2) develop specific strategies to reach those goals and (3) initiate and sustain the motivation for using those strategies (Snyder et al., 1991; Tong, Fredrickson, Chang & Lim, 2010).

*Moral development* is understood in the context of the Four Component Model, which consists of moral sensitivity, moral judgment, moral motivation, and moral character, and suggests that advancement in these areas by individuals is possible (Rest, Narvaez, Bebeau, & Thoma, 1999).

*Moral disengagement* is psychosocial maneuvers by which moral self-sanctions are selectively disengaged from inhumane conduct.

*Moral judgment* refers to that specific aspect of moral development that focuses on the cognitive ability of the individual to understand morality in the context of the situation. According to neo-Kohlbergian theory, the individual can be categorized in three successive moral schema equating to different levels of moral adequacy: pre-conventional, conventional, and post-conventional (Rest & Narvaez, 1994).

*Moral relativism* is the meta-ethical thesis that the truth or justification of moral judgments is not absolute but relative to some group of persons (Zalta, 2008).

*Moral universalism* is used in its most common form as synonymous with moral objectivism in that the discovery of what is right is not dependent on what anyone thinks. Instead, it is treated like a fact, the authority of which comes from sources such as nature, humans or God depending on the perspective.

*Positive psychology* is offered as a science that takes as its primary task the understanding of what makes life worth living. It is also used as a general term for the study of positive emotions, positive character traits, and enabling institutions.

*Religiosity* is operationalized herein as three distinct aspects of the human condition and includes (1) organizational religious activity such as going to church, (2) non-organizational religious activity such as prayer and meditation, and (3) intrinsic religiosity such as subjective belief in God and the commitment to such belief (Koenig & Büssing, 2010)

## **Chapter 1 – Introduction**

Over the past decade, much research has been done related to issues surrounding combat veterans, including self-destructive behaviors and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and there is a great deal of government funding to support such research (Ehley, 2014). The U.S. Military has focused on developing aspects of psychological resilience in an attempt to reduce self-destructive behaviors, which have become especially unnerving to military and civilian leadership as they apply specifically to veterans of wars in Afghanistan and Iraq (Pargament & Sweeney, 2011). Multiple deployments and the advent of asymmetric warfare seem to be creating widespread challenges amongst U.S. Military members on a scale not evident since the Second World War. Self-destructive behaviors include increases in the abuse of drugs and alcohol, divorce rates, and the number of suicides, the ultimate self-destructive behavior. However, published suicide rates and other measurable self-destructive behaviors related to combat veterans are inconsistent. As will be discussed in more detail, some researchers present rates of suicide that are no different than for the general population, others present rates that are extremely high compared to the general population. How can research be presented with such different findings resulting from what would seem to be such an unassuming type of data to collect? In seeking an answer to this question, it becomes evident that some researchers were including only certain types or categories of combat veterans, like those who experienced direct or indirect enemy fire, while other researchers used the entire military population, including soldiers who had never deployed, or never experienced anything like combat conditions. This issue was an important consideration in the development of specific population parameters for this project and our decision to focus the research on recently deployed commando-type combat veterans whose missions have involved a high probability of direct contact with the enemy.

## Research Aims and General Methodologies Employed

Research focused on understanding cognitive processes and resulting behavioral manifestations is complex and problematic in that by using a range of social scientific methods to answer questions spanning the spectrum of planned behavior, we often marginalize the subjective human aspect (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Many considerations are necessary in order to understand human action that is considered self-destructive in nature. Some factors may be considered more universally objective, such as behavioral aspects related to the act of physical abuse, while other factors are too individually subjective and must therefore be considered in some personal - what we shall often refer to as *agentive* - form. It is not enough to apply universally applicable terms without scrutinizing the agentive assumptions implied in the use of such language, first, because this tends to overlook the complexities of human cognition and behavior, and second, because to apply terms universally implies some agreement in regards to the logical and rational use of the terminology in question. To mitigate this problem, we aim to consistently apply an agent-centered perspective with regards to conclusions that might be drawn from our more empirical analysis. By doing this we recognize both the importance of empirical consistency and problems that often co-exist with such consistency. Thus we start more empirically oriented in the early chapters and move to a more subjective analysis in later chapters.

The empirical portion of this research employs a standard non-experimental research design to test measurable latent variables. These latent variables consist of perceptions that in turn allow us to formulate a testable model. The model is presented first in a basic linear form at the end of chapter 2. We test each latent variable and several control variables for significance and then test the predictability of the overall model using statistical analysis software (SPSS). We then modify our model to include only those latent variable constructs that demonstrate statistical significance and re-test the predictability of the model. This allows us to focus the remainder of our investigation on the possible relationship between the statistically significant latent variables. Specifically, we seek a better understanding of what is meant by hope, intrinsic religiosity and moral

disengagement and how they relate to one another. Research within the social sciences often ends by simply drawing inferences from the results of data analyses. We consider a single methodological approach as insufficient in assisting us in answering the deeper more subjective questions we pose related to the relationships between such things as hope, intrinsic religiosity and moral disengagement within the context of the U.S. Military. Therefore, we continue our investigation by utilizing an agent focused philosophical lens, which allows us to be more specific in our conclusions while controlling for larger contextual differences. This approach allows us to recognize and correct for a deficiency involved in utilizing universally applied psychological constructs that involve particularly moral characteristics. This additional philosophical investigation is critical in helping us to discern what is relevant and why in respect to the development of servicemembers' psychological resiliency. We define terms initially on the basis of what they are commonly assumed to mean within the U.S. Military context only to challenge aspects of the terminology later from an agentive perspective. This initial course is necessary in order to achieve our primary goal of establishing a theoretical position that describes the factors affecting self-destructive behavior supported by standard methods employed in the social sciences. However, the intent for this project has always been to establish more than a scientifically testable theoretical model. We wish to explore the nature of the limitations of the terminology used to develop such a model and identify both strengths and weaknesses of generalizable claims through the lenses of the individual moral agent.

An agentive understanding might be viewed as an ultimately impossible endeavor due to the subjective nature of the engagement, and while we certainly recognize this problem, the relevant empirical evidence suggests that there are categories of agents within the military context that can be generalized within groups and compared against other groups that are philosophically and discernibly different. These are groups within the U.S. Military that are clearly divergent in their understanding of some of the basic aspects of life, such as spirituality, religiosity, hope, being, and morality. The method we employ allows us to first

understand basic empirical connections between psychological constructs that became evident through experience, interviews and reviews of pertinent literature and later to further analyze each construct and their connections in a more subjective manner. Of course this does not mean that we reject our original model. The mixed methodology that we employ allows us to focus more philosophically in the later chapters on those aspects we are currently able to support through a more quantitative methodology. This approach also allows us to focus our attention on understanding the various meanings, connotations and connections between significant aspects related to self-destructive behaviors; these aspects being hope, intrinsic religiosity and moral disengagement. Thus, we explore these specific aspects through varying subjective philosophical lenses commonly found in the U.S. Military. Finally, we advance a theoretical, yet pragmatic, suggestion of how the U.S. Military might go about strengthening the psychological resilience of soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines regarding the disengagement of moral self-sanctions that is required to commit self-destructive behaviors.

Moral inquiry limited to the field of psychology is challenging. Inevitably we must subjectively categorize our assumptions in order that we understand some reasonable form of generalizability. Varying ethical perspectives is important in avoiding outright moral prescription, while categorical ethical perspectives allow us to make sense of some subjectivity through a more scientific examination. We aim at a balance between the two. The field of psychology often draws upon wider philosophical and social debates so that things like values, standards, and moral principles are generalizable to a larger population. For example, research has demonstrated that neo-Kohlbergian moral development is rooted in a Rawlsian type of principled moral reasoning in which things such as *fairness* and *justice* are preeminent, and words like *fairness* and *justice* must be disambiguated in order to make sense of the general construct and testability of the theory.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, it is logical to prescribe the moral aspects of such terms on a basis of universal

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<sup>1</sup> For a more complete explanation see Mensch, K. G. (2009). "Belief and Moral Judgment: Considering Implications of a Religious Paradox in neo-Kohlbergian Moral Reasoning," Doctoral Dissertation, Regent University.

rationality. In the research that follows, we are intentionally careful of the subjective problems related to moral universality as it naturally conflicts with an agentive perspective of inquiry.

### **Initial Basis for Exploration**

Albert Bandura became famous following his “bobo doll” experiments that he conducted in the 1960’s. These studies provided a scientific foundation for his social learning theory. He was able to demonstrate that people imitate others by way of observational learning. After many years of experimentation and exploration he published his seminal theoretical work, *Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory*. Published in 1986, this text provided theoretical insights into social cognition and learning, self-efficacy and moral development. *Social Cognitive Theory* and its relation to the disengagement of moral self-sanctions is both encompassing and enlightening (Bandura, 1986). His ideas regarding psychological mechanisms that are activated in order to disengage from one’s own moral self-sanctions, assuaging guilt and relieving self-condemnation were of particular importance to the development of this project. Certainly we welcomed his focus on the autonomous moral agent and his notion of *moral self-sanctions* as a way to move forward in the study of moral psychology without being generally morally prescriptive. Bandura (1986, 1999, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2015) places the responsibility for moral belief on the agent without apology, which is useful for a project in moral psychology because it focuses on what the agent believes is moral as opposed to measuring the agent’s action or belief against a prescriptive principle or moral system.

Alistair MacIntyre’s attention to varying worldviews and philosophies and how they should be examined in relation to one another, and specifically his work including *After Virtue* and his *Three Rival Versions of Moral Inquiry*, was also helpful in the conceptualization of this project. MacIntyre’s continuous encouragement for a return to open and respectful scholarly discourse, the kind of discourse that he suggests has been lost in parts of the Academy, the kind of exceptional communal dialogue that might produce novel understanding for all

involved and where respect for persons is paramount, was an important moral perspective that influenced the construction of this project. MacIntyre's encouragement of interdisciplinary perspectives, along with Bandura's agent centered *Moral Disengagement Theory*, gave us motive to focus the placement of ultimate responsibility of moral rightness upon the agent and at the same time, treat different theologies and philosophies of moral rightness with dignity.

Bandura's (1999, 2002) research also led to our understanding of how self-destructive behaviors were intimately connected to the disengagement of moral self-sanctions. It seemed to us reasonable that one would activate psychological mechanisms in order to disengage from their moral schema and commit self-destructive behaviors, which has been supported in previous research (Moore, Detert, Trevino, Baker, & Mayer, 2011). This general line of thinking, that a rational individual would not intentionally harm himself or herself, along with the research connecting moral disengagement and self-destructive behaviors eventually led to the development of the main thesis contained herein. This thinking and previous research also encouraged us to explore basic questions such as, what things about a person, what attitudes, what manner of philosophies, what aspects of the human being, might affect one's propensity for moral disengagement.

For purposes of general introduction, it is important to note that the literature that covers questions like these is vast, and elements have been addressed in many fields including psychology, philosophy and theology. In the sub-discipline of positive psychology, *flourishing* is meant to convey one's ability to live life in a meaningfully optimal way, as opposed to living a trivial or unfulfilled existence struggling to get through each day. This consideration led to Snyder's concept of *hope*, which focuses on the psychological aspects of goal-directed agency and one's ability and desire to create pathways for success. Adrienne Martin's more encompassing work on hope was beneficial in understanding a more complete account of Snyder's (1994, 2002) conception. Connections were also established between certain spiritual and religious aspects of well-being and moral disengagement, which was added to the general inquiry of this project. These aspects of being human were formulated as theoretically supported predictors to the



disengagement of moral self-sanctions, and therefore became the focus of our empirical investigation. We will of course discuss the above works at length in the following chapters.

### **Contextual Ties to Comprehensive Soldier Fitness**

Understanding the context for this research is important. In the early part of this decade the U.S. Army was being sued by atheist organizations for purportedly creating an intimidating, or perhaps something of a disagreeable, religious environment. This was due to the implementation of a new program referred to as Comprehensive Soldier Fitness, but specifically, because of the programmatic aspect known as *Spiritual Fitness*, which was one of five major categories of soldier well-being as defined by the U.S. Military. The U.S. Army was attempting to create more psychologically resilient soldiers in order to stem the tide of self-destructive behaviors, which had become prevalent amongst its ranks, such as the abuse of alcohol, family tribulations, and suicide. The U.S. Army seemed to believe that something like spiritual resilience was an important soldierly characteristic worthy of cultivation in the Army's war against self-destructive behaviors and the promotion of psychological resilience.

Tension exists in the U.S. Military between what some might call freedom from religion, and others might refer to as freedom to practice religion as is evidenced by recent lawsuits brought against the U.S. Military by organizations like the Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers (MAAF). However, it seems common for new soldiers who suddenly find themselves in especially restrictive environments for perhaps the first time in their lives, to feel that their individual identity is in jeopardy and test the limits of control and authority. This is a well-known challenge for leaders in the U.S. Army. Whether manifested as a right to grow hair longer than standards permit or wear questionable attire off-duty, young soldiers will often find ways to assert their personal freedom. Of course, these actions become particularly troublesome for leaders when they cause discord in the unit because unit cohesion is a tenet of military tactical and operational advantage. Our research seeks to better understand some of the psychological

factors related to religiosity and spirituality so that leaders in the U.S. Military can make good decisions based on a superior understanding of the psychological impacts. We also aim to help military leadership appreciate possible psychological consequences resulting from differing interpretations of orders and regulations related to what they call *spirituality*.

### **Contextual Ties to Hope, Religion and Psychological Flourishing**

As stated earlier, it was important that this project should have an empirical foundation based in theory, something psychologically testable to establish repeatable results, and Bandura's (1986, 1999, 2015) *Theory of Moral Disengagement* and resulting psychometric instruments provided that initial foundation. Not only was his work with the disengagement of moral self-sanctions theoretically connected to self-destructive behaviors, Bandura also provided direction regarding additional concepts that we determined to be important in understanding why soldiers may have a higher or lower propensity to commit self-destructive behaviors. As we shall discuss at length in the following chapters, things such as hope and despair, religious and spiritual inspiration, and constructs found in positive psychology, such as the idea of flourishing, emerged as critical aspects related to moral disengagement and self-destructive behaviors. We came to believe that specific psychological concepts were not only in some way related to self-destructive behaviors, but that certain psychological constructs might act as predictors of one's propensity for the disengagement of moral self-sanctions and self-destructive behaviors (Moore et al., 2011; Seligman, 2011). We considered that if we could more fully understand the relationships between these constructs, we could also better contextually understand some of the problems related to self-destructive behaviors in the U.S. Military.

With this goal in mind, we attempted to empirically test a predictive model whilst maintaining the utmost consideration for the individual's moral autonomy. Hence, our model reflects the view that we may be forewarned of an individual's propensity for self-destructive behaviors by forecasting the individual's propensity for the disengagement of moral self-sanctions. In our model, the inclusion of

particular theoretically supported predictors to moral disengagement are key to a more comprehensive understanding of problems related to self-destructive behaviors. The consideration of spirituality seemed suitable as it was not only theoretically connected, but also logically and pragmatically connected. In fact, it is already being assumed that a relationship between spirituality and self-destructive behaviors exists in the U.S. Military and that their *Spiritual Fitness* programs create moral resiliency. In our research, we determined that the U.S. Military's understanding of spirituality is more closely aligned to a particular psychometric construct of religiosity. Furthermore, the military believes that, spirituality, or what we often more precisely refer to as religiosity, is assumed to be a key aspect of holistic well-being. In other words, increasing the psychological resilience of the soldier in the U.S. Military involves the strengthening of a spiritual aspect.

The term *spiritual* had been chosen by the U.S. Military as an attempt at full inclusiveness and as a way to bypass the consternation that any derivation of the term *religion* would surely produce in this pluralistic society. This does not mean that some servicemembers, as we establish in the following chapters, did not regard *spirituality* as something of a *religious* component to Comprehensive Soldier Fitness. This issue of terminology relates to the chaplain's primary responsibilities in a U.S. Military unit, which are soldierly and personal aspects related to spiritual and religious orientation. One of the interesting facts about the U.S. Army Chaplain Corps is that it has diversified its membership over the past 20 years. There are now not only Protestant and Catholic chaplains, but also Muslim, Jewish, Wiccan and others. This diversity in chaplains also creates a form of complexity in relationships in the pluralistic society that is the U.S. Military, which sees good in both religion and spirituality, and wishes to encourage it generally. However, tension often arises, tension that is somewhat implied in the U.S. Constitution, where there is a sort of dual proposition of freedom of religion and freedom from religious imposition.

### **Additional Context for this Project**

Next we considered certain contextual actors. First is the military commander who is not only responsible for things like mission accomplishment and unit cohesion, but also for the health and welfare of each soldier. These commanders have their own spirituality, religion or skepticism and can be unguarded about their religious positions. These same commanders hold great influence and authority within their military units. Therefore, it is important to understand how commanders' and chaplains' interpretation of the U.S. Military's policy regarding *Spiritual Fitness* might affect the soldiers in their units. Military psychologists also have a role to play in soldiers' well-being and psychological resilience. U.S. Military psychologists are able to directly influence commanders and therefore should be considered in the interpretation of soldiers' spiritual matters that might be considered psychologically associated. These three particular actors would normally play an important role in the case of a soldier exhibiting self-destructive tendencies. The precarious nature of these relationships in the context of the U.S. Military became straightaway evident. The prospect of situations like, an ardently atheist commander working together with a Wiccan chaplain leading soldiers in one unit, and a passionately evangelical commander and a Baptist chaplain leading another, seemed challenging. In other words, soldiers in different units might have very different experiences, depending on factors related to spirituality and religiosity, and the U.S. Army didn't know what effect these experiences might have on the soldiers' overall well-being. Our research recognizes the importance of such experiences and aims to better understand the more objective as well as the more subjective antecedents of moral disengagement.

Ultimately, this project was designed to test hypotheses related to whether or not the U.S. Military and other similar organizations might be able to affect the propensity for moral disengagement by understanding the psychological constructs of hope, flourishing, and religiosity, and then to better understand these constructs from a subjective perspective. Psychometric instruments for hope, religiosity, flourishing, and moral disengagement were utilized to develop a testable linear model. We used this model to develop a survey instrument that was administered

to a sample of U.S. Military commando type combat veterans. The data was collected using an online survey instrument and later analyzed to determine statistically significant constructs as well as the overall predictive strength of the model. Next, we sought to better understand statistically significant predictor constructs associated with the model, specifically hope and intrinsic religiosity, and their relationship to the disengagement of moral self-sanctions. We therefore chose to investigate these specific aspects that predict a propensity for moral disengagement by way of differing philosophical perspectives found to be common in the U.S. Military. In the case of hope, we consider a more existentialist view and a more theistic view. In the case of intrinsic religiosity we consider a more theistic view, a more agnostic view, and a more atheistic view. These perspectives provide new insight into the understanding of hope and intrinsic religiosity in the context of the pluralistic society that is the U.S. Military.

### **Summary of Findings**

The results of the empirical analysis were consistent with regards to several expectations. The empirical study supported that several constructs have a significant relationship with the disengagement of moral self-sanctions. They included the constructs of *hope* and the particular aspect of religiosity known as *intrinsic religiosity*, which focuses on belief in a higher power and the impact that this belief might have on one's life (Koenig & Büssing, 2010; Snyder, 1994, 2002). Thus, we investigate these constructs both psychologically and philosophically.

The notion that the construct of psychological flourishing had a significant relationship with moral disengagement was not supported, although this idea remains quite plausible. This particular result was somewhat unexpected because there seemed to be a strong theoretical connection between the psychological construct of flourishing and moral disengagement (Bandura 1999, 2015; Fredrickson & Losada, 2005). Furthermore, the U.S. government has spent considerable amounts of economic capital operating under an assumption that psychological flourishing is important in decreasing self-destructive behaviors. If psychological flourishing is not in fact significantly related to a propensity for

moral disengagement, it would seem inconsistent with the U.S. Military's current understanding of Comprehensive Soldier Fitness. Therefore, although we do not focus extensively on the construct of psychological flourishing herein, we do encourage further research into the possible connection between flourishing, moral disengagement and self-destructive behaviors.

Organized and non-organized religious activities were also not supported by our empirical investigation as good predictors of moral disengagement. This result was not entirely surprising in that many people attend religious functions and say prayers, yet they would not consider themselves to be religious or even spiritual. Since our empirical research did warrant additional investigation regarding hope and intrinsic religiosity, we conducted further inquiry relating to divergent yet common philosophical viewpoints that would allow for the discovery of issues related to the generalizability of our data.

Several distinct and incommensurable philosophies pervade the pluralistic culture in the U.S. Military. The first of these philosophical positions we categorize as the *agnostic or existentialist* position, depending on the context. In the U.S. Military, this perspective can be seen in the paratroopers whose primary church is the cargo bay of an Air Force C130 and who, just prior to a nighttime parachute assault, might pray something like this: "God, if you're up there, please help my parachute to open thus preventing an experience with gravity that I would rather avoid for the time being." The intent of this inquiry was to inform us of how hope and intrinsic religiosity were generally defined in the mind of the more agnostic or existentialist soldier, and then what this understanding might mean in relation to the disengagement of moral self-sanctions. Another philosophy of life used to more completely interpret hope and intrinsic religiosity is that of the more atheist type of soldier. This thinking seems less common in commando-type units where members are consistently confronted with the prospect of a quick and awful death. Paratroopers of this sort might focus more on calculating the odds of a malfunction or accident prior to the nighttime jump referred to earlier. We also explore a philosophy of life associated with a more theistically minded soldier.

This is a category of soldier who not only believes in a higher power, but also believes that they can personally commune with the divine.<sup>2</sup>

The current form of this project culminates with the proposition that it is essential for researchers to better understand the predictors of moral disengagement, such as hope and intrinsic religiosity, and to appreciate the same through varying philosophical perspectives. Furthermore, that leaders in pluralistic organizations such as the U.S. Military, should consider employing approaches that allow for a minimization of risk related to relationships that might be conducive to activating psychological mechanisms leading to the disengagement of moral self-sanctions. Attempts by leaders, chaplains, psychologists and other counselors to assist people in mitigating a propensity for moral disengagement should be approached with an urgent respect for the moral autonomy of the agent. Instead of attempting to reconfigure or redefine the agent's moral schema, respect for the agent's moral autonomy should be valued and honored if the psychological stability of the agent is to be considered a paramount concern.

The result of these considerations is what we refer to as *agentive moral reinforcement*, that is, an approach to encouraging psychological resilience that stresses thoughtful respect for the autonomy of the moral agent and the strengthening of the agent's moral schema, as opposed to a reordering or outright replacement of certain principled moral reasoning. This respect for moral autonomy is fundamental to a process in which the agent might be able to conserve the necessary responsibility and dignity of maintaining their own moral schema. Therefore, a leadership perspective is introduced that emphasizes the importance of agentive moral reinforcement as a proactive measure that should be taken to reduce risk related to an agent's propensity to disengage from his or her own moral self-sanctions.

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<sup>2</sup> The divergent philosophies utilized in chapters 6 and 7 were developed and categorized over several years through numerous conversations with chaplains and commanders from the U.S. Army and the United States Marine Corps.

## **Navigating the Following Chapters**

In order to examine as full a spectrum of moral behavior as is possible within the constraints of the study, we ask two fundamentally different questions. First, we ask if the agent's action is consistent with his or her own moral schema. This agentic perspective allows us to examine moral disengagement and draw conclusions about the intent of moral activity. Second, we examine whether these actions or the intent of the actions are considered ethical or not, depending on the categorical philosophical perspective. The point of the following chapters is to intentionally bring together moral questions and various lenses of analysis from traditionally different disciplines. We will consider aspects of moral psychology, philosophy and theology in an attempt to understand a more complete picture of human belief and action that will hopefully lead to new and better ways of understanding ethical behavior and developing moral resiliency.

We begin in chapter 2 with an introduction of relevant literature related to the U.S. Military's Spiritual Fitness Program and positive psychology. This chapter culminates with a general thesis about certain aspects related to moral disengagement and self-destructive behaviors. We theorize a connection between psychological hope, flourishing and religiosity, and the disengagement of moral self-sanctions. Following our explanation of the theoretical support for such a relationship, we develop testable hypotheses. Utilizing several psychometric instruments that measure each latent variable (hope, religiosity, flourishing, and moral disengagement) and that are merged into a single survey instrument, we then test these hypotheses and underlying latent variables. We control for several aspects that U.S. Military commanders and chaplains have identified as possible influencers of our latent variable constructs.

In chapter 3 we continue our analysis by attempting to more clearly understand what things such as spirituality, moral development and positive psychology mean, and how these subjects are related. Varying views on what is meant by things such as religiosity and spirituality are presented as we argue for specific definitions that form the basis of our analysis in chapter 4. The disambiguation of terminology used in this form of interdisciplinary research is critically important



when conducting research in certain disciplines, which traditionally utilize different definitions for certain terms.

In chapter 4 we attempt to test aspects of our thesis by empirical means through the use of latent social science constructs and traditional quantitative methods. We limit our population to combat veterans in the U.S. Military who have returned from combat within six months of participating in this study. Our sample draws specifically from commando-type units such as the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division and the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division. The empirical study is intended to be exploratory and therefore necessitates a smaller number of respondents who meet what we consider multiple important criteria, rather than focusing on a larger more diverse sample, because we wish to control for as many exogenous variables as possible in this type of limited study. Little research has been done with such stringent population parameters. As we argue in chapter 2, the lack of appropriate population parameters regarding military and veteran populations can be problematic for accurate analysis. Next, following collection of the data and an initial screening for statistical outliers, we utilize a basic structural equation modeling technique and analyze the model using multiple regression and other standard forms of statistical analysis to draw conclusions from the data.

The purpose of chapters 5 and 6 is to more deeply explore aspects of human cognition and behavior related to moral disengagement. We employ philosophical inquiry to better understand hope and intrinsic religiosity as related to moral disengagement by way of varying assumptions related to worldviews commonly found in the U.S. Military. We first identify several relatively distinct worldviews found in the U.S. Military and then explore how individuals with these different worldviews might interpret varying conceptions of hope and intrinsic religiosity related to moral disengagement. We specifically focus on divergent aspects of philosophical assumptions held by many U.S. Military members by identifying possible consequences of such assumptions and how these assumptions might affect cognitive processes related to our inquiry. Finally in chapter 7, from our analysis of the empirical investigation and the philosophical inquiry, we offer a new

theory of *agentive moral reinforcement* aimed at encouraging the development of moral resilience.

## Chapter 2 – Comprehensive Soldier Fitness

Many post-9/11 governmental military organizations including those in the United States and United Kingdom have been involved in projects to affect the psychological resilience of their members. This work was arguably stirred by a noticeable increase in the self-destructive behaviors of their members returning from the theater of war. The U.S. Military has implemented psychological resilience programs in all of its service components including the Army, Navy and Air Force. These programs are all variations of what is known as *Comprehensive Soldier Fitness* (CSF) in the U.S. Army, which focuses on many aspects of individual health, including psychosocial and spiritual areas. This is a recent and notable shift in focus from a more singular attention to physical fitness. Programs focused on affecting soldier psychologies and laden with philosophical overtones have not come without controversy.

High rates of suicide, spousal and child abuse, alcohol and drug abuse, and further self-destructive behaviors related to PTSD, depression and other psychological disorders have prompted the U.S. Military to spend many millions of dollars in exploratory research in areas such as practical positive psychology in hopes of enhancing psychological resilience (Seligman, 1998, 2002; Gillham, 2000). The Comprehensive Soldier Fitness program advanced by the U.S. Army is a holistic approach to fitness and it has led in the roll-out of military Comprehensive Fitness Programs (CFP) in general. The once dominating but still central theme of physical fitness has now been joined by a concern with other aspects of human well-being such as family life, social interaction, emotional stability and spiritual health.

The Comprehensive Soldier Fitness program utilized by the U.S. Army is based on *positive psychology*, described by the University of Pennsylvania as:

...the scientific study of the strengths and virtues that enable individuals and communities to thrive. The Positive Psychology Center promotes research, training, education, and the dissemination of Positive Psychology. This field is founded on the belief that people want to lead meaningful and fulfilling lives, to cultivate what is best within themselves, and to enhance their experiences of love, work, and play.

The Positive Psychology Center developed a model consisting of five unique yet interrelated dimensions, described in Table 1. The model does, perhaps somewhat conspicuously, lack a distinctly moral aspect, something beyond mere professional ethics. Instead, the moral aspect is either assumed within or incorporated into other aspects of Comprehensive Soldier Fitness. Nevertheless, since the start of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, many public ethical tragedies regarding the conduct of military personnel, related to matters such as PTSD, depression and substance abuse, embolden questions regarding moral development and ethical behavior in the ranks of the U.S. Military. It therefore seems reasonable that the U.S. Military would emphasize a unique dimension of fitness related to moral self-awareness and behavior. However, moral development programs can be particularly challenging when they are created with psychological aims in religiously pluralistic societies. Thus, it is not ultimately unexpected that the U.S. Military might focus on ideas of right and wrong in Comprehensive Fitness Programs through professional ethics. Considering the history of the U.S. Army's Comprehensive Soldier Fitness program, it appears that, prior to 2009, this moral characteristic was originally intended to fall within the sub-construct of *spiritual fitness*. Due to the consternation that resulted from initiation of this formal program, promulgated by atheist and other anti-religious groups, the moral aspect was relatively quickly diluted into something less than an agentive personal morality and something more aligned with social norms. This agentive moral aspect can of course be complicated by an indubitable connection to religiosity, and perhaps was therefore set aside for something less controversial and more akin to professional ethics. Although words like character self-control are utilized in what is referred to as the *emotional fitness* dimension of CSF, the focus with emotional fitness seems much more closely aligned with the behavioral results of emotional feelings and much less on something like moral reasoning. Thus, if examining the moral dilemma, it seems most appropriate to appeal to the Spiritual Fitness dimension within the CSF program.

Table 1

*Aspects of the U.S. Army's Comprehensive Fitness Program*

Dimension	Definition
1. Physical	Performing and excelling in physical activities that require aerobic fitness, endurance, strength, healthy body composition and flexibility derived through exercise, nutrition and training. The physical domain also encompasses the OTSG Performance Triad initiative of sleep, activity, and nutrition to improve personal and unit performance, resilience and readiness.
2. Emotional	Approaching life's challenges in a positive, optimistic way by demonstrating self-control, stamina and good character with your choices and actions.
3. Social	Developing and maintaining trusted, valued relationships and friendships that are personally fulfilling and foster good communication including a comfortable exchange of ideas, views, and experiences.
4. Spiritual	One's purpose, core values, beliefs, identity, and life vision. These elements, which define the essence of a person, enable one to build inner strength, make meaning of experiences, behave ethically, persevere through challenges, and be resilient when faced with adversity. An individual's spirituality draws upon personal, philosophical, psychological, and/or religious teachings, and forms the basis of their character.
5. Family	Being part of a family unit that is safe, supportive and loving, and provides the resources needed for all members to live in a healthy and secure environment.

*Note.* Information retrieved on February 20, 2013 from [www.csf2.army.mil](http://www.csf2.army.mil).

For many service members, the Spiritual Fitness aspect of Comprehensive Fitness Programs may seem intimately related to their religiosity and personal morality. But, the U.S. Military has recently distanced itself from this notion, stating that Spiritual Fitness is not *religiosity* and instead that it relates simply to the *human spirit*. Yet, for those who understand religiosity and spirituality as

perhaps distinctive yet quite imperative to a *good* personal existence, a position statement of this kind may not suffice. Two recent quotes demonstrate the more humanistic definition of *spiritual* as defined by the U.S. Military in the *Resiliency Tips* noted in two of the recent editions of the *Comprehensive Soldier and Family Fitness Quarterly*:

Spiritual - Do you know someone personally who has demonstrated amazing resilience through really challenging circumstances? Think how you would like to imitate the spirit of that person (2012, vol. 2).

Spiritual - Take a break from your busy schedule to meditate on what is really important to you (2012, vol. 1).

The Comprehensive Soldier Fitness program was introduced to the broader U.S. Army in 2009 with the help of researchers from the University of Pennsylvania (*American Psychologist*, vol. 66-1). The program, including the aspect of spiritual fitness, is now being implemented in other services such as the U.S. Air Force. In a recent publication a U.S. Air Force Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO) described the spiritual component of the CSF program thus:

In my view, there are several ways we can be spiritually fit, even if we're not religious...Spiritual fitness is about finding those practices or routines which will help you deal with stressful situations, whether they are in deployed locations or not. It could mean leaning on your chaplain if you happen to be religious, or it could mean leaning on a close friend or confidant if you're not. It could mean transcendental meditation, or focusing on a connection with nature. For me, the bottom line regarding spiritual fitness is all about the ability to overcome stressful situations or bad times, and being able to focus my attention on mission accomplishment (Retrieved on February 17, 2013 from <http://www.jble.af.mil/news/story.asp?id=123332437>).

In the same article, the officer, Master Sgt. Potvin (Air Combat Command) emphasized several specific ways to be more spiritually fit including: Connecting with friends and family and keeping yourself out of isolation, being nice to others, utilizing mind-body exercises such as yoga or tai-chi, and taking care of things at home. Several of these suggestions allude to moral action and developing the moral self, yet the statement almost seems to suggest that doing this apart from religion is, or perhaps ought to be, the norm in the U.S. Military. There may be no specific

issue with this suggestion in general within a pluralistic society such as is the case in the U.S. Military, although it does seem to avoid the issue of the keenly religious service member who bases their existence, hope and morality within the context of their religious beliefs.

The distancing from religion in general, and religious or theologically based philosophies of life specifically, might be viewed as a demonstration of *freedom of religion* on the one hand, and *freedom from religion* on the other, depending of course on the beliefs of the authority or service member. The first legal action was initiated almost immediately following the U.S. Army's decision to move forward with the CSF program. The Spiritual Fitness component of the CSF program clearly made some soldiers feel uncomfortable with the religious overtones related to this spiritual area. The U.S. Army has responded to soldier objections over Spiritual Fitness by removing any significance with regard to religion and placing the emphasis on a much broader, yet perhaps convoluted, concept of the human spirit.

### **Inception of *Spiritual Fitness***

In 1987 the Department of the Army (DA) published Pamphlet 600-63-12 entitled *Spiritual Fitness*. This seems to have remained an inconspicuous document until the effects of prolonged war in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century encouraged inquiry into the effects of multiple deployments on military personnel. Studies have shown that the effects of deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan do increase the risks of PTSD and self-destructive behaviors in combat veterans (Hoge, Castro, Messer, McGurk, Cotting, & Koffman, 2004). However, studies conducted by the U.S. Military often attempt to disassociate the effects of prolonged war on the individual by sometimes focusing analysis on active duty personnel and other times convoluting the data by generalizing to populations not indicative of the sample. For example, concluding that suicide rates are not higher among servicemembers than the general U.S. population by *not* controlling for the population parameter of *combat veteran* sufficiently. In other words the population is not controlled for combat veterans who experienced actual combat. Therefore it is arguable that biased results confound the issues related to the long-term effect of combat on former mili-

tary personnel. The confusing of this population issue seems to muddle an almost obvious conclusion, that traumatic experiences in combat do in fact significantly contribute to long-term mental health issues in combat veterans, especially when the military support system is no longer available (Boscarino, 1995).

An example of research that seems to convolute the issue is a study conducted by the Naval Health Research Center, where it is stated outright that PTSD, depression and substance abuse have been demonstrated as higher in combat veterans. Yet ambiguity remains in what constitutes self-destructive behavior, the motivation behind risky and self-destructive behaviors, and the limiting of subjects under consideration (Thomsen, Stander, McWhorter, Rabenhorst, & Milner, 2011). The debate on what constitutes self-destructive behavior from the perspective of an individual moral agent will be explored philosophically in later chapters. For the time being, let us assume that high suicide rates, occurrences of PTSD and related psychological issues, elevated numbers of child and spousal abuse, alcohol and drug related troubles, and other social pathological behaviors are in fact self-destructive in their nature. Evidence also supports the notion that research dating to the First World War and even earlier connects pathological behaviors with combat trauma, and that these behaviors are evident in veterans of the Afghanistan and Iraqi Wars (Hoge et al., 2004). This conclusion is reinforced by the fact that the U.S. Military leadership has chosen to pursue what can only be deemed extraordinary measures in a purposeful attempt to stem the tide of self-destructive behaviors that have become rampant in the post multiple deployment lives of many service members.

### Contemporary Spiritual Fitness

The 1987 publication entitled *Spiritual Fitness* is the magnum opus of the U.S. Army's early advance toward addressing the spiritual aspect of soldiers. This text provides a comprehensive starting point for what is meant by spiritual fitness in the US Army today and opens with a quote from General George C. Marshall: "The Soldier's heart, the Soldier's spirit, the Soldier's soul, are everything" (p. iv). The short quote from Marshall is expanded upon:



Unless the soldier's soul sustains him, he cannot be relied on and will fail himself, his commander, and his country in the end. It is not enough to fight. It is the spirit that wins the victory. Morale is a state of mind. It is steadfastness, courage, and hope. It is confidence, zeal, and loyalty. It is *elan*, *esprit de corps*, and determination. It is staying power, the spirit which endures in the end, and the will to win. With it all things are possible, without it everything else, planning, preparation, and production count for naught (DA PAM 600-63-12, p. v).

This quote from Marshall is useful in that it reveals an understanding of what was originally defined as spiritual fitness in the U.S. Army and communicates that the spiritual concept seems fundamentally focused on the beliefs, values and attitudes of an individual (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). This is different to the Army's concept of *resilience*, which centers more on intention and behavior. The concept of spiritual fitness is a combination of the psychological and the philosophical and attends to the more formative cognitive aspects of the individual. This includes some primary aspects of what is more commonly referred to as *worldview*, worldview in this sense being something less than spiritual fitness as a whole.

As stated earlier, spiritual fitness is a component of the US Army's Comprehensive Soldier Fitness program, established in 2009 and costing over 100 million U.S. dollars. CSF was developed with the help of researchers at the University of Pennsylvania led by Martin E. P. Seligman, who was the American Psychological Association President in 1998. Several years of development were necessary but by 2009 the CSF program was officially unveiled. Its fundamental claims are aimed at better preparing the Army community "not only to survive, but also thrive at a cognitive and behavioral level in the face of protracted warfare" (Kimball, 2007, p. 73).

An immediately evident challenge in understanding the literature related to the CSF component of spiritual fitness is to first understand the many definitions, contexts, uses, and implications of the term and its derivations such as *spirituality*. In the U.S. Army's CSF program, spirituality "refers to the continuous journey people take to discover and realize their spirit, that is, their essential selves" (Parliament & Sweeney, 2011, pp. 58-59). A more anthropological definition of spirituality as used within the context of the CSF is stated as "the journey that people

take to discover and realize their essential selves and higher order aspirations” (Pargament & Sweeney, 2011, p.58). To better articulate this personal journey, Sweeney, Hannah and Snyder (2007) developed a conceptual model that identified several psychological structures and processes that they claim, “facilitate the development of the human spirit” and include (a) building awareness of the self and the human spirit, (b) building awareness of resources to cultivate the human spirit, and (c) building awareness of the human spirit of others (Pargament & Sweeney, 2011, p. 58). This is the basis for spiritual fitness within the CSF program.

The more recent conceptualization of spiritual fitness provides a much more psychological conceptualization than is provided in the 1987 *Spiritual Fitness* manual (DA PAM 600-63-12) in which the Department of the Army defines spiritual fitness officially as:

...the development of those personal qualities needed to sustain a person in times of stress, hardship, and tragedy. These qualities come from religious, philosophical, or human values and form the basis for character, disposition, decision making, and integrity (p. 8).

Additionally, the *Spiritual Fitness* manual, written and edited by a high-ranking U.S. Army chaplain, defines spiritual fitness as “being right with God, with others and with oneself” (Johnston, 2010, p. 1). The “manual” states that:

Spiritually fit persons are leaders who make a positive difference in what they do. They have defined a quality of life that allows for service to God and Country. The spiritually fit Soldier, Sailor, Marine, or Airman has the personal ability to worship and walk with God while honorably serving Nation, family and oneself. (Johnston, 2010, p. 2)

Spirituality as the overarching aspect of spiritual fitness can most commonly be thought of as both a “fundamental dimension of the human being” and “the lived experience which actualizes that dimension” (Hansen, 1990, p. 17). The concept of spiritual fitness as employed by the U.S. Army seems to include the first, while focusing pragmatically on the latter, which is of course organizationally logical. It seems therefore, the behavioral is meant to be understood as a product of the cognitive in that *beliefs* and *values* relate to *attitudinal formation* which relates to

intention, which relates to behavioral manifestation, as described in a basic linear model (see Figure 1) by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975).



Figure 1. A simple behavioral model (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975).

A progression regarding spiritual fitness from the more philosophical to the more psychological, which seems to have occurred in the U.S. Army from 1987 to 2011, is perhaps of no surprise since this seems a normal progression of the application of theory to practice. Furthermore, it does not seem that the problems with the implementation of the U.S. Army's *Spiritual Fitness* component have arisen from a mere lack of definitional clarity, although there do seem to be inconsistencies regarding the programmatic message and how policy has been interpreted. Additionally, scientific issues such as generalizability and construct validity seem to be instigators of discord and programmatic issues related to spirituality and religion have surely proved philosophically controversial. Of course, this is to be expected as some sort of consequence in a free and pluralistic society in general. Yet in the case of the U.S. Military, there seems to be more of an issue with what Alasdair MacIntyre might suggest as an example of incommensurability of values and incompatibility of underlying philosophical assumptions. Individual soldier beliefs about spirituality and religiosity do not seem consistent with perceptions of what spirituality means to the U.S. Army. However, it could also be detrimental to the soldier and the unit to exclude or minimize a spiritual aspect from holistic soldier fitness, which creates a bit of an organizational dilemma. Yeung and Martin (2013) note that the spiritual aspect of military members ought not be overlooked or dismissed and offer:

Possessing a sense of meaning and purpose in life is strongly positively related to quality of life. Second, personal religious and spiritual practices are

linked to improved health and functioning (e.g., protective against substance use). Spiritual meditation may also help improve health (e.g., pain tolerance, buffer physiological stress). Third, there is indirect but converging evidence that support from a spiritual community is generally beneficial to health and well-being. Finally, spiritual coping that is related to purpose in life (i.e., using spiritual beliefs to cope with stressors) drives post-traumatic growth and improved well-being, as opposed to coping that is more narrowly religious. However, spiritual coping is not necessarily effective in coping with such physical stressors as pain. Several constructs of spiritual fitness may be linked to suicidality, such as religious affiliation (p. ix).

Most of the information regarding spiritual fitness that is readily available to military members begins with differing definitions or conceptual understandings of spiritual fitness. The conclusions drawn from interpretations of policy material are of course widely varying as they are formulated through differing *a priori* assumptions. The materials produced by the U.S. Military on notions surrounding spiritual fitness seem as though it is assumed that philosophical starting points are generally consistent and dependably understood by military personnel, as are other areas of human functioning such as physical, mental and social aspects. Yet, at certain times the *spiritual* factor is stated to be “explicitly from a Christian perspective” (Kassab & MacDonald, 2010, p. 976). Other literature clearly assumes the spiritual aspect of human functioning as part of the holistic health and well-being of *all* people. At times, terms such as spirituality are used in the literature as something more synonymous with “resilience skills” and as strictly psychological in nature (Tucker, 2012, p. 1).

The U.S. Military’s concept of spiritual fitness is not only offered as a way of improving the self, and in the aggregate of course the unit, spiritual fitness is also assessed by use of a standardized test, referred to as the Global Assessment Tool (GAT), and is promoted as a major component of the holistic health of the servicemember. It does seem that a goal of the programmatic aspects of spiritual fitness was to effectively reduce the number of PTSD cases and lower the overall number of active military suicides and incidences of other self-destructive behaviors, by way of providing psychological resiliency training. According to Leopold (2011) self-destructive issues related to psychological disorders have reached a crisis

point. This notion is supported by the large amount of money the U.S. Military has dedicated to evaluating sub-components of identified holistic soldier qualities and the training associated with improving such qualities. These components are deemed to be especially important in coping with war-related trauma.

The Global Assessment Tool (GAT) is used to evaluate these important dimensions of the servicemember's life, and provides feedback regarding what perhaps ought to be done if someone is lacking in one of the holistic areas such as spiritual fitness. While the U.S. Army contends that the GAT evaluation is not exploited in the promotion process, questions arise concerning whether or not the results of the evaluation might influence a servicemembers performance evaluation (Banks, 2011). This is of course in addition to the influence the evaluation might have on the individual servicemember's psychology.

It seems that the most current trends, terminology, training, and practice concerning moral and spiritual issues can be found in just a few series of U.S. Army and DoD documents from the 1980s. This does not of course mean in any way that the tradition related to such trends, terminology, training and practice was created at this time, but simply suggests that the most recent changes to U.S. Army guidance on these issues can be traced to just a few key documents. If we are to consider the tradition of spirituality in America as affecting the use of the term in the U.S. Military, we should at least consider an interesting change of use with the term *spirituality* occurring around the time of the Second Vatican Council. Shelldrake (2007) states:

The use of the word "spirituality" as an area of study gradually re-emerged during the twentieth century but it was only by the Second Vatican Council in the early 1960s that it began to dominate and replace older terms such as ascetical theology or mystical theology. The emergence of "spirituality" as the preferred term to describe studies of the Christian life increased after the Council until it was the dominant term from the 1970s onwards (p. 102).

There are also several key aspects about spirituality and its common use noted by Shelldrake (2007) that seem particularly applicable to what has become known as spiritual fitness in the U.S. Military. Perhaps most notably, beyond the paradigm shift of spirituality being generally regarded as both individual and col-

lective in nature, “it was not limited to personal interiority but integrated all aspects of human experience” (pp. 102-103). This seems to be in agreement with the U.S. Army’s new notion of the soldier’s holistic health and the Comprehensive Soldier Fitness program.

If we consider that Sheldrake also described the term *spirituality* as “a medium for ecumenical growth [and]...by the end of the twentieth century this had extended further into the wider ecumenism of interfaith dialogue” (p. 103), we can begin to understand how the term moved from more of a Christian notion to a broader religiously encompassing one. Couple this with the prolific and ambiguous use of terms such as *religion* and *worldview*, often meant to encompass *all* belief systems, and with the fact that the origins of spirituality for many lie in specific but different sacred texts, and we begin to understand the complexity of the current encyclopedic situation.

### *The Struggle between Establishment and Freedom*

A central and consistent point of disputation seems to relate to religious practice and the struggle between what are referred to as the establishment and free exercise clauses in the U.S. Constitution. Army Regulation (AR) 165-1 states that “Congress recognizes the necessity of the Chaplain Corps in striking a balance between the establishment and free exercise clauses” (p. 1). Traditionally, that balance has been difficult for leaders to identify and regularly put into practice.

In December of 2011, the Wisconsin-based Freedom From Religion Foundation sent a letter to the Secretary of the Army asking that he immediately cease the spiritual evaluation components of the Global Assessment Tool (Banks, 2011). This was not the first time there were concerns about the spiritual fitness component of the CSF program and the Global Assessment Tool. However, this seemed to be a clear overture to formal legal action. The Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers (MAAF) in a recent article claim that servicemembers with an atheist persuasion are needlessly being outcast because of a resistance to accept what they believe is something akin to religious piety or a call to the supernatural (MAAF, 2012).

The U.S. Army contends that spiritual fitness is merely offered to all soldiers but that the CSF approach is not meant to persuade or coerce soldiers to believe in a deity or to encourage soldiers to attend church or endorse religion in any way. The U.S. Army also claims that a soldier who scores low on this aspect of the Global Assessment Tool, and therefore lacks in spiritual fitness, is by no means unfit to serve. *Non-theistic servicemembers*, a self-appointed term, are speaking out against the entire notion of spiritual fitness and have threatened legal action against the U.S. Military for pressuring them to conform to what they view as a form of mandatory religious participation or even coercion regarding beliefs and practices (Banks, 2011; Surman, 2011).

This issue is related to a growing dispute over the religious freedoms of U.S. Military personnel. As mentioned previously, it seems that it is not clear what the U.S. Military means by spiritual fitness as a consistent concept, much less as an operationalizable psychological construct. Consequently, it might be expected that problems might arise when attempting to evaluate or measure military units, leaders, servicemembers and their families on their *level* of spiritual fitness. Furthermore, a questionable assessment of such a basic foundation of belief and philosophy of life may of course cause unforeseen problems that might compound and lead to a breakdown in military unit cohesion.

The dispute between U.S. Military theists and anti-theists will continue to be aggravated by policies such as Spiritual Fitness until both sides of the divide are willing to consider that respectful and safe environments must be ensured for all individuals. Some ethicists such as MacIntyre (1981, 1988, 1990) might consider this problem a matter to be explored through open and respectful philosophical inquiry, and perhaps argue that a more complete understanding of the reasoning and assumptions behind the notion of spiritual fitness, coupled with a focus on the virtue of respect for persons, might lead to a better relationship between factions. The current discord is surely causing divisions between soldiers and leaders, and very likely affecting unit cohesion; a precisely opposite influence of one of the primary intentions of Comprehensive Fitness Programs, which is to create unit stability and cohesion.

The Freedom From Religion Foundation, an organization in the U.S. that exists to defend citizens' constitutional rights related to the separation of church and state, claims that the basic rights of the servicemember are being violated through an attempt to evaluate the spiritual fitness of soldiers whilst creating an environment of potential hostility and prejudice towards those who claim to hold no religious beliefs, especially those who choose to openly defy belief in a deity. The Foundation has referred to the specific questions found in the Global Assessment Tool and the resulting evaluation as haughty and even condescending in nature (Banks, 2011; Koltko-Rivera, 2004).

The Army's response to such claims has been somewhat guarded and ambiguous. However, there has been emphasis placed on the confidentiality of the assessment instrument. The Global Assessment Tool is currently an annual requirement for all non-deployed soldiers, as well as a requirement for all new basic trainees. Questions remain as to the ultimate purpose of the spiritual portion of the GAT and whether or not the aspect of spiritual fitness is generalizable to all servicemembers in the U.S. Military regardless of religious affiliation or belief. There are also questions as to whether the spiritual fitness component is achieving its intended results. Although the U.S. Military admits it does not yet have enough data to support the claim that spiritual fitness is credible as a separate and distinct military servicemember quality that improves positive coping skills, decreases the likelihood of suicide, and increases the psychological resilience of the soldier in times of stress, the instrument is surely being interpreted in diverse ways that include these assumptions of generalizability, reliability and validity (Herron, 2011). Conclusions based on an assumed validity and reliability of the GAT may be problematic. However, it is not uncommon that instruments of this type encounter a myriad of issues in both development and implementation. Social science instruments such as the Myers Briggs Type Inventory (MBTI) have encountered challenging problems regarding use and interpretation. Difficulties also arise from the administration, application and interpretation of such instruments. In the case of the GAT, issues could be assuaged relatively simply by the provision of additional training on the uses and intent of the spiritual fitness component. Yet, the heart of the prob-



lems arising from implementation of the spiritual fitness component of the GAT seems a bit more complicated. At a fundamental level, there does seem to be evidence of an ethical quandary in that the U.S. Military has chosen to administer training to soldiers as a consequence of the outcome of the spiritual fitness assessment. This activity may unnecessarily provoke polemical opposition and does not seem to dependably align with soldier expectations regarding the constitutionality of the assessment and follow-on training. At a minimum, the consternation emanating from the implementation of spiritual fitness training and assessment seems to warrant both scientific and philosophic exploration.

Consider for a moment that the notion of meditation is commonly defined as a harmonization of the mind, body and spirit whilst prayer is normally defined as having spiritual communion with a deity. Statements and phrases contained within the Global Assessment Tool are at least as perplexing as attempting to understand the difference between what is meant by prayer and meditation. The GAT tool includes phrases such as, “I am a spiritual person” and “In difficult times I pray or meditate” or “I often find comfort in my religion or spiritual beliefs.” In the latter statement the phrase “spiritual beliefs” may have been added after legal considerations. Some concerns surround negative perceptions of specific language involving terms such as religious or spiritual, but these perceptual concerns are often argued away, sometimes as if the concern is simply related to an oversensitivity on the part of anti-theists (Dawes, 2005).

The Director of Development at the Institute of Humanist Studies, Stuart Bechman, has described the U.S. Military’s actions surrounding the Global Assessment Tool as clearly proselytizing, and as an invasion of privacy. But in the context of the military, any statement regarding unqualified individual privacy is surely controversial. In recent years, the Military Religious Freedom Foundation (MRFF) has threatened to launch hundreds of lawsuits on the behalf of servicemembers due to supposed theistic activities and the creation of a new environment of fear for non-theistic servicemembers by U.S. Military leadership (Surman, 2011).

Soldiers have also accused the U.S. Army of failing to keep soldier Global Assessment Tool scores confidential and have accused leadership of issuing proselytizing lectures to those who score low on the spiritual fitness section of the GAT. One soldier was quoted in an email to the Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers as stating:

When this chaplain told me that I failed the [spiritual fitness test] because it was [Jesus'] way of personally knocking on my door as an invitation for me to come to Him as a [born again, real Christian] so that I could be saved and not burn forever in hell for rejecting Him, I thought of...the fact that I was already born a Christian and did not need to be born again...[and] I thought of my battle buddy...who took a bullet for me in his face...and that he was the same kind of Christian as me and this chaplain is telling me that my battle buddy...is burning in hell for all time (Surman, 2011).

Such statements by any military officer to another servicemember would surely raise questions, especially in an environment where encouraging intellectual exploration may include an unsavory element of coercion in the dyadic relationship. Of course, there may be ulterior motives or unexplained circumstances behind such allegations. And yet, questions as to whether officers and chaplains are using rank and position to promote religion, and perhaps coerce soldiers into changing their spiritual beliefs, or whether these same officers feel fearful about openly professing their true beliefs, are surely important enough to warrant a thorough investigation. In the same manner, the need for privacy should not be overlooked for servicemembers who wish to be allowed to practice a religion free from intimidation, and who should be allowed to practice religion without fear of reprisal. Forms of anti-religious and religious discrimination have always existed in the U.S. Military. Nevertheless, important questions remain as to the currently relevant issue of spiritual fitness and possibilities of uniform discrimination.

### **The Moral Constituent**

A question seems to naturally arise when considering current Comprehensive Fitness Models as they relate to moral development and ethical action. Since the moral component seems conspicuously vague, are we left to assume that ethics should be developed within other constructs within the Comprehensive Fitness

Programs, and that this is sufficient in terms of the goals of the organization? Or, might it be better for the organizational goals to encourage moral and ethical thought and conduct as a separate and distinct domain of human functioning within the CFPs? The lack of prominence of an ethical or moral domain within CFPs surely seems surprising considering their connection to self-destructive behaviors and also, following the barbarism of the Abu Ghraib Prison scandal in 2003 and numerous public reports of other questionable activities, such as waterboarding, conducted by the U.S. Military over the past decade.

Public brutalities committed by U.S. servicemembers over the past decade have surely provoked inquiry into the training around professional ethics and the development of moral character. However, the U.S. Military's response seems to be limited simply to professional ethics training. In other words, the response seems aimed at clarifying the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ). Unfortunately, this legalistic approach has proven to be ineffective in meeting the ethical goals of the U.S. Military in so many instances. The approach normally includes some online training and classroom instruction, with perhaps some role-playing involving a sort of situational ethics. Occasionally, the training might include an ethical dilemma that is supposed to be solved through something of a Rawlsian perspective of social justice, the answer being valid as long as the response falls within the UCMJ. But is this form of ethics training really helping the soldier to tackle real world moral dilemmas? Is this training helping the soldier navigate the moral choices he or she has made that might be causing symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder to be exacerbated? Is this ethics training helping to improve what the U.S. Military considers the holistic soldier? Or, in the case of PTSD, is the U.S. Military simply trying to temporarily assuage guilt associated with a service-member's moral schema by adjusting their sense of moral responsibility?

Is this *dealing with the past* aspect of ethics training aimed more at convincing the soldier, assuming they followed the spirit of the UCMJ and Rules of Engagement (ROE), that they are not to blame and that they ought to be positive-minded and not dwell on, or perhaps even consider, the morally questionable things from their past experience? If this is the case, then this could be considered an

alarming attempt at behavioral modification that might only serve to encourage the disengagement of moral self-sanctions and alleviate moral dissonance for a relatively short period of time. It would seem that such an approach would be a temporary solution; something aimed at fulfilling immediate organizational goals and objectives, and not satisfying the substantial risk of personal anguish that might naturally arise when reflection becomes, shall we say, more convenient.

The lack of a robust moral component within the current Comprehensive Fitness Programs seems the result of several factors, including that personal moral development was intended to be integrated with the Spiritual Fitness component of the CFPs. It seems obvious that this emphasis has been minimized due to the U.S. Army's response to the alarm that has arisen from anti-theists against things related to what they consider an endorsement or promotion of religiosity and spirituality. Also, remember that this CSF model is being replicated in other military service branches such as the U.S. Navy and U.S. Air Force. Therefore, reasonable questions arise as to whether the U.S. Military is dealing effectively with the moral component of the human condition for all or even a majority of servicemembers through Spiritual Fitness within the CSP, understanding that the original intent of Spiritual Fitness within the CFP seems now to be significantly changed. Is the U.S. Military helping soldiers develop the necessary aspects needed to sense, judge and act morally? Or, is it possible that the U.S. Military is enabling military servicemembers to avoid or counter their own moral schema; or as Bandura (1999) might question, is the U.S. Military mistakenly encouraging the disengagement of moral self-sanctions?

There is clear evidence to support the claim that the disengagement of moral self-sanctions is related to psychological aspects such as hope and positive thinking, morally relevant individual personal traits, moral reasoning abilities and orientations, and dispositional moral emotions. The disengagement of moral self-sanctions can also lead to destructive behaviors such as child abuse, suicide, spousal abuse, alcoholism and drug addiction (Moore, Detert, Trevino, Baker, & Mayer, 2011). All of these issues are of course considered important to the health and welfare of U.S. Military servicemembers.

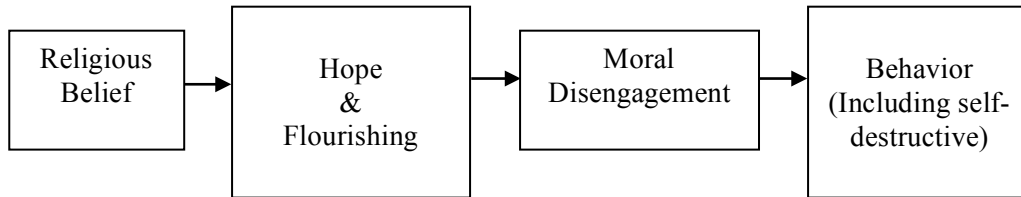
A lingering question remains concerning the validity of the nomological network being utilized by the U.S. Military if it is missing a strong moral component, and that excludes or diminishes one's religion or religious experience, or attempts to capture the impact of such beliefs in a more ambiguous manner (Schwab, 1980). In other words, the current Comprehensive Fitness Program as a unified *construct* may not be sufficient in scope. It may not affect the reduction of self-destructive behaviors as might be assumed, and the current CFP may not be ultimately consistent with the U.S. Military's overall intent. Research suggests the importance of religion and traditional spirituality for many individuals and groups, including a large percentage of self-identified religious servicemembers, when attempting to describe or predict phenomena related to moral development and which are associated with moral dissonance and self-destructive behaviors.<sup>1</sup>

### **Formation of a Research Question Worthy of Attention**

Understanding that the disengagement of moral self-sanctions can often lead to self-destructive behaviors, and that the practice of religion is important for many who utilize certain core beliefs as the foundation of their moral beliefs, and being appreciative that aspects of psychological resilience are important within the Comprehensive Fitness Program (specifically the concepts of hope for the future and ability to flourish in the present), we can thus connect the aspects of belief to action as described in Figure 2.

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<sup>1</sup> See Mensch (2009) for a literature review and analysis of research related to moral development and religion.



*Figure 2.* Simple linear model of religious-based hope, moral disengagement and self-destructive behavior.

If we can better understand the predictors for the disengagement of moral self-sanctions, while respecting that a propensity for moral disengagement can lead to self-destructive behaviors, which are a foundational aspect of resiliency in Comprehensive Fitness Programs, then it seems that the U.S. Military would consider an improved understanding of moral disengagement and its antecedents as essential to the mission of making servicemembers more psychologically resilient. As a result, we ask the following research question based on the model in Figure 2; can we predict a propensity for the disengagement of moral self-sanctions by understanding one's perceived outlook for the future (hope), one's current perceptions about the present (flourishing), and one's religiosity? The first two predictors encompass important aspects of psychological resiliency currently utilized in Comprehensive Fitness Programs, whilst the aspect of religiosity might be considered evidence of a strong religious and spiritual basis for moral thought and action. In the chapters that follow, we consider three distinct aspects of religiosity including aspects of both spiritual practice and religious beliefs.

### Chapter 3 – Disambiguating “Spirituality”

It is challenging to clearly distinguish between different terminologies that refer to something akin to spirituality within the U.S. Military context. The “Moral Leadership Training Program”, which seems to closely correlate with the concepts of spiritual fitness, is defined in a 1987 edition of Army Regulation 165-1 *Chaplain Activities in the United States Army* thus:

The Moral Leadership Training Program of the Army addresses the full spectrum of moral concerns of the profession of arms and the conduct of war. Moral leadership training focuses on those virtues and values that were present in the shaping of America and are still present in the contemporary military setting. This training recognizes the inherent dignity of all people, the value of the state, and the virtues of good citizenship (p. 21).

This definition for many is likely to invoke some form of spirituality for those who base their moral principles within the context of religious virtues and values. The role of the chaplain in the U.S. Army is meant to be inclusive and not exclusive in nature, although many would argue that the virtues and values that “shaped America” were inherently religious in nature. Regardless, a pluralistic society such as we find in the U.S. Army, will normally allow individuals to apply their religious and spiritual freedoms to the ethics that underlie things such as “virtues and values” and the meaning of “dignity for all people.” The chaplain is the religious and spiritual proponent for a U.S. Military command. The chaplain is also the staff proponent to commanders for “Moral Leadership Training”, as we can see from U.S. Army Regulation 165-1 (1987) where it states that, “The chaplain, as the adviser to the commander in the areas of morals and morale as affected by religion, is the principal staff officer for this program” (p. 21). However, the commander is ultimately responsible for all training programs, including the scope, perspective and context, and it is the commander who must ultimately be burdened with the translation of such regulations. In fact, AR-165 (1987) follows by stating, “the range of topics to be addressed requires that commanders consider the appropriateness of the topic in assigning the task of conducting command training classes” (p. 21). Although there are suggested topics provided throughout the regula-

tion, commanders are given great latitude in the disambiguation of terms and the implied intent of many parts of the regulation.

The flexibility provided to commanders is a hallmark of the American Military in general and something the U.S. Army prides itself in maximizing. The concept of placing decisions and understanding implied tasks to the lowest level commander allows for quick adaptation to changing battlefield conditions and situations. This is of course a principle of warfare that can provide tactical advantage in combat. However, when considering this flexibility in the interpretation and implementation of values, moral principles and virtues, it is possible that this flexibility and ambiguity might also become problematic. By interpreting things such as moral virtue inconsistently, commanders may inadvertently influence soldiers in ways that might possibly create tension between the *establishment clause* and freedom of religion.

U.S. Army Regulation 165-1, *Army Chaplain Corps Activities* (2009) states, “The first Amendment to the U.S. Constitution prohibits enactment of any law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” Furthermore, this manual makes it clear that the U.S. Congress does recognize the need to “strike a balance” between establishment and free exercise clauses. Therefore, at least at the strategic level, it is evident that the U.S. Army does recognize the potential for tension between two extremes (p. 1).

The *Army Chaplain Corps Activities* manual is a key text in that the chaplain is the unit commander’s proponent for carrying out such things as the Spiritual Fitness component of the Army’s Comprehensive Soldier Fitness program. The culture in which the chaplain operates is intended to mirror the culture of the United States in general and it is noted as a “pluralistic religious” culture where Army chaplains “demonstrate the values of religious freedom of conscience and spiritual choice” (AR165-1, 2009, p. 1). This manual also cites the establishment clause in the U.S. Constitution as prohibiting the mandate of any religion or way of prayer. It seems that the latter may be more difficult in practice in that to not pray at certain functions or ceremonies would offend some, whilst to pray at any event might offend others. The manual could be viewed as contradictory in that it cites the estab-



ishment clause whilst mandating that chaplains provide worship services, religious classes and prayers, without compromising their own faith tradition or ecclesiastical endorsement requirements. The goals here seem obvious in that the chaplain should provide the greatest breadth of religious support possible. Of course, the question as to how well any particular chaplain may be able to provide such support while following other guidelines and their own religious convictions might be of reasonable concern. It would seem exceedingly difficult to provide such support to a military unit when in one unit there may be Protestant, Catholic, Wiccan, Mormon, Jewish, Muslim, as well as atheist, agnostic and even anti-theistic soldiers, who might be uncomfortable in the presence of any particular religious setting, practice or prayer.

The U.S. Military also connects behavior and unit culture to religiosity by mandating that commanders establish a climate of high moral and ethical standards and includes specifically that “The religious program for the Army *is* the commander’s program” (AR 165-1, 2009, p. 2). This sort of mandate might of course lead to cries of hypocrisy by atheist and anti-theistic individuals and groups. For example, a 2012 article regarding the aforementioned extramarital sex scandal of General David Petraeus is entitled, “Hey General Petraeus, How’s That ‘Spiritual Fitness’ Stuff Working for You” (Rodda, 2012). Still, this should not be a distraction from the central issue that, regardless of personal failings, U.S. Military commanders are mandated to create an environment that supports the spiritual needs of the servicemembers. The importance of the spiritual and religious well-being of the military servicemember can of course be argued by citing regulations. However, the importance of this kind of well-being and soldier fitness may also be argued as vital simply from the U.S. Military’s inclusion of Spiritual Fitness as only one five key areas of focus within Comprehensive Soldier Fitness.

### **Claims of Spiritual Fitness**

The U.S. Army currently maintains a website designed to present research findings related to the Comprehensive Soldier Fitness Program and makes the following claims regarding CSF in general:

Comprehensive Soldier and Family Fitness is effective: An evaluation completed by Army and Civilian scientists showed that soldiers who received [Master Resilience Training] MRT-led resilience training reported higher levels of resilience and psychological health over time than soldiers who did not receive the training. Most importantly, good leadership matters - soldiers improved more when their commanders endorsed the program, scheduled training, and select confident Non-Commissioned Officers to serve as CSF2 trainers (C2F2 Information Sheet, 2012).<sup>1</sup>

Three technical report surveys are summed up in the C2F2 Information Sheet (2012):

Survey Validation Technical Reports #1, #2 and #3: Soldiers who completed suicide, tested positive for illicit drug use, or committed violent crimes, tested as being less resilient than those who did not engage in these activities. Officers who were promoted ahead of peers or selected for command are more emotionally and socially fit than Officers not promoted early or selected for command. Together, Tech Reports #1 and #2 showed that resilience is linked to important behavioral outcomes. Soldiers who received resilience training taught by a Master Resilience Trainer (MRT) improved more than those Soldiers who did not receive the training (p. 2).<sup>2</sup>

According to these reports, psychological resilience training in the U.S. Army appears to be more effective among soldiers aged 18-24 than for older soldiers. The training is generally reported as more effective when commanders ensure that training is properly scheduled, confident leaders are selected as trainers, and the trainers feel supported by individual unit commanders. Furthermore, these reports indicate that psychological resilience is directly related to behavioral manifestations of right or wrong conduct.<sup>3</sup>

The conceptualization of *right* organizational conduct in general has come to mean more of an “adherence to codes of practice, or the development of those codes of practice” (Ladkin, 2006, p. 89). For some, this may be something of a compromise or reduction of ethics or right to the lowest common denominator, the rule of law. The U.S. Military seems to have recognized certain shortcomings of

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<sup>1</sup> Comprehensive Soldier and Family Fitness (C2F2) reports retrieved from <http://www.dtic.mil> on February 28, 2013.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

this conceptualization in an attempt to better deal with moral dilemmas through concepts like spiritual fitness, which offers more than a comparison of expected outcomes with behavioral outcomes. In other words, instead of focusing strictly on the consequences of actions related to policy and the Uniform Code of Military Justice, the U.S. Military seems to be addressing a more complete approach to ethics that includes a broader spectrum of beliefs and how they relate to actions, and thus aspects of the individual's behavior such as virtue and principled moral reasoning. While a focus on action is surely the hallmark of a bureaucracy such as the U.S. Department of Defense, it is perhaps commendable that this organization not only recognizes the limitations of such a philosophy, but that it is institutionally attempting to encourage moral development through spiritual fitness (Cummings, 2000; Ladkin 2006).

However, the implementation of spiritual fitness has come with many challenges that could jeopardize the integrity of initial programmatic conceptions. Osran, Smee, Sreenivasan and Weinberger (2010) claim that placing combat experiences within a meaningful context is beneficial for the soldier because this will promote spiritual and emotional growth. In other words, proper contextualization of stressful combat experiences leads to new existential meaning and purpose. The assumption that this is true is surely nothing new, but it is controversial. In Plato's dialogues we find it clear that Socrates focused his search for wisdom on existential questions such as; what am I made of (i.e. does the soul exist), and what is my purpose in life? Nevertheless, if an organization coerces one to explore such questions at an existential level, the intent and process of encouraging exploration may create concern, and in this case, the concerns of soldiers fighting for the freedom to believe as one wishes without coercion or intimidation. Socrates may have been right about the merits of the contemplative life, but not all are ready, willing or able to navigate such a life.

The U.S. Military seems keenly aware of the challenges regarding religious coercion. The U.S. Army's Comprehensive Soldier Fitness program offers that the spiritual fitness assessment within the Global Assessment Tool is not a test or measure at all and specifically not a pass or fail instrument; and that the results

simply provide feedback. However, if there is no measurement, then the purpose and validity of the construct might obviously come into question. The ensuing education options are not mandatory for soldiers who score low on the spiritual fitness portion of the Global Assessment Tool. There are however, additional learning modules offered to those who do score low (Banks, 2011). Scoring low logically seems to indicate some form of measurement. If this seems confusing, it may be due to the fact that from one perspective, the GAT seems to do exactly what its proponents claim it is not doing - attempting to measure psychological aspects of servicemembers. Brigadier General Rhonda Cornum commented in 2008 that the U.S. Army's spiritual fitness assessment was developed partly because people who are inclined toward spirituality seem to be more resilient. She does however stop short of claiming that high levels of spiritual fitness make for a better soldier (Hagerty, 2011).

So whether the spiritual fitness component of the Global Assessment Tool is a test, questionnaire, survey, or assessment, the Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers (MAAF), founded in 1997, is troubled by the notion of spiritual fitness in general, and specifically the spiritual fitness measure included in the Global Assessment Tool. The MAAF did meet with key U.S. Army leaders and expressed concern about the spiritual fitness test and language related to the Comprehensive Soldier Fitness program especially any use of the term *religion*, as opposed to a more neutral term such as *spiritual* or *spirituality*. The MAAF has claimed that the three components of spiritual fitness are physical, mental and spiritual and that the three are not mutually exclusive but in fact intertwined and mutually dependent. This leads to an impression that if one is weak in one area, it necessarily affects the whole. So any notion that a soldier is lacking in spirituality or religiosity, the latter term seems to be preferred by the MAAF, can logically be perceived by themselves or others as incomplete or something less than fit. After raising concerns regarding an infringement of rights of non-religious soldiers, the MAAF claimed that the bureaucracy of the U.S. Army remains at least indifferent to the concerns of an infringement of rights related to non-religious servicemembers, if not outright dismissive. The situation is complicated by claims that spiritu-

al fitness is particularly helpful in preventing suicide or sustaining soldiers in times of stress. Army Chaplain (Major General) Douglas L. Carver commented: “That’s what spiritual practice does, lighten the load. . . I’m not sure you can find some answers to those things [referring to issues of guilt and forgiveness] outside of a religious perspective.”<sup>4</sup>

The Director of Duke University Center for Spirituality, Theology and Health, Dr. Harold G. Koenig, stated that religion is a “powerful coping behavior” for individuals undergoing anxiety and stress, as might be experienced in combat.<sup>5</sup> Many studies have been conducted that essentially conclude that religiosity lowers destructive behaviors such as alcoholism, drug abuse and suicide and that those engaged in religious practices have lower rates of depression, and the U.S. Military is surely operating under a comparable assumption. The U.S. Army Chaplain Corps’ Center for Spiritual Leadership has proposed a study that will allow researchers to follow soldiers in the field for up to a year to determine the impacts of the spiritual fitness initiative on their well-being and sense of hope (Agency Group 9, 2010).

The benefits of spiritual fitness may not only assist people in finding meaning in life but also (a) help soldiers cope with multiple deployments, combat stress or injury; (b) protect soldiers from experiencing “moral injuries,” which can occur from either participating in or witnessing certain acts during war that may conflict with deeply held moral beliefs and expectations; and (c) encourage a supportive environment and foster unit cohesion, as many spiritual practices promote tolerance of other worldviews and diverse populations.<sup>6</sup> It seems that the creators of the U.S. Military’s Comprehensive Fitness Programs believe that spiritual and religious practices are beneficial to soldiers because it makes them more psychologically resilient; but claims of this type, of course, whether true or not, are exactly what the Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers seem most concerned about because they perpetuate the notion that religious soldiers are somehow *better* soldiers.

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<sup>4</sup> Retrieved on February 28, 2013 from <http://christianfighterpilot.com/2011/01/04/army-spiritual-fitness-can-lighten-load/>

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Retrieved on November 12, 2012 from <http://www.realwarriors.net/active/treatment/spirituality.php>

## Psychological Moral Development

Antecedents such as religiosity and spirituality, which an individual may put into practice prior to the process of disengaging from their own moral self-sanctions, are not well understood as directly connected with moral disengagement. Moral disengagement can be considered “an individual difference in the way that people cognitively process decisions and behavior with ethical import that allows those inclined to morally disengage to behave unethically without feeling distress” (Moore et al., 2011, p. 2). The term *distress*, as used in this definition, is a psychological term. The causes of distress related to moral disengagement might cause one to think more about the processing of moral self-sanctions prior to moral judgment. This is referring to moral judgment as a neo-Kohlbergian construct (Rest, 1999). Consider moral judgment as following the formation of moral beliefs and values, and that the same is implied in the concept of moral disengagement, leading to a somewhat relativistic (but more specifically Rawlsian) type of ethic. The presence of this relativistic perspective, which may complicate matters slightly at the level of the individual moral schema since forms of what is *just*, for example, can be vastly different, seems necessary from a psychological perspective (Mensch, 2009). Otherwise, we risk imposing a prescriptive ethic.

Table 2

*Levels of Moral Development (Rest, 1999)*

Level	Description
Preconventional level	Punishment and obedience Individualism and rewards (hedonistic)
Conventional level	Approval of group (good boy/girl) Orientation to authority (law and order)
Postconventional level	Social contract orientation Principled conscience

Rest's derivation of neo-Kohlbergian moral development, specifically focusing on moral judgment, is presented in Table 2. Moore et al. (2011) use moral disengagement as functioning within the realm of cognition but also as something more encompassing than simply moral judgment. The neo-Kohlbergian conception of moral judgment should be considered an aspect of the process related to the disengagement of moral self-sanctions on the one hand, but one should also consider the psychological distress or feelings of guilt or self-condemnation that might follow such disengagement, even if at some distant future time when the individual may be provided with the opportunity to reflect in such a way as to understand the cause of the distress differently.

Narvaez and Bock (2002) also provide an interesting and appropriate reference to understanding moral disengagement in that their concept of the personal interest schema, the maintaining norms schema, and the post-conventional schema of cognitive moral judgment can assist in a more holistic view of how one might retain a certain moral self-sanction. There seems to be an obvious encyclopedic relationship between these schema and moral disengagement in that if someone is more self and survival focused, they might be more likely to disengage from their own moral self-sanctions. This seems a pertinent example of the essence of Bandura's (1999) contention regarding the reasons for the disengagement of moral self-sanctions. In other words, it seems plausible that if an individual is operating under a survival orientation, they would likely be more apt to disengage morally through a mechanism of, shall we say, diffusion or displacement of responsibility. In fact, Kern and Chugh (2009) support such a claim by connecting how individuals process and frame information in order to make ethical decisions. This notion also seems to be congruent with Bandura's (1999 & 2002) assumptions regarding moral disengagement as being agent-centered, morally relativistic, and yet having social implications.

An understanding of these aspects of moral development in relation to moral disengagement may support a better understanding of possible predictors to both constructs, but particularly to the construct of moral disengagement since it includes relevant personality traits, moral reasoning abilities and orientations, and

dispositional moral emotions (Moore et al., 2011). There is thus a relevance of concepts that are likely to affect things such as personality, emotions and moral orientation, characteristics that can be associated with the positive psychological concepts of hope and flourishing (Harris et al., 1991 & Diener et al., 2010).

Osran, Smee, Sreenivasan and Weinberger (2010) claim that placing combat experiences within a meaningful context is beneficial for the soldier, in that it promotes spiritual and emotional growth. In other words, proper contextualization of stressful combat experiences leads to new existential meaning and purpose. This is consistent with research that suggests moral development education has a positively mediating relationship with self-efficacy and that increases in perceived self-efficacy, in this case specifically related to morality and ethics, do have a significant impact on cognitive functioning. The research also includes perceived self-efficacy as a mediating factor related specifically to depression and PTSD and that a propensity for the disengagement of moral self-sanctions, resulting in such things as spousal abuse and suicide, may be significantly lessened due to complimentary educational endeavors, both psychological and philosophical, and related to moral development (Bebeau, Rest, Narvaez, 1999; Ahn & Picard, 2006; Bandura, Caprara, Barbaranelli, Gerbino, and Pastorelli, 2003; Bandura, 2007).

Forethought, intentionality and self-regulation are key components in Bandura's (1989, 1996, 2001) agentic perspective of social cognition. The self-regulatory aspect seems particularly relevant to the goals and objectives of the U.S. Military, and related to spiritual fitness training. For Bandura (2001), personal agency operates within a broad network of sociocultural influences. He states:

In these agentic transactions, people are producers as well as products of social systems. Social cognitive theory distinguishes among three modes of agency: direct personal agency, proxy agency that relies on others to act on one's behalf to secure desired outcomes, and collective agency exercised through socially coordinative and interdependent effort. Growing transnational embeddedness and interdependence are placing a premium on collective efficacy to exercise control over personal destinies (p. 1).

Bandura has proposed a framework that assists in understanding the disengagement of moral self-sanctions (1999). The disengagement criteria have been



utilized to develop an instrument that is intended to measure a respondent's propensity for moral disengagement, specifically related to competitive sport, which seems in many ways quite similar to the environment of competition found within officer training programs in the U.S. Military (Boardley & Kavussanu, 2007). The practice of spiritual fitness is in part aimed at reducing PTSD and self-destructive behaviors, and what can also be categorized as self-destructive products of the disengagement of moral self-sanctions, such as suicide and child abuse. Therefore, one might question whether it is beneficial for the U.S. Military to pursue formal programs of education in moral development, addressing both the psychological constituent (such as is found in the Restorian Four Component Model) and philosophical concepts (such as consequentialism, deontology and virtue theory), as complementary and even perhaps preeminent factors in spiritual fitness. Training in moral development has been encouraged as part of larger leader development programs in the United States Marine Corps (Murthy, Dingman & Mensch, 2011). Although any direct connection regarding a decrease in the propensity for the disengagement of moral self-sanctions of people who have matriculated through such programs is still unclear, it seems that the U.S. Military has presumed such an association is likely.

### **Spirituality in Society and Positive Psychology**

Mellinger (2011) describes what she considers a general cultural shift from the decades of the *Jesus Freaks* of the 1960s and 1970s, to the *moral majority* of the 1980s and 1990s, to a more contemporary focus back to the power of belief in *truth*. Additionally, she posits a "depth of belief" that is greater than simply *affect* and that includes the seeking of a virtuous existence, something beyond mere cognition and far beyond the emotive. She says that people in the United States seem to be generally and more openly seeking a genuine relationship with the divine in hopes of living a life of virtue and a humble character consistent with conviction instead of hypocrisy (personal communication, December 4, 2012, Evangelical Theological Seminary). Woods (2006) similarly describes how in modern culture, some see authentic spirituality as a product of the lived life, rather than merely

something of an academic endeavor. Woods offers that many people in today's society seek a connection with God in ways that assist people in forming a coherent system of beliefs, the result being something of a more communal relationship with the divine.

The societal context is ordinarily implicated in inferences made in psychosocial research. Since the science of psychology tends to follow generally held societal philosophies, it seems rational that there would emerge a focus on creating a psychology that fits with the contemporary religious experience. Accordingly, there has been a noticeable societal shift in the practice of psychology over the past 30 years. What was formerly a focus on post-pathological diagnosis and treatment has led to a concentration on the development of positive coping skills that contribute to psychological resilience, or perhaps even resistance, to psychological trauma or other psychological distress. This is an attempt to affect the core beliefs of individuals, which for many, are inextricably connected to their personal spirituality. The term *spirituality* has emerged, commonly not restricted to a theological context, but instead used to express a more general human perspective, which seems to have aligned quite nicely with the emergence of the field of positive psychology in the United States (Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Pargament & Sweeney, 2011).

What has become known as the science of positive psychology is somewhat controversial and there has yet to emerge what is generally considered a clearly coherent and encompassing theory. Still, the applications and emergent theories in positive psychology seem exceedingly culturally relevant. Moreover, researchers in the field of positive psychology have made considerable advances over the past decade, especially in descriptive terms. It is perhaps the prescriptive notions in positive psychology, that are treated as something like science that has rid itself of the burden of philosophical ethics, that provoke the most ardent adversaries. In order to fully accept the conditions of the science of positive psychology, challenging philosophies including some basic ethical philosophies must be assumed in the pursuit of empirical data and analysis. This is surely a noble pursuit of science, to continue to consider the moral domain, regardless of the fact that ethical assumptions can easily become polemic. For example, the neo-Kohlbergian view of moral de-

velopment requires a prescriptive Rawlsian view of social justice and a resulting psychological prescription. So for some, like Christians, the assumed highest moral principle of *justice* may not be appropriate because these individuals might assume a highest moral principle more akin to benevolence or love (Mensch, 2009).

It is important to be aware of such philosophical debates in positive psychology, not so one might simply discount the field outright, but instead, understand its merits where warranted and otherwise be normatively skeptical where necessary; as when virtue or good character might be assumed by the psychologist. Additionally, the merits of addressing more negative aspects of human psychology such as suffering, weakness and disorder are surely worth exploring. Positive psychology has more recently become known as the science of the study of positive emotions, positive character traits, and enabling institutions, and more generally as the science of “understanding...what makes life worth living” (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p. 13). This appreciation leads to a more complete appreciation of psychology, the highs and the lows, not simply the lows, the trials and the happiness, not simply the suffering and despair. Perhaps most importantly, positive psychology may help in understanding one’s strengths in relation to one’s weaknesses, whereas psychology has traditionally focused on merely the latter (Seligman, Steen, Park & Peterson, 2005).

The components of positive psychology are best described by the acronym PERMA, which stands for positive emotion, engagement, positive relationships, meaning, and accomplishment/achievement (Seligman, 2011). Table 3 provides the definitions for each term.

Table 3

*PERMA*

Term	Definition
Positive Emotion	For us to experience well-being, we need positive emotion in our lives. Any positive emotion like peace, gratitude, satisfaction, pleasure, inspiration, hope, curiosity, or love falls into this category – and the message is that it's really important to enjoy yourself in the here and now, just as long as the other elements of PERMA are in place.
Engagement	When we're truly engaged in a situation, task, or project, we experience a state of flow, time seems to stop, we lose our sense of self, and we concentrate intensely on the present.
Positive Relationships	As humans, we are "social beings," and good relationships are core to our well-being. Time and again, we see that people who have meaningful, positive relationships with others are happier than those who do not. Relationships really do matter!
Meaning	Meaning comes from serving a cause bigger than ourselves. Whether this is a specific deity or religion, or a cause that helps humanity in some way, we all need meaning in our lives to have a sense of well-being.
Accomplishments/Achievements	Many of us strive to better ourselves in some way, whether we're seeking to master a skill, achieve a valuable goal, or win in some competitive event. As such, accomplishment is another important thing that contributes to our ability to flourish.

*Note.* Definitions retrieved from <http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/perma.htm> on June 20, 2013.

The research related to positive psychotherapy is certainly promising, but it is also a bit controversial. Contributing studies often have issues ranging from low

sample sizes to questionable control factors in placebo groups. In a study published in 2006, the authors readily admit issues with a low total sample size that included the control group (N=40), so low that some might dismiss any conclusions as exploratory or even speculative (Seligman, Rashid & Parks, 2006). Other research, especially telephone or web-based interventions, is often plagued with issues such as the *Hawthorn Effect* or longitudinal problems related to the science of what constitutes a valid control group. These are surely complicating concerns that should be taken into account as appropriate in drawing conclusions and devising psychological interventions that are utilized for servicemembers. Still, positive psychology has many promising applications in the U.S. Military (Duckworth, Steen & Seligman, 2005).

These challenges surely exist but the positive psychology archetype is well established and is supported by the theories of many pioneers of more traditional psychology such as Rogers (1951), Maslow (1954, 1962), Jahoda (1958), Erickson (1963, 1982), Vaillant (1977), Deci and Ryan (1985), and Ryff and Singer (1996). Still, such appeals do not really weaken arguments related to the more philosophical challenges produced by the current understanding of positive psychology, especially from the field of ethics. In fact, several of the appealed-to authorities were criticized for similar philosophical issues, specifically related to what Maslow might consider *higher order functioning*. The following quote is telling regarding the approach of particular groups and related to both positive psychology and positive education:

The schooling of children has, for more than a century, been about accomplishment, the boulevard into the world of adult work. I am all for accomplishment, success, literacy, and discipline; but imagine if schools could, without compromising either, teach both the skills of well-being and the skills of achievement (Seligman, Ernst, Gillham, Reivich & Linkins, 2009, pp. 293-294).

This is an appeal to the merits of positive psychology by infusing it into the educational process. The problem of this lack of skills related to well-being is surely connected to the broader issue of a general shift away from the liberal arts, like philosophy and literature, and toward a more vocational education that has come to

dominate the American education system. Seligman et al. (2009) explored this issue of well-being further and defend the need for debate by appealing to the “prevalence of depression among young people” and the thinking that “almost everything is better now than it was 50 years ago”, with specific examples including better homes, clothing, purchasing power and cars (p. 294). This argument seems more philosophical than psychological, and surely controversial. Yet, since the onus is on the science to support through empirical investigation, positive psychologists have made respectable attempts to construct valid research over many years to tackle what has traditionally been discussed as strictly philosophical issues. The U.S. Military has experienced desperate times over the past decade of prolonged war, and many military leaders are willing to implement programs that might facilitate the claims of positive psychology. As with many psychological practices, the rewards of success seem to outweigh the risks associated with an incomplete scientific understanding.

Operationalizing the concept of happiness has become a focus in positive psychology. Happiness is currently understood by way of three particular aspects. The first is *hedonic positive emotion* that includes such things as love, joy, pleasure and contentment. Maximizing this kind of emotion is a key characteristic to happiness according to positive psychology. The second aspect of happiness is known as the *engaged life*, of which the concept of *flow* is a major component (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). In this case, positive psychology appeals to Aristotle’s notion of engaging in one’s talents to the best of one’s ability as a major basis for the realization of the good life. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) describes *flow* as being “one with the music” and the loss of self-consciousness and the feeling of the stoppage of time. In order to complete the positive psychological conception of happiness, the concept of the *meaningful life* is offered as an increase with regard to “connections to others” and “causes that transcend the self.” Here, the concept of the meaningful life is of course a philosophical assumption. These assumptions are important to consider when operationalizing happiness as a line of empirical research, and not mere “grandmotherly common sense.” That said, the research does not overly seem to appeal to common sense and instead suggests plausible findings such as

“optimistic people are much less likely to die of a heart attack than pessimists” (Seligman et al., 2009, p. 296). However, problems may arise if the philosophical assumptions related to the empirical study are not universally accepted. This of course cannot be assumed and so discourse regarding variants of such assumptions is surely warranted. Therefore, this particular philosophical issue does seem to be dealt with satisfactorily by positive psychologists, which in turn seems to afford opponents a superfluous opportunity to disregard empirical research from the field.

The U.S. Army developed the Comprehensive Soldier Fitness program partly in response to evidence related to positive coping skills and psychological resilience. The CSF model includes the aforementioned personal dimensions of social, family, emotional, spiritual and physical. The U.S. Army seems not to have based spiritual fitness in any particular ontological truth, but instead allows leadership to encourage the search for truth, self-knowledge, and purpose in life (Sweeney, Hannah & Snider, 2007). The spiritual in this sense is offered as something distinct from personal identity. Still, it does seem to possess a tone of sacred quality. As used in the Comprehensive Soldier Fitness sense, the notion of *spirit* is “tied intimately to other higher order qualities, including purpose and meaning, enlightenment, authenticity, interconnectedness, and self-actualization” (Pargament & Sweeney, 2011, p. 58).

### **Philosophical Challenges Related to Positive Psychology**

At a Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (RSA) event in the United Kingdom, Seligman was asked (Seligman & RSA, 2011) if *is* and *ought*, from a moral perspective in positive psychology, are in alignment with one another? In other words, what is, ought to be, morally speaking. His response was essentially that *is* and *ought* “are completely orthogonal” and he continues to state:

Aristotle believed that happiness, virtue, truth, and beauty were all the same thing. I think that is completely wrong and that these are different human capacities, and that if you take PERMA...the study of well-being is completely different from the study of ought, the study of morality, which is different from truth, which is different from beauty (Seligman & RSA, 2011, 23:19-24:36).

This response seems somewhat consistent with the study of psychology and this may be an attempt to provide an explanation as to why *ought* in a moral sense is less relevant to the individual in a relativistic and pluralistic society. Nevertheless, this question seems to provoke less of an argument about science and more of an argument for philosophy; and it is surely important that assumptions be acknowledged and defended philosophically before conclusions are drawn from empirical data. It also seems likely that philosophical problems will continue to plague the field until they are more fully addressed. Seligman (2011) also provides the example that Osama Bin Laden's life experience probably rated very highly in regards to what we mean by PERMA, but that he was "condemnable" in his actions and that PERMA is not relatable to "good and evil" which is of course a descriptive argument (Seligman & RSA, 2011, 23:19-24:36). However, a major problem seems to be that PERMA and other aspects of positive psychology are often translated into and implemented as a prescriptive approach. It naturally becomes an issue of debate when a moral argument is supported strictly on descriptive terms, as this is arguably not possible since implications of morality often become prescriptive when programmatic assumptions are projected on an organization.

This is perhaps the greatest challenge to positive psychology; coming to terms with the philosophy of the psychology and providing a consistent and articulate defense. Of course this is not the strength of many psychologists, and so some antagonists will completely discount various aspects of positive psychology, or even the entire discipline, due to a myriad of ostensible philosophical issues such as *non-sequiturs* related to diagnosis and treatment and *post hoc ergo propter hoc* fallacies related to prescriptive moral assumptions. Such attacks on the philosophical grounding of positive psychology seem to lead to a need for a better philosophical defense of its assumptions. Still, there seems to be hesitation in attempting a clearly articulated philosophical defense, which is evident from the positive psychologists' inability to clearly disambiguate related terms such as *universal morals* and *truth*. This is a problem in the related field of moral development and has been argued over for several decades with the inevitable result of division. The division is



based on issues related to such things as inference, assumptions and prescriptions in the science of psychology that result from differences in philosophy. The debate has been somewhat beneficial for the field of moral development as the disputes have encouraged many moral developmental psychologists to refine and better develop their philosophical arguments related to their science. It is of little consolation if one party in psychology believes it is above the philosophy of science. Alas, there seem to be those in the field of psychology who believe they are immune to defending the philosophy of their science when attempting to utilize inference or prescriptive analysis, or even admitting that philosophical assumptions exist within their own research. This brand of pseudo-scientific vanity can lead to something like pop-psychology, which is exceedingly unfortunate. There seems to be psychological empirical evidence that is too often tainted by a refusal to address the philosophy of the science (Mensch, 2009).

Positive psychologists have also tended to divorce positive psychology from the fundamental philosophical assumptions of most humanist psychologists. Waterman (2013) claims that, “proponents of humanistic and positive psychology start with different premises about human nature and the nature of the psychological enterprise” (p. 124). Waterman continues:

In general, humanistic psychologists are not pleased with the study of human potentials and well-being with respect to theory, research, or therapy. These two perspectives [are] a function of the extensive differences in their philosophical grounding...with respect to (a) ontology, including the ways in which human nature is conceptualized regarding human potentials and well-being; (b) epistemology, specifically, the choice of research strategies for the empirical study of these concepts; and (c) practical philosophy, particularly the goals and strategies adopted when conducting therapy or undertaking counseling sessions (p. 124).

These claims are at least valid in that they identify a divide that currently exists in the philosophy of psychology within the humanistic and the positivist traditions. However, both traditions have similar goals in that humanistic and positive psychology wish to improve and heal the character of people, and both look to do this through psychotherapy, education, and advancing a philosophy of psychology and research methodologies related to social psychology (Waterman, 2013). Fur-

thermore, both traditions claim similar origins in Maslow (1943, 1954) who wrote prolifically about positive emotion, even utilizing the term *positive psychology* in his 1954 publication, *Positive Psychology in Motivation and Personality*. Nevertheless Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) “criticized humanistic philosophy for its association with self-help movements and for encouraging self-centeredness” (p. 125).

The issue of the self reveals a fundamental difference in personal agency between these two factions. On the one hand the humanist psychologists seem to place a great deal of emphasis on the individual understanding, reflecting and coming to beliefs and judgments that they would consider their own. On the other hand, positive psychology seems to attempt to view the human condition as more feeble and people as needing more guidance in the process of discovery. It is as if the humanistic tradition presumes the agent ought to struggle with personal philosophical issues, whilst the positivist tradition wishes to offer answers to philosophical matters such as *telos* and meaning. The latter allows the applied science to utilize descriptive analytics as a foundation, and then be much more prescriptive in application (Waterman, 2013).

The divide between the philosophies of positive psychology and humanist psychology currently means they seem to be somewhat incompatible and surely, as MacIntyre (1981) might argue, incommensurable. Waterman (2013) states:

I contend that both the desire of positive psychologists to distance themselves from work in humanistic psychology and the critiques of positive psychology advanced by humanistic psychologists are based on incompatible philosophical perspectives with respect to ontology, epistemology, and practical philosophy (p. 126).

Waterman (2013) suggests that the extent of these differences is so vast that it is “impossible for proponents of the two disciplines to find much in the way of common ground” (p. 126). This split between positive psychology and humanist psychology seems to be what MacIntyre (1981, 1990, 1998) would in fact consider a sort of case study for his concept of incommensurability. Waterman goes on to propose a meaningful discourse under a new paradigm, perhaps with a mutual understanding of the incommensurability. This surely seems like a worthy endeavor

since, as MacIntyre (1981) proposes, are we to choose Nietzsche or Aristotle, and if we choose, then how are we to move forward as scientists within a discipline in a fruitful manner? The current answer seems unsatisfactory at best in that if what Waterman suggests is true, then positive psychology and humanist psychology might very well continue to function as separate disciplines, thus causing confusion and perhaps even unscrupulous science to be conducted by those who are not overly familiar with the underlying philosophical differences. Most troubling for positive psychology as an emerging discipline is that, as is not uncommon in the history of psychology in general, sidestepped philosophical assumptions could lead to research methodologies, analyses, inferences and applications that are abstruse if not outright misleading.

The ontological divide between humanist psychologists and positive psychologists is surely challenging to bridge. The humanists base their ontology in existentialism, consistent with the cause of human agency and so placing great power in the hands of the beholder, the self. Waterman (2013) cites Sartre (1943, 1956) who states “existence precedes essence” and that humans must define who they are by their own consciousness, however limited by biological constraints. The humanistic psychologist also appeals to Fromm (1950) who states that “Man is the only animal for whom his own existence is a problem which he has to solve and from which he cannot escape” (p. 23). Placing human agency solely on the human being leads to a problematic rejection of any absolute moral position and inevitably leads to a relativistic moral rationale, something consistent with social constructivism. The essence of the humanist contention is that as *humans*, we should not turn to other people or institutions to tell us what we ought to do, only perhaps what we could or might do. In other words, this philosophy supports the notion that our destiny is our own and we create or otherwise assume the standards by which we live. Central to humanistic psychology is the concept of human freedom and the autonomous agent “with the capacity for making choices with attendant personal responsibility” (Waterman, 2013, p. 127). This could be a philosophical problem for those not convinced that moral relativism should be applied to psychology, espe-

cially for clinical psychologists who, whether acknowledged or not, implement interventions based on an assumed and prescriptive notion of morality.

This humanistic argument can be viewed as contrary to positive psychology, which by its very presentation assumes that the answers to life's questions regarding happiness and meaning, among other things, are fundamentally the responsibility of science to understand, and are therefore empirically determinable. In the absence of objective science, the positivistic psychologist essentially utilizes probability theory to determine not only what *is*, but what ought to be, and then forwards a formulation of this ought to the agent as a sort of truth. In this case, a paradox arises since the individual cannot be concurrently treated as an independent moral agent whilst prescriptively applying an objective morality to the agent. In the positivist tradition based in probability theory, statistical support is gained by meeting pre-determined standards often used in the social sciences such as *confidence intervals*, which then allow the researcher to argue based on a statistically supported reality. The theoretical psychologist can take an *unobservable* or latent variable construct and create a form of *reality* often explained through theoretical models. These theoretical models can then be passed on to users of the theory, such as clinical psychologists or other counseling practitioners, in the form of treatments or interventions. However, the humanistic psychologist would likely object to any form of moral prescription since the personal agent is no longer free to determine the moral state for him or herself. This use of moral probability may be unsatisfactory to many, yet it is arguably the best we can do if we are going to attempt to address the moral within the psychological. This seems more like a call to respectful philosophical debate in hopes of beneficial rewards similar to what MacIntyre (1981) offers, as opposed to the absence of moral discourse that seems to be the current norm within psychology in general.

If the only things the individual can *know* are things about him or herself then only the agent can assume certainty about things such as feelings, thoughts, perceptions, emotions, and reasoning. Of course, these agentic aspects can only become *known* through introspection. It seems that the humanistic psychologist would be contented with this proposition, while the positivistic psychologist might

oppose the same. This is the crux of the ontological divide between these two camps in psychological discourse, the age-old rivalry between *Cartesianism* and *Behaviorism* (O'Donohue & Kichener, 1996). Of course, as this ontological divide turns into the practice of psychology, this mere philosophical problem can emerge as a moral problem, especially when considering the issue from a perspective of prescriptive psychological intervention. This problem of intervention seems especially troubling when attempting to understand the meaning of variables such as *psychological identity*, and the interpretation of what is taking place with respect to such variables acting on other variables (Waterman, 2013).

Another philosophical segregation between humanist psychology and positive psychology is an epistemological problem. The epistemological problem is conspicuous when considering the phenomenological girding of each psychology. The humanist tradition has a greater focus on qualitative research, which is to be expected by its ontological philosophy that is more closely associated with personal experience. In other words, it is reasonable that if the individual is the central figure of study as opposed to a population of individuals, qualitative methodologies are perhaps more anticipated, even though lacking in generalizability. Positive psychologists on the other hand appear to focus more on science based in statistics and probability theory through the use of quantitative methodologies and specifically, statistical analysis of large samples. This may be expected considering the philosophical ontology and logical positivism found in this form of psychology. This is not to say that each camp, the humanistic and positive psychologists, will not advocate for a mixed method approach to research, but the overlapping of analysis from the two divergent perspectives is somewhat absent in the literature. The epistemic issue is further explained by Waterman (2013):

This failure to communicate across the divide is exacerbated not only by the fact that few researchers are asking both idiographic and nomothetic questions regarding a given construct but also because the publication practices of the majority of psychology journals lead to the acceptance of articles reporting mostly or exclusively studies involving either quantitative or qualitative methods. Among researchers, those preferring one methodological approach seldom read the published research generated by the other methodology (p. 128).

It is not unexpected that researchers have a tendency to lean toward their preference of methodologies, but if the problem is as formidable as Waterman proposes, then this epistemological divide may lead to practical applications and interventions that are not fully informed, or altogether misconstrued. With this consideration in mind, it may be prudent to consider the practical philosophical aspects of this division and the possible implications of bringing theory to practice, especially when considering such things as interventions, counseling and therapy. Understanding this division between humanistic and positive psychology is certainly important in helping to understand arguments regarding the purported constraints and limitations ensuing from each philosophy and methodology. Perhaps improved discourse between the two camps might encourage researchers to clarify philosophical assumptions and the resulting problems of these philosophies, as well as bring together varying research methodologies to produce a more coherent theoretical framework and a less contentious practical psychology.

### **Concerning Moral Disengagement**

Burris, Harmon-Jones, & Tarpley (1997) tested the hypothesis that dissonance reduction attenuates dissonance-related negative affect using a “belief disconfirmation paradigm” (p. 37). This hypothesis was developed from Festinger’s (1957) cognitive dissonance theory, which is consistent with more current theoretical constructs that assess behavioral manifestations as representations of beliefs, attitudes, intentions and affect. Assumptions that belief is linked to behavior are quite apparent in the field of moral development and moral psychology, from the levels of moral development relating to moral action proposed by Kohlberg and Candee (1984) to the moral disengagement criteria of Bandura (1999, 2002). Rest (1986) provides a good description of a rational/deliberate model of moral reasoning where one moves from awareness of one’s moral schema, or moral sensitivity, towards moral situations, to the deliberative judgment of those situations, to intention, and finally to action. This is supported by Fishbein and Ajzen’s (1975) basic linear model of planned behavior.

Without addressing the full spectrum from philosophical belief to observed behavior, there will inevitably be something absent from a model that is thought to be comprehensive in scope, such as the U.S. Military's Comprehensive Fitness Programs. Strong evidence relating cognitive dissonance to a personal morality, and the connection of such dissonance to a myriad of possible diagnosable mental disorders, many of which include subsequent self-destructive behaviors, should be reason for exploration and greater understanding of moral psychology in general (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Beliefs coupled with an intimate understanding of one's values are critical components when considering moral development (Mensch, 2009). Bandura's (1999) description of the mechanisms leading to the selective disengagement of moral self-sanctions requires that, from an agentic perspective, the individual be familiar with their own moral schema in order that activation or deactivation of moral self-sanctions can occur. Bandura (2001) describes three modes of moral agency:

Social cognitive theory distinguishes among three modes of agency: direct personal agency, proxy agency that relies on others to act on one's behalf to secure desired outcomes, and collective agency exercised through socially coordinative and interdependent effort (p. 1).

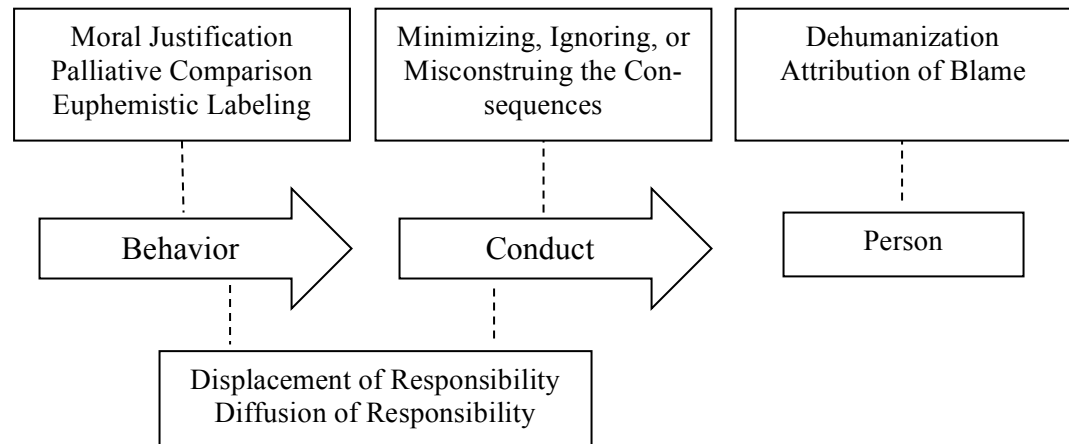


Figure 3. Bandura's psychological mechanisms through which moral self-sanctions are selectively disengaged from detrimental practices at different points in the exercise of moral agency (Bandura, 1986, 1999, 2002, 2007).<sup>7</sup>

Moral agency has “dual aspects manifested in both the power to refrain from behaving inhumanly and the proactive power to behave humanely” (Bandura, 2002, p. 1). The concept of *self* in this case connects personal standards, which are linked to self-sanctions and affective self-regulatory mechanisms. Bandura (2002) claims that these mechanisms of moral disengagement are not utilized unless activated by the agent. The psychosocial mechanisms by which self-sanctions are selectively deactivated come in various forms.

#### Moral Disengagement and Self-destructive Behaviors

There has been a long-standing connection between what has come to be known as moral disengagement and traditional cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957). Burris, Harmon-Jones, and Tarpley (1997) discuss a possible connection, which they refer to as the *belief disconfirmation paradigm*, where actions are compared to current beliefs and those beliefs are either altered or the information is rejected or denied. Furthermore, Mensch and Dingman (2010) argue that a moral

<sup>7</sup> In the most recent moral disengagement model presented in Bandura (2015) he refers to *reprehensible conduct* as *detrimental practices* and *detrimental effects* as *injurious effects* (p. 3).



aspect is always present when a relationship is involved, which is important to understand when considering our application of moral disengagement in the following chapters. It is precisely this sort of psychological dissonance and adaptation of cognition that seems to be the essence of what Bandura (1999) is referring to in his moral disengagement construct. In other words, moral cognitive dissonance can be thought of as a precursor to the disengagement of moral self-sanctions. Therefore, a series of related events takes place where the agent determines if this action is consistent with his or her current moral belief system. If it is not, the moral belief system can be altered or avoided by a disengagement of moral self-sanctions that then becomes a moral belief disconfirmation. It is also possible that, after some reflection, the agent may eventually come to understand this action as immoral, and therefore recognize a previous disengagement from his or her own moral self-sanctions. Here the agent, who at some previous time activated psychological mechanisms leading to the disengagement of moral self-sanctions, comes to realize that he or she was initially self-deceived. Upon reflection, the previous psychological state of affairs can become in essence a falsified belief. This former moral position, presently coming into question, can of course lead to cognitive dissonance. The agent may struggle as he or she reflects to determine the moral rightness of the initial action by way of some new understanding related to disengagement criteria that may have been originally utilized to assuage the anguish of the original act.

Moral disengagement and cognitive dissonance considered from a perspective of personal agency are plausibly associated with self-destructive behaviors. However, individuals do not normally operate in complete autonomy and instead operate within society, which should encourage an understanding of moral disengagement as principally agent-centered, but as also representing interaction within *triadic reciprocal causation*. Bandura (1986) explains triadic reciprocal causation as environmental, behavioral and personal factors related to reciprocal determinism that occurs in human activity. This is of course a social cognitivist perspective of human activity. Activation of the mechanisms of moral disengagement allow for individuals with similar moral standards to operate differently (Bandura, 1986, 2002). Although one might question the veracity of the moral standards held by

each agent, the propensity to disengage from one's own moral self-sanctions seems more likely in those who have a less complete understanding and sensitivity to moral judgment (Mensch, 2009).

The sociocognitive model of moral development (Bandura, 1999; Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 1996) theorizes that moral behavior can be viewed as a criterion of moral standards and moral self-sanctions. This sociocognitive model is different from the work of Piaget (1932) and Kohlbergian and neo-Kohlbergian models (Rest & Narvaez, 1999) that emphasize moral reasoning. The Bandurian model includes moral reasoning but focuses on self-regulatory mechanisms (Aquino & Reed, 2002). Although these two theoretical constructs surely overlap regarding certain affective, cognitive and conative aspects, the disengagement of moral self-sanctions through cognitive restructuring is of specific interest because of the cognitive restructuring process related to moral disengagement and the moral dissonance that can result if the restructuring is incomplete or ineffective. This ineffective or incomplete moral restructuring can then lead to self-destructive behavioral manifestations that seem to be at the heart of the U.S. Military's goals regarding psychological resilience.

#### Defining the Mechanisms of Moral Disengagement

It is important to note that although Bandura (1999, 2002) applies an agentic perspective to the concept of moral disengagement, the mechanisms are activated in a social context. Moral self-sanctions are not activated through some kind of unadulterated cognition apart from the world and the society in which one abides. Instead, the disengagement of moral self-sanctions occurs in a social setting of reciprocity. Next we shall explore various aspects of moral disengagement as described and defined by Bandura.

The first category of disengagement criteria focuses on the conduct itself. This is a cognitive reconstruction of the mind related to a former action that would be unpalatable and not congruent with the moral self-sanctions, yet which involves adapting a new moral structuring of the mind allowing the conduct to be justified. Hence, the first criterion is known as *moral justification*.

Moral justification focuses on the reconstruction of the behavior itself. This allows people to engage in harmful behavior and even atrocities by justifying to themselves the superiority of their own morality over another group or individual. Holy wars such as the Crusades, the assassinations of presidents and other leaders, and military action have all been presented to masses and then internalized as morally justifiable through the use of mechanisms of moral disengagement that focus on the behavior directed against others (Bandura, 2002).

The use of drones to kill adversaries in countries that are not at war with one another, and where the country is considered a sovereign nation by the United Nations, is described by some as targeted assassination, which the U.S. Government adamantly denies as this action would be counter to the laws of the United States. Still, this type of military action is often viewed as an explicit violation of U.S. and international law. In this case, the behavior of a government, a chain of command, and inevitably the pilot flying the drone who pulls the trigger to fire the missile, will likely morally account for such action in order to justify past and future engagements. So, moral justification can and often is observed as an argument provided by a higher authority, in this case the U.S. Government and U.S. Military command, which is then adopted by persons to morally justify their own behavioral manifestations. However, this should not be confused with *displacement of responsibility*, which will be diagnosed later. Bandura (2002) notes that moral justification can often be observed as the leadership within a society or organization attempts to mobilize the masses and convert socialized peoples into dedicated fighters or workers, through the use of such justification. Perhaps this can be seen nowhere more strikingly than in the propaganda campaigns of the Nazi regime under the leadership of Joseph Goebbels prior to and during the Second World War. By convincing the German masses through massive propaganda campaigns of their moral superiority over other races, nations, peoples and even the Church, the Nazis were able to turn a once dignified people into a den of ravenous wolves who were willing to give their lives for a terribly defective moral argument. This is moral justification at an extreme; however, this form of justification is common in everyday situations as we maneuver psychologically and physiologically through life.

*Euphemistic labeling* is another mechanism of moral disengagement that is affiliated primarily with the conduct itself. If one considers that language can shape patterns of thought and influence conation, it is not difficult to realize how words and the structure of sentences can act as a mechanism for the disengagement of moral self-sanctions. Language can be used to sanitize the actions of the individual, another person or a group and is often used to make immoral actions seem morally better, or perhaps even amoral (Bandura, 2002; Lutz, 1987).

The military establishment in general has been known to commonly use euphemistic language to what Gambino (1973) refers to as, sanitizing activities. For example, one phrase in common usage in the U.S. Military is that a unit intends to “seek out, close with, and destroy the enemy.” This is uncharacteristically direct language, specifically the word *destroy*, yet even here we can understand how the term *enemy* is used to vilify a person and sanction their destruction, and although here we focus on the language, we will discuss later the disengagement criteria that are also intended to dehumanize the object of the act. More commonly, words and phrases such as eliminating the threat, target of opportunity, surgical strikes, necessary force, collateral damage, and servicing the target are used to sanitize the morality of the act itself.

This type of action sanitization is often used by others and even, might we confess, ourselves in our daily lives. Politicians and lawyers, the sophists of our day, could perhaps be viewed as masters of language sanitization. Instead of using the term *execution*, they might instead prefer the term *capital punishment*. Of course, marketing and advertisement executives are often focused on the utilization of language that might encourage euphemistic labeling in their potential buyers. Words like organic, fat-free, pre-owned, can be used to detract or distract the consumer from what they are actually eating or buying. Companies use terms like transformation, career opportunities, organizational change, restructuring, lean and efficient, to describe layoffs, downsizing or selling off of company assets and staff. But it is not simply the use of euphemistic words and phrases that Bandura (2002) connects to moral disengagement, but also the intent of the language directed at the consideration of an act as less immoral, more moral or altogether amoral. Euphe-

mistic labeling is focused on the action. Religious organizations, pastors and preachers often utilize euphemistic labeling and might even attempt to defend such use as fostering some greater good. For example, people who have died are often referred to as being “promoted to Heaven.” Religious groups categorize themselves as fundamentalists or conservatives, often appealing to some superior moral position. Of course, most prominent and debatable euphemisms in religious organizations are normally tied to the word *truth*; with statements like, “Believe me here, I know and have seen what it is I thus defend, and it is surely the truth.”

Clear and concise language is often not used in euphemism. The passive voice is frequently used in euphemistic labeling as Bandura (2002) so aptly describes:

...a driver explaining to police how he managed to demolish a telephone pole, ‘The telephone pole was approaching. I was attempting to swerve out of its way, when it struck my front end’ (p. 105).

This is perhaps one of the most commonly utilized forms of moral disengagement, used to the extent it almost seems something of a norm in certain vocations such as politics and the legal professions, and it is perhaps interesting to note that many politicians are trained as lawyers. There is an ethical theme here that should be explored further, but this issue has been exposed as far back as Socrates, who personally disliked sophistry for perhaps the same morally ubiquitous reasons. This is not meant to avoid the use of the term *lie*, since in many instances evading forms of dialogue would be perceived as an outright lie. However, a focus on the sender or receiver, and thus the agent of the euphemism, is appropriate. An agent, utilizing this technique, whether sending the euphemism or receiving it, may in turn disengage from his or her own moral self-sanctions. Consider the action that an individual has taken or is about to take, or that an individual vicariously learns by viewing the action of another, but then proceeds to transmute into euphemism that is inevitably owned by the receiving agent. This agent-centered activity of transmutation is an emphasis of euphemistic labeling.

The same agent-focused attention is necessary to understand what Bandura (2002) means by *advantageous comparison*, which he describes quite aptly as the

“contrast principle” of moral disengagement (p. 105). Advantageous comparison can be understood as the comparison of something quite virtuous, to something rather corrupt. The agent creates a cognitive association between something that the agent views as morally right, for example an act of selflessness, with something morally wrong, the killing of innocent people. The agent is then able to construct a new paradigm regarding what the agent might call martyrdom through the use of suicide bombing, and what others might refer to as the destruction of innocent persons or simply murder.

A comparison of this sort in some way self-exonerates the agent’s action or at least makes it less reprehensible and internally pardons the agent from feelings of guilt, shame, or other self-condemnation. Like other aspects of moral disengagement that focus on the conduct, advantageous comparison typically utilizes a utilitarian or consequentialist view of morality to justify the conduct itself. Certain forms of virtue ethics and deontology might naturally be at odds with the underlying philosophical argument, but the important aspect here is that agentive cognitive restructuring does take place, even for example in the mind of an ardent Kantian, who for the moment has fallen away from their own dutiful moral self-sanctions.

Moral disengagement is not possible if there are no standards to disengage *from*, morally speaking. So, for example, if someone truly believes that the act of abortion is morally acceptable, say before the twelfth week of pregnancy, then there can only be moral disengagement following that standard. Of course this is often not the case over an extended period of time when individuals have time to reflect upon past actions and may change their moral reasoning on specific issues. Only basic moral principles are standards that seem to have veracity over long periods of time (Mensch, 2009). So, if the abortionist believes that killing a person is wrong, then they must justify that the fetus at a certain point is not a person; otherwise they jeopardize something like the fidelity of their own principle of respect for persons. They may also focus on the consequences of the action, an action of abortion that was initially deemed morally justifiable but later deemed as consequential and so focus on the ends, where, in this case, the death of a potential person may inevitably generate moral dissonance. This specific example is contentious but also sup-

ported by a great deal of research related to decisions of women to abort a fetus and follow-on cognitive dissonance (Major et. al., 2008).

Of course, Aristotle made similar morally justifiable arguments related to slaves and other non-persons, which illustrates the complexity of moral standards and how an agent's action can be exceedingly cognitively multifaceted, often employing many aspects of moral disengagement simultaneously. An initial agentic focus on moral action can undoubtedly turn into unintended moral consequences. We shall elaborate on the specific example of abortion further when we consider Bandura's concept of dehumanization as a criterion focused on the victim and utilized in the disengagement of moral self-sanctions. Simply put, Bandura recognizes the fallibility of the agent at the outset, and therefore the choosing of moral principles on the one hand, and the action the agent chooses to commit on the other. This dualistic perspective seems helpful in a broader understanding of the results of moral disengagement related to moral dissonance and self-destructive behaviors.

Here we have focused on action but have alluded to how closely action can be related morally to a consequence of the action. The use of moral justification to cognitively restructure morally reprehensible action is perhaps the most common and effective moral disengagement criteria. Moral justification, euphemistic labeling, and palliative comparison are all focused on the conduct itself by construing the conduct as alternatively morally acceptable in order to reduce or eliminate self-censure (Bandura, 2002). Next we shall focus on the disengagement of moral self-sanctions related closely to the conduct, but instead focus expressly on the consequences of action.

Following the action itself, Bandura (1999, 2002) next focuses on the consequences, or effects, of action. The first criterion we shall define is *displacement of responsibility*. Bandura describes this aspect of moral disengagement as minimizing or obfuscating the agentic role in the aftermath of action. If the agent believes in a legitimate authority and chooses to view their own actions as stemming from the authority's edicts, commands, orders or decrees, then by avoiding responsibility for the actions and the harm that is inflicted because of such action, the agent has displaced the responsibility for such action to another person or group.

Bandura notes that this specific type of moral disengagement has been used for the self-exoneration of gruesome acts of brutality, pointing to the Nazis and the Nuremberg trials where many who had been brought to trial claimed that the destruction of human life that they wrought was morally palatable because they were simply following orders. Many claimed that they had to follow orders because otherwise, they themselves would have been killed. Therefore, to avoid self-condemnation, it can be understood that the mechanism of self-exoneration was communicated to the court at Nuremberg in what Bandura (1999) refers to as displacement of responsibility.

However, Bandura (2002) notes that acceptance of moral responsibility is very rarely offered outright. Instead, authorities tend to sanction broader elements of action by sanctioning systems or institutions. This disguises the accountability of the consequences of individual actions so that it might not be inferred or assumed by the agent that there is a legitimate authority that is responsible and accepting of the blame for the destructive behavior. This is also problematic when the same authority is either unable or unwilling to accept the responsibility that the moral agent so freely places upon the authority, because the assigned authority is fundamentally unable to accept the burden of responsibility from an agentic perspective. In this form of moral disengagement, authority is relegated to a non-legitimate moral authority.

*Diffusion of responsibility* is slightly different than displacement of responsibility, although both mechanisms focus on the detrimental effects of action. Diffusion of responsibility has what might be considered something of a debilitating effect on moral agency in that it allows the agent to consider the role of *agent* to be less absolute. Bandura (1999, 2002) describes this as something akin to a transfusion of moral agency from the person/agent to the social context. The social context can be another person but can also be thought of as an institution such as a church, government, corporation, club, or any other organization that might hold influence over the agent. This may be viewed as something less than a complete moral displacement. The subdivision of tasks or duties in some grander structure is a hallmark of diffusion of responsibility. This division of labor allows the agent to



view the situation in a smaller context where the morality of the situation can be more easily distributed to other agents. Democratic or collective decision making may facilitate diffusion of responsibility because the agent can view their own action as only one vote in a larger process and therefore see themselves as not fully responsible for the decision of the group (Bandura, 2002).

The final aspect of moral disengagement, which is also focused on the ends, but also the conduct, is known as the *disregard or distortion of the consequences*. By minimizing the effects of an agent's action, one can more readily commit inhumanities without regard for self-sanction. In many cases this disregard can be due to a distancing from the consequences. Bandura (2002) uses the example of the famous picture of a young Vietnamese girl crying and running down a street with her clothing burned off by napalm as a catalyst to international policy change in the United States during the Vietnam War. This policy change occurred after the people of the United States were confronted with the consequences of the situation by viewing pictures and television news reports of the bombing campaigns in Vietnam. The people, confronted in this way, were appalled and then demanded changes in bombing policies. In this case it is interesting to look further at the perspective of the people of the United States. Did they really not know the consequences of massive, relatively inaccurate, bombing from fifty thousand feet, and the effect it would have on the population below? Certainly the people of the United States knew generally what happens when you drop thousands of tons of bombs from high altitude over populated areas. However, many U.S. citizens chose to disregard a certain conceptual consequentialist consideration of this action and were stirred from passivity only when they saw disturbing photographs like the one of the young naked Vietnamese girl.

We might also consider that this type of horrific action may be less condemnable in a time of opportunity for disregard or distortion of the consequences, as in the current era of technologically "smart" weapons. After all, consider that the further we remove the moral agent, in this case the soldier, from the consequences, the easier it might be for that agent to pull the trigger. A video-game type of warfare is currently being conducted via unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) and

other smart weapons that distance the moral agent from the effects of action. Yet, many people do not seem to wish to debate what this type of distanced action does to the moral agent sitting at the military computer flying the UAV and launching a *Hellfire* missile at selected targets. It seems somewhat easier for a soldier to disregard the consequences due to the distance in experiencing the aftermath of such actions. This is nothing necessarily new. The Nazis were forced to confront this issue when they created the mobile killing units known as the *Einsatzgruppen* (special duty units). The Commander of the Nazi (SS) units, Heinrich Himmler, was forced to abandon the idea of utilizing such groups for mass killings due to the proximity of the soldiers to the to their actions. This same regime later decided that types of gas were a more efficient way of disposing of people both in terms of the economic cost to the state and moral cost to the members of the *Einsatzgruppen*. In this case, the gas provided an opportunity for soldiers to distance themselves from the action of killing.

The disregard or distortion of consequences is often facilitated in organizations that have a hierarchical chain of command. An organization functioning under a hierarchical structure has a greater tendency for operant transmission of moral responsibility. This transmission of moral agency allows leaders to transfer, and at the same time disregard or distort, the moral consequences of action. This is not limited to the military, although Bandura (1999, 2002) often uses military or combat scenarios to highlight his point. The disregard or distortion of consequences can just as easily occur in corporations across the globe, where orders are passed from high levels and where the workers who carry out the orders are far removed from the original order but much closer in proximity to the consequences of the action.

The objects of action complete Bandura's (1999, 2002) model of moral disengagement. *Dehumanization* and *attribution of blame* focus immoral action on the victim of the action, where the victim is treated or thought of as something less than the moral agent of the action in the case of dehumanization, or otherwise by assigning responsibility to the victim undeservedly in the case of attribution of blame. Bandura (1992) points out that to humanize another is to perceive similar-

ty, which activates empathic reactions and benevolence in general. Conversely, it is easier to act with harshness upon another if we view them as less than human or less than the human we propose ourselves to be. This is apparent in the Nazis' treatment of the Jews prior to and during the Second World War. Posters of Jews being depicted as monsters, with distorted facial features and with images of devilish eyes and pointed ears were common, and intended to portray an entire race as evil, and something less than *human*. It was a demonization with the purpose of dehumanization. Of course this related to a strategic goal of top Nazi officials, to vilify and find scapegoats for the troubled German economy. But we do not need to turn to the Nazis to find daily examples of dehumanization. Prejudice, bigotry, racism, gender inequality, and inequality in general, all allude to the absolution of moral self-sanctions regarding acts or thoughts against those who are considered somehow not as worthy of respect as others.

The depriving of human qualities of one individual or group by another allows for deeds that can result in horrific ends. All too often it seems that the ends are not beforehand so obviously horrific, especially to the actors. In the corporate setting, it is assumed that people prefer to hire other people who are much like themselves. People desire to socialize with others who are similar in looks and who are likeminded in many respects, and this type of thinking can often lead to seeing others as lesser humans. At least, people with somewhat lesser qualities than the person doing the thinking, the moral agent. This type of dehumanization happens so frequently that laws have been established to protect classes of people in society who are at risk of being dehumanized by others, and of course we often refer to the result as some form of discrimination. Managers, and in this case the moral agent, that have hiring authority might not consider that they are dehumanizing an employment candidate until some future point when reflective growth might occur. Nevertheless, dehumanization can manifest itself in forms of discrimination and if this were not a prolific issue, there would be little will of the people in society to create laws to protect certain groups and classes of people. The United States and many other countries have deemed it necessary to take action to protect certain

groups from this kind of discrimination, such as with the Veteran's Employment Opportunity Act.<sup>8</sup>

The ability to relate to others in anonymous and impersonal ways seems to be more and more prevalent due to technological innovations that encourage a sort of interpersonal distance. Bandura (2002) maintains that impersonal social conditions are normally amenable to the process of dehumanization and that atrocities can occur because of these conditions. This surely seems to be the case as society in general moves closer to large techno-bureaucracies and impersonal communication, which tends to create a divide between the moral agent and the principled ethic of respect for persons. This divide is perhaps often at the heart of dehumanization as a moral self-sanctioning process.

#### *Neurologic Disorder or Moral Disengagement*

It is interesting to note that the disengagement of moral self-sanctions, if viewed as a sort of cognitive dissonance, might be considered a diagnosable disorder, according to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5). Patterns of self-destructive behavior might very well be diagnosed as some type of mental disorder, especially by those who choose to believe that *cognition* is something of a myth (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). For the purpose and clarity of this research, and without the intent of inciting too much in regard to the mind-body problem, it is assumed that although complicating neurological problems may exist and that medications and other factors may be involved, cognition does exist and that there are things we can understand about the cognitive process from belief to action that cannot, at least currently, be understood by neuroscience.

Whilst we might hold some expectation that neuroscience might teach us something about morality and moral judgment, we will focus on conation and the agent's behavioral manifestations and from these agentive aspects attempt to appreciate the underlying cognition. Actions will therefore not be conveniently reduced

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<sup>8</sup> Additional information retrieved on February 28, 2013 from <http://www.armycivilianservice.com/JOA/VEOA.pdf>

to some sort of mental disorder. Instead, we place the onus of moral responsibility upon the individual *self*. This is congruent with the meaning of agent-centered morality as described by the *Blackwell Dictionary of Western Philosophy*. Here the onus of consideration is placed not on the consequences of the act, such as in utilitarian ethics, and the view that moral obligation should be given primarily to the agent. While consequentialism should of course be considered in social ethics, this study intends to focus on the perception of the agent, and so admittedly operates within a relativistic model of the agent-centered moral domain.

Through the use of Bandura's (1999, 2002) construct that focuses on the disengagement of moral self-sanctions from an agentic perspective, we hope to better understand moral dissonance and resulting self-destructive behaviors by understanding the predictors of moral disengagement, and perhaps offer a more concise understanding of predictors related to specific disengagement criteria. Holding a relativistic position may be disconcerting to the moral absolutist, but here the intent is to strive to understand the mind of the individual moral agent whilst risking the assumption that the individual is rationally aware of his or her own moral sanctions. This allows us to assume the agent can effectually encounter both the disengagement of moral self-sanctions and associated cognitive dissonance.

Moore, Detert, Trevino, Baker, and Mayer (2011) suggest that moral disengagement is positively correlated with relativism due to the agent-centered nature of the cognitive process and that moral disengagement is negatively correlated with idealism. This is surely something worthy of consideration. Therefore, following the analysis of the data produced in this current project, this specific issue will be addressed in detail. Notwithstanding, if the agent is more of an idealist in that they believe they understand moral *rightness*, they will be less inclined to deviate from those principled ethical standards. The point here is that the relativistic nature of the agent-centered approach is necessary in order to comprehend the possible predictors to moral disengagement. However, Moore et al. allude to an important point. The disengagement of self-sanctions is in essence relativistic due to the individualistic, or self, focus of this form of assessment, and this holds for even the most idealistic of agents who might seem less inclined to navigate the intricacies of

any particular moral dilemma by simply appealing to a larger idealistic approach. Still, individually held idealism does not imply that the moral dilemma does not exist. This form of ethical idealism simply suggests that the moral dilemma might be disengaged from action by way of different moral lenses, dependent upon the individual's moral schema. Otherwise we must assume that a comprehensive and consistent idealism exists in the ethical practice of each moral agent, which is inconsistent with an agentic moral perspective free from the imposition of prescriptive ethics. Perhaps this is theoretically possible, although that is debatable because the existence of any moral dilemma would be abolished. This is arguably possible for a god, but it is irrational to assume in the study of human beings.

Since this research is focused on certain predictors related to moral disengagement, including hope for the future, ability to flourish in the present, and spiritual/religious beliefs, it is prudent that we focus on these aspects as possible predictors to the propensity to disengage morally, and not be mired in debate on the rightness or wrongness of the individual's moral schema. Else, we are doomed to be reduced to conjecture over the rightness of the act itself, thereby deviating from the emphasis on the moral agent. This focus on agency does not make the ethical judgment irrelevant to this research, but it does attempt to make a clear distinction between the moral schema of the agent and the ethics and values of the culture. This issue of ethical judgment should certainly be questioned, perhaps in conjunction with a sort of situational ethics, although there should be caution regarding the danger of prescriptively assigning such judgment. Accordingly, this research adopts an initial position in which the individual is a rational agent able to construct a moral schema, as well as a position that suggests the agent is capable of disengaging from this personal moral schema, thus avoiding guilt or self-condemnation. We also do not assume that the moral dilemma will never re-present itself to the agent in a different manner, with perhaps different unique outcomes, as the agent better defines and comes to know his or her own morality.

### *Measuring the Propensity to Morally Disengage*

The propensity to morally disengage has been linked to a broad range of unethical behaviors and over the past two decades there has been a growing interest in measuring this propensity, which is based on Bandura's (1986) theoretical construct related to self-regulation, and which has been commonly referred to as an agentic perspective. This agentic perspective has allowed researchers to develop a measure of the propensity to disengage from one's own moral self-sanctions, which is associated with a propensity for unethical behavior in general (Moore et al., 2011).

Following Bandura's general conceptualization of moral disengagement as associated with various mechanisms that form tendencies and manifest in individuals as traits, Moore et al. (2011) explored a systematic propensity to morally disengage by developing and validating a state trait test. This measure of the propensity to disengage from one's own moral self-sanctions also serves as a predictor of one's propensity to conduct unethical organizational behavior relative to other constructs that "share common conceptual space" (p. 1237). Similarly, our research assumes that certain forms of religious participation and spiritual beliefs, the ability to psychologically flourish and be positive in the present, and the level of hope that one holds for the future, share this "common conceptual space" and therefore serve as predictors for moral disengagement and relevant immoral conduct, such as unethical professional behavior and self-destructive behaviors (p. 1237).

### *Spiritual Fitness as Moral Development*

Osran, Smee, Sreenivasan and Weinberger (2010) connect the spiritual domain with the moral domain by elucidating an understanding of moral meaning in the context of spirituality that may lead to personal growth. This seems to be the ultimate goal of the notion of spiritual fitness in the U.S. Military and over the past decade as the military has attempted to strengthen the spiritual resiliency of its servicemembers, many of whom have experienced consequences related to protracted warfare. As noted earlier, the U.S. Military has changed what it means by spiritual fitness and its relation to religion since legal challenges began in 2009. The larger

ethical aspects of this challenge seem somewhat irrelevant to this research as they focus on matters of politics and not matters of science. Instead of seeking some sort of constitutional agreement, this research pursues theoretical conduits that might provide new and perhaps important connections between spiritual fitness and moral development. Additionally, since spiritual fitness proposes the importance of an ability to cope with and enjoy life, spiritual fitness is also logically correlated to a propensity for moral action. In other words, the individual will *care* about the significance of their actions and choose to pursue actions that are self-sanctioned. If this assessment is accurate, then there should be a coherent connection between moral disengagement and spiritual fitness.



## **Chapter 4 – Predicting Moral Disengagement**

The empirical portion of our project was conducted with two important questions in mind. First, we wanted to understand if we could predict the disengagement of moral self-sanctions by considering psychological constructs related to flourishing, religiosity and hope. We next asked why, assuming support for our first question, these relationships might exist and what can be done to assist in influencing these psychological factors and lessen a propensity for moral disengagement. As noted earlier, the literature supports several possibilities for answering the primary research question, including suggestions that religiosity may have a reciprocal relationship with such things as future hope and current flourishing. Furthermore, if Bandura's cognitive and behavioral ideas are correct, we should be able to predict someone's propensity for the disengagement of moral self-sanctions by way of an understanding of other cognitive constructs. The literature also supports the notion that there should be some significant correlation between one's current positive mental state described as flourishing, and one's hope about the future.

Finally, and as examined in earlier chapters, the United States Military is operating under an assumption that one's spiritual state, which includes both a humanistic spiritual aspect and religiosity, has an effect on the well-being of military members and their families. In an attempt to narrow this definition to something more operationalizable, the objective components of what is most likely intended by spirituality are considered throughout the remaining chapters, including participative religious activities. The intent here is that if we narrow the broader definition now used to encompass the meaning of spirituality by initially focusing on behavioral activities, perhaps we can continue to improve this theory in the future with supportable evidence. Therefore, we utilize an objective measure of what is meant by spirituality by including objective religious activities, both organized and non-organized activities, as well as views regarding spiritual beliefs.

The research hypotheses are logically presented in the order that they were developed. They were designed to assist in better understanding certain aspects of

religion and spirituality, as well as the psychological notions of hope and flourishing, and whether these are important to consider in regards to one's propensity to disengage from one's own moral self-sanctions. Furthermore, these hypotheses allow us to appreciate certain elements of human functioning supported by the literature that will help us better understand a propensity for moral disengagement.

Our second research question stirs us to pursue a philosophical inquiry into the meaning of certain language and also intends to help us better understand the theoretical implications related to inconsistencies in meaning. In an attempt to provide pragmatic and actionable solutions, this question is explored with the prospect of offering new insight into particular challenges that may result from the implementation of programmatic religiosity or spirituality within intentionally pluralistic societies such as those in the United States Military.

### **Research Question and Hypotheses**

Understanding that the disengagement of moral self-sanctions can lead to self-destructive behaviors, and that the practice of religion is important for many who utilize such core beliefs as the foundation of their moral beliefs, and the aspects of psychological resilience within the Comprehensive Soldier Fitness program (specifically the concepts of hope for the future and ability to flourish in the present), we can thus theoretically connect the aspects of belief to action.

If we can better understand predictors that affect an increase in the propensity to morally disengage from one's own self-sanctions, while understanding that a propensity for moral disengagement can lead to self-destructive behaviors which are a fundamental focus of resiliency in the Comprehensive Soldier Fitness Program, then it seems that the U.S. Military would naturally consider such evidence as valuable to their mission of making servicemembers more psychologically resilient. At the conclusion of chapter 2 we asked the following question; can we predict the disengagement of moral self-sanctions by understanding one's perceived outlook for the future, known as hope, one's current perceptions about the present, known as flourishing, and one's perceived or demonstrated religious beliefs, and if

so, how does this inform programmatic interventions aimed at sustained behavioral change in general, and specifically the U.S. Military's Comprehensive Soldier Fitness Program and its derivatives? The first two predictors encompass important aspects of psychological resiliency currently utilized in Comprehensive Soldier Fitness whilst the other aspects related to religion might be considered evidence of spiritual belief through self-perception and the practice of religion. We are now able to restate the research question more precisely.

Restated RQ<sub>1</sub>: Can the psychological constructs of *flourishing*, *hope* and *religion* assist in understanding a propensity for individuals to disengage from their own moral self-sanctions, leading to possible self-destructive behaviors?

The first hypothesis was designed to test the more behavioral aspects of *flourishing* (F), *organizational religious activities* (ORA) and *non-organizational religious activities* (NORA) and the more cognitive aspects of psychological *hope* (H) and *intrinsic religiosity* (IR) proposed in the model.

H<sub>1</sub>: The constructs of *Flourishing* (F), *Hope* (H), and *Religion* (ORA+NORA+IR) significantly predict one's propensity for *Moral Disengagement* (MD).

$$\hat{Y}[\text{MD}_1] = b_0 + b_1H + b_2F + b_3R$$

As a derivative of the first hypothesis, the second focuses more on the cognitive aspects of *hope* (H) and *intrinsic religiosity* (IR) proposed in our model. These two cognitive components seem to be more theoretically aligned with the propensity for the disengagement of moral self-sanctions. Thus, there is stronger theoretical support for the second hypothesis.

H<sub>2</sub>: The constructs of *Hope* (H) and *Intrinsic Religiosity* (IR) significantly predict the propensity for *Moral Disengagement* (MD).

$$\hat{Y}[\text{MD}_2] = b_0 + b_1H + b_2IR$$

Finally, if a connection between religion and moral disengagement can be empirically established by testing H<sub>1</sub> and H<sub>2</sub>, it is important to consider the following pragmatic question related to challenges faced by this particular population of military servicemembers:

RQ<sub>2</sub>: What can be done to facilitate the free and ethical practice of religion and spirituality, as part of the larger understanding of soldier fitness, in the pluralistic culture of the United States Military?

### **Methodology and Measures**

A quantitative non-experimental approach was utilized to understand the first research question and the hypotheses. The methodology used to assist in understanding H<sub>1</sub> and H<sub>2</sub> centered on an empirical investigation. An instrument was constructed from groups of items utilized in previously validated instruments. The sub-instruments remained intact within the larger measure and the sequencing of control variables and sub-instruments was screened for response bias. The items from each predicate construct were presented intact and in the order used in previous research studies so as not to jeopardize the integrity of the amalgamated instrument. The overall sequence of items presented to respondents was examined to minimize order bias.

A narrative inquiry and philosophical exploration is offered in later chapters in an attempt to better understand the nature of issues brought to light from the empirical exploration that follows.

### *Empirical Exploration of the Data*

The empirical portion of this study of U.S. Military Combat Veterans centers on the data collected by utilizing the crafted instrument, which shall be referred to as the Flourishing, Future Hope, Religion and Moral Disengagement Scale (FHRMD). The scale was designed by utilizing the instruments created by Moore, Detert, Trvino, Baker and Mayer (2011) known as the *Propensity to Morally Disengage Scale* [ $\alpha = .70 - .90$ ], the *Adult Hope Scale* [ $\alpha = .72 - .88$ ], developed by Snyder, Harris, Anderson, Holleran, Irving, Sigmon (1991), the *Flourishing Scale* [ $\alpha = .72 - .88$ ], which measures additional aspects related to positive psychology (Diener & Diener, 2009), and the *Duke University Religion*

*Index* [ $\alpha = .78 - .91$ ] will measure aspects of organized, non-organized and intrinsic religiosity (Koenig & Büssing, 2010).

These four instruments were provided to each respondent utilizing an online survey tool and along with demographic questions that would allow for robust respondent analysis regarding the relationship between each construct and a combination of the constructs with specific controls for extraneous variables.<sup>1</sup> These constructs were then analyzed to investigate RQ<sub>1</sub> generally, and to test H<sub>1</sub> and H<sub>2</sub> specifically. The study was focused on investigating whether participation in religious activities, coupled with aspects of psychological flourishing and hope, has a significant impact on the predictability of the propensity for moral disengagement.

Moore et al. (2011) suggest that a variety of undesirable behaviors are interconnected to someone's propensity to disengage from their own moral self-sanctions and that this relationship may be viewed as correlative and reciprocal in nature. In order to better understand the relationship between self-destructive behaviors, this research aims to better understand certain characteristics that may increase or decrease one's propensity to morally disengage from self-sanctions. The aspects of one's hope for the future (Snyder et al., 1991), one's ability to flourish with positive feelings and a general sense of well-being (Diener et al., 2010), and one's propensity to engage in religious activity (Koenig & Büssing, 2010), all have a demonstrated tertiary connectivity to personal health and well-being, both physiological and psychological. These aspects of human functioning have been suspected of affecting moral disengagement in general (Bandura 1996, 1999, 2002). This research explores this notion to investigate if the propensity to disengage from one's own moral self-sanctions is predictable by understanding the specified aforementioned aspects of human functioning and cognition. Research suggests that it is important to explore and better understand the cognitive processes that lead to unethical behavior (Tenbrunsel & Messick, 1999; Tenbrunsel & Smith-Crow, 2008). This literature, considered in the context of moral

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix A and C.

disengagement, suggests that the propensity to disengage from one's own moral self-sanctions can be predicted by an understanding of such things as hope and spirituality.

This research used a purposeful sample of combat veterans (N>50) in order to conduct a preliminary exploration of the aforementioned hypotheses. The respondents in this study were veterans of the U.S. Military's conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq (2001-present).

*Data collection.* Data were collected using the *LimeSurvey* tool provided by the University of Exeter. The survey was constructed using several sub-surveys identified as providing meaningful measurable independent variable data, those being the *Hope Scale*, *Flourishing Scale*, and the *Duke University Religion Index*. Dependent variable data were collected within the overall survey by including all items from the *Propensity to Morally Disengage Scale*. Several control questions were added to complete the survey and the final survey was provided to several researchers at the University of Exeter and Penn State University for pilot testing. Accordingly, adjustments were made before the final survey was released. Survey instruments were distributed electronically through the link provided by *LimeSurvey* to specific U.S. Military units and servicemembers based on knowledge of their recent combat experience. The majority of the sample had returned from combat within 6 months of taking the survey.

A total of (N=62) surveys were initially collected. Surveys that were found to be incomplete were removed from the final data set prior to analysis with a resulting total of (N=50). The raw data were transcribed to SPSS and each respondent questionnaire was scrutinized for anomalies in the data. Descriptive statistics were analyzed prior to performing inferential multivariate analysis using SPSS.

Respondents were notified that they were free to omit any response or stop the survey at any point during the test, which is one likely reason for the relatively large number of incomplete surveys. Each respondent received a notification upon completion of the survey with information provided should they have any follow-up questions for the research team. No follow-up questions were received.

*Sampling strategy.* In order to add controls to the non-experimental design, the decision was made to risk creating potential external validity issues by pursuing more stable overall internal validity. To accomplish a high level of confidence in the analysis, a purposeful sample was utilized, which consisted almost exclusively of the commando type of combat veterans, who had very recently returned from Afghanistan or Iraq, most within 6 months of responding to the survey. The intent of the sampling strategy was to focus on commando-type personnel in order that a generalization may be inferred to the larger U.S. Military commando population. This population would include units that tend to rotate officers and non-commissioned officers frequently, such as the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division, the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division, the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division, and the 75<sup>th</sup> Ranger Regiment. These units represent the bulk of the U.S. Army's 18<sup>th</sup> Airborne Corps.

*Statistical and quantitative analysis.* Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS version 17.0 and translated into appropriate tables. The original data will be maintained in an original version for a minimum of 3 years. Certain variables such as *hope* (H), *intrinsic religiosity* (IR) and *flourishing* were analyzed for multicollinearity, which was not discovered. Regression analysis was conducted as described in the hypotheses. After initial analysis, attention was focused on the predictor variables of *hope* (H) and *intrinsic religiosity* (IR), which were both found to significantly predict a propensity for *moral disengagement* (MD). Variables to measure *flourishing* (F) such as relationships, self-esteem, purpose and optimism were not found to be statistically significant. *Organizational religious activity* (ORA), such as attending church services, and *non-organizational religious activity* (NORA), such as prayer or meditation, were also not statistically significant in predicting a propensity for *moral disengagement* (MD).

#### *Narrative Research Leading to Philosophical Investigation*

The phenomena under consideration are complex and closely related to theory in moral psychology and ethics. Therefore, it was deemed profitable to conduct additional inquiry based on relevant literature in order that a more complete perspective and understanding of the data might be obtained. In later

chapters, an application of philosophical methods will allow the exploration of ethical-related problems and possible solutions beyond the descriptive.



## Presentation of Empirical Data Results

This section presents quantitative analysis of each hypothesis respectively. However, it is important to note that The Duke University Religion Index (DU-REL) identifies three aspects of religion for measure. The first religious subscale is referred to as *organizational religious activity* (ORA) and measures the frequency of attendance at religious services. The second religious subscale *non-organizational religious activity* (NORA) measures the frequency of private religious activities. Both of these aspects were *not* found to be statistically significant when attempting to predict moral disengagement. The third religious subscale was found to be significant in predicting moral disengagement and is described by Koenig and Büssing (2010) as a measure of *intrinsic religiosity* (IR) or subjective religiosity. Koenig and Büssing (2010) warn against combining these three measures in multivariate analysis due to problems with multicollinearity. Therefore, each of the subscales was analyzed separately and only intrinsic religiosity was found to provide significant results. Intrinsic religiosity assesses the degree of personal religious commitment or motivation and the “pursuit of religion as an end in itself”, which are viewed as primary considerations in answering important life questions and as preeminent to other needs. An individual with high IR attempts to bring harmony between religious beliefs and actions more than someone with low IR (Koenig & Büssing, 2010, p. 80).

Additionally, controls for servicemembers’ military rank, PTSD, and number of multiple deployments were found to be statistically insignificant. These specific controls were selected due to the possibility of high correlation with other variables, and although this was found not to be the case, it seems prudent to continue to consider these particular controls in related future research.

### Statistical Tests of Hypotheses

Hypotheses testing is presented below. In order to answer H<sub>1</sub> and H<sub>2</sub>, predictor and criterion variables were analyzed using bivariate and multivariate regression analysis in SPSS. Basic regression is utilized for each hypothesis in order to minimize the possibility of oversimplification and model bias. Although some of

the analysis may seem redundant, it is important to consider each of the hypotheses as presented in order to more fully understand the results.

H<sub>1</sub>: The constructs of Hope (H), *Flourishing* (F) and *Religiosity* (R) significantly predict a propensity for *Moral Disengagement* (MD).

$$\hat{Y}[MD_1] = b_0 + b_1H + b_2F + b_3R$$

Based on H<sub>1</sub>, a multiple linear regression was calculated to predict a propensity for *moral disengagement* based on levels of hope, flourishing and religion. Religion was analyzed as three independent variables. Preliminary analyses were performed to ensure against violations of assumptions of normality, linearity and multicollinearity. A significant regression equation was found ( $F(5, 44) = 3.24, p = .014$ ), with an  $R^2$  of .27 and adjusted  $R^2$  of .19. Although we cannot reject H<sup>1</sup>, the independent variables of *flourishing* (F), *organizational religious activity* (ORA), and *non-organizational religious activity* (NORA) were not significant.

Table 4

*Regression Analysis for Effects of Hope (H), Flourishing (F) and Religion (ORA, NORA, IR) on Moral Disengagement (MD), (N = 50)*

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$
Hope	-1.02	.401	-.341*
Flourishing	-.214	2.704	.084
Organizational Religious Activities	.990	.366	.716
Non-Organizational Religious Activities	.943	2.148	.085
Intrinsic Religiosity	-2.128	1.016	-.459*

Note.  $R^2 = .261$  ( $p < .05$ ).

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

Table 4 illustrates the results for H<sub>1</sub>, which indicates that *hope* (H) and *intrinsic religiosity* (IR) are significant ( $p < .05$ ) predictors of the propensity for *moral disengagement* (MD).

H<sub>2</sub>: The constructs of Hope (H) and Intrinsic Religiosity (IR) significantly predict a propensity for Moral Disengagement (MD).

$$\hat{Y}[\text{MD}_3] = b_0 + b_1H + b_2\text{IR}$$

Based on H<sub>2</sub>, A multiple linear regression was calculated to predict participants' propensity for moral disengagement based on their levels of hope, and intrinsic religiosity. Preliminary analyses were performed to ensure against

violations of assumptions of normality, linearity and multicollinearity. A significant regression equation was found ( $F(2, 47) = 8.23, p = .001$ ), with an  $R^2$  of .26 and adjusted  $R^2$  of .23.

Table 5

*Regression Analysis for Effects of Hope (H) and Intrinsic Religiosity (IR) on Moral Disengagement (MD), (N = 50)*

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$
Hope	-1.025	.376	-.344**
Intrinsic Religiosity	-1.626	.584	-.350**

*Note.*  $R^2 = .259$  ( $p < .05$ ).

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

Table 5 illustrates the results for  $H_2$ , which indicate that *hope* (H) and *intrinsic religiosity* (IR) are significant ( $p < .05$ ) predictors of the propensity for *moral disengagement* (MD). The independent variables H and IR account for approximately 23% of the variation in the dependent variable MD. We thus fail to reject  $H_2$  due to the significance of each independent variable and the  $R^2$  indicating that H and IR can in fact predict significant and substantial variation in MD. Specifically, the results indicate that H and IR are negatively related to MD, so we can suggest that greater *hope* (H) and *intrinsic religiosity* (IR) lead to a lower propensity for the disengagement of moral self-sanctions. These results support the basic model developed in conjunction with the research question presented in Figure 2. This is a revision of Figure 1 that reflects a more accurate and empirically supported representation of an understanding regarding the basic research question and is presented in Figure 5.

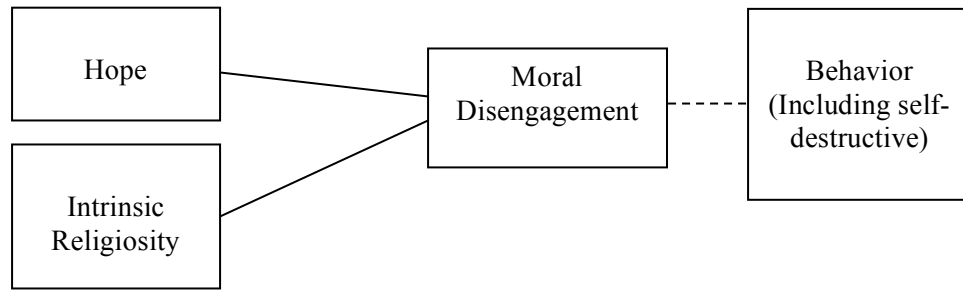


Figure 4. Revised model of hope, intrinsic religiosity, moral disengagement and self-destructive behavior.

### Summary of Statistical Analysis

An analysis of the data from this study reveals that the concept of flourishing based on theories of psychological well-being is not significant in predicting a propensity for the disengagement of moral self-sanctions. The *Flourishing Scale* focuses six items on social relationships, one item on purpose and meaning, and one item on engagement and interest in activities. The concept of flourishing in this study is operationalized by a respondent's self-perceived success in areas such as relationships, self-esteem, purpose, and optimism although the social relationship aspect is emphasized (Diener et al., 2010).

The particular operationalization of flourishing in this study may be of further interest to researchers. Although flourishing was not supported as a statistically significant construct in this study, a more intense examination regarding the *purpose* aspect of flourishing may be warranted, as the more general construct that includes social capital and humanistic psychological components may convolute a possible relationship. The flourishing construct in this study only utilizes one item out of eight that explores a more intrinsic aspect of well-being; this being the item related to assessing a perception of present purpose. It is therefore possible that the focus on present purpose in these respondents might overshadow a more general lifelong form of purpose and might help begin to explain why the concept of *hope* was significant whilst the concept of flourishing was not. Of course, this is inferring a great deal from the data and is speculative. Therefore, more research should be conducted to parse out issues related to hope, purpose and a propensity for moral disengagement. It is important to understand the possibility of psychological flour-

ishing as being vital to well-being. Regardless, due to the results of this empirical study, a central focus on the aspects of hope and intrinsic religiosity is considered most prudent for the purposes of this project, and since psychological flourishing as measured herein did not demonstrate significant results ( $p > .05$ ) in predicting the disengagement of moral self-sanctions, it is better to focus on those aspects of the human condition that are presently supported.

*Hope* ( $M = 68.6$ ,  $SD = 6.752$ ) and *intrinsic religiosity* ( $M = 9.04$ ,  $SD = 4.342$ ) were found to be statistically significant ( $p < .01$ ) and were able to account for approximately 23% of the variation in (MD) someone's propensity to disengage from their own moral self-sanctions ( $M = 52.84$ ,  $SD = 20.145$ ). While it is arguable that the total predictive power of the model is relatively low, one must consider the relative complexity of the *moral disengagement* (MD) construct. Additionally, we should consider that the relatively low sample size ( $N = 50$ ) might very well impact the  $R^2$  result and that an increase in sample size could significantly impact the model's predictive power. This is the reason for an emphasis on continuing research. The discovery that moral disengagement can be predicted with such high confidence, whilst accounting for a quarter of the variation in such a complex cognitive model, is surely noteworthy and warrants a more thorough investigation.

For these reasons, we shall presently explore hope as related to moral disengagement, followed by an examination of intrinsic religiosity as related to moral disengagement. The following chapters are an attempt at a better appreciation of the promising significance of these relationships.

### **Limitations to Design**

The survey instrument utilized in this research includes some demographic questions that have not been independently verified, although many of the demographic questions are commonly utilized as control questions in similar survey instruments. Additionally, while it may be prudent to include certain demographic items as predictor variables, any such use should be considered exploratory until they can be independently verified. Furthermore any statistical

interpretation and inference, although supported by a review of the literature, are intended simply to encourage further research.

The generalizability of any exploratory study should be taken into consideration and although an argument could be made that results of this current project might be generalizable to similar combat veterans from other wars, different demographics, or other countries, this ought not to be assumed. Until more research is conducted utilizing the survey instrument constructed in this research study, the generalizability to larger or otherwise dissimilar populations should be advanced with scrutiny.

Finally, the nature of the non-experimental methodology allows for interesting exploration in regards to moral issues. However, moral assumptions and philosophical ethical investigation may not be independently verifiable, and surely not empirically. Therefore, examination in later chapters will be conducted as cognizant of this challenge and attempt to investigate several incommensurable philosophical perspectives. The particularly multifaceted nature of the philosophical investigation in later chapters may be more difficult to empirically support, but may also be most useful to those who may utilize this research in a pragmatic manner. Consequently, the chief purpose of this research should be considered exploratory with the objective of encouraging continued empirical and philosophical investigation. It is hoped that the further exploration of this and new data, as well as additional philosophical inquiry related to such data, will be conducted in the future with fewer limitations and constraints.

### **Transitioning to a Better Understanding of the Relationship between Hope, Intrinsic Religiosity and Moral Disengagement**

Thus far, we have empirically determined that hope and intrinsic religiosity are exceedingly important if we are to develop a complete understanding of the disengagement of moral self-sanctions. However, these operationalizable definitions of hope and intrinsic religiosity are limiting. In our empirical study we incorporate well-known, valid and reliable psychometric instruments in order that we might have a more empirically supportable initial understanding of hope and

religiosity. We have directly incorporated Snyder's (2002) survey instrument to help us understand hope in a more generalizable manner. This sort of hope is arguably limited, but we will address these theoretical limitations by exploring varying philosophical assumptions of identifiably different groups within the U.S. Military Community. Yet, we recognize the limitations of this form of inquiry due to the generally positivistic tradition of psychology and that Snyder's investigation of hope is limited by this tradition. However, Snyder's conception of hope is the most developed and respected within the positivist psychological tradition and his theory allow us to explore hope in relation to moral disengagement in a unique and substantive way.

In the same manner, we chose to utilize the Duke University Religiosity Index via research presented by Koenig and Büssing (2010) to sort out three aspects of religiosity that have been identified by commanders and chaplains as evident in the U.S. Military context, and are venerated to varying degrees as helpful to psychological well-being, including a more public form of religiosity, such as church-going, a more private form of religiosity such as private prayer, and finally an aspect of religiosity focused on one's belief in the power of the divine.

In order to fully appreciate the implications of these relationships, we must explore a more comprehensive examination of hope and intrinsic religiosity, beyond what is currently implicit in positive psychology. If we can better understand these relationships, we not only expand theoretical suppositions, we assist in praxis related to the lessening of moral disengagement and its more pragmatic association with important organizational contexts such as the development of professional ethics. Of course, we make a special effort to speak to the military environment. Military chaplains, commanders and leaders in general will profit from this form of philosophical inquiry. We therefore go to great lengths to assist in bringing theory to practice by explicating the nuances of varying conceptions of hope and intrinsic religiosity in the following chapters.

Furthermore, we attempt to employ pragmatism to some extent in order that we might provide perspective and draw conclusions from our research that should be immediately helpful to the U.S. Military, and perhaps other organizations with



similar conditions and difficulties related to moral disengagement and self-destructive behaviors, such as civilian police forces or private military organizations. We have supported a connection between the disengagement of moral self-sanctions and self-destructive behaviors. Furthermore, we have empirically supported the connection between hope and intrinsic religiosity, which we will now investigate from the various philosophical perspectives identified as pertinent to the U.S. Military Establishment.

## Chapter 5 – Hope and Moral Disengagement

In the story of *The Great Knock* by C.S. Lewis, Lewis meets his new teacher, Kirk, whom he refers to as *The Great Knock*. On a spring day at Bookham, as they walk to their destination, Lewis attempts to make conversation, saying that he is surprised at the ‘scenery’ of Surrey; that it is “much ‘wilder’ than I had expected.” The Knock immediately replies: “Stop!...what do you mean by ‘wildness’ and what grounds had you for not expecting it?” Finally, after what turns into quite a teaching moment, the story continues with the Knock saying, “Do you see, then...that your remark was meaningless?”

Having analyzed my terms, Kirk was proceeding to deal with my proposition as a whole. On what had I based (but pronounced it baized) my expectations about the Flora and Geology of Surrey? Was it maps, or photographs, or books? I could produce none. It had, heaven help me, never occurred to me that what I called my thoughts needed to be “*based*” on anything. Kirk once more drew a conclusion without the slightest sign of emotion, but equally without the slightest concession to what I thought good manners: “Do you now see, then, that you had no right to have any opinion whatever on the subject” (Lewis, 1998, p. 75).

In this chapter, we take this lesson about understanding the foundations and implications of our assumptions from the *The Great Knock* and apply it in an attempt to avoid straightforward assumptions regarding what is meant by certain terminology. We do not assume two individuals hold the same meaning either between themselves or that we have otherwise operationalized to this point in our study. Our intention is to allow for a more flexible account of the meaning of critical terms in our study, notably hope and moral disengagement, and of the relationship(s) between these terms in the worldview(s) of respondents. This said, it remains necessary to disambiguate what is meant by hope in our study, in order to discuss its relationship with moral disengagement. Broadly speaking, we move from a relatively unsophisticated, everyday understanding of hope to more complex variants, first considering the etymology of the word hope and then purposely differentiating it from terms that are often utilized to define it which, although perhaps closely associated, are not synonymous. We include an explanation of the differ-

ence between hope, optimism and self-efficacy related to Snyder (2002) and Snyder, Irving & Anderson (1991) which will allow us to confront the major purpose of this chapter, namely to demonstrate that Snyder's (2002) conception of hope is incomplete in that it treats religious thoughts as merely emotion, thereby failing to take into account the consequences of Bandura's (1986, 1999) notion of moral disengagement and how this affects his more inclusive conception of hope. Bandura's treatment enables a sort of authentic hope to be distinguished from a sort of morally disengaged false hope.

We defend several crucial claims in this chapter. First, we aim to extend Snyder's (2002) more empirically oriented hope construct to incorporate aspects of religious belief and moral processes as interconnected rational functions. Also, we contend that the selective activation of psychological mechanisms of moral disengagement affects various aspects of hope, making hope something other than an agentively virtuous hope. Specifically, the claim is that hope can be affected by the cognitive restructuring of moral sanctions caused by things such as moral justification, euphemistic labeling, and advantageous comparison; or, if the outcome affects another agent, dehumanization and attribution of blame. Moral disengagement may also directly influence the agency of hope by reducing the moral fidelity of that agency by way of diffusion or displacement of responsibility. Agents may activate psychosocial maneuvers that allow for the disengagement of self-sanctions leading to the creation and utilization of pathways of hope that are inconsistent with the agent's moral schema (Bandura, 1999, 2015; Snyder, 2002).

We also assert that emotions related to hope can have the effect of both strengthening or weakening self-regulatory mechanisms related to moral agency and assist or detract from the agent's ability to hope in accord with their own moral standards. Affect, or the experience of emotion, is something distinguishable from but also essentially connected to moral cognition and moral conation, and the association is complicated by the reciprocal relations between the aspects of moral cognition, moral conation and emotion. Affective influencers bear upon the agent's ability to proactively refrain from hope that is contrary to their own moral self-

sanctions and can also proactively encourage hope that is consistent with the agent's moral schema (Bandura, 1996; Snyder 2002).

Snyder, Irving, & Anderson's (1991) definition of hope found in Snyder (2002) states: "Hope is a positive motivational state that is based on an interactively derived sense of successful, (a) agency (goal directed energy), and (b) pathways (planning to meet goals)"; however, it does not account for the prospect of hope that is tainted by the disengagement of moral self-sanctions (p. 250). Notice the focus of hope on positive motivation related to specific goals. Motivation can include moral disengagement and still be perceived, at least as a psychological state, as positive. Hope is also different from optimism in that hope, as understood by Snyder, Irving & Anderson (1991) referred to specific goals whereas optimism normally refers to something of a more general outlook on life and the future. Moral disengagement can affect these specific goals as well as pathway and agency thoughts related to hope. Goals, for Snyder et al., are cognitive components of hope that provide a "target" for mental energy (p. 250). These goals can be conceptualized in many ways and Snyder et al. do not restrict goals to some sort of mental imaging. This is important in that it allows individual agents to think about specific goals without necessarily having a picture or image that relates to some sort of communicative aspect of the goal. For Snyder et al. goals are not bound to mental images and are also not temporally restricted to the short term but instead include both short and long-term goals. Long-term goals may be initially confused with something more akin to optimism, but for Snyder, optimism would lack an aspect of specificity that provides the objective of pathways and motivation. The more vague the target or goal, the less likely the individual is to be able to create pathways and the more difficult it is for the individual to "warrant sustained consciousness" (p. 250). This criterion seems to offer a fairly clear division between hope and optimism.

The inclusion of specific goals for Snyder's (2002) conception of hope should also be considered in relation to Bandura's (1999, 2015) criteria for the disengagement of moral self-sanctions. First, we might consider that a goal is not necessarily or perhaps universally moral under Snyder's paradigm, but could be

agentively considered as such. Specifically, the impact that a more moral goal might have on hope, as opposed to a more immoral goal, is a factor that it is important to consider. Remember here that Bandura and Snyder both provide agentive perspectives whereby the agent is essentially responsible for both the goal itself and the morality of the goal. Yet, for present purposes, these agentively oriented constructs do not restrict us from applying and determining implications related to an interpersonal relational association.

Snyder (2002) does distinguish between positive and negative goal outcomes, which are connected to pathways thoughts, agency thoughts and also a cognitive process related to the value of the outcome, all of which could have moral associations. Figure 6 helps to clarify the effect that moral disengagement can have on Snyder's hope model. Snyder's emotional feedback and feed forward functions are not included in Figure 6 but these emotional processes are reciprocally interconnected with each aspect of the model. In Figure 6 we illustrate the effect of moral disengagement as the more dominant influence and specifically related to distinct aspects of Snyder's hope model including hope outcomes, pathways thoughts and agency thoughts. Moral disengagement can occur during the prevent phase in Snyder's (2002) model of hope through the interaction of mechanisms of moral disengagement with what Snyder refers to as *outcome value*. For example, outcome value can be morally minimized, morally justified, or otherwise overlooked from a moral perspective altogether, although we could argue that the latter is simply another form of moral justification. Snyder alludes to this association as he states, "Goals based on one's own standards should be more attractive than goals built on the standards of other people," which might be linked specifically to Bandura's (1999) notion of displacement or diffusion of moral responsibility.

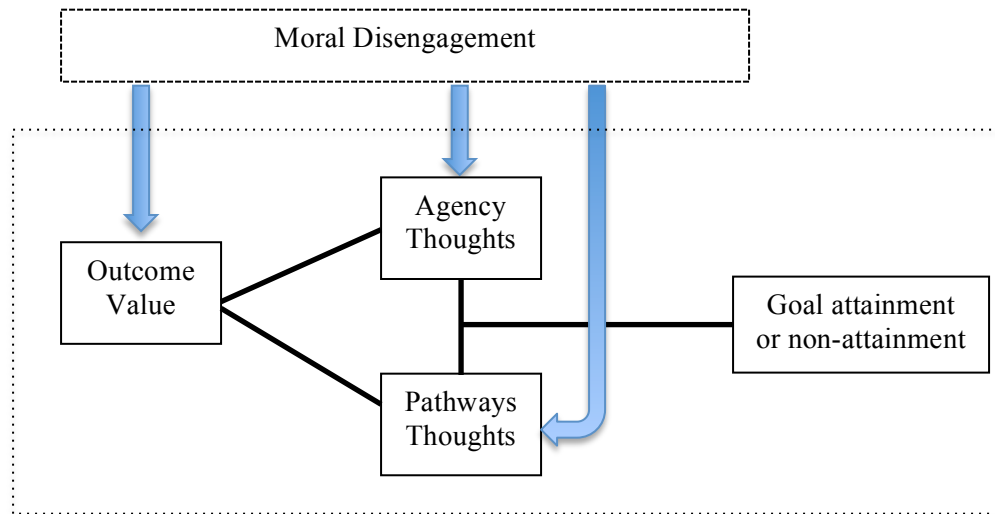


Figure 5. Relating moral disengagement to aspects of hope (Bandura, 1999, 2015; Snyder, 2002).

Moral disengagement can influence outcome values, agency thoughts and pathways thoughts in the hope process, a relationship that is not developed in previous research. Snyder (2002) describes the value of the hoped for outcome as a significant point of consideration. Mechanisms of moral disengagement can be activated that affect the perceived value of outcomes related to goal pursuits and that influence the hope process. Proactive moral disengagement can warrant an outcome value related to agency and pathway thoughts so that the pursuit of a goal is favorable to continued cognitive engagement. Snyder (2002) states that, “the outcome value check-back allows the person to cease cognitive processing if a given goal pursuit does not have the value estimated” (p. 253). Outcome values can be affected by a complex combination of check-back mental processes and also emotions. This check-back process can be affected by various mechanisms of moral disengagement, which might be focused on reprehensible conduct, detrimental effects, or a victim, depending upon the nature of the goal pursuits.

Pathways focus on the more cognitive aspects of hope and agency focuses more on conative aspects of hope, while the selective disengagement of moral self-sanctions interacts with each aspect differently. The relationships are reciprocal in nature and can be better understood in a more complete context of human agency.

Bandura (1989) presents a helpful understanding of human agency through his conception of *Social Cognitive Theory* where he offers:

Social cognitive theory subscribes to a model of emergent interactive agency. Persons are neither autonomous agents nor simply mechanical conveyers of animating environmental influences. Rather, they make causal contribution to their own motivation and action within a system of triadic reciprocal causation. In this model of reciprocal causation, action, cognitive, affective, and other personal factors, and environmental events all operate as interacting determinants (p. 1175).

Mechanisms of moral disengagement such as moral justification are understandably connected to pathways thinking, whereas mechanisms such as diffusion of responsibility are logically connected to agency thinking. Consider here that moral justification is primarily a moral reasoning endeavor. Pathways thinking includes what Snyder (2002) refers to as “reciprocal temporal thinking,” which links one’s present cognition to an image of a future goal (p. 251). These pathways and the commitment to any specific pathway can be affected by mechanisms of moral disengagement to the point that one can hope for things that contradict one’s own moral schema. Bandura (1989) states that, “Much human behavior is regulated by forethought embodying cognized goals, and personal goal setting is influenced by self-appraisal of capabilities” (p. 1175). Bandura connects self-efficacy with human agency and mechanisms of moral disengagement and it should be of no great surprise that we claim that high hope persons will, *ceteris paribus*, have a lower propensity for the disengagement of moral self-sanctions.

It is important to note that Bandura (1999) does not subscribe to an extreme notion of personal agency, in that his agency is part of a process of reciprocity, engaging social and other outside influences. This is a way of treating personal agency as helpful in understanding that the agent does not live in isolation. Instead, agents interact with the world. Our treatment of personal agency is more restrictive as a way to avoid a more general problem of moral prescription. We assume the agent is ultimately responsible for the determination of moral rightness, whilst not prescribing this to other agents. We should remember that this is ultimately a psychological argument and not an ethical argument. From an agentic perspective,

we are not initially concerned with a defense of moral dilemmas based on differing philosophies of ethics. From our agentic perspective, respect for the agent's autonomy encourages us to accept a defense based in moral absolutism just as much as a normative ethical defense based on consequentialism. These defenses are ultimately important as they are related to relationships within the organization and the society but we choose to separate out this philosophical ethical aspect, at least initially, in order to focus on understanding the psychology of the agent. The social cognitive aspects of agency are much broader in scope and include such things as environmental and socio-cognitive factors. However, in the context of moral agency and due to the focus on the individual's moral schema, we choose here to focus on an autonomous moral agency, which should be distinguished from a more general autonomous agency that claims people are completely independent agents with regard to their own actions. This is what Bandura (1989) refers to as an "environmental determinist" view (p. 1175). In this larger context, Bandura's framework of "triadic reciprocal causation," which describes a wider interaction between the agent and the environment, is appropriate. We raise this issue here as a matter of focus, not a matter of paradox. Later, we will introduce a theory of agentic moral reinforcement, which includes a relational context and is more amenable to Bandura's *Social Cognitive Theory* generally and his notion of emergent interactive agency specifically (Bandura, 1986, 1989).

Although we rely principally on Snyder's (2002) conception of hope in order that we might explore more operationalizable constructs that reveal the nature of moral disengagement and hope, it is important also to consider that hope itself could commonly have several different meanings. For instance, hope is derived from the Greek word *elpis*, which is to do with ambiguity of the future and has more of a neutral, or perhaps even a negative, connotation. Hope in this sense is related to the unknown-ness of future events and the powerlessness of the human, something more akin to what we in the Western tradition might consider *fate*.



Hope became a more positive word following the death of Jesus Christ and is commonly referred to in Western tradition and Christian thought<sup>1</sup> as:

...one of the three theological virtues, the others being faith and charity (love). It is distinct from the latter two because it is directed exclusively toward the future, as fervent desire and confident expectation. When hope has attained its object, it ceases to be hope and becomes possession. Consequently, whereas “love never ends,” hope is confined to man’s life on Earth.<sup>2</sup>

In this examination we refer to how a more psychological concept of *hope* can be defined as involving the interconnected components of pathways and agency and how this construct is influenced by moral disengagement.<sup>3</sup> By *pathways hope* Snyder considers the individual’s ability to contrive various routes or courses of action that one might use to advance toward a goal. This is certainly an agentic perspective but we should not confuse Snyder’s use of the term agency that is specific to his construct. By *agency hope* Snyder identifies the competence one perceives that one possesses in order to be able to utilize the pathways effectively to the end of the goal. These two aspects allow us to better understand cognitive and conative aspects of hope and in this sense *agency* includes both the motivation and the ability to successfully assume any pathway during the pursuit of a goal. These components must not be thought of as dichotomous. Instead, pathway and agency thinking should be considered as something of *gestaltism* in that the whole of the two forms a self-organizing construct for a psychological understanding of hope. Therefore, from this perspective, it is through the reciprocal interaction of pathways and agency that hope is formed.

Bandura’s (1977) understanding self-efficacy, understood generally as a belief in one’s ability to succeed in particular situations, is closely associated with the psychological understanding of hope. This makes sense as we consider Bandura’s

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<sup>1</sup>See Jürgen Moltmann’s *Theology of Hope* for a more complete 20<sup>th</sup>-century treaty regarding Christian hope.

<sup>2</sup>Hope. (2016). In *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Retrieved from <http://www.britannica.com/topic/hope-Christianity> on 8 September, 2016.

<sup>3</sup>See the psychological hope construct of Snyder et al. and Bandura’s theory of moral disengagement in previous chapters or Bandura (2015).

broader concept of agency with Snyder's hope agency. Self-efficacy is associated with hope in that it is an "expectancy belief that forms a cognitive set yet each "focuses on different aspects of competence and control" (Robinson & Snipes, 2009, p. 17). This conception may not be completely palatable to some because we might easily confuse *agency* thinking in regards to what is meant by *control*, specifically as characterized by what might be implied by *agency* and *control* when used together. Snyder's agency aspect of hope is focused on control of achieving a pathway, but not necessarily on control over the outcome or end-state. This is an important philosophical argument that is perhaps what Bandura was alluding to when he writes of the differing conceptions of agency, such as a purely deterministic agency. Within the context of hope, one has the power to control the pathway or the precept, but not the actual mechanism that might achieve the goal. Otherwise, hope agency thinking simply becomes something of a sub-construct of self-efficacy, focused too strictly on an interpretation of what the *self* perceives can be accomplished regarding certain tasks toward goal achievement.

The empirical study of U.S. combat veterans discussed in earlier chapters seems to indicate a significant relationship between Snyder's (2000, 2002) conception of hope and Bandura's (1986, 1999) conception of moral disengagement. Furthermore, the study supports the hypothesis that the higher the levels of psychological hope that one possesses, the less one has a propensity to disengage from one's own moral self-sanctions. Therefore, if one can increase Snyder's form of psychological hope, one might also become more resilient against activating mechanisms of moral disengagement.

There is, as might be expected, controversy related to Snyder's psychological conception of hope (Martin, 2014). Hence, it is important that we analyze the conception of hope used in the accompanying research and how this conceptualization differs from other perspectives on hope. An operationalized version of Snyder's conception can be compared to differing philosophical and psychological ideas related to hope in order that we might better understand implications related to the disengagement of moral self-sanctions. As previously noted, Snyder's concept is best understood as a view of hope that includes the reciprocal interaction of

both agency thinking and pathways thinking. Agency thinking is a competence belief specifically related to one's perceived ability to utilize pathways developed by the agent that assist the agent in progressing toward a goal. This concept of hope is a cognitive and motivational construct. Hope is also understood as something that "initiates and sustains one's progress in goal pursuit" (Robinson & Snipes, 2009, p. 17). This definition does rely on a strictly probabilistic type of hope.<sup>4</sup> This issue will be clarified later as we attempt to explicate Martin's (2013) treatise entitled *How We Hope*; which is perhaps the most complete philosophical examination produced in the past several decades on what is meant by *hope* and how it manifests in persons.

### **Differing Philosophical Conceptions of Hope**

In order to better understand the relationship between hope and moral disengagement, we need at least minimal understanding of varying philosophical conceptions of hope that might affect the interpretation of a correlational or causal association. These differing conceptions, which produce varying models and when scientifically studied are referred to as constructs, require that we first explore differing assumptions related to an understanding of hope. We have chosen to utilize Snyder's (2002) conception of hope as our foundation for understanding hope but later expand his construct by including the specific psychosocial influences of moral disengagement and religious thinking. We understand that for some, hope is strictly emotional. For others, hope is something wholly spiritual. To still others, hope is a cognitive process. Of course, there are all manner of conceptions in between. For now, let us at least respect these varying considerations of hope that are the result of particularly different philosophies.<sup>5</sup> This exploration of certain conceptions of hope that vary in regards to philosophical assumptions and moral premise may assist in developing some understanding of why the concept of hope as op-

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<sup>4</sup> For a more thorough explanation see Crowson, J., Frueh, B., & Snyder, C. R. (2001).

<sup>5</sup> This analysis is not an attempt to determine what form of *hope* is prescriptively right and is surely certainly not meant to develop into some sort of comprehensive defense of *hope* from any particular philosophical vantage point.

erationalized by Snyder (1994, 2002) might be related to the disengagement of moral self-sanctions.

Discourse about hope is not consistent throughout the academic community. Some view hope as an agentic process, others as sheer emotion, and others even view it as synonymous with desire. Drahos (2004) relegates hope to a passion or emotion and separates this from cognition. This relegation is common, but it does seem to discount the psychological gains of adopting a cognitive and conative understanding of hope. What is more troubling is that these limited definitions, such as that hope is some amalgamation of the passions, do not seem to help us in understanding complex processes related to hope such as the disengagement of moral self-sanctions. If this basic understanding is confused, then hope can be misunderstood as something altogether different to what psychologists refer to as hope. For example, Drahos (2004) states that, "hope, which on the face of it might seem to be an individual and unilateral act, enters the bilateral context of the market" (p. 19). He uses this basic non-agentic understanding of hope to form social conclusions. However, where Snyder (2002) differentiates hope from emotions that influence aspects of the hope construct, and where outside forces are distinct elements that may affect specific aspects of hope but are not a part of the agentic hope process, Drahos (2004) does not draw out these distinctions and instead makes a social argument by defining hope in terms of the personal and also in terms of the collective. Drahos (2004) develops an ethical argument against organizations that appeal to individual hope by promoting corporate hope. We understand his meaning of hope to be something other than hope in that we treat hope as primarily agentic, and that the process that allows an individual to assume some corporate optimistic outlook is something relational. Drahos' corporate promotion of hope could be manifested as actions that look like a transfer of hope has taken place, but from the agentic perspective, the agent must remain responsible for the hope. Perhaps the person is influenced to disengage from their own moral self-sanctions to engage in a hope that is counter to their own moral schema. Regardless, the individual is the only being that can hope. Any assumption of social or corporate hope assumes that individuals are all autonomous agents and we are simply assimilating the hope of

the many into the hope of the one. Otherwise, there is a diffusion of responsibility or some other unethical aspect interfering with the agent's hope process, which we consider something other than authentic hope. This makes sense in the context of our empirical analysis of hope in the preceding chapters. We understand hope as a fully agentic cognitive process but also realize the impact that emotion and social influences may have on hope.

Mindful of this complexity, we must be yet further aware that hope may be understood from differing moral perspectives, differing natural scientific perspectives, and differing modern psychological perspectives – all of which must be accounted for in relation, for our purposes, to Snyder's (2002) construct of hope. We closely examining Snyder's more empiricist form of hope, what we consider a more natural scientific type of hope, and then consider Snyder's hope construct as juxtapositional with a more existentialist and a more religious interpretation of hope. As we compare these different versions of hope, the limitations of each version from any other prescriptive perspective should become clear. These versions of inquiry concerning hope are of course only a start to a much more complex matter of dealing with almost infinite possibilities of moral schema available from an agentic perspective. However, a central sensitivity herein is that any morally prescriptive psychology of hope will be severely limited to those who agree with the ethical argument, and so we would do well to utilize models that are amenable to various moral philosophies. Some psychologists may wish to dismiss this issue by way of supposedly generalizable moral principles, intuitionism, evolutionary intuitionism, or by some form of common sense morality.<sup>6</sup> But here we recognize that moral aspects of hope cannot be generally prescriptive because people simply do not hold identical moral schemas. If we therefore treat aspects of hope as generally prescriptive in this way we, at a minimum, only capture a portion of those who trust

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<sup>6</sup> Jonathan Haidt has argued for the evolution of moral intuitions and moral emotion. The arguments we make herein should not be confused as contradictory to these or any other prescriptive line of thought. However, we do assert that the agent must *own* the reason (Haidt, 2006, 2012).

the proposed moral framework. This problem is evident in Lawrence Kohlberg's developmental stages, which have been criticized by way of religion and gender.<sup>7</sup>

Attempting to appreciate the complexity of hope from a position of categorical moral prescriptions allows us to create general assessments of an agent's moral schema, noting of course that these categories are ultimately insufficient to precisely describe any particular agent's moral schema. However, this application of prescriptive moral categorization is how the next generation of research will continue to develop theory on things like hope and positive psychology, through an understanding of varying moral positions and a unique respect for the moral schema of the agent, and not by way of universal moral prescription. Unfortunately for the social sciences, any advancement of this agentively relativistic view has been depreciated by the demarcation of academic sub-disciplines over the past century. At the same time, psychology has made significant strides in understanding the human psyche and well-being (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Seligman, 2011). Therefore, we purposefully consider some major categories of moral thinking in order to understand more fully the psychological implications of hope, allowing us to understand hope by way of dissimilar moral schemas. In the following sections, we consider several different moral categories while realizing that these categories are not mutually exclusive or all-encompassing. We assert that these varying perspectives can be helpful in developing a more complete understanding of moral disengagement and hope but that for our purposes, Snyder's (2002) more empiricist model provides a basis for accommodating aspects of the more existential and theistic agentive conceptions of hope. By accommodating these perspectives and choosing an agentive positive psychological approach, we aim to extend Snyder's (2002) construct to incorporate religious beliefs and moral processes as interconnected rational functions.

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<sup>7</sup> See Mensch (2009) for a comprehensive explanation of the problem of moral prescriptivism in developmental psychology. For an explanation of the problem of determinism in moral psychology see Bandura (2015).

*Snyder's Empirically Supported Understanding of Hope*

By focusing on psychologically testable aspects of hope, Snyder (2002) offers what might be considered an empiricist model of hope. Of course, whether cognitive functions and emotions are fully empirical seems to be a matter of debate. Regardless, by understanding the relation of two principal variables Snyder offers a form of hope that is analyzable by psychometric means. For Snyder (2002), the relational variables of *pathways* hope and *agency* hope can be studied as parts of the psychological construct of hope. Of course, it is important to understand what Snyder means by pathways and agency, these things that together make up what it is we call hope. In this sense Snyder attempts to explore each variable and its association to the construct, a sort of means of understanding hope by way of understanding its related parts.

It is through this scientifically oriented line of inquiry that we find a contemporary understanding of psychological hope. In Snyder's account, if we can understand what it means to create pathways that one might undertake to fulfill one's goals, and, if we can understand what it means to assume the agency necessary to assume such pathways, then we can understand what it means to hope. This is a measured calculation of hope as the sum of its parts focused on sensory perception, something a bit different to a more existential or theistic perspective of hope. Since we cannot directly observe these *pathways* and *agency*, we must infer them. Therefore this empirical inquiry is supported through inferential probability. While not unflawed, this inquiry is surely helpful in understanding a basis for the principle processes of hope.

As an extreme example, the empirically testable context of Snyder's (2002) model of hope can be used as a relational structure by scientists who attempt to understand the neurology of hope. The aspects of brain function affecting hope will surely allow us to continue to grow our understanding of the hope process and perhaps components that interact to produce feelings and emotions related to hope. However, there is something of a self-imposed limitation to this kind of epistemological application since this view is inherently limited to interpretations of sense data, which is one reason why psychoanalysis brings something important to the

discussion. The neurological exploration of hope could be similar to any other exploration of conscious feelings produced in the brain. Things like fear and evil can be studied from this empirically rigorous way of understanding the mind. A complete understanding of hope demands an exploration of both the psychology of hope and the neurology of hope. Other more metaphysical perspectives are also helpful in developing a comprehensive understanding of hope, as we shall explore in due course.

An advantage of the empiricist form of hope is that the self-imposed limitations of neurologically focused science keep us from self-deception and certain forms of more mystical bias and allow us to study the underlying central and peripheral nervous system and its relation to hope. It might seem that Snyder's (1994, 2002) understanding of hope is, at first glance, completely in line with an empiricist or even strictly naturalist conceptualization of hope. However, the naturalist could be critical of Snyder's (2002) method because Snyder is essentially appealing to an aggregate of individual perception as a sort of normative reality, and for the strictly pragmatic empiricist, this aggregation of non-observable perception-based science will simply not do. In other words, Snyder is utilizing perception and probability theory commonly associated with present-day social science methodology, which allows us to take a more agent-centered perspective of hope but of course does not offer the direct observation of phenomena by the scientist. Therefore it might be better to call Snyder's method something of a quasi-empiricist methodology, which could be considered more scientifically rigorous than other more qualitatively oriented methodologies. But this form of methodological variant cannot fully inform us as to what hope is, why it exists, and how it is produced and sustained. Snyder's (2002) conception does allow us to better answer these questions, by utilizing some normative properties of his model, while accounting for agentic beliefs as reasonable and not strictly pathological. From this we can explore a more qualitatively informative understanding of hope. After all, these are important questions related to human flourishing. The main point we make here is that varying views of hope studied through the lenses of varying methodologies are best considered, along with their respective strengths and weaknesses, to more fully



inform us on psychological phenomena, since no single methodology can fully inform us things such as hope. According to some traditions, like theism, hope can never be fully explained by way of scientific inquiry alone. So we can treat outgroups as something like pathological and move on. Or, we can assume the more challenging endeavor involving multiple understandings of methodological inquiry, such as is encouraged by MacIntyre (1981, 1988, 1990).

We should consider a primary weakness of a more empiricist argument of hope. This is a hope that is more scientifically testable through the use of instruments that measure perception and are analyzed by way of statistical probability. A deficiency with this form of method can be seen from the fact that, even if 999 people perceive that hope is whatever they say it is, there may be one person who doesn't perceive it in the same way, meaning the project would be verifiable by disregarding the outlier, often referred to in economics as an error statistic, but without being fundamentally falsifiable. If treated as falsifiable, we must reject the null hypothesis on that single counter-observation. Therefore, if we apply a strict interpretation of the empiricist view that does not tolerate probability, we prohibit the possibility of understanding hope through normative means and would therefore constrain Snyder's (2002) conception of hope to the falsifiable. However, through a more complete understanding of this fundamental methodological risk, we may better comprehend the hazards associated with instruments that supposedly measure constructs of hope, realizing that these instruments may be flawed, which inevitably might reveal something like Type I and Type II statistical errors.<sup>8</sup> It is therefore of great benefit that various views, including but not limited to a more empiricist form of hope, are taken into consideration.

Martin (2013) discusses a more empiricist form of hope that includes this problem of probability. She explores several interesting aspects of hope from what she refers to as the "evidentialist perspective" and the "certain kinds of attention and thought" that the hoping person may feel (Martin, 2013, p. 66). Any hope based strictly in probabilistic thinking may be limiting in scope. Yet, Martin's per-

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<sup>8</sup>See the Problem of Demarcation and other information regarding Karl Popper's philosophy of science at <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/popper/#ProDem>

spective does have a normative appeal. In this sense, in order to call something hope, we must consider that it is something to be experienced by all, and also not constrained to an utterly subjective experience. This view does not forbid the inclusion of subjective experience, but does attempt to create a normative construct, a construct that can hopefully be understood with parameters so as to differentiate hope from other psychological constructs. Here we can include things associated with descriptive and inferential statistics such as construct validity and multicollinearity. However, with this view based in the normative, several fundamental problems remain.

Martin's (2013) critique of hope is helpful in understanding what she refers to as an *orthodox* definition of hope. It is also helpful to consider certain scientific assumptions that have supplemented her orthodox definition. The orthodox definition contains both desires for specific outcomes, and the belief that the outcome itself is in fact possible. However, Martin points out that Downey's more current understanding of hope also relies upon the notion that the *object of hope* has the physical possibility of occurrence and is not simply based on some metaphysical belief. This reliance on the object of hope is an attempt to demarcate hope into a scientific and thereby normative, testable, and generalizable concept. The demarcation of hope as Downey suggests, may have scientific advantages, but it also seems to impose a stringent philosophy of science upon a psychological concept rooted in a very agentic type of belief, a personal belief in the object of hope. This personal belief is in essence agentively subjective in nature. However, from the standpoint of a strictly empiricist view that includes some sort of perception, subjective or personal beliefs are somewhat minimized. So in the case of this scientific definition of hope, something like *true* hope is based in a testable reality, otherwise it is effectively treated as some pathology acting on or in place of true hope. The aspect of reality surely has a place in the argument for hope, but this singular philosophical view cannot respectfully dominate the entire discourse on hope (Martin, 2013, pp. 11-34).

The agentic emphasis on a moral aspect of hope offers an utterly subjective moral perspective and cannot be bound to external impositions such as hope in

which the outcome must be physically verifiable in order to be valid, otherwise we become morally prescriptive and hope becomes something that *ought* to be from a third-party perspective and not something that is intrinsically experienced. The term *rational* is often invoked to mean different things depending on assumptions. Many economists define rationality in terms of social norms, by way of utilitarian philosophical principles. However, if we juxtapose this definition with something like a theistic, and perhaps more gnostic, belief that a *fallen* world is filled with evil and operates out of immoral motives, arguments then based on social norms can quickly be deemed as irrational or even absurd. Snyder (2002) offers a form of hope that is neither for nor against these types of supposition and which could serve as a platform for understanding the nature of the differences in understanding hope. Instead of being deemed irrational or pathological by one group, varying perspectives can be viewed as having some common structure that allows for discourse that might lead to a fuller understanding of agentive hope, which is a more communal and less divisive approach to understanding hope. Problems synergizing these understandings of hope are precisely why we need to explore what we mean by hope from various philosophical perspectives.

Consider the challenge of understanding the intersection of Snyder's (2002) hope construct and those who might hold to differing paradigms resulting from fundamentally different moral philosophies. At the heart of this problem of understanding hope from a strictly psychological viewpoint, is the moral problem of hope.<sup>9</sup> Hope and the nature to desire towards something, necessarily includes a moral aspect or component. In Snyder's (2002) construct this can be located prior to pathways and agency hope in an understanding of the moral relation to outcome values. This could be the foremost reason that hope may be able to predict one's propensity for the disengagement of moral self-sanctions. If the agent considers hope to be a fundamentally moral process, then the idea that hope is observed and

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<sup>9</sup> The moral problem of hope relates somewhat to Hume's *is/ought* problem but this of course depends upon an interpretation of Hume's Treatise. For a more complete review of this problem see Max Black's *The Gap Between "is" and "should"* in *The Philosophical Review*, 73(2), 165-181.

normatively defined as some irreducible construct is, in some sense, irrelevant. In other words, the observer has no specific moral claim to hope through observation. So in this manner one person's hope might be another person's folly, or perhaps despair, or so it might seem. Snyder's model for hope is agentic and can be understood within the context of the agent's own moral schema. However, caution should be taken when adapting aggregate data from this model to produce arguments about what *good* hope should look like, say organizationally. Of course, most social scientists are aware of this problem and thus tend to avoid morally prescriptive implications related to constructs such as hope, since to determine the morality of hope is not the intent of the method, which is aimed instead at understanding what constitutes a cognitive process of hope. However, this method of exploration is insufficient in supplying agentic information for a complete understanding of hope.

A danger lies in the theory-laden weaknesses of the aggregation of individual observations related to a social science model such as hope that cannot account for the individual agentic moral perspectives. Models built upon theory in a constructivist manner, as we have seen, also risk unintentionally inferring the normalization of morality. Specifically, if verifiability with regards to a construct for hope is the primary method for making sense of hope, then there is a risk associated with morality and confirmation bias. This danger is reduced in Snyder's (2002) construct if the construct is used as intended, as a hope based in moral subjectivity and agentic perception. The moral schema of the agent can affect all aspects of Snyder's model through things such as the disengagement of moral self-sanctions, as shown in Figure 6. We should not attempt to strip hope of morality due to the subjective nature, but instead attempt to account for the agent's moral perspective, no matter the difficulty of the endeavor. For present purposes, only then can we have a workable understanding of what it means to hope.

#### *Agentic Hope and Moral Disengagement*

Assuming the notion of hope contains an individual moralistic aspect, contrasted with something like a universal objective moral truth, we understand that

the subjective nature surely affects both the cognitive and psychosocial more conative components of hope. Should the agent hope, the moral agency related to the process of hoping will be assumed by that agent, or otherwise disengaged from in one way or another. Considering this subjective moral aspect of hope allows us to better understand how an individual might hope towards something that, in his or her own understanding, is essentially immoral. But is this truly hope as generally understood? This same individual might assuage the guilt or bad conscience associated with this hope by activating mechanisms that allow them to disengage from their own moral self-sanctions. Now consider Snyder's pathways toward the object of hope. Moral disengagement seems particularly relevant to this outcome value of hope. The objects of Snyder's pathways may be immoral from an agentic perspective. An agent may consider the object of hope itself to be immoral and consider pathways that are agentially moral. In this case, the activation of mechanisms of moral disengagement is focused primarily on the object of hope. So if the value of the hoped for outcome involves another person, Bandura's (1999, 2015) disengagement mechanism of dehumanization might be employed to assuage the guilt related to the value of the person/object, thus allowing the process to continue.

An individual might also consider that the object of hope is in fact morally satisfying, yet they may activate Bandura's (1999) mechanisms of moral disengagement by considering and choosing pathways towards that hope that are agentially immoral. It is also possible, and perhaps even more probable from an agentic perspective, that an individual may hope for something that is completely moral and yet choose to develop pathways that are immoral. In this way the individual might utilize pathways themselves as a means. The individual may disengage from their own moral self-sanctions related to pathways of hope in order that they might obtain a greater good. This more utilitarian notion of hope is nothing new to philosophy. However, Snyder (2002) provides a way to consider certain agentic aspects of hope that might be overlooked by other, perhaps more qualitative methods used in understanding hope. There surely seems to be great value in an application of mixed methodologies, such as more empirical methods combined with more qualitative methods, to more fully understand an agentic perspective of hope,

which is why we attempt to understand hope from the context of the agent and by applying our empirical results to a larger framework of hope and beliefs. Hope without understanding its intrinsic qualitative components simply does not allow us to explore it in the context of inconsistent agentive moral beliefs.

Consider the disengagement of moral self-sanction directed at the object of hope. This is the moral dilemma focused on the outcome of hope, or the thing hoped for. This dilemma is created by a personal tension between the outcome and the moral schema of the individual. In other words, a person might hope for winning the lottery and at the same time believe that actually winning the lottery is immoral, say because it is hoping for something material in the world when one believes material things either are somehow evil in themselves, or that the material might otherwise encourage evil to flourish. Here, the thing hoped for can be considered immoral, yet the individual may activate mechanisms of moral disengagement to assuage the anguish affiliated with such a hope. For example, one could utilize *euphemistic labeling* and refer to the lottery not as gambling, but as playing a prize draw or raffle. They might also assuage the guilt associated with the hope of winning the lottery by *moral justification* by promising that they will give away a certain portion of the winnings to the poor or needy. This is not a judgment of the agent's moral schema, but an agentive recognition of its existence and an examination of the reasoning related to hope (Bandura, 2015).

The tension of the moral problem related to hope might also be focused on the pathways themselves, the ways in which one chooses to proceed in order to achieve the hope in question. The agent, in this case, may see the hope of winning the lottery as a truly greater good. The agent may have no moral qualms about hope as related to the winning of the lottery, but they may utilize moral disengagement to assuage culpability related to the creation of pathways and actions related to them to facilitate the outcome of the hoped for thing, in this case the winning of the lottery. In fact, the individual may believe so strongly in the *good* of winning the lottery that they may do *harm* in order to obtain the prize.

Consider a husband and wife who together play the lottery. In this case, the husband is a bit of a philanthropist and has overtly discussed his intention to give

away his portion of lottery winnings to charity. The wife instead believes that the winnings can bring great joy by allowing her to travel the world with her daughter. Furthermore, she imagines that it would be better if the husband had a heart attack and died upon hearing the news that they have won the lottery. It is irrelevant whether the wife simply cogitatively desires such an outcome or whether she takes action to consciously facilitate it, shall we say by feeding him very unhealthy meals. If *she* believes these thoughts or behaviors to be morally wrong, then in relation to winning the lottery, she might create pathways that generate an opportunity for moral disengagement. From an ethical perspective, we can of course question whether or not this sort of hope is a hope consistent with the wife's moral schema and the good of hope. However, we might come to find that the wife honestly and morally believes that a smaller harm to her husband warrants a greater good to society. If this is consistent, there is no need for the wife to activate mechanisms of moral disengagement, because there is no moral imperative from which she must disengage. Therefore her hope in this case, could be consistent. In other words, she may hope for winning in her way and not disengage from her moral self-sanctions. This is an important distinction because there are two sides to this more general question to be explored, the question of a normative hope and the question of an agentive hope. From our agentive perspective, we assign autonomy to the moral agent. However, we must remember that this is not the end of what should be a more general inquiry, but the beginning. There remains the question of the ethics of the agent's moral schema, and this moral schema's alignment with something like organizational or professional ethics.

We might also consider that, with regards to an agentive perspective of hope, the activation of psychological mechanisms of moral disengagement might occur by degrading one's own agency related to the process of the hoped for thing. Bandura (1999) might consider this as something like the *displacement of responsibility* regarding pathways to hope in general. In our lottery example, the husband of a wife may think it wrong to play the lottery and so assuage the guilt associated with participating by displacing the responsibility to his wife. There is another dimension here related to the wife who could be considered an enabler to the situa-

tion, but for the sake of this inquiry we will focus on the agent, the husband, who delegates moral responsibility to the wife for the activities related to planning and purchasing lottery tickets. So the husband may hope to win the lottery, but allows his agency to be displaced by proxy to another, shifting responsibility for the actions that might facilitate the result. In other words, the husband has displaced his moral agency in regards to the hoped for outcome. A similar scenario could be imagined between a soldier and a chaplain, or a counselor and a counselee, where the soldier or counselee displaces or diffuses moral responsibility related to pathways hope onto the chaplain or counselor providing advice.

Now, here we should make note of a problem of philosophy. While things like probability play a part in the hope process, they are not necessarily dominant from each agent's perspective. In order to understand such things as moral disengagement as related to hope, the agent must be generally responsible for their own moral schema, which invokes a notion of free will, and this is a complex matter, which is why we focus on an agent's *initial* position of moral agency. However, some may still attack this agentic notion by taking on something of the following position:

It seems backward for cognitive scientists to simply assume a non-naturalistic or dualist theory of free will, since the history of cognitive science can be seen as a series of attempts to demonstrate how we can put aside dualistic theories of mind and cognitive functioning...as cognitive scientists increasingly explain how the mechanisms of the brain can explain language and flexible reasoning, they do not thereby conclude that we lack these capacities. Rather, they conclude that dualist theories of such capacities are false (Vargas, 2014, p. 60).

It seems important to note that in some instances, the argument for a certain moral psychology that is dependent on and intermingled with debates about free will and naturalism is critically important in social science, especially in areas such as political theory. To set aside notions of a non-physical mind is necessary for consensus. However, to attempt to impose such beliefs upon the agent seems to encourage a risk of moral disengagement. For this reason, we continue assuming that those of differing moral traditions can learn from one another in a way that may help all that are willing to develop new understandings in moral psychology.



Chance or probability related to the outcomes of hope for the strict empiricist appear to have certain qualities that are quite different when compared to a more theistic or existentialist notion of hope. The overarching differentiating aspect seems to center on the notion of chaos and biology. By chaos, we simply mean that the normal view of the universe is that of randomness, since there exists no God or other supernatural entity that has set things in order. If the agent holds this more atheistic and random understanding of hope, the agent operates agentively within his or her mental ability and those cognitive or conative aspects of pathways to hope. The likelihood of achieving the outcome related to hope is a function of the *ability* of the individual and of *being* in a chaotic world. The prospect of considering the hoped for outcome in terms of pure odds seems more likely for a more empiricist moral thinker because regardless of what the agent might have the *ability* to do, the chaos of *being* may ultimately prove superior. The likelihood of achieving a hoped for outcome involves a comparative process. The specific hope, say to win the lottery, is considered in the context of people who have hoped for the same outcome and taken action. Through this comparative thinking, perception is gained regarding an estimation of the chances that I might have to actualize my hope through certain pathways. I may recognize that there is a chance of higher or lower odds for or against my hoped for outcome, but my hopes are contained in the chaos that is inevitably assumed in the cosmos. There is no external force assisting me in my chances of winning the lottery, and my *selfness* is limited to the disorder that surrounds me. For a more empiricist moral thinker, the freedom to realize hope is not only limited by an ultimately chaotic notion of the probability of hope, but also by an understanding of one's own biological limitations in creating and fulfilling pathways related to hope. In a sense, the self for the strict empiricist is only free within the boundaries of one's biological abilities, regardless of self-determination. Otherwise, things are left to chance. This is a more deterministic view of the cosmos and a moral perspective that should be considered in the context of hope by anyone engaging with an agent whose moral schema is developed with such assumptions. The notion of probability related to obtaining or achieving any particular hope might be somewhat more prominent in the mind of the empiri-

cist moral thinker than in the mind of a more theistic or existentialist moral agent. In other words, the moral schema of a more empiricist moral agent will support, due to the chaos of the universe and the law of large numbers, a greater consideration of the sheer probability that something may occur in the future based on observations and events in the past. These deterministic forms of empiricism will obviously have a bearing on how one might conceptualize and interpret Snyder's (2002) pathways and agency, and allows us to scrutinize the initial empirical conceptualization of hope found in our study.

### *A More Existentialist Understanding of Hope*

Thus far we have focused on the philosophy of an agent with a more empirical moral schema and the association with hope and moral disengagement. In this section, we should begin by reiterating that we are not arguing for any specific good or bad hope, only a good or a bad hope in relation to the agent's own moral schema. This agentive focus on beliefs allows us to understand Snyder's (2002) hope in a unique way, keeping the responsibility of moral belief with the agent. Therefore, an agent who subscribes primarily to an existentialist moral schema might conceive hope as something unique, holding distinctive beliefs related to things such as death and temporality, which may coincidentally change the parameters of hope. Certain well-known contributions by philosophers such as Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) and Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) may help us to better clarify a more existentialist perspective of hope, without requiring that we indict ourselves as experts in existentialism. Instead, with the help of these philosophers and specific prominent philosophical texts, we attempt to construct a more existentialist notion of hope by way of Snyder (2002). The existentialist moral agent may be exceedingly comfortable with relativistic form of hope, and since hope must be congruent with the individual's moral schema, there is no contradiction with Snyder's (2002) model from this moral perspective. So hope can be understood as agentively good if it satisfies the condition of congruency with the individual's moral schema, yet the view of reality from the agent's perspective may vary from that of a more strictly empiricist moral agent. This can be viewed as an opportunity

for a unique exploration of hope and helps us distinguish coercive or otherwise prospectively unethical processes that influence agentic hope. What one ought to hope for is inevitably a matter for philosophy or theology. When we attempt to do social psychology on hope, we either understand hope in this agentic and morally relativistic way, or we prescribe the moral conditions of hope, and then see who fits this morally prescriptive model. That is to say that Snyder's (2002) conception of hope should not be considered relativistic in the sense that researchers must ethically approve of the agent's moral schema. This is not the case at all. It is instead an attempt to understand the psychology of hope by way of the agent's own moral schema and not by moral imposition or prescription.

The agent holding a more existentialist moral schema might consider authentic hope as something to be understood through the action of *hoping*. We can understand this type of hoping from Snyder's (2002) pathways definition. In other words, a more existentialist hope is dependent on development through acts of the will where hope is understood within a consideration of the means to the hoped for end. This existentialist form of hope will emphasize Snyder's pathways as paramount to one's ongoing understanding of the object of hope. If we consider the essence of human *being* and hopefulness as a part of this *being*, then we can begin to understand how a more existentialist moral agent may come to understand what it means to hope. Hope in this sense happens because we are both *being* and *hoping* in a sort of inextricable engagement. Hope in this sense is understood as existing before and during our cognitive engagement related to the activity of hoping.<sup>10</sup>

Snyder's (1994, 2002) hope construct differs somewhat from a more existentialist appreciation of what Heidegger calls *free association*, where each agent might freely craft their own conception of hope. Snyder (2002) focuses on goal-oriented motivation and one's ability to create relevant pathways through planning to achieve desired goals. By focusing on goals and human agency, Snyder provides

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<sup>10</sup> This pre-activity and activity seems something more like Heidegger's association between beauty as it is and the creative logic of the unconscious as something following recognition of that beauty. This is something he associates more with the feeling of *dwelling* in one's being.

a construct that is arguably measurable, since we can attempt to understand the perception of an individual related to these specific definitions and then generalize to a larger population. If a person actively formulates goals or perceives themselves as motivated in this type of action, and if a person is actively planning and seeking conduits to achieve related goals, then it is theoretically possible to compare one individual to another and thus measure the level of hope that one person might hold. If we can accomplish this task of measurement then we can compare and correlate different constructs. This is the basis for the thinking behind our use of Snyder's (2002) construct in our empirical study. An existentialist moral perspective helps us appreciate some limitations of Snyder's (2002) model and reminds us that one person's hope may not describe another person's hope, nor should it be prescriptively employed if we are to maintain a strong emphasis on moral agency. So qualitative clarification is surely warranted when utilizing such constructs as a basis for practice.

From an existentialist perspective, the empirical view provided by way of Snyder's (2002) hope construct may seem somewhat incomplete. However, if we consider Snyder's hope in a more MacIntyrian light, where rival or incommensurable assumptions are to be respected, then perhaps we can move beyond a limited conception and better understand challenges to a singular perspective and reach a richer understanding of hope.<sup>11</sup> For example, Snyder (2002) provides a clear distinction between the conscious and the unconscious, but for the existentialist moral agent, this distinction does not necessarily hold true. The existentialist moral agent might instead require that hope fall within what is considered the conscious world, whilst the choice *to hope* might be considered more as existing within something

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<sup>11</sup> Consider Snyder's claim that the understanding of what he refers to as pathways and agency thinking encapsulate what it means to *hope*. For example, we might attempt to phenomenologically suspend judgment or *bracket*, what it means to *hope* in a Husserlian sense of *epoché*. Thus, we might suppose to isolate what hope *is* and what it means *to hope* within experience. The latter as actionable may be more lucid within the existentialist convention. Here I consider a primary distinction between more deterministic views, as opposed to considering the complete *freedom of the will* that we encounter in existentialism.

like *good faith*.<sup>12</sup> In other words, hope for the existentialist moral thinker should not be self-deceptive and should not rely on an ambiguous conception, nor might we alleviate the responsibility of the action of hoping from the individual. This is an appeal to the notion that if we overestimate our hope or underestimate our hope we act in *bad faith*. So we must juxtapose something like *sincerity* and something like *knowing*, or what Sartre calls *facticity*. This existential notion is extremely helpful in articulating a relationship between hope and moral disengagement because in one sense, moral disengagement can be seen as ultimately self-deceptive and perhaps an undervaluation of our hoped for outcome.<sup>13</sup> However, we should note that Bandura (2015) denies any connection between moral disengagement and self-deception:

One cannot deceive oneself into believing something while simultaneously knowing it to be false. Hence, literal self-deception cannot exist. Attempts to resolve the paradox of how one can be a deceiver fooling oneself while knowing the falsehood have met with little [empirical] success. These efforts usually involve creating split selves and rendering one of them unconscious. A theory of self-deception cast in terms of multiple selves plunges one into deep philosophical and unfriendly empirical waters (pp. 101-102).

However, Bandura lays the blame for this conundrum of believing and knowing at the feet of paradox and later explains the dilemma by appealing to a sort of “true...knowing” and an intentional “keeping oneself uninformed” way of thinking (Bandura, 2015, p. 102). This is a manner of dealing with the paradox of self-deception in moral disengagement, and we would generally agree with this epistemological argument. However, we do not wish to completely ignore all forms of self-deception, whether empirically supportable or not.

Since a more existentialist moral agent might require an extent of *unknowing*, it seems difficult to reconcile this with a complete and scientifically universal construct of hope. So in this sense one might argue that the sincerity of the agent and his or her understanding of hope, as well as the potential for a novel under-

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<sup>12</sup> The terms *good* and *bad faith* were used by Sartre to develop his conception of self-deception. See Sartre J. P. (1993) *Essays in Existentialism*. New York: Citadel Press.

<sup>13</sup> See Figure 6.

standing of hope through action, might be imperative. As previously stated, this existential view of hope relates to Snyder's pathways, where there is a moral sincerity related to the creation of pathways in which one might fulfill *hope*. In fact, because Snyder (2002) forwards personal agency as something that doesn't necessarily appeal to circumstances outside of one's possible realm of control, it does seem at first to be harmonious with existential moral views. However, an existentialist notion of *good faith* requires a self-reflective moral component that exists beyond one's rationality.<sup>14</sup> Therefore we find difficulty in fully synergizing Snyder's construct with aspects of hope considered independent of the agent's own moral schema.

In a recent work, which covers a more thorough view of the conception of hope, Martin (2013) uses an analogy within the context of the movie *The Shawshank Redemption*. This analogy is helpful in more fully developing hope that might be otherwise be limited to a singular psychosocial context. Martin's analogy is particularly helpful in explicating differing conceptions of hope, as shown by analysis of the characters of Andy and Red. Martin (2013), instead of focusing solely on the components of hope, provides an inquiry into how people generally go about hoping. Martin's process view of hope certainly has limitations. Still, her work yields one of the most complete accounts of how people generally go about hoping, and her work is quite suitable for utilization in a comparative analysis between differing philosophical conceptions of hope. In *The Shawshank Redemption*, both Andy and Red are sentenced to life in Shawshank prison, with little chance of ever experiencing life outside it. Martin (2013) argues that Andy seems to have hope about freedom but Red seems to despair at the thought of being free. Yet, from an existentialist moral perspective we find an ultimately subjective form of hope that can only be understood through one's personal experience. In this sense Andy and Red encounter different conceptions of hope within their own subjective

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<sup>14</sup> We ought not to consider this synonymous with contemplation or rationalization since one of the philosophies Sartre rails against relates specifically to rationalism. Sartre might even argue that hope cannot consist strictly in conscious rationalism but that it does exist in something like a dream state.

experience. So Red may actually hope for something like consistency and continuity. One cannot assume that they encounter the same object of hope. Andy seems able to conceptualize hope in regards to the object of a form of freedom where Red's view is quite other. Andy seems to understand prison life in a way that changes the meaning of the present for him and in a way that affects the hope he holds for his future. In other words, his understanding of a possible future alters his present reality. Snyder's hope consists of the three interrelated aspects of goal orientation, pathway generation, and personal agency related to one's ability to affect such pathways. The action-orientated form of consciousness espoused by many existentialist thinkers is important in understanding both the cognitive and conative aspects of Snyder's hope. This action-orientation is also critical in perceiving what Snyder's hope means to the agency of a more existentialist thinker. From an existentialist perspective, the moral agent might be affected more by interactions between the psychological mechanisms of moral disengagement and hope agency than perhaps a more atheistic thinker, due to this action orientation of consciousness.

This type of hope agency is also closely related to self-efficacy, which leads to the question: does a more existentialist moral schema tend to have a greater influence on hope agency? It seems reasonable to conclude that a low-hope existentialist moral agent is more likely to also be low in self-efficacy and have a greater propensity for the disengagement of moral self-sanctions. A person with higher self-efficacy should logically have a lower propensity for activating mechanisms of moral disengagement, and we can perhaps make the same argument for self-esteem. Although some of these relationships have been tested, they do not specifically account for differing philosophical moral frameworks (Snyder, 2002). In social science this form of moral inquiry is often simplified to something as basic as religious and non-religious people, and this oversimplification is only very basically helpful in the search for new knowledge in psychology and exceedingly limiting for any interpretation of results. This is unfortunate in that this form of inquiry never really uncovers the details and nuances of varying moral schemas and the effects on the relationship between things such as hope and moral disengagement.

Instead of simply religious or spiritual, and non-religious or not spiritual, we should begin to consider the many moral positions and begin to study them within common frameworks such as hope, so that we can develop models that are more explanatory, models that change depending upon moral positions and models that elaborate more on the intricate cognitive functions related to beliefs, attitudinal formation and conation.

This problem of accounting for moral disposition has consequences for many areas of the social sciences, including positive psychology in general, as well as hope theory, optimism, self-efficacy and flourishing, to name but a few. Although the instruments are meant to be descriptive in that they describe a model, they are also normatively prescriptive in that they attempt to measure normative aspects. This may be fine with amoral constructs, but most cognitive and behavioral constructs seem to imply or assume a moral norm. In other words, there is a good form of hope and also bad forms of hope. There is good optimism and bad optimism. There is good self-efficacy and bad self-efficacy. Most importantly, these associations are not often readily apparent. We just assume that the definition of *optimism* that is offered as a social science construct is *good* optimism and so we create instruments to test that *good* optimism by measuring levels of attributes associated with the construct (Seligman 1991; Seligman, Reivich, Jaycox & Gillham, 1995). This is how things like *authentic leadership* come about and are differentiated from mere leadership. A researcher utilizes something like a leadership construct and eventually realizes that the construct allows Adolph Hitler to be categorized as a *good* leader, since he meets all the criteria in the model. Next, someone thinks that this outcome is unacceptable and so they look to separate good from evil and bring morality into the construct. This is how the social sciences normatively develop theory. The moral questions, beyond some basic assumptions, are often left for another day. What we propose here is that the moral problem should be addressed more completely from the outset of any understanding of cognitive processes, and especially in interpersonal and psychosocial constructs. This becomes tricky if we are attempting to avoid being overly prescriptive in regards to constructs with moral implications such as hope. This is a problem that can be ad-



dressed in several ways. Ordinarily, there is a philosophical view that is presented as right or good, and sometimes defended to some extent. Other times it is left to something like common sense or intuition that the construct being measured captures the *good*. Constructs associated with positive psychology cannot avoid this paradox because by *positive*, there is a normative implication of good or right. So *good* hope, or to use a popular term, *authentic* hope, is assumed under the paradigm.

For example, Snyder (2002) asserts that high-hope persons will feel or demonstrate friendliness and happiness. Why is this socially and culturally generalizable? Take for example the stoic person or the individual who holds the belief that the individual should dominate emotion. This is a moral position and many through history have lived by a similar creed of ethics. Could a person with a great deal of *hope* be non-friendly? Could a low-hope person be exceedingly happy? These questions help us in understanding the nature of the problem in asking normative questions without moral psychology. Now, consider this in the context of an agent who has a strong propensity to activate mechanisms of moral disengagement. If we are attempting to measure hope, we must account for all of these aspects of influence. Otherwise, we risk oversimplifying exceedingly complex issues related to the underlying agentive moral psychology of hope. The point here is that agent-centered constructs like hope and moral disengagement are helpful but can be problematic when moving from a descriptive theory to an instrument that measures agents with prescriptive implications. In the case of hope, we assume this risk by placing normative value on feelings such as friendliness and emotions such as happiness.

There does seem to be an alternative to this normative and perhaps probabilistically generalizable form of inquiry that is more consistent with the notion of moral agency. This has to do with allowing the agent to establish the moral assumptions. Now, if we did this to an extreme, we would find that there is a different conception of something like hope for each and every individual agent and that this hope would depend on his or her own subjective moral schema, making scientific reliability an impossibility. We therefore do not advocate this extreme but do

eventually anticipate a move beyond general categorical representations, such as religious or non-religious. This categorical approach, which allows us to maintain a more complete agentic perspective and still provides replicable scientific examination, may be the best we can do. Yet, as we bracket these moral assumptions into more and more verifiable categories, we are sure to learn more about the nature of the problem we are attempting to fully address.

With this in mind, Tennen, Affleck and Tennen (2002) posit that Snyder's (2002) hope construct is incomplete without the additional component of trust. Trust in this sense is understood as seeing some sort of order in the world. Specifically, they state, "a trust in the goodness of the world that makes sense" and that "trust is the foundation of hope" (p. 312). This is an interesting claim in light of our inquiry into the philosophical foundations of hope and, we believe, perhaps somewhat unintentionally leads us to believe that a full understanding of hope must include something like a virtue of trust. Such a virtue is surely able and likely to be defined differently by different people. One person's trust might be another person's foolishness. So in order to add moral elements such as trust to Snyder's hope construct, we are either prescriptive in our assumptions at some basic level or we must allow the agent to define virtue. However, this latter notion seems to be challenging because we must find a way to determine each person's moral views on trust in order to make sense of hope. Here again, the hope process is dependent upon the moral schema of the agent.

There are many ways to attempt to deal with this problem but here we suggest that a more deliberate categorical analysis is warranted, something much greater than a binomial analysis of in group or out of group, yes or no, zero or one. Therefore, it is critical that we begin by understanding some generally incommensurable views related to hope. As Tennen, Affleck and Tennen (2002) assert, "If hope is a virtue, high hope individuals should pursue more virtuous goals than their low hope counterparts" (p. 313). This is a prescriptive notion and what we have essentially suggested herein, is that psychology should not be in the business of establishing what is and what is not virtue. This task should be left to philosophy and theology and should be described by psychology placing the responsibility of belief

primarily on the moral agent. For now, perhaps the best we can do is to establish some more complex categories of moral belief. Another, perhaps intermediate option is to utilize research methods that are more open to something of a phenomenological approach. Snyder (1991) discusses this problem in the context of perception and constructivism, as described by Tennen, Affleck and Tennen (2002):

The constructivist approach, which has generated a spate of research over the past decade and has been widely successful in its influence on the lay literature, is based on the notion that how people construe, understand, or appraise themselves and their world anticipates their health, well-being, and productivity (p. 313).

This issue of perception and virtue is perhaps also related to Snyder's goal orientation of hope, by considering the referential aspect of goal orientation. This referential aspect seems to obliterate any attempt at objective measure and this has surely been a problem of psychology, to the extent that terms like moral and virtue seem to be dismissed with a wave of the hand as some bygone Aristotelian notions that simply don't apply to contemporary psychology. But here we offer that we can no longer operate under the constraints of dyadic moral understanding. In other words, the moral assumption that underlies a certain psychological construct is presumed true and good, and if the agent falls outside of these parameters, then the agent is dismissed as outside of the norm or even counted irrational. This is the position of much psychology and social science today, and this presupposing will simply not do.

For those who hold a more existential moral philosophy, the consideration of what the conscious existence might mean in regards to hope seems important.<sup>15</sup> It is first interesting to note some differences in the philosophy of the more existentialist thinker as compared to someone who may hold to a more religious or empiricist philosophy of hope. For the existentialist moral thinker, a way to understand

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<sup>15</sup> Read Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) for supplementary existential understanding of consciousness in relation to considerations such as hope. In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre provides an interesting perspective on existence and from this it is possible to infer additional aspects and conceptions of *hope* and *hopefulness*. Sartre, J.-P. (1966). *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*. New York: Washington Square Press.

consciousness is by distinguishing between things in a sort of continuum of existence. In order to fully understand what is meant by hope, we must first understand existence, and then encounter what hope is not, hence Sartre's phrase *no-thingness*. So for those who hold a more existentialist moral philosophy, we should allow for a consideration of hope that allows for a developmental cognitive process, comparing hope to what it is not. For example, hope is not freedom, hope is not despair, hope is not happiness, etc. However hope is a bit more tricky than an understanding that a certain chair or a certain table, is *not* a certain window and is also recognized as *not* a lamp, both of which negations help me better understand the chair and the table. Hope can be thought of cognitively in a similar way in that hope is something different than self-efficacy, although they share some commonality. This aspect of existentialist thinking can be helpful in diagnosing hope for those who might tend to consider the world of existence in this manner (Sartre, 1948, 1966, 1972). What some existentialist thinkers refer to as the *reflective* consciousness seems to have more to do with hope as a determinable action; whereas hopefulness, or perhaps something more like optimism, seems to be more congruent with the *unreflected* conscious. The unreflected conscious has been described as akin to a sports metaphor of being in the zone. This is similar to what positive psychology refers to as optimism and something different than hope and this is helpful in determining agentic moral distinctions with regard to Snyder's (2002) construct. Take the basketball player who we might consider in the zone. Making the basket is an aim involving a conscious hope, even if other aspects of cognition might dominate the process. An example could be something like muscle memory that is missing certain cognitive components that make it what Snyder would consider hope. Specifically, if we remove or diminish the pathways component of hope so that it no longer exists or becomes something other than pathways thinking, then we lose the hope construct and are referring to some other phenomenon. Hope as hoping towards some specific goal seems consistent with what Snyder (2002) describes as hope and also seems more aligned to an existentialist view of the reflective conscious. For the existentialist moral thinker, this form of experiencing hope may be something more than a simply scientifically observational or

strictly psychological experience of hope. But according to Snyder's construct, this *something more* would be better described by what Snyder might refer to as emotion. This affect of hope is not confined to existentialist thinking and will be considered in the context of Christianity and the Holy Spirit. The point we are trying to emphasize here is that we measure hope through the use of Snyder's (2002) psychological construct, yet this is not the way many people understand hope. This issue of definition then has implications when attempting to convert psychological theory to counseling practice, especially when attempting to maintain the integrity of moral agents.

The limitations of Snyder's (2002) construct do not mean it has a deficit that makes it nonsensical or irrelevant, but instead should be considered as capturing some common understanding to be explored by way of different philosophies, clarifying what one means by hope without imposing a morality on hope. We ought not consider the moral agent who holds a fundamental belief in an ultimately absurd or meaningless world to be delusional or irrational for holding this belief. The same could be said about the empiricist holding that hope can only be defined through sensory experience. Should we treat this belief as abnormal or pathological? This would be a mistake from an agentic perspective of hope and will only lead to confusion, misdiagnosis and even a deterioration of respect for persons. So how then might an empiricist moral thinker differ in a broader conception of hope to, say, a more existential moral agent and why does this matter?

The more existentialist moral thinker might consider notions regarding the probability of hope in a different way than say, a theist, because of their perspective on chance. It might mean that things that cannot be controlled affect the existentialist moral schema. For example, how others might perceive the agent. Although this aspect may not dominate the existentialist's moral thinking, it is seemingly an important aspect related to things that might affect hope. There also seems to be a very varied notion of chaos or randomness in the world. This is important because a minimization of external affects might play a role in the veracity of one's considerations regarding probabilistic notions of hope. In other words, someone with a more existential moral understanding of hope may hope for something, feel ul-

mately responsible for the creation of pathways related to the hoped for outcome, yet still believe that the outcome is not achievable due to a sort of diminished agency. It is however this focus on the *self* as the sole achiever in an absurd world that seems to differentiate a more existentialist conception of hope, which places great responsibility on the agent as the sole creator of one's own existence, yet in a life that is essentially random. This thinking is sure to have effects on the moral schema generally and on hope specifically. This is a focus on the outcome of hope with the ever-present chance of failure, and it seems to be what Snyder (2002) refers to as a *stressor* in his model. The point here is that the stressor may have different effects on the outcome values, pathways creation and agency thinking of the individual with a more existentialist moral schema. For the existentialist this self-responsibility for pathways creation and agency thinking may be in certain ways more burdensome, but the probability of the hoped for thing not coming to fruition due to a stressor, or chaotic event, is still utterly present. However, the burden on the self in achieving the hope is preeminent and may dominate the thoughts of the more existential moral thinker, and this is something a bit different to thinking dominated by a more theistic moral schema. To a more existentialist moral thinker, the more theistic view of hope may seem like a Rawlsian *veil of ignorance* and something that may minimize personal responsibility. A key difference here seems to lie in the probability of understanding and carrying out God's will on the one hand, and the probability of understanding and carrying out the will of the *self* as god in an absurd and chaotic universe. If we are to maintain a truly agentic perspective, both of these influences on the moral schema must be considered.

The probability of the more existentialist moral perspective of hope being realized is inextricably tied to the *self*-made world in which the individual exists and the community of interaction with others who exist. The community engagement would not alleviate this type of agentic thinking as the agent maintains the ultimate responsibility for his or her own hope. This thinking may also forward a moral schema in which no hope outside of the hope conceived by the individual exists. In this sense, a more existential moral agent may be optimistic towards the human race or for prosperity in general, but the hope belongs to the self. This bur-

den of responsibility seems crushing at first, yet the existentialist moral thinker may see this taking on of the responsibility to hope, and the carrying out of pathways towards that hope, as something freeing. To do otherwise may seem repressive and essentially be more like moving to act on a sort of false hope, or at least a lesser hope than could be otherwise realized if one would take on the full responsibility of their own agency and act in their hope. The pathways toward hope within this moral schema may change more rapidly than pathways based on theistic beliefs due to this extreme focus on the self and the present. The present is that current state in which the self has both the power and responsibility to change circumstances. A more existentialist moral agent may consider the odds or chances of attaining hope but also assume a distinctive obligation in creating, controlling, amending, and inevitably the carrying out of pathways to hope. This type of existentialist moral thinking affects the moral schema of the agent and the process of hoping.

We should note that Bandura (2015), in describing human nature, also introduces the term “potentialist” as something between applied determinism and free will, but the approach is not notably different than a traditional applied compatibilist approach (p. 17). His potentialism seems fitting to any approach to human nature that places the human will over and above biological evolution. Bandura (2015) would seem to agree more with an existentialist or theistic notion of the moral schema as these more easily allow for an agentive approach to being and do not reduce all human functioning to chemical and biological evolutionary functions. While this is a bit of speculation, we can be sure that Bandura (2015) places great emphasis on environmental and social factors:

People are not merely reactive products of selection by environmental pressures served up by a one-sided evolutionism. They not only are prime players in the coevolution process but gain ascendancy in the codetermination process by altering their life conditions at a dizzying pace (p. 22).

This is of course Bandura’s (2015) reaction against any strict deterministic view that might strip the agent of moral judgment. This view is easier to conceptualize within our more existentialist or theistic moral perspective since the freedom

of the will maintains its preeminence over evolution and in a situation where “biological endowment is [not] treated as the ruling force” (p. 21).

### *A More Theistic Understanding of Hope*

A more theistic moral schema leads to something very different than a more deterministic, or existential view of hope. As noted earlier, hope for the more existentialist moral thinker is centered on the self, and then, other things in relation to the self. Hope for the more empiricist moral thinker is centered on the descriptive aspects of hope, and then, inferences that might be developed from these descriptive aspects. For the more theistic moral agent, hope is centered on the belief in God as the primary actor, while the self and the descriptive are something like second-order facets of hope. In this sense, aspects of hope may be related to the self, but are not dependent on the self. For a more theistic moral agent, hope is more of a gift that is given to those who place their faith in God.

It is important to emphasize that the conflict between various philosophies is not the focus of this inquiry, and the intent is to understand different views on hope and not advocate for any particular moral philosophy. Instead we understand the moral schema as *a priori* to an understanding of psychological hope and that this form of inquiry should be a concern of moral psychology, and therefore believe the dissection of the moral schema into something like incommensurate moral categories can be advantageous in developing new understanding of the psychology of hope. This is potentially beneficial to understanding hope in the context of pluralistic societies such as the U.S. Military. So we are deficient if we do not address the common theistic worldview.

For a more theistic analysis of the moral schema, we pay special attention to a prevailing American Evangelical view of Christian theism found in large populations in the United States in general and specifically in the U.S. Military establishment. The more theistic moral agent’s hope is sometimes professed as more of a certainty. However, this form of hope is different than what Snyder (2002) offers. This more certain hope is a kind of conviction of belief in such things as the return of Christ, and equivalent to truth. For many theistic moral agents, it would be con-



sidered something heretical to consider hope in terms of probability, except perhaps in the context of timing. Optimism is also something a bit different in that optimism might be desired generally, but can better satisfy a requirement of probability. Hope, by way of faith, is something believed to be both certain for many theistic moral agents, and from their perspective something altogether unknowable for the non-theistic moral agent. This preliminary position might make it somewhat challenging for the theistic moral agent to have a fruitful dialogue with, say, a more empiricist moral agent, since an initial claim is that the non-theistic moral position essentially cannot know true hope. Pieper (1965) makes the argument that the Christian's hope is a gift from God. This gift is not a particularly special problem for the Christian. The more existentialist moral agent might argue that the Christian in this sense is simply blinded by the veil of tradition. Instead of allowing this epistemological non-starter to dominate, we suggest focusing on the moral psychology of the agent, allowing the agent to determine the moral parameters and ontological aspects of belief that may affect psychological processes.

There seem to be two highly important aspects of belief for the more theistic moral agent, and in this case specifically the evangelical Christian, and its relationship with Snyder's (2002) hope construct. The first relates to belief in the revelation of Jesus Christ, and how this revelation is a most essential communication from God to humankind, otherwise known as the *gospel of Jesus Christ*. For the evangelical Christian theistic moral agent, this knowledge is essential to all things related to true hope, and any specific hope without this revelation, is not really hope at all but something more akin to desire. Another important aspect is related to the relevance of the belief in communication with the divine through prayer and God's outworking in the world. Both of these aspects of belief are important in understanding the effects this form of belief may have on the moral schema and also the construct of psychological hope. Specifically, Snyder (2002) seems to delegate these forms of interaction between belief and cognitive judgment to emotion. Yet, this simplistic understanding relegating all interaction between belief and cognition to emotion or feelings would likely be offensive to the more theistic moral agent. Instead, we want to allow the beliefs of the moral agent to offer an under-

standing of hope without degrading such beliefs, invoking the principle of respect for persons.

If we wish to understand a more theistic notion of hope, we should take into account things such as faith and perspectives on reason, which are appreciably related to hope. The credo of Anselm of Canterbury was “I believe so that I may understand”, from the Latin *Credo ut intelligam*, which was adopted from St. Augustine.<sup>16</sup> This implies a distinctly different assumption to what might be found in some other moral philosophies. Belief in this sense comes prior to an understanding of such things as hope. Without this conviction of belief, the idea of hope is destined to be confused with something altogether different. From a Christian perspective, the belief *in* Jesus Christ as a part of the triune godhead allows one to experience the power of God through the Holy Spirit, and this belief is what leads to a more authentic understanding of hope. Of course what is meant by *in Christ* is both simple and complicated. This belief is not simply that the person of Jesus Christ existed, it is a belief in the life, death and resurrection of Christ, that he *was* and *is* God, and that only through *His* power may we have authentic hope. This is to offer one’s entire being to *Him* freely.<sup>17</sup> Wolterstorff (1984) clarifies a philosophical distinction when he states, “Augustine points to the phenomenon of *absolutizing* as a clue. Instead of taking God as absolute, the unbeliever absolutizes something else” (p. 32). With this in mind, let us turn to how, more generally speaking, the theist might formulate a coherent understanding of hope by way of a more theologically based moral schema. As noted earlier, the Christian hope begins with a belief in the revelation of Jesus Christ. This revelation is commonly broken into *general* revelation and *special* revelation. Broadly speaking, general revelation, sometimes referred to as natural revelation, refers to the discovery of God by natural means such as reason, observation, and sense data; but also and perhaps most importantly for this analysis, includes the spiritual realm related to the agent’s conscience. The evangelical perspective of general revelation does not

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<sup>16</sup>See Chapter 30 in Turner, W. (1903). *History of Philosophy*.

<sup>17</sup> See the Apostle Paul’s letters to the Corinthians (2 Cor 5:14-18; 8:5).

provide by way of reason, the knowledge of God. Berkouwer (1959) makes this point quite clear:

To speak of the general revelation of God does not in any respect mean doing less than justice to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. Rather, it emphasizes the guilt and lost condition, the darkness and the blindness, of fallen man, who sees the works of God's hand no more, and no longer can discover God therein (pp. 16).

In the evangelical tradition in the United States, God's general revelation, which Berkouwer (1959) also deems to be sufficient for God's judgment of humankind, is a consideration of belief that should not be overlooked when examining the moral schema of the agent. For a more existentialist non-theistic moral thinker, this theistic view may be considered a sort of self-imposed veil of religion that creates a sort of blindness to the freedom of reality. Likewise for the theist, the existentialist is oblivious to an appreciation for the general revelation of God. Of course, proponents of both worldviews might believe that the strict anti-theistic empiricist is closed to anything metaphysical and beyond the testable senses. This is of course one of the fundamental issues when trying to define something such as hope in a pluralistic yet agentive context. The outcome of these different views is often what seems like inconsistency but may be better treated as paradox. Unfortunately, it seems that in a relational context, there is often a greater risk of coercion and imposition upon the moral agent, as opposed to an open willingness to understand and accept someone else's beliefs. For many theists, especially in the United States, the revelation of God also includes another type of revelation found in sacred texts, which also provides a foundation for some agents' moral schema.

According to a broad-based consensus in Protestant Christian traditions, *special* revelation has been provided to humankind due to the sinful state of the human and God's willingness to restore "fellowship" with humankind; Enns (2008) comments for example: "...it was essential that God reveal the way of salvation and reconciliation; hence, the essence of special revelation centers on the person of Jesus Christ" (p. 161). This is important for an understanding of a more theistic moral agent who might view sacred texts as an ultimate authority. Often, in the United States, when a Christian from the Protestant tradition speaks of things such

as *hope*, there is ordinarily an implied connection to the special revelation provided by God through the life and words of Jesus Christ and found in Biblical texts. This can be an exceedingly uncomfortable foundational belief for some psychologists, who may hold very incommensurable beliefs than those that gird the moral schema of many theistic agents.

This is not an easy concept to grasp from other incommensurable moral perspectives, because the moral theist includes God's authority on all matters moral or otherwise. Many American Protestant Christians suppose that the belief in God involves willingness on the part of the individual, as well as the grace bestowed by God onto the individual, that allows one to be secure in their belief of eternal salvation and the prospect of spending life after death in the presence of God. This becomes a form of ultimate hope common in American Evangelical Christianity. This particular kind of Christian hope could be incorrectly connected to the other incommensurable moral philosophies by understanding it as optimism. Optimism has a connotation of uncertainty, and therefore a more theistic moral agent might reject this idea on the basis of it being something akin to a probabilistic heresy. This contradictory type of belief makes counseling situations exceedingly risky in terms of moral disengagement, which we will explore later.

In order to understand a more evangelical type of Christian hope commonly found in the United States, we cannot overlook belief involving this form of ultimate hope. The two are interconnected forms of hope, which might be understood in Snyder's (2002) construct in terms of his "developmental lessons of correlation and causality" (p. 254). These are a part of Snyder's "learning history" of the agent, which are also the basis for the agent's moral schema (p. 254).

The hope of the more theistic moral agent is often based on justification through faith and by God's grace and is fundamentally connected to both peace and joy for many American Evangelical and Protestant Christians. By peace, these Christians tend to mean something like the ability to live one's life without the peril of damnation, or experiencing some other complete separation from God after death. Theistic moral agents often connect particular hopes that are morally bound by one's love for Jesus Christ and an understanding of his teachings or interpreta-

tions of his teachings by the church. The notion of joy is also connected to this ultimate hope but can be experienced in the present. MacDonald (1995) states: “It is one of the delightful paradoxes of the Christian faith that joy can coexist with affliction. The opposite of joy is sin, not suffering” (p. 1696). In this sense, the ultimate hope cannot be completely separated from present particular hopes. Often for the more theistic moral agent, the belief in eternal salvation can produce joy in the present, which in turn produces determination in character, which then results in ultimate hope.

This particular hope then, for many Christians, can be closely related to Snyder’s (2002) construct which includes the creation of pathways to the goal of hope and the agency required to engage in such pathways, yet the Christian’s particular hope also works a bit differently. Pathways and agency related to the object of hope can be realized by the more theistic moral agent in the same way Snyder (1994, 2002) proposes, however, the teaching of Christian doctrine allows for authentic particular hope to be different in nature. The mechanism for activation of pathways to hope is not the self, but God. Snyder (2002) might understand this activation as part of emotions. The American Christian understanding of hope takes on agency and pathways of Snyder’s (2002) hope construct in unique ways since “rectification with God, hope, eschatological glory, patience in suffering, the love of God, the Spirit of God, and the death of Christ” cannot be separated without consequence (Witherington, 2004, p. 131). Having such beliefs may create incommensurability between two moral agents, which might cause moral disengagement that could impact either agent in the relationship.

It is particularly challenging to completely reconcile the agency aspect of Snyder’s (2002) conception of hope with evangelical Christian thinking such as that forwarded by Berkouwer (1959). For many theistic moral agents, the notion of *agency* rests ultimately in one’s faithfulness to God. The divide in thinking lies in a sort of ultimate self-reliance. Many theistic moral agents believe that, through faith, God will provide the necessary agency required by the individual, but the source of this agency cannot be attributed to the self, otherwise there is danger related to the sin of pride. It is at this point that certain moral agents will claim in-

compatibility, incommensurability or some other objection related to the inability to synchronize agentive theory. However, moral agents should not use this as a reason to end the relationship. The agent should instead venture further into the meaning behind these challenging aspects of philosophy, theology, theory and practice. This is a journey of understanding that MacIntyre (1981) encourages as a virtuous endeavor.

We should consider that for the theist, there is the belief that pathways are affected through an ongoing relationship with God and that the power of the affect lies in the relationship. So the theist is dually responsible for developing pathways to temporal goals that are consistent with ultimate goals, but may appeal to God for such things as endurance, wisdom, and discernment prior to and during the process of creating pathways. This can be understood in Snyder's (2002) context by way of his affective elements that have a reciprocal relationship with agency and pathways thinking. Additionally, the more theistic moral agent often believes that God can directly affect both the creation of and one's ability to realize goals that are good. These are those goals that are congruent with such things as theological teachings, Scripture, or communion with the Holy Spirit. This is surely outside of what Snyder (2002) intends to capture with emotion.

Snyder (1999) attributes high scores on his Hope Scale to better attitudes of well-being and stronger self-esteem. For the more theistic moral agent it seems more obvious to attribute the first aspect of well-being here to a belief in God who is watching, protecting from evil, and has the agent's best interest in a perfect long-term plan. One can understand how this type of thinking might assist the more theistic moral agent in times of hardship by bestowing some sense of well-being regardless of the actual circumstances. This sense of well-being could provide great resolve for the faithful individual who is confident in an ultimate hope beyond the current circumstances and has the faith that God's plan is perfect regardless of the present conditions. This type of well-being could also be powerful for the more theistic moral agent because pathways and agency are only *wrong* if they are not finally *good*, somehow contrary to God's will. So, the more theistic moral agent

may be more resolved to develop pathways pleasing to God and so fulfill their own well-being through faith.

For many theistic moral agents, goals cannot be divorced from God. They must always be synergistic with God's plan for the believer's life. If the goals are not *good* in this sense, then pathways cannot be fully supported by the accompanying moral schema. What we might call *evil* goals may cause cognitive dissonance for theistic moral agents. For example, the agent may have the personal goal of buying a new house, without God having approved this goal in the mind of the agent. What can then be said about God's response to this hope? Perhaps it would be considered that this is not *good* hope at all. On the other hand, this belief in the search for God's will could allow the more theistic moral agent to continually seek new goals and new pathways through something like prayer or meditation. Cognitive dissonance related to goals for the theistic moral agent is evidence of moral disengagement and hope that is not authentic.

The probability that any particular hope might be realized should not be invalidated even if the agent, as the theist might, places all possibilities in the hands of God. In other words, there exists a maintaining of agency, since the individual cannot comprehend the future relative to God's plan. There is still a probabilistic notion of hope that can be assigned to the theistic moral agent. However, this notion of hope might be perceived differently than other agents'. In one sense, the theistic moral agent might assume full responsibility in actions related to fulfilling the hope they believe is the will of God. The agent may believe they are provided with strength or endurance by God to both create and maintain pathways to hope, but the outcome cannot be *known* in a certain temporal sense.

The more theistic moral agent, especially in the United States, often claims guidance from sacred texts such as the Bible, or even to possess wisdom through communication with the divine. However, if the agent truly believes God has revealed a particular hope, then we are no longer speaking of *hope*, in the sense that there is no perceived chance of failure related to the hoped for thing. There may be a lack of faith, but the constraints of certainty no longer allow for hope to be Snyder's (2002) conception of hope. Instead, we must consider that the hoped for

thing for the theistic moral agent, might be determined through reason as an interaction with the divine.

So for the theistic moral agent, particular hope is always related to a sort of yearning that the outworking of God in the world is fulfilled, but also an understanding that the agent cannot know God's exact plan. This yearning can be accommodated in part by Snyder's (2002) affective dimensions. There is a form of uncertainty present in the mind of most theistic moral agents, which allows for the notion of probability. However, the theistic moral agent may speak of this probability in different terms related to hope since faith in the sovereignty and will of God exists on one hand, and a living-by-faith exists on the other, which creates a sort of paradox. This may be communicated as a sort of certainty on the part of theists due to a matter of conviction but it should not be confused with certainty in the context of Snyder's (2002) conception of hope. The common ground between various agents may be found in the unknowableness of particular hopes. There is a seeking for a relatively good hope in all agentive moral accounts, and there is typically a search for pathways related to that hope. There also seems to be a form of creativity and self-efficacy related to pathways, even if the source of that creativity is claimed to be ultimately different. Finally, there is the unknowable outcome related to any particular hope. The more theistic moral agent may articulate this unknowableness differently, but it still exists, otherwise the agent claims to either be God or know the mind of God, which is something altogether different to hope. Hence, there is a chance that the hoped for thing is either misleading, in other words not good hope at all, or that the thing hoped for is not part of God's plan in the same way, time or place that the agent conceptualizes the hope.

The more theistic moral agent is assumed to activate mechanisms of moral disengagement, pathways, agency and goals in a different way than the more empiricist or existentialist moral agent. An understanding of these various assumptions is important when considering relationships between agents and should not be overlooked in situations where counseling is a primary purpose of establishing the relationship.



### The Moral Nature of Hope

Thus far we have considered hope in regards to three common moral positions common in a modern pluralistic society or diverse organization in the West, specifically in the United States. Research also suggests a relationship between the greater prospects of personal hope as measured by Snyder and colleagues and there being a lower propensity for the disengagement of moral self-sanctions. In Snyder's (2002) hope construct there seems to be an implied moral aspect. This aspect is treated in an agentic fashion, which is morally subjective. The assumed agency and pathways related to the goals of *hope* must be morally consistent with the individual's moral schema. The goals themselves must also be consistent with one's moral schema. Otherwise, the individual contradicts his or her own moral character, a concept that refers to moral consistency over the long term. However, it is obviously not the case that the goals, pathways and agency associated with hope are always consistent with one's moral schema. This is the basis for the connection to Bandura's (1999) notion of moral disengagement.

Consider a specific moral question related to *hope*, something like, is it wrong to hope for the murder of an evil dictator? First, we need to inquire as to whether this is truly hope in the mind of the agent or if, although certain individuals may use the word hope, the actual meaning of their hope is something other than Snyder's (2002) conception of hope, or it is otherwise hope that is not consistent with their own moral schema. The answer is of course dependent upon the agent although the presuppositions may be different, depending on the structure of the individual's moral schema. If the agent assumes something of a consequentialist ethic related to the outcome value, they may believe that it is generally wrong to kill, yet this moral principle can be trumped by another principle related to what the agent considers a greater good, which may justify the agent in hoping for such a thing without them compromising their own agentic moral schema. Another moral agent may hold to more of a Kantian Categorical Imperative and believe that it is never right to kill regardless of the consequences or outcome. In essence, the moral schema of the individual can determine something about the outcome value of hope. Of course, an inconsistency can occur with this same agent where the out-

come value of hope appears coherent, but where the agent disengages from his or her own moral self-sanctions.

For the more theistic moral agent who believes in objective truth, their ethic can be derived from an interpretation of God's revelation. In the case of the killing of the evil dictator, the individual might justify hope without compromising his or her own moral schema. However, many American Christians differentiate between what is meant by killing and murder. So even in this seemingly straightforward example, there can still be a disengagement of moral self-sanctions directed at the outcome value of hope.

A more difficult question might be related to understanding whether hoped for things, agency related to hope, and pathways to things hoped for, could be amoral. For some this may not be possible. To the more theistic moral agent this amoral notion seems problematic if all things must inevitably correspond to God's revelation. If hope includes agency, then there is a moral aspect to that agency because "Christian eschatology directs us not only toward the end times but also to responsibilities in the present day to work for God's praise and glory" (Reed, 2007, p. 82). The responsibility of the agent should include both cognitive and conative aspects of hope for the Christian in search of God's will, where hoping is consistent with God's plan.

Hopes are not necessarily equally morally relevant to the individual at any single moment. In other words, hopes hold value in time. From an agentic perspective, the individual assumes the overall aspect of morality related to hoping and each particular hope is subject to the agent's moral schema to the degree the agent recognizes the relationship through some sort of conscious reflection. That all hope from an agentic perspective is necessarily moral is key in understanding a relationship to the disengagement of moral self-sanctions, regardless of *a priori* assumptions.

### **Consequences of Moral Disengagement and Religious Thinking on Hope**

The relationship between hope and moral disengagement is reciprocal in nature. The strength of beliefs, and perhaps aspects of faith, and ultimate authority

related to the agent's moral schema are important aspects of hope, when considering any particular agent. Martin (2013) takes an encyclopedic approach in analyzing hope, which offers a unique and robust perspective. An encyclopedic approach also lends itself to the categorization of individuals into having one kind of hope or another, as opposed to attempting to understand how the agent has come to determine what hope means. This is not a moral categorization but a more intense focus on how hope happens psychologically.

Martin attempts to deal with subjectively varied understandings of hope through a justificatory approach. While critiquing Ariel Meirav, she states, "...he [Meirav] is right that the difference between hope and despair is a matter of the justificatory attitude one adopts. He is also right to call this attitude a way of 'seeing' rather than a belief" (Martin, 2013, p. 58). This aspect of seeing hope emphasized a process approach to hope, although the process of hope does seem inextricably tied to beliefs. The individual's perceived attitude is agentic, and reciprocally related to the agent's own rational beliefs. However, the rational ultimately belongs to the agent, otherwise we start to describe pathology. There is no categorical difference between good or bad hope if we assume that the agent is a conscious being and responsible for their underlying beliefs and a rational deliberation that leads to attitudinal formation. Martin (2013) offers essentially that if hope happens, there will be differences in the strength of hope. For example, there is a distinguishing aspect among agents where hope seems to be stronger in one agent under certain circumstances, a type of hoping against hope. Martin (2013) indicates that working with cancer patients inspired her initial interests in hope. She compares two patients' conceptions of hope and describes the result as, "there is some sense in which her hope [Bess's] is higher or greater or stronger than Alan's" (Martin, 2013, p. 48). Martin initially investigates what she refers to as the *orthodox definition of hope* to help us understand that this *orthodox*, or what might be understood as a more traditional western, definition fails to account for some aspects of hope, specifically this greater or stronger aspect observed in some cases of individuals who hold hope for the same object. It seems that the moral emphasis one places on such things as Snyder's (2002) outcome value are relevant. A greater conviction related

to the moral schema can certainly influence the value of hoped for outcomes. The propensity for moral disengagement related to the outcome value of the hoped for thing is also influential. Bandura (1999) does not suggest otherwise in that activation of mechanisms of moral disengagement can assuage a little or a great deal of the guilt associated with a questionable outcome. Hence Snyder's (2002) focus on this value aspect of hope. This greater or lesser form of hope is something that cannot be set aside by claims of irrationality if we grant the agent rationality based upon their own beliefs, attitudes, intentions, and behavioral manifestations related to hope.

Referencing an earlier example, Martin (2013) analyzes the movie *The Shawshank Redemption* and offers that that Andy and Red's attitudes related to the hope of escape from the prison differ greatly. Martin states that Andy and Red, "plausibly share the same desire and probability estimates" related to the freedom from prison (p. 49), but that Andy seems to have a greater hope than Red. She points out that the orthodox definition cannot account fully for this difference. "Mental imaging", which refers to something like visualization, seems somewhat insufficient to account for the hope described in this case, as well as other cases she presents (p. 52). When considering mental imaging and an agentic perspective of hope, the individual's hope may be framed in the context of the individual's moral schema. We can then attempt to account for comparative differences in hope between individuals who presumably hope for the same goal or outcome, but display different attitudes toward the goal or behavioral manifestations related to the outcome. Consider the difference between Red, who seems not to be overly hopeful for his freedom from prison, compared to Andy, who is exceedingly hopeful towards his freedom. Morally speaking, Red may believe he deserves to be punished for his crime, more so than Andy, who is notably innocent of the crime he is accused of. But, even if this is not the case, Red might still be contented with prison life, and while someone other than Red may not understand why he might not want to be free as Andy does, it is surely reasonable that this might be the case. In the *The Shawshank Redemption*, Red committed a crime and Andy did not, yet both were sentenced to life in prison. Andy and Red are both presented as warranting

their freedom regardless of their former actions. Still, when we consider the agent's moral schema in relation to the hope they have regarding freedom, it is not difficult to understand why they may have the same desire to be free, but have differing hopes toward that objective, or to use Snyder's term, goal - since, from an agentive perspective, the agent's moral schema is treated as unique and distinct (otherwise, there is no autonomous agency).

Desire to achieve a hoped for goal or objective is an attitude reflective of the agent's interaction with his or her own moral schema. We may have a strong desire for something we believe is good or worthy and is completely in line with our own moral schema. However, we may also begin a process of hope and concurrently activate psychological mechanisms of moral disengagement. In other words, we can disengage from our own moral self-sanctions in order to assuage associations of guilt or conscience related to the goal. This becomes complicated because whether the agent actually believes in the goodness or the hope is, for our purposes, the ultimate responsibility of the agent, as is the issue related to activating mechanisms of moral disengagement in order to hold a consistent attitude toward a hoped for thing. The addition of relationships complicates this hope process.

Consider Air Force members piloting UAVs in a combat zone during Operation Enduring Freedom. Pilot A hopes for the destruction of the enemy with minimal collateral damage. This mission may be carried to completion and the hope fulfilled without any disengagement of moral self-sanctions. Here the pilot believes the enemy should be destroyed and there is no cognitive or conative dissonance. However, Pilot B may hope for the same outcome, while being somewhat unsure of his ultimate authority to kill anyone, even the enemy, much less children who may be helping the enemy by bringing them food and who happen to be in the area of the strike zone. How is it that both of these pilots may display the same kind of hope? It is possible to understand this observational similarity by taking into account the disengagement of moral self-sanctions. Simply put, Pilot B can activate mechanisms of moral disengagement in order to carry out the hoped-for objective of destroying the enemy. Furthermore, at the time this is happening, Pilot

B may be unaware of the activation of these mechanisms of disengagement and it may only be years later that this dissonance with his or her own moral schema comes to light. It is reasonable that this issue of hope related to moral disengagement is also related to other issues such as PTSD and self-destructive behaviors. Now, focus on the behaviorally manifested state as compared to the full state, from belief to action, which includes the agent's moral schema. If both states allow for the alignment of the agent's own moral schema, then there should be no direct effect regarding different levels or greatness of hope. If however, Pilot A is in line with his or her moral schema, whilst Pilot B is activating mechanisms of moral disengagement in order to fulfill a hoped for outcome, it is reasonable to assume that there will be differences in the behavioral manifestations which could be easily translated as variations in the agents' strength of hope.

In a similar light, the probability of achieving one's goal or objective is tied to one's moral schema. Here we need to consider how the agent might think about probability in general as well as consider the probability of success related to an associated hope. One of the inherent difficulties related to understanding how an agent might understand any assigned probability corresponds to the issue of personal philosophy related to what is and what ought to be. We do not suggest that an agent is actually considering this is/ought problem for each hope, but we do suggest that this problem is relevant and should not be completely overlooked when discussing hope in the context of probabilities. An individual may accept a standard of probability, such as is found in the social sciences with confidence intervals of 95 or 99 percent, which allows for a 5 or 1 percent significance level, and interpret the results as both what is and what ought to be. This essentially means that, in the standard case of social science, up to 5 percent of results can involve a rejection of a null hypothesis. Of course, people do not go around formally conjuring up hypotheses, null hypotheses, and what the probability of error threshold will be, then calculating the data in an attempt to determine what they might consider truth, wondering whether they might have committed a type I or type II statistical error. However, some people do view the world in this way. So if probability in hope is to be utilized in understanding hope, conscious psychological mechanisms

must be implied in order that the agent is able to make sense of something like probability or chance of success (Black, 1964).

Nevertheless, there are some fundamental aspects related to hope and probability that should initially be explored from more philosophical perspectives. It seems problematic that an observer could assign any authentic value to an agent's hope relating to the probability of success, beyond having some understanding of how the agent might perceive and communicate those odds. But consider the person who claims that they do not believe in *odds* because of a belief that "God doesn't play dice."<sup>18</sup> It seems that there are several issues we must face in order to accommodate this type of moral agent, or otherwise we must consider them simply irrational and move on. Therefore, at the outset of any exploration of hope, we should consider how one understands probability related to hope. If by probability we mean to include some completely external influencer, or an external influence that somehow works through the agent, then we might be able to better understand the hope of this sort of agent. So in this case the agent may hope for something that is completely consistent with his or her own moral schema and that their belief system includes, for example, a sovereign God. In one sense this could mean that an individual is not really hoping independently, but that they are simply trying to understand the will of God and then respectively hope for that outcome. In this case hope simply becomes a means. This line of thinking requires a belief in some infinite force, and in one sense perhaps countering probabilistic thinking.

#### *Hoping and Disengaging from Moral Self-sanctions*

It is important to consider the aspects of rationality, probability, and autonomy in agency if one is to understand how the disengagement of moral self-sanctions might influence hope. Although proponents of *Rational Choice Theory* may wish to focus on a broader spectrum of social behavior, and although moral

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<sup>18</sup> This famous quote is not used here as Einstein intended. His was a metaphysical understanding of order. However, some people do interpret his meaning in this way to synthesize their understanding of God as being fully omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient and in complete control of all things.

behavior can be considered a social behavior, the intent here is to continue to allow the individual to assume full agency within the context of their own moral schema.<sup>19</sup> Arguments that begin with an attempt to define morality for the individual can be helpful, especially in a social or organizational context. However, factoring in the autonomy of the individual moral agent is necessary to understand such things as hope and the disengagement of moral self-sanctions. Otherwise, we are not really talking about *self*-sanctions.

Martin (2013) provides a logical association of hope with moral self-sanctioning through her *incorporation analysis*, where there is a special focus on desire. She specifically describes an aspect where an individual might incorporate their desire into personal agency. This licensing provides reasoning for the motivation to conduct activities related to the hoped for thing. In a different manner, we might say that licensing provides the agency to desire the pathways to hope. This is not exactly what Martin means by her incorporation analysis, but it does allow us to focus on a specific aspect of hope that she elucidates well, which is a licensing aspect of hope. We should consider the practical norms associated with licensing and incorporating one's desires into their own agency, but also consider the reasons for engagement with activities related to the pathways of hope. These reasons might affect one's propensity to disengage from moral self-sanctions, explicitly the justificatory reasons for the assumption of agency related to the creation and follow-on activities related to hope.

Bandura (1999) provides several specific instances of moral disengagement through the activation of psychological mechanisms. These mechanisms are related to Martin's (2013) notion of licensing within her incorporation analysis. For example, we might consider Bandura's argument that moral agency is "manifested in both the power to refrain from behaving inhumanely and the proactive power to behave humanely" (Bandura, 1999, p. 193). It is logical that there is a noteworthy relationship between licensing in hope and a proactive power to behave. Further-

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<sup>19</sup> The major controversy in Rational Choice Theory (RCT) is related to norms and to economic utility, and the necessary autonomy from such utility. See Opp (2012) for a detailed analysis of the social science controversy related to RCT.



more, this connection could be considered a causal relationship. It is reasonable that one must first license the desire for the practical attitudes related to hoping before one can proactively engage in activities related to the hoped for behavior. The latter is included in Snyder's (2002) *pathways*. A follow-on question should of course inquire as to the nature of the agent's licensing and that relationship to the agent's moral schema.

The obvious connection is the association between the argument that hope by incorporation is licensed and that licensing can be affected by psychological mechanisms related to the selective disengagement of moral self-sanctions, which can be activated to allow for such licensing. This may at first seem counterintuitive and so an example might be in order. To develop this idea, consider Martin's (2013) cancer patients Alan and Bess. In Martin's story, Alan and Bess have the same diagnosis of cancer and both hope for an unlikely outcome by enrolling in an experimental cancer treatment program. However, Alan seems to hope something of a lesser hope than Bess, who likely seems overly optimistic about the treatment, from Alan's perspective. One of the causes of such a lessening of hope might be found in the strength of agency that might occur if one has activated mechanisms of moral disengagement in order to justify the hoped for outcome. Perhaps Alan thinks about the economic cost of his treatment for his family. On the one hand he wants to live, but he is also confident that his treatment may simply prolong some kind of suffering for his family. Alan may utilize moral justification, palliative comparison and euphemistic labeling to assuage the guilt associated with *hurting* his family. He may also utilize diffusion or displacement of responsibility to make this hope morally palatable. For example, he may ask his family what they think he should do, knowing full well that they will offer their full support for any treatment, thereby diffusing his own moral agency related to the treatment option chosen.

This moral disengagement associated with hope can surely have an effect on what might be perceived as a sort of altruistic hope. A strength in the *hope* that, prior to a sort of deep reflection, might be thought of as providing the twofold strength of agency as well as a fortitude regarding the creation and execution of

pathways to hope. Moral disengagement related to hoping is also reasonably associated with the incorporation of desire, specifically the licensing of such desire toward hope. Hence, moral disengagement related to hope might help explain Martin's (2013) observation of the cancer patients Alan and Bess, who both seem to equally desire the cure, but where Alan seems to have a slighter hope than Bess.

Understanding a more detailed account of the relationship between the disengagement of moral self-sanctions and hope will allow us to better account for forms of lesser or greater hope. A lesser or greater hope can be affected by moral disengagement during what Martin (2013) refers to as the incorporation element of hope because it better explains the variation in hope that might occur where there seems on the one hand the same probability of the hoped for outcome and the identical potency of desire, but on the other hand where one person may still seem less hopeful than the other. This is essentially the disengagement of moral self-sanctions combined with Martin's (2013) account of what she refers to as hoping against hope as an increase in the licensing of the adoption of desire for hope. Together, the characteristics of moral disengagement and licensing related to the incorporation aspect of hope, allow us to plausibly explain perceived variation in observations related to hope and moral agency.

Snyder, Sigmund and Feldman (2002) conclude, "Many of the costs and benefits of Religion may be explained by hope theory" (p. 237). This connection assists in understanding a relationship between hope, religion and moral disengagement. We will discuss the specific relationship between intrinsic religiosity and moral disengagement at some length but will consider the more general notion of religion and hope. The advent of positive psychology has allowed psychology to move beyond the idea that religion is simply some manifestation of mass neurosis or pathology and instead that religious belief and practices are a part of psychological phenomena that can be studied and that help explain and predict human behavior, conation and cognition. Religion can affect mental health and well-being in positive and negative ways, but herein we agree with Snyder et al. in that religion as a phenomenon is a result of normal psycho-social behaviors and explainable through psychological processes and constructs (p. 234). In fact, our research sup-

ports the idea that certain kinds of religiosity or spirituality are more effective than others in positively affecting psychological processes. We have also supported the notion that hope and intrinsic religiosity are different psychological constructs that both positively correlate and together are important in predicting one's propensity for the disengagement of moral self-sanctions.

Snyder, Sigmund & Feldman (2002) remind us that goals are targets of cognitive processes and purposeful behavior. Goals vary in things like abstractness and time. Some goals are more easily mentally imaged than others and some take many years to achieve. Other goals may never fully be achieved in the normal lifespan. Yet, Snyder's construct includes cognitive mechanisms related to the pursuit of all goals captured in pathways thinking and agency, but important to our examination of intrinsic religiosity, "the subjective experience of hopefulness does not depend on the actual existence or reality of such pathways" (p. 235). Since the notion of agency in hope is also based on perception, there seems no reason that subjective religious beliefs would differ from any other sort of beliefs in their ability to motivate one to utilize developed pathways. Specific goals can be considered religious when the agent ties them to larger abstract religious goals. The religiousness of goals may have a greater or lesser effect on pathways and agency relative to the intrinsic religious connection to the outcome value. Therefore goals can become sacred in terms of the agent's mental processes (Snyder et al., 2002). However, the relationship of sacred or religiously oriented goals to mental and physical health becomes a bit more complicated because unless we maintain health only in terms of the agent's perspective, we become prescriptive regarding what constitutes good health. Snyder et al. (2002) point out that some scientists have determined that religion is harmful to human flourishing and mental health, yet their position is not quite so broadly defined. They conclude that specific goals derived from specific religious beliefs may be harmful to particular persons. We agree with this assessment to the extent that the mental processes are congruent with the moral schema of the agent.

However, the goal conflict has been negatively correlated with religious or theistically oriented goals (Emmons, Cheung & Tehrani, 1998). Our research

demonstrates that hope is negatively associated with one's propensity for the disengagement of moral self-sanctions. This evidence would seem to indicate that religious oriented goals could have either a positive or negative effect on well-being generally. Positive effects of religiously oriented goals may cut down on certain unhealthy practices such as smoking or eating unhealthy foods. Still, our research shows that religious practice, in the case of predicting a propensity for moral disengagement is not significant, meaning that it seems less important that things like goal congruence and hope are affiliated with religious rights and rituals. Our research does indicate a positive relationship between hope and intrinsic religiosity when related to moral disengagement. Therefore, in terms of cognitive well-being it seems that the practice of religious activities is far less important than the conviction of religious belief. Furthermore, it is possible that religiously oriented outcome values may have a positive effect on pathways creation and agency related to hope. This makes sense if the conviction is authentic and the agent is not activating mechanisms of moral disengagement related to hope (Snyder, Sigmon & Feldman, 2002). This conception is demonstrated in Figure 6, although more research needs to be done to fully appreciate these relationships.

Snyder, Sigmon & Feldman (2002) indicate that more pathways might be created through religiously oriented thinking and that a confidence in belief may also allow for more agency thoughts and state:

Religion often instills confidence in believers that they can accomplish their goals or the divine commands. These agency thoughts are the result of both specific religious beliefs and the supportive resources inherent in most religious communities. The more agency thoughts, the higher the person's psychological well-being...Religion offers social support, doctrines, and divine aid, thus increasing the available pathways and one's sense of agency (p. 237).

It is also possible that the strength or veracity, as opposed to the sheer number, of pathways and agency thoughts are important to hope, especially when perceived as divine intervention.

There seems to be ample evidence of a connection between positive aspects of religious thought and hope. Furthermore, it seems practical to conclude that

hope might be strengthened and made more resilient by these religiously oriented thoughts and that this form of hope may lower the propensity for activation of mechanisms related to the disengagement of moral self-sanctions, and that this may lead to a lowering of self-destructive behaviors. Of course, more research should be conducted to elucidate and verify these connections, and it is our hope that this will happen.

## Chapter 6 – Intrinsic Religiosity and Moral Disengagement

Our research has demonstrated a significant correlation between what Koenig and Büssing (2010) describe as *intrinsic religiosity* and Bandura's (1999) notion of *moral disengagement*. Intrinsic religiosity has become a common term often juxtaposed with extrinsic religiosity. Originally, Hoge (1972) and Allport and Ross (1967) contrasted these two types in an attempt to distinguish a sort of subjective internalized religiosity, which became known as intrinsic religiosity, from the practice of religion and religious ritual such as attending church or participating in a religious choir. The latter is what has become known generally as extrinsic religiosity and can be further categorized into *organizational religious activity*, such as attending a religious function, and *non-organizational religious activity*, such as personal prayer or the study of sacred texts (Koenig & Büssing, 2010). The disengagement of moral self-sanctions seems to be understandably allied with the notion of intrinsic or subjective religiosity by two primary factors, *conviction* and *motivation* as described by Koenig and Büssing (2010). We utilize the term *subjective* motivation as synonymous with *intrinsic* motivation throughout this exploration.

Our research establishes significance and connects moral disengagement with intrinsic religiosity and is focused on combat veterans who recently returned from war. This particular form of trauma provides unique insights regarding intrinsic religiosity's association with moral disengagement. The first phase of inquiry follows from the previous chapter and provides a more theistic view of intrinsic religiosity, which also backs up our view that the psychology regarding affairs of the present life lived are inextricably connected with expectations and a conviction based on those expectations regarding the afterlife. This analysis is followed by another common view of intrinsic religiosity that is more associated with the present but with an expectation of the uncertainty of there being anything following one's present existence. This latter encompassing view, which we shall refer to as the *unknowable view*, is associated with intrinsic religiosity through something akin to *Pascal's Wager*, where there exists some rational benefit to believing in the di-

vine but where this rationale is based on odds or probability rather than something more analogous with a commitment through faith. Individuals with this view, who include those with a more empiricist moral schema, might refer to themselves as agnostics or skeptics.

Therefore we consider intrinsic religiosity and its relation to the disengagement of moral self-sanctions in light of three general philosophical views of life, a theistic view, an agnostic view, and an antitheistic view. We purposefully use the term *antitheist* here to distinguish clearly between the second, more agnostic moral view - the *unknowable view* - and those whose perspective is more adamantly opposed to the incorporation of any conception of the divine into their reason, to the point of actively rationalizing against any form of personal religiosity. This is an attempt to take into account the protest culture articulated earlier and make *intrinsic religiosity* relevant to all agents by focusing on the psychological mechanisms related to intrinsic religious belief and moral cognition and conation.

#### *A More Theistic View of Intrinsic Religiosity*

Our more theistic view should not be regarded as strictly limited to those who would consider themselves theists. Nor do we believe this analysis to be contextually restricted to be merely applicable to populations such as combat veterans. Certain deistic, polytheistic and pantheistic philosophical positions are worthy of consideration within our context. Someone who has experienced any near-death or traumatic experience - a car accident, for example - might also fit into the contextual portion of this analysis. We argue that the more theistic moral position can be contextually adapted to any theist or other person who has an intimate understanding of the finality of their present state and who actively pursues communion with the divine in order that their life might be in accord with a divine plan, however that may be interpreted more specifically by the individual. Moreover, the agentive moral perspective is important here because we continue to focus on the beliefs of the individual as providing some authority for analysis, as opposed to imposing a right, ought or should upon the individual moral agent. The intent is to allow for a

closer analysis of the proposed connection between intrinsic religiosity and the individual's moral schema.

For the more theistic moral agent, intrinsic religiosity can be manifested by strong conviction; a conviction that is inevitably connected with things like moral motivation and hope (Rest et al. 1999; Snyder 2002). It is the potency of this conviction that might distinguish the more theistic moral agent from the more agnostic or antitheistic moral agent. It is quite common to hear similar opinions from those who claim Christianity as a basis for their theistic moral beliefs. If asked, do you have any doubt that Jesus Christ is God or that God exists, or, do you believe you will go to heaven after you die? Theistic moral agents often provide answers that allow us to glimpse the conviction of their intrinsic religiosity. Many Christians, when queried with these types of question, at least initially, respond that they have absolutely no doubt for example, that Jesus Christ is God and that God exists. Often this conviction is accredited to their strong faith and the work of the Holy Spirit. These same theistic moral agents may also cite specific passages of the Bible such as "...and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31 ESV). Or, "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life," where stress is placed on the word *know* (1 John 5:13 ESV). Regarding this *knowing* state, many Christians will specifically claim that they *know* these things as *fact* or *truth* and are completely certain. This observation is important in understanding the mindset of some Christians who might be considered resilient theistic moral agents and who have a strong psychological conviction associated with their intrinsic religiosity and their moral schema. The actual truth of these statements is somewhat of a secondary consideration and we are not interested in verifying or falsifying any particular theological belief beyond seeing that the belief is congruent with the agent's own moral schema. This inquiry aids our understanding of how an agent comes to a stronger or perhaps clearer conviction of their own moral schema, helping us to understand the veracity of the beliefs that underlie this system and the motivation related to the disengagement of moral self-sanctions.



Responses from Christians regarding intrinsic beliefs provide at least some understanding of their level of conviction regarding the beliefs they hold and the makeup of their moral schema. We can also assume without much trouble that most agents generally do not spend a great deal of time considering whether they really believe what it is they say they believe, especially when it comes to religion and spirituality. Instead, these beliefs become convictions that are rarely internally deliberated, except in extraordinary situations. It may be true that some who claim such conviction may only see the strength of their conviction crumble under stressful circumstances, so we must recognize that there is something of a gap between explicit revelations of personal faith and the intrinsic religious reality. In other words, there is a resolve that should be addressed related to conviction and intrinsic religiosity. Not even the individual agent can know this resolve for certain, or at least perhaps until it is tested by circumstance. Some aspects of resolve related to conviction and intrinsic religiosity might be exposed in the face of trials or adversity. We should consider this aspect of the resolve of conviction because many people face trauma or even difficult circumstances only to see the conviction of their subjective beliefs tossed aside. Some Christians claim that they love god, but subsequently curse that same god, or otherwise turn from their conviction in the face of traumatic events. Other people seem to strengthen their conviction in their subjective religiosity in the face of similar tribulation. This is an important perspective and one reason we have focused our research on those who have experienced combat situations. We continue by assuming that the agent's perception of their own subjective religiosity and the resolve of their conviction are accurate and genuine, but admit that this is inherently problematic. Perhaps research into *motivation* related to intrinsic religiosity can furnish some glimpse into the extent of resolve in the conviction of the agent, since the outcome of motivation is somewhat more objective in the sense that it is not completely dependent on the agent's perception. Still, this claim can be problematic because motivation, in order to become objective, must be interpreted by someone or something other than the moral agent.

The relation of motivation and conviction can be understood from a conative perspective, where motivation is more conscious and conviction more intuitive.

This is not to say that there are not cognitive components involved in both aspects of intrinsic religiosity, only that one is perhaps more dominant than the other in certain phases of a process that moves from belief to action. In other words, motivation can be described as more closely associated with an impulse while conviction can be described as more of the result of mental action and the understanding of reason and choice. From this perspective, we might consider motivation as a result of conviction manifested in the form of directed effort towards a goal. Ryan and Fiorito (2003) continue this line of thought:

From a cognitive, self-regulating model, a person's religious involvement consists in part, of that person adopting purposive intentions and personal goals and then acting to realizing them (p. 131).

The *purpose* component of Ryan and Fiorito's (2003) argument is quite interesting in that it alludes to telos and something beyond mere goals. This can be connected with the veracity of goals or to use Snyder's (2002) terminology, the outcome value. Purposeful intentions can provide a greater or lessening resolve and inevitably impact both agency and pathways thinking related to hoping and manifest as a stronger or weaker desire for goal attainment. Our research also suggests that the purpose and conviction of religious belief can reduce or buffer the propensity for the disengagement of moral self-sanctions. Pargament (1992) points out that both the means, how we might go about our task, and the ends, the purposeful activity or goals we pursue, are important in understanding the effects of intrinsic religiosity on psychological well-being. Prior research demonstrates a connection to what Ryan and Fiorito (2003) refer to as good and bad religion. Intrinsic religion is considered "good religion" in that it has greater value-laden implications, whereas "bad religion" is considered something more extrinsically oriented (p. 132). Kirkpatrick and Hood (1990) also conceptualized a value-laden distinction between good and bad religion. These connections are consistent with our more precise findings that intrinsic religious orientations may be more effective than extrinsic religious orientations, such as Koenig and Büssings' (2010) organized and non-organized religious activities, in reducing the propensity for the agent to disengage from their own moral self-sanctions.

Motivation related to the subjective component of religiosity can be somewhat complicated to understand from a more theistic moral perspective. Even discussing a truly agentic perspective involves some difficulty since the theist's motivational aspect of intrinsic religiosity is connected to the divine. Therefore, if we ask the theist to describe motivation in this sense, many may allocate aspects of co-nation to the power of the Holy Spirit, as they perceive the divine moving within them. This is a fundamental tenet of most forms of Christianity and is one of those incommensurable or incompatible aspects that distinguish a Christian form of motivation related to subjective religiosity from another. The same might be said about the more cognitive aspect of conviction since many Christians intrinsically believe that their conviction is not of their own doing alone, but essentially the doing of the divine. We are not ignorant to the challenge this poses in understanding intrinsic religiosity from an agentic perspective, but do think it is necessary to account for this distinction amongst differing beliefs adopted by individuals if we are to attempt to understand the perception of the agent.

This consideration regarding divine outworking in human thought and activity is not taken into serious account in many pluralistic or secular settings in which an organization attempts to affect aspects of individual's reactions and actions such as the disengagement of moral self-sanctions leading to self-destructive behaviors. Psychologists and even chaplains are often unable or unwilling to truly appreciate this aspect of many people's beliefs and the intrinsic influence it holds. The effect of relational interactions between those holders of positional or referential power like psychologists, chaplains, and leaders in general, and those whom they treat, counsel or lead - and with whom they hold incommensurable personal beliefs - is somewhat unclear, which should encourage more research into this possible conflict of beliefs. If a leader intends to develop a follower whilst respecting the follower's agency, the leader ought not to assume that the follower is something like delusional for believing that their religious beliefs are affected or otherwise motivated by the divine. If the leader fails to respect the autonomous agent in this way, then he or she does not take into practice an autonomous agentic perspective, but instead imposes their own *a priori* intrinsic religiosity upon the agent. The re-

sult can be cognitive dissonance and perhaps catastrophic self-destructive behaviors on the part of the agent.

There seems to be several distinct aspects to a more theistic intrinsic religiosity. Without an understanding of how the agent forms their inner belief, we cannot fully appreciate how one who holds a more theistic moral view might disengage from their own moral self-sanctions. This of course holds for all agentic views if we are to encourage personal development and agent-centered change. For the more theistic moral agent, the conviction and motivation of intrinsic religiosity is dependent on the fundamental belief that they do not take on these aspects unaided and that the potency of conviction and motivation are based upon their relationship with the divine. Their perceived relationship with the divine is unique because this prospective relationship is the fundamental source of all that is good. Therefore, if a more theistic agent can know and commune with the divine, then they possess the hope of realizing the good in life.<sup>1</sup> This communion may come in the form of a supernatural understanding of sacred texts where the divine intercedes with an understanding through things like faith, hope and wisdom. The more theistic moral agent may also undergird their convictions through this communion with the divine, which can affect both cognition and conation. Accordingly, this form of intrinsic religiosity could lessen a propensity for the activation of mechanisms of moral disengagement and lessen behavioral manifestations inconsistent with the agent's moral schema such as self-destructive behaviors.

#### *A More Agnostic Moral Agent and Intrinsic Religiosity*

We use the term agnostic loosely to mean a general view of the sacred or divine where it is considered unknowable from the perspective of a personal relationship. This perspective may include those who hold to views that are more agnostic, deistic or even pantheistic in orientation. In other words, the unknowable view relates to those individuals who fundamentally believe that they cannot certainly know if the divine exists, and that only something like an ethereal encounter

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<sup>1</sup> Meaning something like Aristotle's *eudaimonia* or human flourishing and the life well lived.

may allow for some sort of actual communication with the divine. This is different from theism in that for theism we assume the belief in the ability to communicate personally with God. However, the *unknowable view* does have a form of intrinsic religiosity that it is important to understand in the context of a relationship to the disengagement of moral self-sanctions. In this view we might consider subjective religiosity as not taking the form of faith as it does with the more theistic moral agent. Yet, this agent might still choose a form of credence or duty to morality as a basis for their moral schema.

There has been research into subjective religiosity, psychological distress and depression that highlights an interesting point related to religious conviction and a more agnostic or indifferent view of religion in general. Higher levels of psychological distress were noted in those who were something like participants in religious practice, but not committed to the belief system. These are individuals who may attend church or participate in other religious activities or rituals but who do not hold a strong commitment to the underlying beliefs, as opposed to someone like the aforementioned theistic moral agent, whose communion with the divine is a critical aspect of being. The result of a more theistic moral conviction, as opposed to mere practice of religion, is consistent with research presented earlier, where no statistically significant relationship was found between the propensity to disengage from one's moral self-sanctions and active participation in organized or even non-organized religious activity (Eliassen, Taylor & Lloyd, 2005).

We should consider the notion that it is not the religious activities of the moral agent that are most important when considering things like psychological distress or moral disengagement, but that it is the strength of the moral beliefs and their relation to one's moral schema that are of paramount concern. In fact, the most at-risk category related to the propensity for the disengagement of moral self-sanctions is the moral agent who perceives an ardent unknowableness related to their own intrinsic religiosity. This moral agent may consider a caricature of *Pascal's Wager* and conclude that it is a better bet to believe in the divine than to take some unnecessary risk. Here there is something reduced in the conviction of the moral agent. This is a different type of belief than most theistic moral agents

would declare, and surely not a traditional Christian perspective where belief includes the conviction of being able to commune with the divine. Furthermore, this more agnostic moral agent would may not have the force of conviction of either the theistic moral agent or the atheist moral agent, both of whom may be considered more resolved in their beliefs, which could impact the strength of their conviction in regard to maintaining their own moral schema.

Having certain views towards the knowableness or unknowableness of the divine and the afterlife might be viewed as making an epistemological and ontological choice. However, the conviction represented by the choice and the resolve of that conviction we assign to the moral agent, and so we posit a continuous model of belief as opposed to a strictly categorical separation between groups. The more agnostic moral agent may risk a sort of cognitive dissonance when confronting adversity or psychological distress. Consider for a moment the combat veteran who is struggling with the fact that he or she feels responsible for the death of a comrade. This is a common theme amongst those suffering from combat-related PTSD. This experience may cause deep thought on the part of the agent as they seek to make sense of the situation. Some may fall into a sort of rumination, others a more healthy form of reflection. But it seems logical that those who claim an unknowable agnostic view of the divine may, in times like these, turn to this higher power through things like prayer and meditation or to sacred texts. The more agnostic moral agent may seek answers through prayer, with wording something like: "God, if you exist, please forgive me and assuage my anguish for my actions on the battlefield." But this type of prayer seems hollow and unable to resolve a much deeper sort of cognitive dissonance because the object of the conviction, in this case God, is considered to be perhaps even probable, but still unknowable. Therefore, the ability of the object of conviction related to the moral agent's intrinsic religiosity to affect the psychological cause of the distress is somewhat diminished.

In the case of the more agnostic moral agent, it is imperative that we consider the strength of intrinsic religiosity as a possible culprit, or at least contributor, related to what Martin (2013) sees as a diminished hope in certain people. The agent who has committed to a more atheistic moral view or a more theistic moral

view has the potential for a greater sense of conviction. From an atheistic perspective, this conviction may contribute to resolution of distress based in the self, and for the theist this conviction may contribute to resolution of the same kind of psychological distress but based instead in communion with the divine. But the more agnostic moral agent may be more at risk regarding the relatively weak conviction, and although these agnostic beliefs may be proposed as something intellectual or well-reasoned, the same lack of veracity regarding moral beliefs may also prove to be a hindrance in the resolution of psychological distress or cognitive dissonance that relates to their moral schema. Aspects of motivation related to the more agnostic moral agent's intrinsic religiosity might be more likely to be affected by conative dissonance when the object of belief is in doubt. We are not suggesting that the more theistic or atheistic moral agent can epistemologically know the object of their belief any more than the more agnostic, yet there can be a difference in resolve. For the more agnostic agent, the motivational or conative aspects of intrinsic religiosity can be less impactful in regards to their psychological well-being.

Consider as an example again, the combat veteran who experiences psychological distress related to the death of a comrade. This soldier decides to seek help from their organization. Where will they go? To whom will they speak? In most cases, if they seek out anyone at all, which is another common problem - altogether related to a culture that sees psychological distress as a weakness - they will likely seek out one of three types of individual in their military organization: a leader, a psychologist, or a chaplain. Now we must ask if all of these people understand the dilemma articulated above and related to more agnostic moral agents, who comprise a large portion of the U.S. Military specifically. Will these counselors understand the implications of their interaction with such a moral agent? The psychologist might focus on emotions, feelings, mental processes, and primarily on the behavior of the soldier in question. The military chaplain might focus on what the chaplain considers to be the spiritual and religious needs of the soldier, and the counsel of the more general leader would be somewhat unpredictable, depending on many factors, including their own agentive moral schema and views on leadership. A lack of understanding on the part of psychologists, chaplains and leaders in

relation to the more agnostic moral agent and intrinsic religiosity could have negative consequences because instead of assisting the agent, there is a risk of their causing additional cognitive dissonance. In other words, the counselor, whoever that might be, may inadvertently cause the more agnostic moral agent to ruminate on religious beliefs more similar to those held by a theistic or atheistic moral agent. This type of counsel may even lead to some sort of coercive influence upon the more agnostic agent's moral schema and might cause greater psychological distress in the long run.

#### *A More Atheistic Moral Agent and Intrinsic Religiosity*

I use the term atheist here to describe a category distinct from the more agnostic moral agent, although these categories should not be considered mutually exclusive. However, the more agnostic moral agent maintains the possibility of the divine and establishes their moral schema under this general assumption. The more atheistic moral agent is one who claims a greater certainty that god does not exist, where this forms the basis of their intrinsic religiosity, perhaps something of a humanist religiosity. Some more atheistic moral agents will use the terms *nature* or *universal laws* to describe something similar to the divine, or at least to describe an order to the cosmos, but this is something much different to the authoritative God of the more theistic moral agent or the possible but unknowable deistic understanding of the more agnostic moral agent. Terminology can be problematic when conducting research related to intrinsic religiosity because it is much easier for the researcher to discount the more atheistic moral agent as simply not possessing intrinsic religiosity. However, consider certain survey items or questions that are often constructed to gauge an agent's level of intrinsic or subjective religiosity. Three items posed in the Duke University Religion Index (DUREL) showed a significant correlation between the specific measure for intrinsic religiosity and a propensity for the disengagement of moral self-sanctions.

The first item states, "In my life, I experience the presence of the divine (i.e. God)" (Koenig & Büssing, 2010, p. 79). The respondent is then asked to answer on a 5 point Likert scale ranging from *definitely not true* to *definitely true of me*.



When we initially consider this question, the assumed response of the more atheistic moral agent is toward the extreme end of the scale - *definitely not true of me*. But this assumption may be misplaced. In many pluralistic societies it is common to refer to atheism as a religion. This seems to be something of a relatively new phenomenon in the United States. This argument is often a sort of *leveling of the playing field* in the mind of some atheists, who might be offended by the question itself, as if it makes them somehow less religious because they don't believe in a god. The other items in the DUREL might only reinforce this outcome. The next items in the index state, "My religious beliefs are what really lie behind my whole approach to life" and "I try hard to carry my religion over into all other dealings in life" (Koenig & Büssing, 2010, p. 79). It is surely reasonable to conclude that some more atheistic moral agents will answer items such as these with contempt, and others will perceive their god to be a god of science or cosmic order. This issue with the items within the survey instruments used in this project should be explored further in the future to attempt to establish a more complete notion of intrinsic religiosity related to the moral agent. The more atheistic moral agent may view intrinsic religiosity as something utterly similar to the way the more theistic moral agent sees it, but it is possible that we often misrepresent a suitable categorization due to offensive language used in survey items. So where the term *nature* might offend some, the term *god* might offend others. From an agentive perspective, an individual can have very strong convictions that might be categorized as intrinsic religiosity, and they can be firmly atheistic in their beliefs. In other words, we ought to ensure we grant the moral agent respect for having their own beliefs that form the basis for their own moral schema. This should be done by proactively taking the agent's fundamental belief system into consideration when constructing psychometric instruments.

Once we take on the assumption that it is possible for the more atheistic moral agent to treat their beliefs similarly to that of the more theistic moral agent, we can begin to appreciate that the term religiosity can be used to capture the more atheistic moral agent's sense of intrinsic religiosity. Therefore, we should not expect that all atheists would answer questions or items such as those posed in the

DUREL on the extreme *not true* end of the scale. Furthermore, regarding conviction and intrinsic religiosity, it is possible that an agent who holds a more atheistic view may have strong convictions related to their moral schema and intrinsic religiosity. Remember that we are considering the conviction of a set of subjective beliefs. Someone who has adamantly considered the problem of the existence of the divine and come to the conclusion that God does not exist can be incredibly convinced of this idea. This is a conclusion that is very hard for many, especially perhaps the more theistic moral agent, to appreciate. Many who hold to a more theistic view of intrinsic religiosity would say that the more atheistic moral agent is simply blind to truth. Of course, this is also how many atheistic moral agents treat the belief system of the more theistic moral agent, as something of a grand illusion. An understanding of this sort of controversy is helpful with respect to our exploration regarding an agentive conception of intrinsic religiosity and its connection to the propensity for moral disengagement. The outcome can look very similar. If this is the case, then the conviction related to the more atheistic view should be treated no differently from a theoretical psychological perspective than that involved in the more theistic view. Those who might be categorized as more atheistic in their thinking may have very strong conviction related to their intrinsic religiosity and others may have very a weak conviction related to their intrinsic religiosity, just as there are more theistic moral agents who might have either strong or weak convictions related to what they consider their intrinsic religiosity. Similarly, the more conative aspects of intrinsic religiosity can be manifested as something very similar for both groups. This is important in understanding the connection between intrinsic religiosity and moral disengagement.

### **Intrinsic Religiosity in Social Practice**

Sternthal, Williams, Musick & Buck (2010) conducted a systematic review of research related to religion and mental health. They concluded that “religious beliefs and practices were consistently associated with greater life satisfaction and psychological well-being; increased hope and optimism, less anxiety and fear, reduced substance abuse and addictive behavior; and decreased depression” (p. 343).

Our research confirms some of these conclusions but also reveals interesting exceptions and differences. Firstly, we conclude that intrinsic religious belief is more important than organized religious activities such as attending church or participating in religiously oriented rituals such as burning candles or incense or singing religious hymns. We do not conclude that these organized and non-organized religious activities are not helpful to well-being, only that they are not as important as the agent's intrinsic religious beliefs. Salient aspects of religiosity impacting long-term well-being are found in intrinsic belief. Sternthal et al. (2010) point out that most studies on religiosity have been focused on religious practices and behavioral manifestations and that these measures "fail to capture the complexity of religious life" (p. 343). Our research is in line with this suggestion and focuses on the subjective components of religious thought and specific long-term impediments to intrinsic religiosity such as the disengagement of moral self-sanctions. Our research supports the notion that the disengagement of moral self-sanctions is perhaps the single most threatening agentive aspect of cognition related to psychological distress and cognitive dissonance in the long term.

We must also be more attentive in addressing different bases for the agent's moral schema. The more atheistic moral agent, just as the more theistic moral agent, may possess a stronger or weaker conviction and motivation related to their intrinsic religiosity, and these aspects will affect someone's propensity to disengage from their moral self-sanctions. Instead of making arguments for any particular moral schema, we propose that it is most important that we understand the cognitive and conative aspects of intrinsic religiosity related to moral disengagement in order to better understand the depths of the moral agent's thinking. When interpreting or applying social science research, it is possible to corrupt moral agency through prescription due to the variation of fundamental moral philosophies that can be entrenched in the mind. The history of engagement with these cognitive aspects of belief has been to begin with right, wrong, good and bad and then impose this thinking on our subjects. This is surely the way in which most people approach others in everyday life, which is a primary reason to consider the perspective provided herein. That inclination to impose moral prescriptions on an agent

must change if we are to truly gain a deep appreciation of the agent and the intricate aspects of the psychological mechanisms within the agent that may affect someone's propensity for moral disengagement.

The analysis of this subjective form of religiosity brings us to an interesting question. How do we treat intrinsic religiosity relationally as we go about the practice of social interaction? Specifically, we are interested in exploring how a person who holds some power or authority ought to act towards an agent who may be seeking counsel. Earlier, we discussed a soldier struggling with some sort of PTSD and cognitive dissonance related to moral aspects of their combat experience. This is a most intriguing case to consider and highlights some of the dangers of this kind of personal interaction. However, we should not blindly assume that religion is positive for the agent because the agent may be in conflict with his or her own moral schema, and for the more theistic moral agent, perhaps God (Koenig, Pargament, and Nielson, 1998). While religiosity can assist with things such as a sense of purpose or security when dealing with certain situations, there can also be conflict and this conflict can be manifested by mechanisms of disengagement related to moral self-sanctions. Entering relationships with any moral agent struggling with things such as PTSD allows for reinforcement of the moral agent's true moral schema or otherwise assisting the moral agent in moral disengagement.

Consider the military leader or commander who attempts to assist a soldier who is displaying symptoms of PTSD. We can assume there is some level of trust between the leader and his or her follower and that the follower seeks out counsel from the leader regarding feelings of despair or confusion regarding an incident that happened in the theater of war. In this example, let us say the soldier chose not to interfere in what most people in the United States would consider a public domestic dispute. Specifically, the soldier witnessed a husband in Afghanistan who was in an alleyway beating his wife with a stick for an unknown reason. The soldier kept walking and did nothing to interfere. Non-interference in situations like this was clearly a part of the rules of engagement (ROE) at the time, but the soldier can't stop thinking about this specific incident. The soldier expresses feelings of guilt and shame, and regrets that he did not intervene. This may seem like a silly

example to some, but it is events such as this that later, once the agent has the opportunity to reflect, cause psychological discord, moral disengagement and self-destructive behaviors. So here we have a simple case of a soldier who believes they did something that is in conflict with their own moral schema, but let's assume it was clearly not illegal according to the ROE. The soldier approaches their immediate commander, for whom they have great respect, for help. How might the leader interact with this soldier? In some cases, the military leader will act like a moral authority, which is often touted as an essential aspect of military leadership. The leader will listen to the general situation and circumstance, and determine that there was no legal reason to intervene and that the inaction on the part of the soldier did not contradict the ROE. The leader, whether by positional or reverent authority has assumed the role of a moral authority and will often counsel the soldier in a way that helps alleviate the guilt or assuage the anguish related to the specific action, or in this case inaction. In the act of attempting to alleviate the guilt, the leader will likely provide moral reasoning for the soldier's action being justified. This counsel can be considered as wisdom coming from a moral authority, and the soldier may leave the counseling feeling somewhat alleviated of the self-reproach caused by the incident.

In this case the leader is at risk of encouraging the disengagement of moral self-sanctions, especially if the leader's moral schema is vastly different from the soldier. The risk of the leader affecting some sort of longer-term moral dissonance is lessened if there is a recognition that the leader's influence may encourage moral disengagement; but this is likely not at the forefront of the leader's thoughts. The leader who has assumed this moral authority risks a sort of unintended moral coercion. The leader of course has no intention of harming the soldier, but this is precisely what can result from this type of engagement. Instead, the leader might consider that they are, whether they wish it or not, assuming this moral authority and act cautiously as they proceed, focused on assisting the soldier in an understanding of their moral schema that allows the soldier greater insight into their own cognitive dissonance without diffusing or displacing moral agency onto the leader. Therefore, it may not really matter, in terms of the soldier's moral schema, that the

action of the soldier was within the ROE. We should also assume that the leader's intrinsic religiosity is in some ways different to the soldier's.

Unfortunately, this is too often not the case because the leader feels a natural obligation due to his or her position to fix the soldier by convincing the soldier to alter their moral schema. This may lead to greater unit effectiveness and cohesion in the short term. But this kind of *fixing* through moral authority is a short-term solution at best. The leader will not normally alter the moral schema of the soldier at all but instead, by assuming moral authority that inherently belongs to the soldier, the leader encourages the activation of psychological mechanisms of moral disengagement in the soldier, causing long-term cognitive dissonance. Some may argue that this is justified through some sort of utilitarian defense of the leader's actions and it is hard to reason against such an argument in certain circumstances where the time and situation might dictate a need for advancing a greater good of the military unit. However, the leader does well to realize when he or she may be affecting the activation of these psychological mechanisms, so the situation can be dealt with more in favor of the long-term psychological health of the soldier. In the short term, the leader may think that he or she is doing right by providing the soldier with a moral justification for their actions that have caused psychological distress, where a moral argument can be made for such actions. However, unless the soldier truly believes, and by this we mean that the soldier does not contradict his own moral schema, the soldier is likely to be activating psychological mechanisms that permit the disengagement of moral self-sanctions and provide temporary as-suagement from guilt. Someday however, the soldier will likely revisit this dilemma and one of three things will occur: either the soldier will actually change or adjust his or her own moral schema, which is most unlikely; the soldier will continue to engage in the disengagement of moral self-sanctions, which is more likely; or it is very likely that the soldier will realize that he or she was just assigning moral authority to another. This last result includes an element of what Bandura (1999) refers to as displacement or diffusion of responsibility. What we suggest is that, if circumstance permits, it may be better to sacrifice a short-term "reduction of anxie-

ty” or “daily adjustment” for “long-term growth” which better accounts for the risk of disengagement of moral self-sanctions (Hackney & Sanders, 2003, p. 52).

Here we should remember that the moral schema is connected to the agent’s intrinsic religiosity. Now, take the Christian military leader, who feels an obligation to the soldier, the U.S. Military, and to God, and feels justified in discussing the moral dilemma by way of his or her own intrinsic religiosity and moral schema. Leaders often counsel from their own perspective of intrinsic religiosity in moral matters, as this is the nature of leading. But we should ask if this is in the best long-term interest of the agent. Of course, the answer is, “sometimes not” and in pluralistic organizational settings such as the military, any other assumption to the contrary can be risky. The leader may, while assuaging short-term guilt, actually cause long-term harm to the agent. The leader essentially runs the risk of encouraging moral disengagement by speaking from a dissimilar intrinsic religiosity and incongruent moral schema. Now, if the leader holds in high esteem the principle of respect for persons and considers this issue, and is sympathetic to the risk of encouraging moral disengagement on the part of the soldier, then the leader can lessen the risk of impairing real moral development or otherwise bringing psychological harm to the agent. Due to the sometimes overwhelming aspect of conviction related to intrinsic religiosity as discussed earlier, and its association with the individual’s moral schema, this type of error seems likely within organizations in which leaders take on great responsibility for the health and welfare of their followers, as we find in the U.S. Military.

This example helps to illustrate a risk within many organizations, particularly those with a hierarchical structure of authoritative leadership where the leader feels personally responsible for all facets of the agent’s life. Similar dilemmas are not restricted to the front line leader, especially in the military or similar contexts such as those we often find in police forces. In many cases the leader may opt to recommend the involvement of a chaplain or a psychologist, often without much consideration as to which counselor might be best for the particular moral agent in question. If the leader holds a more atheistic moral schema and intrinsic religiosity, they may be more inclined to send the soldier or agent to a psychologist. If the

commander is a more theistic moral agent him or herself, and believes the dilemma is in any way connected to spirituality or religious belief, they may be more inclined to send the soldier to the chaplain. This is a tangential issue that we do not intend to solve herein, but we believe that it is extremely important for organizations to consider, especially when the leader holds a more formalized sort of moral authority over followers. If the leader considers this problem and has some measure of respect for the autonomy of the agent's moral schema, then the leader can at least deliberate over his or her own actions with more intentionality and more appropriately provide a reflective and thoughtful sort of leadership to the specific agent in question. After all, "religion is a multifaceted construct and it is possible that different aspects of religiosity are differentially related to mental health" (Hackney & Sanders, 2003, p. 43).

We should reemphasize that this issue is not limited to a commander type of leader but is also appropriate for consideration by chaplains and psychologists alike. These individuals, in the context of the pluralistic organization, especially that of the U.S. Military, are in no ethically separate category in regards to the agent. They hold no moral authority greater or lesser than that of the commander. The chaplain and psychologist are leaders in their own right and assume the same level of responsibility related to the agent's psychological well-being. However, we must understand that the agent in these situations may be directed to one or the other, the chaplain or the psychologist, depending on the intrinsic religiosity of the front line leader or commander. Perhaps the frontline leader or commander may inquire as to the *spirituality* of the follower prior to directing them to the chaplain or psychologist. In today's pluralistic U.S. Military, it could certainly be either the chaplain or psychologist. The U.S. Military has encouraged the diversity of religion within the chaplain ranks. Therefore we should consider other dangers of moral agency and intrinsic religiosity from a leader's perspective. We should perhaps consider scenarios like the Baptist soldier who is directed to the Catholic chaplain. This may be due to a determination by the leader that the soldier holds an intrinsic religiosity closely aligned with the chaplain. But, although the two may perhaps be categorized as both falling within a more theistic type of intrinsic religi-



osity, we must not assume that this translates into comparable non-contradictory moral schemas. The agent must be treated with moral autonomy when attempting to assist them in some long-term resolution related to a moral dilemma. We propose that the possibility of causing long-term damage to the psychological well-being of soldiers through a misunderstanding of moral agency is neither well understood nor dealt with effectively through *leaderful practice* within the U.S. Military and other similar organizations.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> For a more complete elucidation of leaderfulness, see Raelin, J. (2005). We the leaders: In order to form a leaderful organization. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, 12(2), 18-30.

## **Chapter 7 – Agentive Moral Reinforcement**

The fundamental claim resulting from this investigation is that various agentive notions of hope and intrinsic religiosity are significant predictors to the disengagement of moral self-sanctions. We have demonstrated that this is important for several reasons, not the least of which has to do with the connection between moral disengagement and the propensity for self-destructive behaviors. We have also argued that our research demonstrates that there is a significant statistical relationship between hope, intrinsic religiosity and moral disengagement. Furthermore, when moral disengagement is treated as a criterion variable, it seems likely that we can decrease someone's propensity for the disengagement of moral self-sanctions, thereby decreasing a propensity for self-destructive behaviors, by targeting specific psychological and psychosocial aspects of the agent. We have demonstrated this more general thesis by measuring and analyzing the interaction of variables related to one's hopefulness and intrinsic religiosity but believe these are not the only predictor variables associated with positive psychology and that affect an agent's propensity for the disengagement of moral self-sanctions. However, attempts to manipulate predictor variables related to the disengagement of moral self-sanctions should be done without encouraging contradiction related to the agent's own moral schema and should not be otherwise coerced by the imposition of some other schema. In simple terms, we have argued that if we can assist a person in changing their perspectives regarding hope and intrinsic religiosity in a positive manner, we might then diminish the same individual's propensity for the disengagement of moral self-sanctions. This lessening of someone's propensity for moral disengagement should then have a direct effect on the agent's tendency toward self-destructive behavioral manifestations.

### **Clarifying Agentive Moral Reinforcement**

Many psychological, social and environmental factors influence an agent's ability to behave in ways consistent with their own moral schema. As both Bandura (1996) and Snyder (2002) have suggested, emotion and environment have a

reciprocal relationship with behavioral manifestation. *Agentive moral reinforcement* is the developmental process of strengthening the fidelity of self-regulatory mechanisms that govern moral conduct whilst diminishing a propensity for the employment of psychosocial maneuvers that license activation of psychological mechanisms leading to the selective disengagement of moral self-sanctions.

Agentive moral reinforcement consists of the key components of moral beliefs, moral reasoning and moral emotion, as shown in Figure 7, and is related to agentive characteristics such as values congruency, purpose clarification and behavioral consistency, as shown in Figure 8. These relational models are supported by many well-researched and related theoretical constructs including Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), and specifically *triadic reciprocal causation* (Bandura, 1996), Moral Foundation Theory (Haidt, 2003), Hope Theory (Snyder, 2002), and moral ambiguity in the relational context (Schafer, 2014). Bandura's SCT and triadic reciprocal causation support the strong connection between personal factors (e.g. cognitive and emotional), environmental factors (e.g. relational and organizational), and behavioral factors (e.g. conditioning and reinforcement). All of these factors must be accounted for in the context of agentive moral reinforcement. Snyder's Hope Theory supports the important connection between reasoning, emotion and specific aspects of psychological well-being, an essential assumption in agentive moral reinforcement. Schafer's explanation of moral ambiguity affirms the importance of the impact of dyadic communication and relational factors that influence the evaluative moral process, also fundamental elements of agentive moral reinforcement.

The implications of agentive moral reinforcement may be far-reaching and are surely not limited to the simple psychological models presented herein. Cognitive and conative psychological aspects such as optimism and authentic happiness may also contextually increase the predictability of moral disengagement, although we cannot currently scientifically support this notion beyond theory. We can also not currently make empirical claims that aspects such as personal flourishing are unimportant. What we do claim is that an agent's conception of hope and intrinsic religiosity are important aspects to consider when making any attempt to take a

comprehensive view of an agent's propensity to disengage from their own moral self-sanctions. Treatment, intervention, counseling, and other mechanisms for affecting these aspects of the individual must begin with an understanding of and respect for the agent's autonomous moral schema, especially within a pluralistic society, which in the United States claims to support the rights of freedom of religion *and* freedom from religion.

Agentive moral reinforcement begins with the precept of human dignity and due reverence for the moral agent. The person is preserved as an autonomous moral agent who engages with an organization or society and who is fundamentally accountable for his or her own beliefs, attitudes, intentions, and behavioral manifestations. Moral agency is a possibility but should also be considered within the leader-follower relationship, especially within hierarchical organizations such as the U.S. Military where the autonomy of the moral agent is more naturally diminished by circumstance. Here, we do not use the term *leader* frivolously. A leader might be a friend, a colleague, a manager, a chaplain, a psychologist, or anyone else who holds influence over the moral agent. Within the context of this relationship, both leader and follower have the opportunity to disengage from their own moral self-sanctions, but the leader also has some power to influence the agent and in proactively refraining from activating mechanisms of moral disengagement. The leader may believe it is wrong to coerce a follower into contradicting the follower's own moral schema. Still, the leader may disengage from this moral prescription through mechanisms of moral disengagement and thereby affect the follower. The follower agent may, in similar fashion, grant moral responsibility to the leader that inherently belongs to the follower agent. We should here be cautious in the way we refer to the follower agent as opposed to the leader agent, since both are considered autonomous moral agents in their own right yet both hold different moral schemas and dissimilar stations within the context of the relationship. Of course, similar forms of psychological maneuvering by leader agents and follower agents are conducted frequently within the organizational context. But the more conflicting the moral disengagement with the agent's own moral schema, the more it may affect other aspects related to the moral fidelity of either agent, although the follower agent is at

a greater risk as the relationship unfolds. However, consequences may affect the psychological wellbeing of either agent in the long run.

In order to encourage the development of agentive moral reinforcement, one should consider aspects of the individual that may provide psychological resilience to the agent's propensity for moral disengagement. These aspects of positive psychology include things such as hope and intrinsic religiosity, but there are many psychological aspects that may positively reinforce an agent's moral thinking and reduce the likelihood of moral disengagement. Of course the leader, counselor, or chaplain cannot truly understand these aspects of the follower agent without the development of an intimate and mutually respectful relationship. Even then, the leader, counselor or chaplain must not assume the moral responsibility of the follower agent and should operate initially with the understanding that the follower agent's moral schema is preeminent, thus avoiding some sort of moral coercion. For example, if the follower agent currently believes it is utterly wrong to kill another person regardless of circumstance, yet has done so in a previous combat situation, the psychologist should not attempt to provide pathways of reasoning to alleviate the moral dilemma outside of the follower agent's own current moral schema. For example, if the combat veteran believes that the Bible is the inspired word of God and therefore a primary authority on all moral issues, reasoning provided by the psychologist that contradicts this authority of scripture, as it is often referred in the U.S., is perilous. It might encourage the agent towards a temporary disengagement from the agent's own moral self-sanction against killing, that is dependent upon their principled moral reasoning based on sacred texts, and which may later, upon further reflection by the follower agent, lead to psychological distress. Seligman, Rashid & Parks' (2006) notion of positive psychotherapy is an example of what could be a very healthy and prosperous relationship between a counselor and counselee, assuming that agentive moral reinforcement is taking place and not a coercion of what they refer to as "meaning" (p. 774).

But do leaders, counselors or chaplains routinely operate with such respect for the follower agent and with prodigious sensitivity to the agent's moral schema, especially when the former is unfamiliar with the follower agent's principal moral

authority? In these circumstances, sensitivity to the follower's psychological aspects such as hope and intrinsic religiosity are of the utmost importance. The leader agent should normally operate within the philosophical assumptions of the follower agent. The agent's interpretation of moral authority must be taken into account and then related to explicit positive psychological aspects of the follower agent such as hope, optimism and intrinsic religiosity. This relational activity can then more suitably effect change in the agent's attitude towards the moral dilemma that may be the cause of psychological distress. This form of reverence for the agent's moral schema is not something instinctively awarded in hierarchical pluralistic organizations. Instead, the leader, counselor or chaplain often tends to operate as if their philosophies are justified by their personal interpretation of organizational values and are therefore right or good, and think that by helping the follower agent to appreciate this justified quality, the agent might gain some new and better perspective in regards to their moral dilemma. In fact, this approach runs a great risk of generating conditions that increase an agent's propensity to disengage from their own moral self-sanctions. This intervention or treatment may effect a temporary assuagement of guilt or shame, but may also be the primary cause of devastating psychological distress in the long run, should the follower agent come to recognize his or her own moral disengagement.

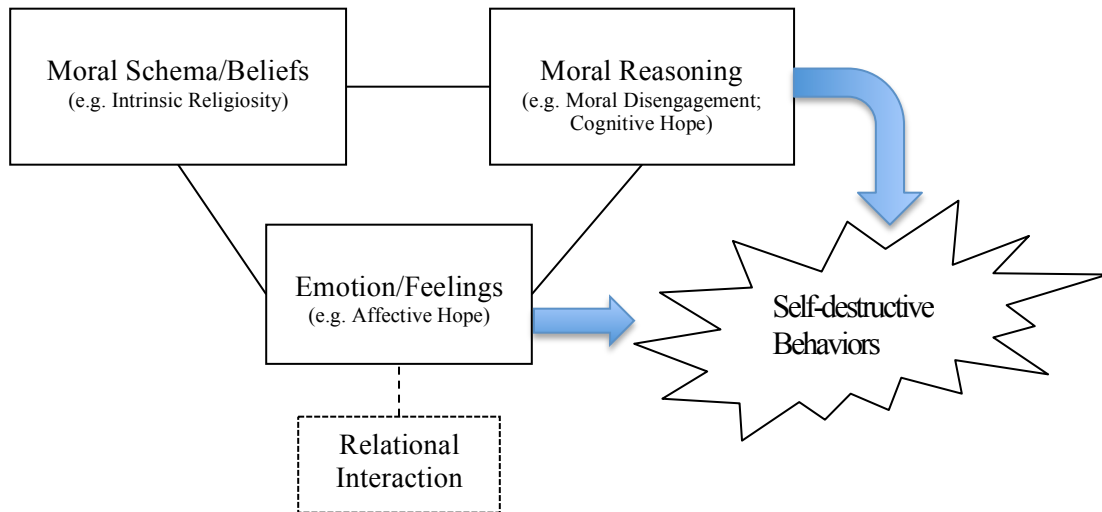


Figure 6. Agentive moral reinforcement and the relation to self-destructive behaviors.

The structure and relatively short-term relationships between individuals within military units may encourage this type of insincere interaction because the leader, counselor or chaplain is often not predominantly motivated to be concerned with the long-term psychological resilience of the soldier but is instead motivated to address near-term issues. These include short-term matters such as unit effectiveness and cohesion. The latter issue involves a sort of organization-over-or-before-the-individual type of thinking. This includes rationales such as the notion that temporary or quick fixes can reduce risk to the military unit and an organization such as the Veteran’s Administration is available for any long-term consequences of the soldier’s psychological distress. Military commanders are often deeply concerned that a soldier might commit suicide under his or her command. This is yet another example of a condition that might encourage temporary, but mistaken, solutions and interactions - interactions that do not hold an ultimate respect for the agent’s moral autonomy as a preeminent guiding principle. This is often a matter of circumstance as the legitimacy of the unit over the individual is surely a valid consideration. There are, in many cases, issues of time and circumstance related to military unit effectiveness and cohesion, and a utilitarian case can surely be made for the justification of such interaction. We also realize that this is

a critical and far too generalized assessment, but we do think this area is something about which military organizations should be concerned, specifically the long-term psychological resilience of the individual soldier. Perhaps further questions should be considered, related to how and why the follower agent is experiencing hope. What constitutes the follower agent's intrinsic religiosity? What insight can we appreciate related to the follower agent's present moral schema and the more philosophical aspects of existence? These are just a few questions that should be seriously considered if attempting to justly assist a follower agent who has a propensity for the disengagement of moral self-sanctions and also a risk of self-destructive behaviors.

The aspect of *respect for persons* within the context of agentive moral reinforcement should not be reduced to something like mere care. The relational context in which agentive moral reinforcement can thrive and govern is within the context of the virtue of love. The relationship must include an interpersonal affection that exceeds ordinary compassion or empathy. The leader agent in the relationship, whether counselor or chaplain, ought to bear the burden of possessing a self-sacrificing love that includes benevolence and affection directed to the good of the follower agent as an end in itself. In order to maximize the potential for agentive moral reinforcement to occur, there must be an intimacy and commitment between the leader agent and follower agent that is often lacking or otherwise not considered. The words *sacrificial love* are not too strong to describe the human condition that should be present in the relationship that might encourage agentive moral reinforcement. Although this relationship need not begin at a point where this type of love that is benevolent, committed, affectionate, and compassionate exists, it must be developed in order for moral reinforcement to flourish as a result of the relationship. If the leader agent and follower agent relationship in the context of agentive moral reinforcement is not fostered, and this form of altruistic sacrificial love is not conatively or purposefully generated, then the relationship runs a far greater risk of suffering the consequences related to the disengagement of moral self-sanctions, and in the counseling environment this moral disengagement is most threatening to



the follower agent, although the same threats of moral disengagement and resulting psychological distress do exist for the leader agent also.

How can a leader expect to excellently engage personal aspects of an agent such as hope and intrinsic religiosity without this authentic form of sacrificial love? *Excellently* is a key term here, by which we mean to incorporate an expected striving for virtue. Now, some may argue that this excellent interpersonal engagement is possible without authentic sacrificial love. However, if the self-sacrificing nature of love on the part of the leader is diminished, then this form of leader-follower relationship is something less than virtuous in an agentive sense, and runs a greater risk regarding moral disengagement on the part of the follower agent.

The situational practicality of agentive moral reinforcement may be difficult to implement consistently under many current paradigms, including the traditional counselor-patient relationship or military leadership environment. The pragmatic implications of this theory of agentive moral reinforcement are surely important and we certainly do not claim to understand how best to create the full scope of environmental conditions that encourage this type of relationship under current organizational paradigms; although we do suggest that these relationships are at present, at least in many cases, not ideal. While we respect the difficult organizational circumstances that accompany the leader-follower relationship, the problem of implementation and third order organizational effects is not our initial concern as we focus on the agent. However, one should recognize that the organizational structure, traditions, laws and culture in many pluralistic societies such as the U.S. Military are often ill-equipped to create intimate relationships based on authentic sacrificial love, which in the military is something very different to what might be attributed to something like strong camaraderie. If authentic sacrificial love is a key virtue of the relationship between the follower agent and others such as chaplains, counselors or leaders, then the organization has, at a minimum, some obligation to acknowledge obstacles in creating such relationships. This is of course based on the assumption that people are of exceptional value and should be respected as autonomous human agents, and in hopes that organizations might begin to change current paradigms to address cultural issues as regards relational deficiencies.

Most organizations have a great challenge in understanding this dilemma as a moral issue since many organizational decisions are operationally determined in a climate suited for the diffusion of moral responsibility. In this organizational situation, utilitarian arguments are unsurprisingly dominant. But if we consider the moral autonomy of the agents involved, say the leader agent and the follower agent for example, the utilitarian arguments will often fail when placed into the context of individual moral schemas.

For example, in the United States, classrooms that cover topics such as ethics or social justice often propose the thought experiment commonly referred to as *The Trolley Problem*. This problem creates a moral dilemma in which the student, acting as a moral agent, must decide to act or otherwise be accountable for inaction. Proposed actions are limited to results that will end in either killing one person, or consist of inaction that will kill several people. Many students appeal to some sort of utilitarianist ethics to negotiate the dilemma and inevitably decide to take action to save the several but kill the one or the few. It seems initially to be a simple calculation of the greater good. There are normally a few students that refuse to act and kill the several by providing reasoning related to an absolving fate, or something to that effect. But very few students are ever confident about either option and most of the students think that whatever option they choose is still somehow a *bad* solution because the dilemma forces them to contradict their own moral principle related to not killing people. Even in this artificial context, it is often easy to observe manifestations of cognitive dissonance and even psychological distress, and it is not uncommon for students to wish to readdress this dilemma weeks after the problem has been posed in the classroom, which clearly indicates that it has been, shall we say, on their minds. In smaller classrooms where there is more interaction regarding the dilemma between the students, it is often fairly easy to observe manifestations of forms of moral disengagement taking place in the minds of the student agent, such as diffusion of responsibility. In other words, some students inevitably choose to act or not act because the majority of the class has chosen to act or not act. In other cases, one student will make a convincing and passionate argument and another student will then change what seemed like a secure position

by what seems to be a form of moral justification, but a justification that clearly contradicts at least one of the agent's primary moral principles, again indicating the possibility of moral disengagement. The point here is that if these things can be observed in a college classroom with an artificial moral dilemma, how much more potent must these dilemmas be when engaged by an agent in the organizational context, where intimidation, coercion, and many other social pressures are often onerously present.

When agentive moral reinforcement is presented thus, it may seem like something of a common sense argument, and one might wonder why any organization would hesitate to create such conditions. However, one might also recognize that many organizations are not primarily concerned with creating conditions that encourage autonomous moral agency, a condition that is far beyond some synchronicity of organizational and individual values. If we attempt to apply agentive moral reinforcement to a leadership context within an organization operating under competing philosophies, such as might be found in certain highly competitive capitalistic situations, we also quickly realize that agentive moral reinforcement might be easier to employ in certain organizational contexts where autonomous moral agency can exist more freely and where agents are not required to forgo their personal moral freedom or inevitably be expelled from the organization. Applying this assumption of moral agency can be exceedingly difficult in contexts such as those that operate within an organizationally competitive environment, which is of course often the case in a capitalistic corporation or a military unit.

Agentive moral reinforcement should be considered especially important in counseling environments. In these environments, relationships such as those involving a mentor, a chaplain, or even a counseling psychologist are common. Consider a context that we have purposefully engaged herein, the context of the chaplain and soldier in the U.S. Military. As U.S. soldiers, both of these individuals would be said to have obligations or duties to their military unit, their military service, such as the Army or Marine Corps, and their country. A standard role of the chaplain in any U.S. Military unit is to form relationships of trust with soldiers in order that they might effectively counsel soldiers on spiritual issues. Of course,

these spiritual issues often have moral implications. Now, consider that it seems inherently virtuous to grant both the chaplain and the soldier autonomous moral agency within the context of their relationship, and that to do otherwise would be counter to the basic moral principle of respect for persons. Most U.S. Military leaders would agree with these basic assumptions if we limit the context to the relationship, not jeopardizing the strength of the larger military unit. However, placing these basic assumptions within a theory of agentive moral reinforcement is often not pragmatically intuitive, and is instead brushed aside as impractical or even threatening to the mission or integrity of the organization. In order for agentive moral reinforcement to flourish, the military chaplain must first appreciate that the soldier is a moral agent with a distinctive autonomous moral schema worthy of deference. The agent's schema should also not be implied as organizationally consistent. The chaplain must also consider that both parties in the relationship have the potential to influence the activation of psychological mechanisms of moral disengagement and be cautious about the perils of influencing the agent's moral schema by way of formal authority. Furthermore, the chaplain must recognize long-term implications associated with agentive moral reinforcement and psychological distress on the one hand, and psychological resilience on the other. The chaplain, in order to avoid this risk of influencing moral disengagement and the possibility of long-term psychological distress on the part of the soldier, should approach the relationship in a spirit of authentic sacrificial love in which care for the soldier's long-term mental health is preeminent.

The notion of sacrificial love may seem somewhat off-putting in the context of a psychologist-soldier relationship, but this is likely due to alternate connotations related to the word *love* that tend to dominate our modern society. Perhaps our rendition of authentic sacrificial love here is somewhat unconventional, yet it does seem to best capture the essence of an important relational aspect of agentive moral reinforcement. Plus, the primary principles associated with the chaplain-soldier relationship ought to endure in other ideal counselor-counselee relationships. Therefore, consider the soldier who has had a traumatic experience in combat and is demonstrating signs of psychological distress. For the sake of clarity on this spe-

cific point, we can assume that the soldier freely approaches the chaplain for assistance, and is otherwise not ordered to see the chaplain by a commander. However, we should recognize that coercion into any counselor relationship might generate confounding difficulties. Now, consider the common bond described between soldiers; a bond often described in some way that communicates that the soldiers are fighting not for their country or people back at home, but simply for the comrade next to them in combat. It is common to hear soldiers state that they would “give their life” for their comrade, and of course many have done this throughout history. Perhaps the most dramatic stories involve those individuals who have sacrificed their lives by throwing themselves on grenades, or dragging a fellow soldier to safety whilst under direct enemy fire. Many of these acts are done for reasons such as, feeling a deep affection or love for their comrades, and not a sort of psychological egoism that might suggest that the soldier sacrificing his life does this out of some reprehensible self-interest such as fame. Soldiers may often experience circumstances similar to what I have offered prior to the beginning of a counseling relationship with a chaplain or psychologist. Close examinations of ongoing relationships with comrades, which many soldiers are accustomed to, reveal this close bond. These relationships often involve a form of sacrificial love to the point that comrades, without the slightest hesitation, would give their life for each other. This preamble is an important context for the chaplain or counselor to consider. If the chaplain holds within him or herself or directly communicates counterfeit sentiments, perhaps that the relationship is built on something more like pity, or anything other than an aim toward what we describe as authentic sacrificial love, then the relationship is at risk of engendering moral disengagement.

If we consider additional agentive aspects of the soldier, such as hope and intrinsic religiosity, with attention toward a possible association with moral disengagement and self-destructive behaviors, the chaplain or counselor might be more sensitized to certain foundational aspects of the relationship. If the chaplain is sensitized to the threat of moral disengagement occurring within the counseling relationship, and appreciating that this moral disengagement might occur more readily without a deep and abiding respect for the moral autonomy of the agent, then there

may be less of a propensity for the disengagement of moral self-sanctions, especially for the follower agent or counselee. If chaplains and counselors understand this virtue, they can begin to form a trusting relationship based on a commitment to authentic sacrificial love. The relationship can begin with a healthier form of charity that can grow into a relationship of noble trust and respect. In this case, counselors will hold the soldier's beliefs regarding hope and intrinsic religiosity as agent-centered, valid and respectable, and not something to be fixed or corrected. In order for this to occur it is possible that the chaplain will be required to set aside his or her most fundamental beliefs related to things such as hope, religiosity and spirituality. In other words, the chaplain or counselor might in a sense *sacrifice* his or her own philosophical or theological position for the sake of honoring the soldier as an autonomous moral agent worthy of agentive moral reinforcement. Therefore, the good and most effective long-term counseling relationship will be approached with an expectation of authentic sacrificial love for the follower agent.

The term *ideal* was used earlier to describe the best counselor-counselee relationships that have this form of authentic sacrificial love. Attempting to understand what the counselee is psychologically experiencing by placing oneself within the other's frame of reference is most insufficient. This is something more akin to empathy, which is not adequate to describe what is meant by authentic sacrificial love because empathy assumes that the counselor can experience what the counselee has already experienced. In a sense, this merely empathetic approach could be considered some sort of psychological slight regard on the part of the counselor relative to the full experience of the counselee. Empathy, whilst present in agentive moral reinforcement, must be humbled. The vain sort of pride that is often hidden within empathetic relationships must be kept in check by humility. Now, some might argue that we are not speaking here of true empathy, but instead referring to some form of pity. However, empathy is different to pity in that the counselor's premise is that he or she actually possesses the capacity to place themselves in the

circumstance of their counselee, which is of course absurd and brings to mind the story of *The Pitcher's Pitcher*.<sup>1</sup>

Consider a Major League Baseball (MLB) pitcher who wishes to seek advice on how to become a better pitcher. He receives offers from two people to provide advice on his development. The first counselor is a MLB Hall of Fame pitcher who recently retired after many years of playing in the Majors. The second counselor is intimately familiar with the pitcher's current team and has watched him pitch every game of his MLB career. Although this counselor's experience came by way of his armchair and television, this counselor is very passionate about this pitcher's circumstance, to the point of often throwing empty beer cans at the television to show his discomfort with the pitcher's actions. Who should the pitcher approach for advice? Both may provide a useful perspective for the development of the pitcher, but perhaps it is better for the pitcher to seek advice from the MLB Hall of Fame pitcher, since their experience is a little more contextually similar. This answer may seem obvious. But this is not all there is to this story. What if the MLB pitcher approaches the relationship with a sense of superiority due to his personal experience? His experience is surely closer to the current pitcher's experience than the beer-wielding fan in front of the television. Still, neither of their experiences is identical to the experience of the pitcher who is seeking help. In fact, the MLB Hall of Fame pitcher may be able to offer a great deal of advice, and it may all be bad. The point we recognize here is that the crucial concern is not necessarily about the experience of the counselor as related to the counselee but rather, the ethical stance of the counselor upon entering into the relationship. Of course similar experiences can be helpful. So we should ask if the MLB Hall of Fame pitcher is entering the relationship with a virtuous respect for the current MLB pitcher's unique experience and fundamental beliefs. This makes this story much more difficult to resolve because it actually may be better for the pitcher to seek counsel from the beer-wielding fan, if the fan is approaching the relationship with a form of authentic sacrificial love. If both advisors approach the situation in the same way,

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<sup>1</sup>The story of *The Pitcher's Pitcher* was recalled from many years past but we have found no present reference.

an argument from experience could be made for the MLB Hall of Fame pitcher. Yet, there are many complicating factors that are undoubtedly not so obvious. So the best we can say is, *ceteris paribus*, we should choose the MLB Hall of Fame pitcher.

Any assumption that a counselor can fully understand another person's experience seems to be utterly irrational, yet assumption seems common. The counselor should consider beginning the relationship by assuming his or her own experience is unique in relation counselee's experience. This assumption of humility on the part of the counselor is the beginning of what may lead to a relationship based on authentic sacrificial love. Humility related to a more considerate sense of genuine relational experience is a positive way to begin the respectful and virtuous relationship in which a high level of human dignity is granted equally to both parties.

Some might argue that a form of compassion, as opposed to sacrificial love, will remedy this form of relational interaction. However, the term *compassion* does not fully encompass and cannot be considered synonymous with authentic sacrificial love. *The Book of Virtues*, edited by William J. Bennett, describes compassion as:

...a virtue that takes seriously the reality of other persons, their inner lives, their emotions, as well as their external circumstances. It is an active disposition toward fellowship and sharing, toward supportive companionship in distress or in woe...compassion thus comes close to the very heart of moral awareness, to seeing in one's neighbor another self (p. 107).

But consider this form of compassion in our context. Would the soldier describe the relationship found in the camaraderie on the battlefield as merely compassion? Obviously this would be unlikely. Yet, there is likely a desire on the part of the soldier to have such relationships in something of a more ideal form. These ideal expectations cannot be met with mere compassion, and, like empathy, compassion can go wrong if left to its own, and is severely insufficient in describing the virtuous choice of authentic sacrificial love. This is not to say that virtues such as empathy and compassion are not important in the relationship between counselor and counselee agents. In fact, what are commonly referred to as the four cardinal virtues, prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance, are important in the practice of



agentive moral reinforcement, but not sufficient. The cardinal virtues are descriptive of the moral activity involved in agentive moral reinforcement, yet agentive moral reinforcement, in order to be fully recognized, must be viewed as only ideally fulfilled through the virtue of charity or love, which is often historically described as a theological virtue (Pieper, 1965). However, in this context we assume charity or love to be an ethical virtue and not restricted to a theological gift from God. Simply stated, the cardinal virtues are insufficient in describing the ideal relational form of what we mean by agentive moral reinforcement. Therefore, in order to ensure authenticity in the relationship, we require the virtue of love to be a necessary component of agentive moral reinforcement.

Consider the following scenario, which it is reasonable to assume might occur at the beginning of a chaplain-counselee relationship. In a few sentences, the chaplain may determine that the soldier believes in God. In fact, the chaplain might make this assumption if the soldier simply approached the chaplain for counseling under his or her own volition and not by some commander's order. Many U.S. Military chaplains will offer the soldier the opportunity for the chaplain to pray for the soldier and the interaction that is about to take place. This seems, on the face of it, a benign act that has little to do with moral disengagement. However, if the act weakens the moral responsibility of the soldier-agent or establishes some greater moral authority on the part of the chaplain-agent, the relationship is already at risk for such things as diffusion of moral responsibility or deceitful moral justificatory cognitive responses that are counter to the soldier-agent's own moral schema. The chaplain must therefore, from the outset, be cognizant of these perilous actions and perhaps even forgo certain aspects of his or her own moral reasoning in order to establish a relationship that is most likely to encourage agentive moral reinforcement. The way in which this prayer is conducted might be inevitably harmful to the psychological well-being of the agent-soldier. Furthermore, the act itself may be harmful at this point in the relationship, since the chaplain cannot have any authentic sense of the goodness of the act within the context of agentive moral reinforcement. Consequently, any action that may cause a liberation of moral responsibility on the part of the soldier-agent should be undertaken with great caution or

perhaps avoided altogether. Now, there is a circumstance that may be worth considering relative to a belief that the agent may harm themselves or others, but situations like this should be treated as not being ordinary.

Consider also the aspect of reinforcement. This term implies both an encouragement of moral agency and an enduring reward of psychological well-being. It is very possible that some near-term cognitive dissonance might not be immediately alleviated, and that a chaplain or counselor ought not to attempt to provide some sort of satisfying philosophical or theological wisdom, which might even be an act of pride counter to authentic sacrificial love. Instead, we might assume that somewhere in the labyrinth of the mind of the agent, there exists a map for psychological reconciliation, a map that is at the beginning of the relationship both incomplete and inadequate. The virtuous chaplain or counselor will not attempt to somehow force or otherwise coerce insight into pathways that relieve the moral dilemma, but will instead embolden the agent to explore the deep realms of his or her own mind as a responsible moral agent, remembering that “not all those who wander are lost.”<sup>2</sup> This may seem to the chaplain to be a form of *sacrifice* on his or her own part, because positive results may be not immediately evident. But consider the complexities of establishing a relationship of mutual trust and respect. In an instant, the chaplain, by way of a well-reasoned theological argument based on something like a just war tradition and regarding the justificatory killing of enemy combatants in the throes of war, convinces the soldier-agent that a dilemma caused by killing someone in combat is not a moral dilemma at all and that the soldier was, in one way or another, justified in killing the enemy combatant. This argument may seem to offer great promise and immediate psychological rewards. Yet, the chaplain in this situation is more focused on solving the immediate moral dilemma, as opposed to helping the soldier-agent confront his or her own philosophies or beliefs on the matter, and this may work to some extent in the short-term. However, consider the soldier several years later, sitting on the front porch of his or her house, drinking tea and contemplating the argument of the chaplain relative to his

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<sup>2</sup> This refers to a positive aspect of this famous quote from J.R.R. Tolkien in his poem ‘The Riddle of Strider’.

own moral schema. We might argue that the soldier-agent's moral schema has changed, and this is of course possible, but not likely. Dangers of psychological discord lie in assumptions such as this. Once the soldier-agent has an opportunity to conduct deeper reflection upon the circumstances, there are recognizable risks. Especially a risk that the agent will inevitably feel that they were somehow duped into believing an argument that is not consistent with their own moral schema, and causing cognitive dissonance to the agent. This form of postponed dissonance may be far worse, since the agent not only feels duped but may also regret that they continued on with life as though the dilemma never existed, which may stir feelings such as anger, resentment and despair. In this situation, reflection can quickly turn to unhealthy rumination.

For many, the past unreservedly affects the future. Consider the Christian who believes that he will be held to account for his actions in life by God on the Day of Judgment. In this sense, the past and present life of the agent affects the future. Therefore, the chaplain or counselor ought not to enter this relationship with the intent of providing advice or counsel that might override the agent's moral schema. The complexity of the differences in their moral schemas should be valued and considered agentively authoritative. To disregard or overrule an agent's moral schema at the start of a counseling relationship is absurd considering the complexity of personal philosophical differentiation in a pluralistic society such as we find in the U.S. Military. But to be clear, at the beginning of the relationship it might behoove the chaplain or counselor to take extra caution and not assume a strong correspondence between philosophical assumptions by considering such simple questions as, "Do you believe in God?", which may in actuality divulge very little about an agent's moral schema.

The sense of moral superiority by a chaplain or counselor in a relationship with a counselee is possible; still, the counselor might minimize the extent to which this risk of moral dominance could negatively affect the agent, through an understanding of the possible catastrophic psychological outcomes. This may at first seem like a slight to professional counselors, but consider that most intellectual people spend considerable time and effort in developing their own moral schema

and therefore become quite convinced that their moral philosophy is both right and good, and we have granted the counselor nothing less. What we suggest is that the chaplain or counselor, out of an authentic sacrificial love for the counselee, should willfully relinquish their own moral philosophy in an attempt to more altruistically assist the counselee-agent to retain his or her own moral agency and support them in navigating their moral dilemma. This is perhaps an unchallenging sounding approach, but it does seem it would be exceedingly difficult to practice consistently. It is not that counselors cannot and do not often act with virtue in these circumstances. It is more that there are problematic and self-deceptive psychological vulnerabilities that create the conditions for the breakdown of self-regulatory mechanisms and the ensuing disengagement of moral self-sanctions.

Now, this entire argument may at first seem to fly in the face of proponents of positive psychology. However, at a fundamental level there is much synergy between the philosophy of positive psychology and a theory of agentive moral reinforcement. If positive psychology is defined as, “A science of positive subjective experience, positive individual traits, and positive institutions that promise to improve quality of life and prevent the pathologies that arise when life is barren and meaningless” (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p. 5), then there seems to be consistency, and perhaps some inconsistency, with agentive moral reinforcement, depending on the interpretation of several terms.

First we must consider the different notions of the social sciences. We previously provided three very different philosophical positions regarding science and its proposed limitations. Therefore, if we are to choose one of these general positions, perhaps that of the more empiricist moral schema, then there will of course be difficulties when attempting to synchronize positive psychology with agentive moral reinforcement, especially if suppositions do not allow the moral agent conviction of belief and a full assumption of moral responsibility. But these challenges can be overcome and therefore should not govern that certain fundamental aspects of positive psychology ought not to be employed simultaneously with a theory of agentive moral reinforcement. We believe in quite the opposite, with some notable caution. The fact that the agent is suffering some sort of cognitive dissonance re-

lated to a personal moral dilemma must of course be distinguished from some severe psychological disorder. The caution here is twofold. First, a psychological disorder should not be overlooked in favor of the agentive aspect that places full responsibility on the agent when the agent is unable to accept such a responsibility. Second, psychological disorders are often not easily diagnosed and so the interaction between counselor, chaplain or leader and the counselee-agent should operate accordingly. It is far too easy for a counselor-agent, who is firmly established in one of the moral philosophies discussed previously, to consider the thinking of a counselee-agent holding a different moral philosophy as simply irrational. Judgmental assessments of this kind are quite contrary to what we have established herein as agentive moral reinforcement and instead seem more like an approach of something like moral reconfiguration. Such a hasty and judgmental attitude will surely not coexist with the type of sacrificial love that we offer as a necessary component of agentive moral reinforcement.

However, if we consider the essential role of science as descriptive and not prescriptive, and if we assume a psychology consistent with the respectful and purposeful attempt at understanding the moral nature of the relationship, then there is little disagreement between the positive psychologist's notion of science and that of agentive moral reinforcement. This is especially true if we consider the importance of acquiring a richer appreciation regarding the moral schema of the agent. Moreover, a scientific understanding of psychology, as well as a healthy appreciation concerning the philosophy of science, provides a suitable foundation for the counselor-agent's behavior that ought not be overlooked. Just as the positive psychologist claims to focus away from a diagnosis of pathology and toward an appreciation of subjective experience, agentive moral reinforcement should not focus on moral judgment and instead focus on appreciation of the moral schema of the agent. This obligation to the counselee-agent's moral schema is somewhat beyond, but not exclusive of, strict scientific inquiry.

There is also a fundamental synergy in both positive psychology and agentive moral reinforcement, and this synergy is related to Seligman and Csikszentmihalyis' (2000) notion of "positive subjective experience" (p. 5). The focus on

how agents view their own experience is crucial for agentive moral reinforcement and is directly related to someone's ability to obtain a fulfilling and satisfying view of their own life. However, agentive moral reinforcement adds certain parameters to this more general characterization of positive subjective experience and should operate within these parameters. Agentive moral reinforcement is not simply concerned with the agent's subjective experience, but encourages a deeper understanding of this experience by both agents and relative to both agents' personal moral schema. Furthermore, each agent is sensitive to the limitations of subjective experience and has an appreciation of risks regarding the agents' ability to employ "psychosocial maneuvers by which moral self-sanctions are selectively disengaged" (Bandura, 1999, p. 193). The employment of such psychological maneuvers may create temporary and otherwise self-deceitful changes in subjective experience inconsistent with the agent's moral schema.

The notion of subjective experience should imply responsibility and ownership on the part of both agents in the relationship, and an increased awareness of the need for sacrificial love on the part of any counselor-agent toward the perhaps more vulnerable counselee-agent. The moral responsibility relating to the individual's subject experience ought not to be diffused onto others, or displaced by the counselee-agent onto the counselor-agent. In the process of agentive moral reinforcement, both subjects must assume moral agency and expect the same in return. This is conceivably a greater parameter than imposed by positive psychology, perhaps due to the more pathological tradition of diagnosing and fixing people from which positive psychology seems to be trying to escape. The assessment of positive psychology in this light may alleviate this burden of tradition and bring the overall positive psychology enterprise more in line with the essence of agentive moral reinforcement. Certainly, the two concepts seem generally compatible and one might easily perceive where a focus on the practice of positive psychology might benefit a process of agentive moral reinforcement. Thus, there seem to be at least two major issues that must be resolved in order that positive psychology and agentive moral reinforcement attain synergy. The first is that all subjects must be

preserved as autonomous moral agents. Second, all agents must be keenly aware of the potential risk regarding the selective disengagement of moral self-sanctions.

Finally, we connect what seems to be the fundamental purpose of positive psychology as stated by Seligman and Csikszentmihalyis (2000), “to improve quality of life and prevent pathologies” (p. 5). If we consider that the disengagement of moral self-sanctions is in itself pathological, and that the disengagement of moral self-sanctions can lead to pathologically related tribulations such as self-destructive behaviors, then we can also consider that both positive psychology and agentive moral reinforcement have similar ends, which include the long-term psychological resilience of the agent. The psychological resilience of the agent is a focus in positive psychology. Still, it is possible that an agent may exhibit short-term psychological resilience by activating psychological mechanisms that allow the agent to selectively disengage from his or her own moral self-sanctions. These concerns for long-term psychological resilience, the prevention of tertiary pathologies, and the quality of life of the moral agent are more effectively addressed by an additional attention to agentive moral reinforcement. The primary concern here is that, by excluding agentive moral reinforcement, all parties involved may be hoodwinked into believing that psychological resilience is transpiring, when the counselee-agent is actually activating psychological mechanisms that allow the agent to assuage some near-term anguish by disengaging from their own moral self-sanctions. The process of agentive moral reinforcement will assist in lessening the risk of this type of deception and provide the greater prospect of long-term moral fidelity and psychological resilience.

In their definition of positive psychology, Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) focus on the “positive institution” as a fundamental aspect of psychology (p. 5). We propose a similar conception regarding the implementation of agentive moral reinforcement within an institution, organization or other social system. The institution, organization or system must support a positive environment and also encourage positive individual and social interaction in order to realize the potential of agentive moral reinforcement. This includes the initial presumption that the agent is respected and not treated as if they are pathological or psychologically un-

sound, but that they have within themselves the ability to confront the heart of their own moral dilemmas and deal with these dilemmas within their own moral framework.

As we offered earlier, agentive moral reinforcement is interrelated with such things as hope and intrinsic religiosity. Neither hope nor intrinsic religiosity is easily confined to a specific category in Figure 7, although for any particular agent, conceptions of things like hope and intrinsic religiosity may fall primarily within a particular feature of agentive moral reinforcement. Hope defined as Snyder (2002) defines it will fall more within our notion of moral reasoning in the context of agentive moral reinforcement. Yet, as we have noted, many others define hope as a more affective conception. Therefore, personal aspects such as hope and intrinsic religiosity are particularly difficult to effectively address more generally within organizations or institutions that are pluralistic in nature, and also ultimately committed to creating an environment free of religiosity. The problem of common definition is surely a challenge to be overcome for many pluralistic organizations. Yet, this problem can be mitigated in many ways, including pluralistic organizations advocating for the dignity and respect of every agent.

As we noted earlier, there is often a tension between freedom of religion and freedom from religion in pluralistic institutions, and this tension affects personal relationships to differing extents and in different ways. Often, this tension cannot be easily resolved. Some may cry for complete freedom to practice all aspects of their religion and others will cry for a complete ban on all religious practice. There are of course religious practices and beliefs that are fundamentally toxic to an organization and that should be controlled. Take, for example, the religious practices of some minority religions. Some may be relatively benign like polygamy, yet other practices may call for the sacrifice of virgins or babies. Secular forms of minority religion fare no better and have led to genocide, infanticide and other historical atrocities (Trigg, 2007). The argument for how religion may affect a pluralistic organization, or what is or is not considered a religion in a pluralistic society, is not the focus here. However, we should recognize that these are difficult and emotional issues in pluralistic organizations such as the U.S. Military, and



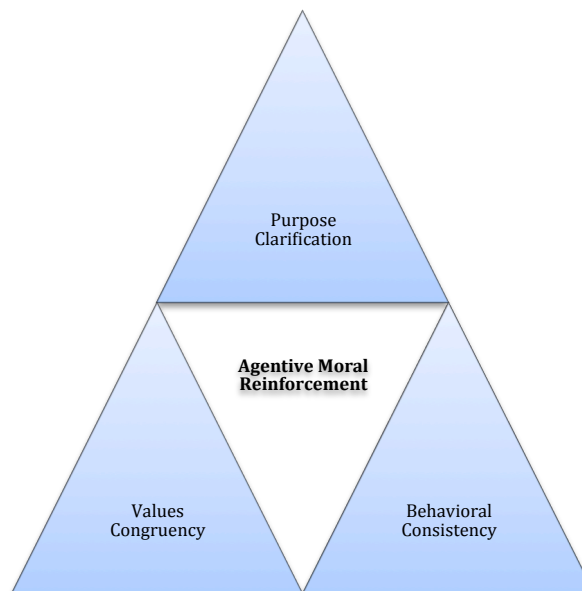
should therefore encourage the ongoing exploration of what is currently considered religion, what ought to be considered religion, what ought to be rules or laws governing certain practices of religion, and of course the freedom to express religious belief, as just some of the important contexts for a larger discussion associated with agentive moral reinforcement. The consequences that such rules, obligations and authorities might have related to agentive moral reinforcement are important to know in the organizational context. It may therefore be useful to initially consider agentive moral reinforcement in a more idealistic fashion, and then apply it as best we can to the organizational context in which it operates. But of course we then run the risk of lofty thinking that is far from reality and situated in a place where agentive moral reinforcement might be discarded as some sort of flight of fancy, a nice thing to consider but completely impractical given the real organizational circumstances. This should not be the case and instead we ought to consider the challenges that might need to be overcome regarding the implementation of an unadulterated form of agentive moral reinforcement within the context of pluralistic societies such as we find in the U.S. Military.

If we consider the situation between the chaplain-agent and soldier-agent, we might recognize that both of the actors find themselves in a struggle, a struggle between their obligations to the organization and commitments to their own moral schema. It might be ideal if organizational values aligned perfectly with the individual values of its members, with those values being created from the agent's moral schema, and this may be the case to some extent. Individuals who freely join the military often presume to share many of the values of that military organization. But even if all the values are shared, the extent to which each value is held will vary. To complicate matters further, organizational values are often vague and can be translated by the agent in various ways. In order to disambiguate these values, an organization like the U.S. Military will often create rules and guidelines to assist agents in the navigation of core values. However, we should remember that in the presence of the moral dilemma, implementation of rules and value constructs is agentively insufficient. The moral dilemma will occur within the context of some conflict between values. Therefore, it is paramount that we should allow agentive

moral reinforcement to abound within the organization, strengthening the whole by strengthening the long-term psychological resilience of each autonomous moral agent.

### **Personal Aspects of Agentive Moral Reinforcement**

We conclude our current project by focusing on three psychologically critical aspects of agentive moral reinforcement. These aspects, depicted in Figure 8, should not be overlooked and by way of positive self-reflection, the agent can strengthen his or her own psychological resilience and reduce the propensity for the disengagement of moral self-sanctions. We refer to these specific aspects as purpose clarification, values congruency and behavioral consistency. By *purpose clarification* we attempt to emphasize the importance of a teleological perspective in one's life. This purpose clarification involves such things as understanding positive aspects related to one's goals, intentions, aims and ends, and the lived life. Everyone, even the nihilist, is ultimately a teleological being. Purpose clarification is the recognition and strengthening of positive aspects related to one's teleological connection to the world. Purpose clarification is associated with a deeper understanding of the moral schema by the agent, which can have positive conative affects related to motivation and intentions.



*Figure 7.* Characteristics related to efficacious agentive moral reinforcement.

The second psychologically critical aspect of agentive moral reinforcement is values congruency. The values congruency aspect relates to an agent's ability to maintain a positive reflective attitude and consistently harmonize the values they place on individual moral standards. The reflective attitude offers the ability to bring incongruences between moral attitudes and the agent's moral schema to the forefront of consciousness. Once incongruence is exposed, the agent can then reflect on the nature of the incongruence, the issues causing the incongruence and possible solutions that might better align attitudes with the agent's moral schema.

The final aspect of agentive moral reinforcement, behavioral consistency, is found in the sustainment of moral judgment and moral character. Here, we describe the nature of moral judgment and moral character as interrelated. As the difficulty and complexities related to moral judgment increase, behavioral manifestations related to the consistency of moral character tend to decrease. The agent's development in the area of moral judgment can have a positive effect on the consistency of moral action. This is of course in line with other theories of moral development related to neo-Kohlbergianism, but here we emphasize the difference in each agent's moral schema and the basis for moral judgment. In other words, our moral principles in agentive moral reinforcement are not considered universal.

These psychological aspects of agentive moral reinforcement are reciprocal processes; each aspect should neither individually nor holistically be considered as fully realized in the developmental context. Instead, we should consider that the closer these aspects are to being in a sort of evolving equilibrium with the agent's moral schema, the more the agent can realize the personal and positive authority gained through agentive moral reinforcement. The developmental process leading to a harmony between cognitive, affective and conative moral aspects, as well as reliability in moral character, is the ultimate purpose of the psychological resilience that can be discovered through agentive moral reinforcement.

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## Appendix A

### Research Project Summary Form

**Original Title of Research Project:**

Religion, Spirituality and Comprehensive Soldier Fitness in the United States Military

**Name and title of Researcher, and Details of Project:**

Name: Kirk G. Mensch

Department: Theology and Religion

Supervisors: Esther Reed & Avril Mewse

Email: [kgm201@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:kgm201@exeter.ac.uk)

Start & end date permission requested for: Start - October 2013; End - June 2015

Date submitted: 18 October 2013

**SYNOPSIS OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT**

This research aims to investigate a possible connection between the psychological concepts of Flourishing, Religion, Future, and Moral Disengagement (FRFMD) in the context of the United States Army's Comprehensive Soldier Fitness program and specifically its unique rendering of the notion of spiritual fitness.

In recent years, there has been a great deal of consternation over the Army's proposal to encourage *spiritual fitness*. Some groups have condemned the U.S. Military's leadership with accusations of the attempted establishment of religion, or on the other hand, the infringement of individual rights of freedom from religion. Specifically, this research will assist in explaining a possible relationship between flourishing, which is a self-perceived success in important areas such as relationships, self-esteem, purpose, and optimism; religiosity, which is the level of one's religious involvement; adult hope, which is a perceived future success or self-efficacy; and the concept of moral disengagement, which will be used as a criterion variable. Specifically, statistical analysis will be conducted to determine if religiosity is a significant predictor of moral disengagement. Other independent variables, both demographic and as related to positive psychology, will be utilized as control variables in order to isolate a possible phenomenon. This is essentially the principle hypothesis.

Through the use of validated personal questionnaires, a literature review and ethical inquiry, this project will endeavour to understand how religiosity is related to aspects of personal wellbeing and the propensity for the disengagement of moral self-sanctions.

**Definition of invited participants:**

The respondent pool will be developed from the United States Military and focus on combat veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars. The pool may grow to include non-combat personnel. The respondents may consist of current active duty, reserve, national guard, retired or other former service members. The primary veteran population will be recruited initially from the United States Army and the United States Marine Corps (USMC) and will initially center on commando unit

personnel. Military veterans and unit leaders/commanders will be approached via email and social media. The researcher will secure the respondents' permission by way of a letter of introduction included in the consent page on the electronic website. Each respondent will be required to push a consent button prior to beginning the survey. Each respondent will be directed to a Limesurvey web-page. The Limesurvey Research System provided by the University of Exeter will be utilized as the collection tool and for the management of data storage. Respondents will be required to read the consent statement and provide their consent prior to taking the survey. An exit survey button will be provided in the survey and all respondents will be afforded the opportunity to read a debriefing statement provided at the end of the survey. Limesurvey is approved by the University of Exeter for use with this type of research and is registered under the Safe Harbor agreement (please see <http://export.gov/safeharbor/>).

Respondents will be notified in the consent statement that their participation as individuals will be anonymous. Contact information for the research team will be provided to the respondents in the consent form. Respondents can opt out of the survey at any time prior to completion of the online survey. The instrument should take less than 20 minutes to complete.

**Data or information to be collected, and the use that will be made of it:**

The methodology used by this research project reflects a combination of quantitative research and follow-on ethical inquiry. Respondent data will be collected by administering a psychometric instrument that is an amalgamation of widely used and validated sub-scales. A theoretical model has been developed using flourishing, religion, and hope, as independent variables and moral disengagement as a dependent variable. This theoretical construct will be tested through analysis of the quantitative data collected from the administration of the psychometric instrument. This research conforms to the ethical guidelines specified by the Social Research Association (2003) and the American Psychological Association (2010) guidelines (please see [http://the-sra.org.uk/sra\\_resources/research-ethics/ethics-guidelines/](http://the-sra.org.uk/sra_resources/research-ethics/ethics-guidelines/) and <http://www.apa.org/ethics/code/index.aspx>). Any implicit guideline for research in the USA subsists within the SRA's guidelines.

**How will the information supplied by participants be stored?**

Data gathered for the purpose of this research project will be safely stored on servers located in the United Kingdom and which will conform to the Safe Harbor agreement. Any paper copies related to this research will be secured in a locked filing cabinet in the Principle Investigator's (PI's) office or on the hard drive of the PI's computer system which is password protected and conforms to the University of Exeter's Information Technology "Keep it Safe" guidelines (please see <http://as.exeter.ac.uk/it/regulations/infosec/keepitsafe/#passwords>).



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## Appendix B

### Information and Consent Statement Form

This research project aims to investigate a possible connection between the psychological concepts of Hope, Religion and Ethics in the context of the United States Military. This research is funded by no outside contributors. The collected data may be used in research in both dissertation form and any published articles, books or papers given on the subject.

The use of the psychometric instrument as a contribution to understanding the psychology means that statistical analysis of the data will be included in the research. The data collected may be stored for as long as is necessary for the completion of this research project and any subsequent publications or continued research.

You will not be identified by name as a respondent and your answers will be anonymous. You will be able to refuse any questions you do not wish to answer and to discuss matters you believe are of interest with the researchers. You may withdraw from participating at any time prior to submission of the instrument by pressing the "Exit Survey" button.

By pressing the "Begin Survey" button, I voluntarily agree to participate and agree to the use of my data for the purposes specified above.

For any further information or follow up questions please contact Dr. Kirk Mensch at [kgm201@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:kgm201@exeter.ac.uk) or the University of Exeter Research Advisors at [a.j.mewse@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:a.j.mewse@exeter.ac.uk) or [e.d.reed@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:e.d.reed@exeter.ac.uk).

## Appendix C

### Flourishing, Religion, Future, and Moral Disengagement (FRFMD) Scales with demographic questions

Below are 8 statements with which you may agree or disagree. Using the 1–7 scale below, indicate your agreement with each item by indicating that response for each statement.

- 7 - Strongly agree
- 6 - Agree
- 5 - Slightly agree
- 4 - Neither agree nor disagree
- 3 - Slightly disagree
- 2 - Disagree
- 1 - Strongly disagree

- \_\_\_\_\_ I lead a purposeful and meaningful life
- \_\_\_\_\_ My social relationships are supportive and rewarding
- \_\_\_\_\_ I am engaged and interested in my daily activities
- \_\_\_\_\_ I actively contribute to the happiness and well-being of others
- \_\_\_\_\_ I am competent and capable in the activities that are important to me
- \_\_\_\_\_ I am a good person and live a good life
- \_\_\_\_\_ I am optimistic about my future
- \_\_\_\_\_ People respect me

Below are 5 statements to assist in understanding YOUR level of religious involvement. Please read and answer each of the following questions.

- \_\_\_\_\_ How often do you attend church or other religious meetings?  
1 - Never; 2 - Once a year or less; 3 - A few times a year; 4 - A few times a month; 5 - Once a week; 6 - More than once/week
- \_\_\_\_\_ How often do you spend time in private religious activities, such as prayer, meditation or Bible study?  
1 - Rarely or never; 2 - A few times a month; 3 - Once a week; 4 - Two or more times/week; 5 - Daily; 6 - More than once a day
- \_\_\_\_\_ In my life, I experience the presence of the Divine (i.e., God).  
1 - Definitely *not* true; 2 - Tends *not* to be true; 3 - Unsure; 4 - Tends to be true; 5 - Definitely true of me
- \_\_\_\_\_ My religious beliefs are what really lie behind my whole approach to life.  
1 - Definitely *not* true; 2 - Tends *not* to be true; 3 - Unsure; 4 - Tends to be true; 5 - Definitely true of me
- \_\_\_\_\_ I try hard to carry my religion over into all other dealings in life - (IR)  
1 - Definitely *not* true; 2 - Tends *not* to be true; 3 - Unsure; 4 - Tends to be true; 5 - Definitely true of me



*Directions:* Read each item carefully. Using the scale shown below, please select the number that best describes YOU.

- 1 - Definitely False
- 2 - Mostly False
- 3 - Somewhat False
- 4 - Slightly False
- 5 - Slightly True
- 6 - Somewhat True
- 7 - Mostly True
- 8 - Definitely True

- \_\_\_ I can think of many ways to get out of a jam.
- \_\_\_ I energetically pursue my goals.
- \_\_\_ I feel tired most of the time.
- \_\_\_ There are lots of ways around any problem.
- \_\_\_ I am easily downed in an argument.
- \_\_\_ I can think of many ways to get the things in life that are important to me.
- \_\_\_ I worry about my health.
- \_\_\_ Even when others get discouraged, I know I can find a way to solve the problem.
- \_\_\_ My past experiences have prepared me well for my future.
- \_\_\_ I've been pretty successful in life.
- \_\_\_ I usually find myself worrying about something.
- \_\_\_ I meet the goals that I set for myself.

Below are statements with which you may agree or disagree. Using the 1–7 scale below, indicate your agreement with each item by indicating that response for each statement.

- 7 - Strongly agree
- 6 - Agree
- 5 - Slightly agree
- 4 - Neither agree nor disagree
- 3 - Slightly disagree
- 2 - Disagree
- 1 - Strongly disagree

- \_\_\_\_\_ It is okay to spread rumors to defend those you care about.
- \_\_\_\_\_ It is alright to lie to keep your friends out of trouble.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Playing dirty is sometimes necessary in order to achieve noble ends.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Taking something without the owner's permission is okay as long as you're just borrowing it.
- \_\_\_\_\_ It's okay to gloss over certain facts to make your point.

\_\_\_\_\_ When you're negotiating for something you want, not telling the whole story is just part of the game.

\_\_\_\_\_ Considering the ways people grossly misrepresent themselves, it's hardly a sin to inflate your own credentials a bit.

\_\_\_\_\_ Compared to other illegal things people do, taking something small from a store without paying for it isn't worth worrying about.

\_\_\_\_\_ Damaging property is no big deal when you consider that others are assaulting people.

\_\_\_\_\_ People shouldn't be held accountable for doing questionable things when they were just doing what an authority figure told them to do.

\_\_\_\_\_ People cannot be blamed for misbehaving if their friends pressured them to do it.

\_\_\_\_\_ You can't blame people for breaking the rules if that's what they were taught to do by their leaders.

\_\_\_\_\_ People can't be blamed for doing things that are technically wrong when all their friends are doing it too.

\_\_\_\_\_ It's okay to tell a lie if the group agrees that it's the best way to handle the situation.

\_\_\_\_\_ In contexts where everyone cheats, there's no reason not to.

\_\_\_\_\_ Taking personal credit for ideas that were not your own is no big deal.

\_\_\_\_\_ Walking away from a store with some extra change doesn't cause any harm.

\_\_\_\_\_ It is OK to tell small lies when negotiating because no one gets hurt.

\_\_\_\_\_ Some people have to be treated roughly because they lack feelings that can be hurt.

\_\_\_\_\_ It's okay to treat badly somebody who behaves like scum.

\_\_\_\_\_ Violent criminals don't deserve to be treated like normal human beings.

\_\_\_\_\_ People who get mistreated have usually done something to bring it on themselves.

\_\_\_\_\_ If a business makes a billing mistake in your favour, it's okay not to tell them about it because it was their fault.

\_\_\_\_\_ If people have their privacy violated, it's probably because they have not taken adequate precautions to protect it.

### **What is your age?**

\_\_\_\_\_ Under 12 years old

\_\_\_\_\_ 12-17 years old

\_\_\_\_\_ 18-24 years old

\_\_\_\_\_ 25-34 years old

\_\_\_\_\_ 35-44 years old

\_\_\_\_\_ 45-54 years old

\_\_\_\_\_ 55 years or older

---

### **What is your gender?**

\_\_\_\_\_ Male

\_\_\_\_\_ Female

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**How do you describe yourself?** (please check the one option that best describes you)

- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- Asian or Asian American
- Black or African American
- Hispanic or Latino
- Non-Hispanic White

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**Are you:**

- Married (to opposite sex)
- Domestic Partnership or Married Same Sex
- Widowed
- Separated
- Divorced
- Never been married

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**What is the highest grade or year of school you completed?**

- Less than High School Graduate/GED
- High School Graduate/GED
- Some College or Associate's Degree
- College Graduate (BA, BS, etc...)
- Graduate Degree (MA, MS, MBA, etc...)
- Terminal Degree (PhD, JD, etc...)

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**How many children live in your household who are...**

- Less than 5 years old?
- 5 through 12 years old?
- 13 through 17 years old?

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**Current or Final Military Rank**

- Enlisted
- Non-Commissioned Officer
- Warrant Officer
- Cadet
- Officer (Company Grade 01-03)
- Officer (Field Grade 04 or higher)

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**Number of Combat Deployments**

- None
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

\_\_\_\_\_ more than 5

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**Military Rank on Last Combat Deployment**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Enlisted  
\_\_\_\_\_ Non-Commissioned Officer  
\_\_\_\_\_ Warrant Officer  
\_\_\_\_\_ Cadet  
\_\_\_\_\_ Officer (Company Grade 01-03)  
\_\_\_\_\_ Officer (Field Grade 04 or higher)

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**Branch of Service**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Army  
\_\_\_\_\_ Air Force  
\_\_\_\_\_ Coast Guard  
\_\_\_\_\_ Navy  
\_\_\_\_\_ Marine Corps  
\_\_\_\_\_ Other Government Agency

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**Do you believe you have Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)?**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Yes  
\_\_\_\_\_ No

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**Have you been treated for or do you believe you have a substance abuse problem?**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Yes  
\_\_\_\_\_ No

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**Have you been treated for any psychological issues that relate to your deployment?**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Yes  
\_\_\_\_\_ No

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**Have you been convicted of a crime or punished under the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) for something you believe is related directly or indirectly to your combat deployment?**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Yes  
\_\_\_\_\_ No

This research is being conducted with support from the University of Exeter, Devon, United Kingdom. For any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact the lead researcher (Kirk G. Mensch) at [kgm201@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:kgm201@exeter.ac.uk).