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## Handbook of Moral Motivation: Theories, Models, Applications

Minkang Kim

University of Sydney, [minkang.kim@sydney.edu.au](mailto:minkang.kim@sydney.edu.au)

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## **Handbook of Moral Motivation: Theories, Models, Applications**

Minkang Kim (Reviewer)  
University of Sydney

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There is a view of the growth of knowledge that likens it to climbing a tree. We make steady progress in our discoveries as we climb the trunk, but at some time we are forced to make a decision. The branches begin to divide, so which will we take, which is most likely to lead us onwards in the quest for truth? As we climb further, decision follows decision as the main branch further divides and divides. Close to the top of the tree we survey the view and feel we have made tremendous progress. But a haunting thought arises, what would have been the view and what might we have discovered if we had taken a different route, a different main branch and different sub-branches on our way up. Would we have learnt more, and would the view from the top provide a more comprehensive panorama?

In the *Handbook of Moral Motivation*, the editors have collected together an array of distinguished authors in the field of moral psychology and moral philosophy, all of whom have an interest, one way or another, in the question what forces us to act morally, how are we morally motivated? Teacher educators, not familiar with the history of moral psychology and Lawrence Kohlberg's work, might wonder why the notion of "moral motivation" is so attractive to these climbers? Well, it was largely procedural. The issue of moral motivation, as Don Collins Reed points out (page 341), relates to the so-called "judgment-action gap, the gap between judging correctly the right thing to do and doing it" that arose within the Kohlbergian tradition. Kohlberg and the later neo-Kohlbergians such as James Rest, needed a way of bridging the dichotomy they observed between moral reasoning and moral action, and the notion of "moral motivation" seemed to provide just such a bridge. The premise of this handbook of moral motivation is that these distinguished authors have been climbing the optimum branches of the tree, in pursuing his or her own disciplinary approach to morality and its putative components. But have they?

The Introduction of the handbook, written by one of the editors Fritz Oser, tells the reader that there are currently "12 different models of moral motivation" (pages 7-24). Most have a strong link to Kohlberg's theory of moral judgment and the subsequent work of James Rest and his so-called Four Components Model of moral functioning, though some authors adopt Augusto Blasi's concept of the "moral self" as the basis of their moral motivation models. One might expect an overall assessment of these different models, but Oser reveals that this was not the handbook's aim. Instead, his chapter attempts to "illustrate how all the dimensions [of moral motivation theory] could be brought together" by providing a tentative "global moral motivational model" (page 22). This kind of synthesising is not unusual in psychology. However, those acquainted with the strictures of "Ockham's razor", which prohibits the multiplication of entities, may wonder why 12 models were necessary in the first place? But, the existence of twelve models does at least indicate that the issue of "moral motivation" has attracted many researchers in the field.

The contributions of philosophers Thomas Wren, Don Collins Reed, and Terence Lovat and psychologists Gerhard Minnameier, and Augusto Blasi considerably strengthen the handbook, because of the critical dimension they bring to their work. They are particularly wary of "naïve psychological realism" (page 28) and the mechanistic reductionist tradition in the field of moral psychology. Augusto Blasi, for example, whose notion of the "moral self" is cited by many other contributors, laments: "the moral process, in fact, is fragmented into many sub-functions, which then need to be coherently organised.... In other words, these

models are presented in such a way as if they were guided by a sort of mechanical rationality” (page 231). In a similar vein, Gerhard Minnameier is critical of the reductive approach taken by James Rest and neo-Kohlbergians. He claims that moral motivation in the form suggested by James Rest is an unnecessary ad-hoc fragment. He argues that “what is thought to be distinguished from moral judgment is proved to be indistinguishable from it” (page 74) and “the whole idea of moral motivation seems utterly flawed” (page 72). Terence Lovat is similarly critical of a reductive approach and stresses the irreducibility of one’s self, noting that “self-knowing is central to motivation” (page 251), which he exemplifies by reference to Thomas More and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. The criticisms of these scholars regarding the notion of moral motivation are refreshing, but the readers need to be warned that a number of contributions by other authors within the handbook are subject to the criticisms these scholars raise. In other words, despite the synthetic aim of the handbook in papering over differences, the cracks remain visible.

Don Collins Reed’s chapter accurately identifies two other deep-seated problems in the study of moral motivation; the prevalent and seemingly irreconcilable dichotomy between rationalism and emotivism, and between acts of deliberate conscious judgment and pre-conscious intuition. Reed notes that within the field of moral psychology, the importance of emotion in moral reasoning and the role of intuition have been brought to focus by Jonathan Haidt’s Social Intuitionist Model (SIM) and by the Dynamic Systems Approach (DSA) as outlined by Kim and Sankey in 2009. Reed’s observations have particular relevance for teacher educators, because, as I have noted elsewhere (Kim, 2013), the two dichotomies he identifies have been pervasive in the pedagogy adopted for “teacher training courses that aim to enhance students’ moral and ethical awareness and behaviour” (p. 13). Reed’s main thesis is that these dichotomies can be overcome if we recognise that “what look like rival and incompatible accounts are accounts of different levels of person functioning” (page 359) and all of these levels are “essential for moral motivation for human flourishing” (page 353). He also believes that the Dynamic Systems Approach could offer a non-reductionist account of moral motivation encompassing different levels of description. Personally, I have my doubts that Reed’s synthetic aims can be realised, not least because in emphasising the role of emotion and intuition in morality, Haidt sets them *against* moral rationality. Indeed, from a dynamic systems point of view, the cognitive developmental models of Kohlberg and Rest and Haidt’s social intuitionism are each founded on a flawed dichotomy between reason and emotion.

The many readers of the *Australian Journal of Teacher Education* will find parts 6 and 7 of the handbook particularly interesting. The contributors in these sections bring extensive outcomes from research conducted in the context of professional education, including teacher, dentistry, business, and military education. Many of these studies were premised on one of the models of moral motivation introduced in the previous parts of the handbook. Sharon Nodie Oja and Patricia Craig, and Elizabeth Campbell identify “collegial loyalty” (page 530) and “pressures to conform” (page 590) as one of the biggest hindrances to one’s motivation to pursue the right course of action within the practice of education. Oja and Craig illustrate how novice interns perceive and cope with this pressure. They conclude that elements of “reflective coaching”, “support and challenge” and “guided inquiry” can form a well-structured internship environment where entering professionals are encouraged to pursue ethical commitment (page 601). As the book title intimates, these sections of the handbook are intended to demonstrate the application of theories and models to professional development and the practice of education. Some readers of AJTE may be unsettled by this ‘theory into practice’ approach, as it seems to separate theory and practice, when in reality theory in education normally has practice in view and practice is inevitably impregnated with theories of one kind or another, even if they remain implicit. Nevertheless, there is much in these chapters that has relevance to teacher education as a spur to reflection, and will reward careful study.

Overall, this handbook will be of considerable interest to those specialising in moral development and moral functioning theory, particularly in the Asia Pacific nations where the Kohlbergian approach remains strong in the context of education. But it also has wider

appeal, if only because it allows readers to see where many established scholars in the field of moral theory are currently focusing their research energies. But the thought returns, is the exploration of morality presented in the handbook situated primarily in just one part of the tree of moral theory, and is the focus on moral motivation a result of climbing up one main branch and its tributaries, ignoring other possible branches where the notion of moral motivation is unnecessary or irrelevant? And has the chosen route taken by these authors afforded the best possible vista, even though over the past half-century, or more, so much time and energy has gone into studying every available twig and leaf?

As noted above, Reed's chapter intimates at least two alternative approaches, the Social Intuitionist Model and the Dynamic Systems Approach, but these do not need a theory of moral motivation to bridge a perceived dichotomy between moral reasoning and moral action, because they do not see a dichotomy needing to be bridged. Haidt, as already noted, does away with moral reasoning, calling it a 'delusion' (Haidt, 2012, p.28); rationality, he claims, is always intuitive. The Dynamics Systems Approach accepts moral reasoning *and* moral intuition, emphasising the dynamic and multi-causal nature of morality, where thought and action are interwoven holistically one with another such that they cannot easily be separated. These alternatives provide two very different main branches up the tree, and the problem is that it is not easy for those who have gone up the cognitive developmental approach to step sideways to joint those on the other routes up. They would need to come down the tree a good way before finding a safe footing to adjoining branches, and doing so would require abandoning the notion of moral motivation. So, to conclude, perhaps the main contribution of the handbook is to provide a rich and deeply interesting account of one theoretical approach to morality, but one senses it is more like reading a compendium of past explorations rather than a climbers guide for the future.

## References

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