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Ecology, Emotion, and Culture: The Moral Psychology of Environmentalism

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Prominent findings in moral psychology are applicable to debates surrounding environmentalism, one of the most controversial and pressing global issues that humans face today. The goal of my thesis is to reveal what moral psychology has to offer these debates. I use the term environmentalism in the broadest sense as any issue that pertains to the wellbeing of nonhuman nature. This includes climate change, biodiversity, sustainable energy, among others, and could extend to issues surrounding animal ethics and food ethics. I begin by presenting a sampling of perspectives that different groups hold with regards to nature, demonstrating the differences among religious, cultural, and political groups. I then provide an overview of empirical findings about human morality, including Jonathan Haidt's social-intuitionist model and moral foundations theory as well as Joshua Greene's moral tribism theory. This discussion demonstrates the role of the emotions and culture as influences in determining what we consider to be morally right and wrong. Lastly, I assume an environmental perspective. Drawing from the various environmental outlooks and the psychology of morality, I illuminate ways in which environmentalism faces obstacles in registering as morally significant among different groups of people. I discuss the limits of our emotional intuitions when it comes to viewing nature as an object of moral concern, as well as the risks of promoting in-group beliefs when it comes to environmental issues. I hope that in understanding these sorts of barriers we can better understand the reasons for conflict, and how to approach the problem by promoting environmentally friendly behavior and learning to see the moral issues inherent in environmentalism.

Part I:
Ecological Approaches

Throughout history, there has been a wide range of views on the moral status of nature. Different cultures and religions have put forth their own philosophies about humanity's moral obligation to the environment. Concerns about environmental affairs, be it energy conservation, climate change, biodiversity, or any of the plethora of ethical issues with links to environmental health continue to be of utmost global importance. Some religious views promote living harmoniously with nature while others promote humanity's superiority. Within contemporary United States society, political groups advocate for different views of environmental issues. In Western individualist societies, such as the United States and other continental European nations, people are more likely to see themselves as separate from their environment as compared to those in non-Western societies. Some of the disparity in varying environmental perspectives comes down to whether nature has an intrinsic value or merely an instrumental one. If an individual believes that nature is intrinsically valuable, then she'll likely be against attempts to exploit it for human benefit—unless the human benefit outweighs the intrinsic value of the resource involved, in which case she'd face a more complex issue. If she believes that nature has only an instrumental value, then she might view the environment as a set of resources to be cultivated for human use.

However, the issue is more complex than whether we value nature for its intrinsic or instrumental values, and it's worth exploring the religious, political, and cultural dimensions involved. The numerous environmental philosophies that exist and the disagreement this causes makes it hard to come to a consensus on some of the most relevant global issues we face today. In Part I, I will present an overview of several of these

religious, political, and cultural philosophies. This will by no means be an exhaustive list. It will demonstrate just a few prominent, and especially relevant, examples of environmental approaches, which will serve as a guide as we examine the moral components of environmentalism in Part II and Part III.

Religion

The way in which different cultures view the environment is often rooted in religion. From an early age, it is typically from religious texts and teachings that we learn of creation stories and humankind's place in the natural world. It is well accepted that the Western Judeo-Christian religious view advocates for man's dominion over nature. In her article "The Historical Roots of the Ecological Crisis," Lynn White contrasts Christianity's stance on nature with that of ancient paganism. She writes, "Christianity, in absolute contrast to ancient paganism and Asia's religions, not only established a dualism of man and nature but also insisted that it is God's will that man exploit nature for his proper ends."[1] Pagans believed in a spiritual animism that encompassed and united every bit of nature, but Christianity, in claiming that man was created in God's image, severed this concept of humanity's union with nature by placing humans above the rest of creation. White explains, "By destroying pagan animism, Christianity made it possible to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects."[2] In White's view, Christianity was the driving force in a switch from valuing nature intrinsically to valuing it instrumentally.

What about Christianity makes its view of nature so different from that of paganism or Eastern traditions and why it is often perceived as advocating for the superiority of

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[1] Lynn White Jr. "The Historical Roots of the Ecological Crisis," *Science*, 155 (1967): 54.
[2] Ibid., 52.

humankind? This human/nature dichotomy may result from the idea that salvation, or eternal life and happiness in heaven, according to Christians, is reserved for humans only. There may need to be some element of superiority involved if only humans are made in God's image and can qualify for salvation in heaven. This suggests a separation between humanity and the rest of creation that could be used to justify control over the natural environment. In "Structuring the Religion-Environment Connection," Darren E. Sherkat and Christopher G. Ellison explain, "This divinely sanctioned domination over nature could lead many Christians to minimize the importance of environmental problems, to be less willing to sacrifice well-being for the sake of nature, and to be less supportive of political and private efforts to prevent environmental degradation."[3] From a Christian perspective, if humans are the chosen species, this might make us a little less inclined to think that environmental matters are of great significance.

Though the Christian approach, in claiming that man is created in God's image, does imply a separation between humans and the rest of creation, the Judeo-Christian model does not advocate for the exploitation of nature on every account nor is it indicative of the entire Christian environmental philosophy. White takes a very strong position, which can be understood in some respects, but which also ignores other examples from the Bible. She seems to have interpreted the passage from Genesis 1:26, "Then God said, 'Let us make mankind in our image...so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky..." in the strongest sense. However, as Robin Attfield notes, there are other instances in the Bible revealing a Christian environmental philosophy that advocates for quite the

[3] Sherkat, Darren E. and Christopher G. Ellison, "Structuring the Religion-Environment Connection: Identifying Religious Influences on Environmental Concern and Action." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 46 (2007): 74.

opposite. Attfield presents several counterexamples to White's claims and explains, "It is not the position of the Old Testament that everything exists to serve humanity, and White is mistaken to suggest otherwise. Thus the valleys are said to be watered for the sake of wild beasts (Psalm 104:10f.), and the same Psalm expresses God's care for a great variety of wild creatures."[4] There are numerous passages in the Bible that stress the beauty and wonders of creation and all of its creatures. Attfield appropriately mentions St. Francis of Assisi, patron saint of animals and the environment, and his advocacy of kindness towards nature. The Old Testament's view of nature has been, and can be, interpreted in different ways. Because these contradictions exist in Christian literature, it likely cannot be claimed that there is one cohesive Christian philosophy regarding the environment. Though, it could be argued that most frequently, the Christian tradition is portrayed as assuming man's superiority over animals and nature.

Is the Judeo-Christian model relevant to environmental problems we face in today's world? Do people base their positions on environmental issues on Biblical teachings? Understanding religious philosophies on the environment is so important because many individuals *do* appeal to religion in shaping their opinions on a wide range of controversial issues, environmentalism included.[5] It might even be the case that people are unaware how much religious teaching impacts their stances on particular issues. In Western society, it cannot be denied that religion plays a crucial role in arguments surrounding issues of abortion, capital punishment, economic inequality, gay marriage—the list goes on.

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[4] Attfield, Robin, "Christian Attitudes to Nature," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 44 (1983): 373.
[5] Andrew Greeley, "Religion and Attitudes Toward the Environment," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 32 (1993): 19.

While the Judeo-Christian view dominates much of Western culture, Eastern religious traditions have historically adopted a more holistic view of the environment. In an article for *Religious Education*, Ven. Sunyana Graef writes, "The premise of the Zen Buddhist ecology is this: When we understand what we really are, we will be at peace with ourselves and our environment...A life of wisdom is a life in harmony with the natural world."[6] Eastern religions typically emphasize the intrinsic value of nature. Instead of the stereotypical Western view of using nature for the benefit of humanity, Eastern traditions teach that humankind should try to fit in with the natural environment, not dominate it. Contemporary moral philosopher Peter Singer presents an ethical theory that approaches nature in a somewhat comparable way to Zen Buddhism. Singer claims that we should extend moral considerations to any being that has interests. While Singer is primarily focusing on animal rights, others, including Zen Buddhists may extend moral considerations to plants and even non-living nature. In *Zen Buddhism and Environmental Ethics*, Simon P. James explains,

> Zen and Singer are certainly of a piece in rejecting the anthropocentric idea that our moral obligations extend only to humans. For Singer, there can be no moral justification for considering the suffering of a non-human animal such as the laboratory rat to be less significant than the suffering of a human. Likewise, Zen inherits the general Buddhist idea that our actions towards those beings able to suffer ought to be guided by the First Precept, non-violence.[7]

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[6] Ven. Sunyana Graef, "The Foundations of Ecology in Zen Buddhism." *Religious Education* 85 (1990): 43.
[7] Simon P. James, *Zen Buddhism and Environmental Ethics*, (Cornwall: TJ International Ltd, 2004), 62.

Along with Buddhism, Taoism and Shintoism are other Eastern religious traditions that focus on a similar concept of living in harmony with the natural world. In *The Geography of Thought*, Richard E. Nisbett writes,

> The holism of the ancient Chinese extended to a sense of the unity of human existence with natural and even supernatural occurrences. What happened on earth resonated with events in nature and in heaven. The same is true of East Asians today. Both Taoism, still influential in China and elsewhere in East Asia, and Shintoism, still important in Japan, retain strong elements of animism: animals, plants, natural objects and even human-made artifacts have spirits."[8]

Many other non-Western religions advocate for the inherent value of nature as well. Different tribes among the people of New Guinea partake in rituals that "play an important part in regulating the relationships of these groups with both the non-human components of immediate environments and the non-human components of their less immediate environments, that is, with other similar territorial groups."[9] The Kwagiutl people, native to British Columbia, place a similar significance on the natural environment. In "Aboriginal Spirituality, Population, and the Environment," Daisy Sewid-Smith details several rituals among the Kwagiutl people that reveal their reverence for nature. For example, before cutting down a tree, an individual verbally expresses gratitude for the tree and provides an explanation for why she is cutting it down. "These practices may seem foolish to modern man," writes Sewid-Smith, "but these daily acknowledgments seemed to remind the

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[8] Richard E. Nisbett, *The Geography of Thought: How Asians and Westerners Think Differently*, (New York: Free Press, 2003), 84.

[9] Roy A. Rappaport, "Ritual Regulation and Environmental Relations among a New Guinea People," *Ethnology* 6 (1967): 17.

Kwagiutl that they were not the only important species on this planet."[10] This sort of aboriginal religious practice, although surely different in many respects, is similar to traditional Eastern religions in the sense that they both deny humanity's inherent superiority over other living beings.

I do not want to oversimplify cultural or religious beliefs or rely on armchair anthropological claims, but I think it is inarguable that different religious traditions hold very diverse views of the natural environment, and that these religious traditions can manifest themselves in the culture in which they are embedded. The idea that nature holds a spiritual identity can be seen in many cultures and religious traditions, but the value of nature in Western society does not appear to be rooted in nature's inherent value. This primarily appears to be a characteristic of the natural environment among Eastern cultures and indigenous peoples. I will discuss more about cultural differences between East and West towards the end of Part I.

Politics

Religion, though it provides a good moral framework for viewing the environment, is just one of the driving forces behind environmental outlooks. Contemporary United States culture illuminates the social, economic, and political dimensions of environmentalism. The environment is a highly politicized issue, and within the polarized American political system, it typically draws opposing responses from liberals and conservatives. There is significant divide on issues such as climate change, alternative energy, how to reduce carbon emissions, hydraulic fracturing, etc. Liberals are generally supportive of environmental causes while conservatives are perceived as being less

[10] Daisy Sewid-Smith, "Aborigibal Spirituality, Population, and the Environment," in *Population, Consumption, and the Environment*, ed. Harold Coward (New York: State Univeristy of New York Press, 1995.), 69.

sympathetic. These opposing views are not directly related to religion, though in some cases religious teaching may be an influential factor. They are more so ideological views comprised of the economic and social factors involved with promoting environmental health and investing in sustainable lifestyles.

While liberals and conservatives are stereotypically portrayed as holding contrasting positions on environmental issues, this is not to say that conservatives never support environmental causes or that all liberals are tree-hugger environmentalists. There is not such an extreme gap. Still, studies consistently reveal certain patterns. Political ideology impacts environmentally friendly behavior and positions on environmental policy, and "values, beliefs, norms, personal identity, trust, and political ideology each have been shown to influence environmental decision-making."[11] More often than not, liberals favor environmental initiatives while conservatives are more skeptical. Gallup polls from 1990, 2000, and 2010 reveal that liberals consistently show more concern than conservatives for river pollution, drinking water pollution, air pollution, soil contamination, deforestation, and global warming.[12] "Over time, Republicans have...been increasingly inclined to believe that the seriousness of global warming is 'exaggerated' by the media and that warming trends are the result of natural causes rather than human activity," writes Deborah Lynn Guber in her 2012 article "A Cooling Climate for Change? Party Polarization and the Politics of Global Warming."[13]

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[11] Thomas Dietz, Christina Leshko, and Aaron M. McCright, "Politics Shapes Individual Choices about Energy Efficiency," *PNAS* 110 (2013): 9191.
[12] Deborah Lynn Guber, "A Cooling Climate for Change? Party Polarization and the Politics of Global Warming," *American Behavioral Scientist* 57 (2012): 103.
[13] Ibid., 98.

It likely comes as little surprise that this disparity between liberals and conservatives exists. The United States is all too accustomed to this sort of partisan behavior. Still, it's worth exploring potential reasons for these political views. For example, conservatives place a high value on economic growth, but often consider environmental initiatives economically risky. Thus, conservatives might be more inclined to be skeptical about environmental causes. Liberals, while they too value economic growth, believe more consistently than conservatives, that environmental health is a higher priority. In *Break Through: Why We Can't Leave Saving the Earth to Environmentalists*, Ted Nordhaus and Michael Shellenberger write,

> Conservatives have their own theological construct that must not be violated: the market. The market, for conservatives, like nature, for environmentalists, is a *thing* separate, sacred, and inviolable. Indeed, it is natural, born of human nature and iron economic law. Sins against the market, like sins against nature, will be punished. Environmentalists argue that societies that violate nature's laws will ultimately collapse, and market fundamentalists argue that economies that violate the laws of the market will ultimately collapse.[14]

The emphasis that conservatives place on the economy might make it more difficult for them to agree to environmental policies, make sustainable consumer choices, and advocate for environmental causes. A study conducted by Gromet et al. involved labeling certain light bulbs as environmentally friendly. When the sustainable light bulbs were more expensive than normal light bulbs, conservatives (and moderates) were less likely to

[14] Ted Nordhaus and Michael Shellenberger, *Break Through: Why We Can't Leave Saving the Earth to Environmentalists* (New York: Mariner Books, 2007), 232-233.

purchase the sustainable bulbs, while liberals chose the sustainable bulbs despite the price difference.[15] However, when both types of light bulb were equally priced, the sustainable ones were preferred among conservatives. This study shows the economic element that is intertwined with environmental issues. "When there is a premium to be paid for efficiency, signaling a product as 'green' may make some consumers skeptical about its economic payoff," write Dietz et. al.[16] Though environmentally friendly consumerism may not appear to be worth the economic benefit in the short term, many environmentalists have argued that disregarding issues such as climate change will ultimately be economically disastrous. The most famous of these arguments comes from Nicholas Stern's 700-page "Stern Review," which detailed the economic consequences of ignoring climate change.[17] The contradictory arguments from liberals and conservatives regarding the economics of environmental endeavors further reveal the polarity that surrounds these issues.

Though environmentalism within the United States is associated with specific political affiliations, the reasons for environmental advocacy, or reasons not to promote environmental causes, do not necessarily need to be politicized. Some people might not look to political ideologies to determine their environmental philosophies. For example, an individual might be pro-environmentalism simply because she thinks that the environment has intrinsic value and thus it is good in itself to make efforts to sustain the natural environment. Another individual might be pro-environmentalism because it promotes public health and this could be rooted in her belief that public health is good in itself. Someone could be anti-environmentalism because she believes it hinders economic

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[15] Dietz et. al, "Politics Shapes Individual Choices," 9191.
[16] Ibid., 9191.
[17] Nordhaus and Shellenberger, *Break Through*, 118.

growth, and this could be rooted in her belief that providing jobs and security for citizens takes moral precedence above sustaining nature. For some individuals, human priorities trump environmental concerns. These are just a few examples of the reasoning behind environmental views that don't necessarily have to be related to politics, though this separation may often be difficult to recognize.

In *Break Through*, Nordhaus and Shellenberger write, "All beliefs are personal and pre-political before they become public and political. The civil rights movement and women's movements began with people seeing themselves and others around them differently than they had before. Social movements grew out of these new values and ways of being in the world."[18] Some philosophers have advocated for environmentalism on the basis of its inherent relation to other historical movements that seek to end oppression. The ecofeminism movement is an example of this. Ecofeminists draw parallels between sexism and "naturism."[19] The quote from Nordhaus and Shellenberger exemplifies how a politicized issue such as environmentalism is first and foremost rooted in our personal values, and that we should recognize this when we advocate and try to make progress on a public level.

A Note on WEIRD Societies

When studying different cultures and belief systems, it is crucial to understand that not all societies are *WEIRD*—Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic. In fact, most societies are not WEIRD.[20] Since we live in a WEIRD society we tend to hear mostly about WEIRD societies and see the world through WEIRD-tinted glasses. However,

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[18] Nordhaus and Shellenberger, *Break Through*, 208-209.
[19] Karen J. Warren, "The Power and Promise of Ecological Feminism," in *Environmental Ethics: The Big Questions*, ed. David R. Keller, (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 285.
[20] Joseph Heinrich, Steven J. Heine and Ara Norenzayan, "Most People are Not Weird," *Nature* 466 (2010): 29.

it is necessary to recognize that not everyone thinks the way that WEIRD people do. Therefore, it is worth exploring potential differences in environmental approaches in both WEIRD and non-WEIRD societies to better understand this issue on a global scale.

One especially relevant difference between WEIRD and non-WEIRD societies is an emphasis on industrialization and capital. Highly developed and industrialized countries face many environmental problems simply because of the fact that they are producing so much. As briefly mentioned with respect to Judeo-Christian theology, Western culture promotes a divide between humanity and nature. The constant need to produce and consume, a process that is inherently destructive to the environment, only seems to further the divide between humanity and nature. This emphasis on industry is characteristic of capitalist and technologically efficient nations. "As countries develop and accumulate capital, pollution levels increase as a result of increase on the scale of production as more output is produced," writes Jevan Cherniwchan in his article "Economic Growth, Industrialization, and the Environment."[21] In such cultures, the environmental movements are less rooted in specific religious traditions or cultural practices, and more so in arguments for a basic human obligation towards the health of the planet either for the sake of the environment or for the sake of human benefit. People in developed countries have the luxury of being able to engage in environmental activism. It is somewhat of a privilege to be an environmentalist; in poorer, less developed nations, individuals likely have higher priorities. However, this does not mean that individuals in these nations care less about environmental health.[22]

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[21] Jevan Cherniwchan, "Economic Growth, Industrialization, and the Environment," *Resource and Energy Economics* 34 (2012): 461.

[22] Riley E. Dunlap. "International Attitudes Towards Environment and Development," *Green Globe Yearbook*

Individuals in Western societies tend to see the world as composed of many distinct parts, while those in Eastern or other non-WEIRD cultures focus more on the relationships between these parts.[23] Western cultures are considered to be *individualistic*, while Eastern cultures are considered to be *collectivistic*. People in non-WEIRD societies "have a more *sociocentric* morality, which means...that you place needs of groups and institutions first, often ahead of the needs of individuals."[24] This may sound similar to the difference in environmental views between the Judeo-Christian and Eastern religious traditions, and it is highly likely that these religious traditions had a significant impact on the evolution of these contrasting perspectives.

In *The Geography of Thought*, Nisbett presents a thought-provoking account of why Easterners and Westerners perceive of their surroundings so differently. He claims that the ecologies of ancient China and ancient Greece might have impacted the way that these two groups interacted with their environment. Ancient China's ecology required that people cooperate and be mindful of one another. Nisbett writes, "China, consisting as it does primarily of relatively fertile plains, low mountains, and navigable rivers, favored agriculture and made centralized control of society relatively easy."[25] Much importance was placed in maintaining harmony within society. This may have been a factor in Eastern cultures adopting more holistic worldviews than Western ones when it comes to society and the environment. The more mountainous ecology of ancient Greece was conducive to hunting, herding, and trade, for which cooperation and community is not as essential for

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(1994): 115.

[23] Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People are Divided by Politics and Religion*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 2012), 98.

[24] Ibid., 114.

[25] Nisbett, *The Geography of Thought*, 34.

success.[26] Although Nisbett's theory is not directly relating the Eastern emphasis on societal harmony with the natural environment, it does provide a potential explanation as to why Eastern cultures and religions perceive of the world as interconnected, while Western cultures and religions view a stricter dichotomy between an individual and her surroundings.

It is interesting to note that while traditional Eastern religions emphasize nature's intrinsic value, as Eastern nations have become more industrialized, it may be difficult to see the role these values play in contemporary culture. For example, China today faces pressing environmental problems due to its population size and large economy. "The list of problems ranges from air pollution, biodiversity losses.... grassland degradation, and frequency and scale of human-induced natural disasters," write Jianguo Liu and Jared Diamond in their article "China's Environment in a Globalizing World."[27] The influence of globalization and industrialization has had environmental impacts in China that appear contrary to philosophies and religious teachings of ancient Chinese culture.

Conclusions from Part I

In Part I, I have reviewed just a small portion of the various religious, political, and anthropological philosophies pertaining to humanity's relationship with the natural environment:

- The Judeo-Christian view of man's dominion over nature
- The Buddhist emphasis on living in harmony with nature
- Liberal advocacy of environmental issues in U.S. culture
- Conservative skepticism of environmental issues in U.S. culture

[26] Ibid., 34.
[27] Jianguo Liu and Jared Diamond, "China's Environment in a Globalizing World," *Nature,* 435 (2005):1179.

- WEIRD societies and an individualistic view of the environment
- Non-WEIRD societies and a collectivist view of the environment

In Part II, I'll switch gears and present research in moral psychology that is relevant to these philosophies and to our perception of environmental issues. These ecological perspectives will be especially relevant in Part III, as I present ways in which perception of the natural world is related to our moral capabilities and psychological makeup.

Part II
The Emotional and Cultural Basis of Morality

In recognizing the many perspectives regarding the environment, or any controversial issue, I believe that it is beneficial to investigate the psychological roots that give rise to such perspectives. How do we as humans come to place value on something like nonhuman nature or anything else that we find morally valuable? From where do our moral sensibilities originate, and how can they differ across groups and cultures to the degree that they do? Answering these types of questions will provide insight into how the religious, political, and cultural factors discussed in Part I can help mold our moral inclinations. An exploration of the research that's been done into human moral processes will give be of great assistance in understanding how religious teaching, political ideology, and cultural upbringing can play a significant role in moral development.

In the mid-twentieth century, psychologists started delving into the inner-workings of human morality to gain a greater understanding of how humans differentiate between right and wrong.[28] Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg were pioneers in the field of moral psychology. Up until that time, morality had been a field generally reserved for

[28] Note: My discussion of moral psychology uses the terms "morals" and "ethics" as well as "moral" and "ethical" synonymously.

philosophers. Psychologists such as Kohlberg and Piaget were after a different sort of inquiry into morality. Instead of evaluating the ways in which we ought to behave, as many philosophers had done, they wanted to study how we actually behave in moral scenarios. These are related but quite separate endeavors, and empirical research in moral psychology does not necessarily undermine the theories that have been put forth by moral philosophers for many centuries. However, the theories asserted by Piaget and Kohlberg were significant at the time because morality had not yet been considered in terms of human psychological makeup. In this section, I will present the gist of Piaget and Kohlberg's theories and compare them with contemporary theories from Jonathan Haidt and Joshua Greene. Though a singular comprehensive theory about human morality might be unattainable, we can at least gain a greater understanding of how our minds work on a moral level.

Piaget, a Swiss developmental psychologist, presented the theory of *psychological rationalism*, which described how human morality develops and matures over time. Lawrence Kohlberg followed this model and proposed the Heinz dilemma, in which subjects are asked to evaluate whether it is morally permissible for a man, Heinz, to steal medicine for his dying wife. Kohlberg discovered that age significantly impacted subject's responses to the Heinz dilemma. Kohlberg differentiated between six specific stages that a person moves through until she arrives at the "universal ethical principle orientation" in which she makes moral choices in accordance with "self-chosen ethical principles appealing to logical comprehensiveness, universality, and consistency."[29] Jonathan Haidt,

[29] Lawrence Kohlberg, "The Claim to Moral Adequacy of a Highest Stage of Moral Judgment," In *Moral Psychology*, eds. Thomas Nadelhoffer, Eddy Nahmias, and Shaun Nichols. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2010), 41.

in his most recent work, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People are Divided by Politics and Religion*, offers an analogy illustrating what psychological rationalism is attempting to show. He explains, "We grow into our rationality as caterpillars grow into butterflies. If the caterpillar eats enough leaves, it will (eventually) grow wings. And if the child gets enough experiences of turn taking, sharing, and playground justice, it will (eventually) become a moral creature."[30] Under the psychological rationalist model, an individual grows into her ability to reason morally, and her judgments are thought to refer back to moral norms that are already in place.[31] The psychological rationalist approach, although not a philosophical theory, is relatable to Kant's Categorical Imperative.[32] The Categorical Imperative is a universal rule that states you should not treat another person solely as a means to an end. Kohlberg believes that at the highest stage of moral development, people naturally adopt a principle such as this.

Just as there is no universally agreed upon ethical theory in philosophy, there is not a complete consensus about what empirical evidence reveals about morality either. Jonathan Haidt criticizes the psychological rationalist approach advocated by Piaget and Kohlberg and believes that the role of reason has been over emphasized in moral philosophy and psychology. His evidence against it is that "reasoning is motivated...the reasoning process constructs post-hoc justifications...and moral action covaries with moral emotion more than with moral reasoning."[33] Haidt's own theory is not based in the idea the humans are meant to reach some moral maturity in which they make decisions more

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[30] Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People are Divided by Politics and Religion*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 2012), 7.

[31] Christopher Miller, *Moral Character: An Empirical Theory*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), *82*.

[32] Ibid., 82.

[33] Jonathan Haidt, "The Emotional Dog and It's Rational Tail: A Social Intuitionist Approach to Moral Judgment," *Psychological Review* 108 (2001): 345.

rationally. Haidt instead is trying to show that emotion and intuition—our gut reactions to moral scenarios—are our primary moral devices. In doing so, Haidt takes a position similar to that of David Hume, one of the most famous modern philosophers, who argued for the influence of the passions on moral decision-making. In *A Treatise on Human Nature*, Hume writes,

> The most probable hypothesis, which has been advanc'd to explain the distinction betwixt vice and virtue, and the origin of moral rights and obligations, is, that from a primary constitution of nature certain characters and passions, by the very view and contemplation, produce a pain, and others in like manner excite a pleasure....Supposing this hypothesis of moral philosophy is allow'd to be false, 'tis still evident that pain and pleasure, if not the causes of vice and virtue, are at least inseparable from them.[34]

This passage illuminates Hume's emphasis on how the passions affect our concept of vice and virtue. This is somewhat difficult to deny, for it is almost always ethical issues that elicit the most impassioned responses from people. Recognition of what we perceive to be a deep injustice may arise from feelings of disgust or anger. These feelings typically precede any sort of rational thought, and are often hard to dismiss.

Think of times when you've had a strong physical reaction when learning about something you perceive to be unjust or immoral. There have been lots of times when I'm confronted with a situation in my daily life, or when I hear of something on the news and I cannot help but to have an instinctual emotional reaction. For example, when I was in second grade, I was playing at recess with a few friends and another classmate asked to

[34] David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Project Gutenberg EBooks, 2010. Web 25 March 2014.

join in the game we were playing. One of my friends replied no, she couldn't. I remember feeling in that moment a sense of wrongness about what my friend had said. I was nervous and unsettled, and felt the urge to speak up. Why did I feel that way? Probably because one of the number one rules I'd ever learned at my Catholic elementary school was the Golden Rule. I had previously learned that my friend's behavior was not okay; I understood that I would not want to be treated that way. In the moment, however, I didn't need to refer back to any rules about right and wrong to immediately realize the situation was unfair. I simply felt it, and without question, acted upon my feelings. We experience strong emotional aversions to people acting immorally before we bring reason into the picture to defend our feelings. It's not only negative emotional responses matched with immoral behavior, for there are times when we experience admiration and approval when witnessing a particularly moral or valiant act.

There's no question that humans are both rationally and emotionally rich beings. When it comes to morality, the question revolves around what role these human qualities play. Haidt and Greene are intrigued by the dichotomy between reason and emotion. They try to deconstruct these two distinct, but related, aspects of human morality in their theories. I will specifically focus on how clarifying the roles of reason and emotion help us understand why ethical issues regarding the environment might have such a wide range of responses, why different groups have different approaches to the natural world. In doing so, I will focus on two themes that emerge from the works of Haidt and Greene. The first is that the basis for human morality comes from the heart, not the head—that morality and the emotions are deeply intertwined. Emotional responses are required to guide our moral decision-making. The second is that an individual's beliefs, including her moral beliefs, are

highly influenced by the culture in which she is embedded. In Part II, I'll present a comprehensive overview of how morality applies to emotions and culture, and then proceed to relate them back to environmental issues in Part III.

Morality and Emotions

Recent empirical research has revealed that moral decision-making has much to do with emotions and how these emotions are interpreted as feelings in cultural contexts. This seems to make sense when you look at what separates moral decisions from other types of decisions. The outfit I pick out in the morning isn't a moral choice; most days I don't feel strongly about which pair of shoes I wear. But moral decisions are different, weightier. A moral decision suggests that wellbeing is at stake—whether this wellbeing is for oneself, other people, or nonhuman beings. The implications of a moral decision are more serious, the wrong decision may lead to harm. Because of the potential consequences of moral decisions, we are inclined to feel more strongly about them. This is where the emotions come into play. There are undoubtedly times when our reasoning capabilities, perhaps through consulting philosophical ethical theories, could lead to a better outcome. Calculating the goodness or badness of a given outcome and acting in accordance with the decision that promotes the most goodness, as John Stuart Mill's utilitarianism promotes, might lead to productive moral decisions in some scenarios. However, for better or worse, human minds do not always work this way. We have rational capacities that set us apart as a species, but as emotional beings, we cannot ignore the role of the emotions and their ability to affect moral reasoning.

The trolley/footbridge dilemma, a popular ethical thought-experiment, provides a prime example of the relationship between morality and emotions. Experiments

conducted by Greene, Sommerville, et al. revealed that regions of the brain associated with emotion were activated when subjects were presented with the footbridge dilemma more so than when presented with the trolley dilemma.[35] The trolley and footbridge scenarios are hypothetical situations in which an individual has the option to save either one life or five lives. In the trolley dilemma, a trolley is approaching on its tracks and five people are standing in its path. You have the option to flip a switch to change the trolley's direction, but in doing so the trolley would hit and kill one person standing on the other set of tracks. The footbridge dilemma is very similar except instead of flipping a switch to save the five people, you have to push a large man off of a bridge to stop the train before it hits them. The scenario that involves pushing the large man produces more emotional responses from subjects. Greene et al. write, "How do people manage to conclude that it is acceptable to sacrifice one for the sake of five in one case but not the other? We maintain that emotional response is likely to be the crucial difference between the two cases."[36] You can reach the same outcome in both scenarios (save five and sacrifice one), but pushing the man off of the bridge in the footbridge dilemma is less appealing. In flipping the switch, you're somehow more removed from the situation, but in pushing the man, it is almost as if you have more personal responsibility in ending the man's life. This study provides some evidence for the idea that the difference between a morally right and wrong action often comes down to good and bad emotional responses. Sometimes a situation simply leaves us with a bad taste even if we cannot adequately put it into words.

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[35] Joshua D. Greene, R. Brian Sommerville et al., "An fMRI Investigation of Emotional Moral Judgment," *Science* 293 (2001): 2105-2108.

[36] Ibid., 2107.

When something goes against my moral system, I may experience negative emotions as a warning sign, the most notable of these negative emotions being ones that elicit feelings of disgust. Simone Schnall and Peter Cannon, in their article entitled "The Clean Conscience at Work: Emotions, Intuitions, and Morality," write, "Beyond the relatively basic, body-based function, disgust responses have also been demonstrated in the social domain; *socio-moral disgust* is the term to describe the revulsion one feels when confronted with immoral behaviors of others that violate established norms."[37] The type of emotional response that we experience with respect to a moral issue or specific situation can have a pivotal impact on how we judge that moral issue or act in that situation. Emotions that evoke disgust are some of the most relevant emotions to moral judgment.

In *The Righteous Mind*, Jonathan Haidt further explains the relationship between emotional and rationality. He describes experiments conducted by neuroscientist Antonio Damasio that involved moral judgments in subjects who had suffered damage to their vetromedial prefrontal cortex, a portion of the brain that is responsible for emotional processing.[38] "Patients with VMPC lesions exhibit generally diminished emotional responsivity and markedly reduced social emotions that are closely associated with moral values," write Damasio et. al.[39] The subjects could reason normally, in accordance with their own cultural values, about moral scenarios. When given tests requiring moral reasoning, their answers were not abnormal. However, they were unable to behave in ways that matched up with their reasoned answers. They acted in offensive and harmful

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[37] Simone Shnall and Peter R. Cannon, "The Clean Conscience at Work: Emotions, Intuitions and Morality," *Journal of Management, Spirituality & Religion* 9 (2012): 300.

[38] Haidt, *The Righteous Mind*, 33.

[39] Michael Koenigs, Liane Young, Ralph Adolphs, Daniel Tranel, Fiery Cushman, Marc Hauser, and Antonio Damasio, "Damage to the Prefrontal Cortex Increases Utilitarian Moral Judgments," *Nature* 446 (2007): 908.

ways that were not in line with their proclaimed beliefs about right and wrong. According to Haidt and Damasio, the explanation for this was that the emotions had lost the ability to regulate moral decision-making. The subjects' behavior revealed that "reasoning *requires* the passions."[40]

Moral psychologists have begun to explore the idea that the emotions, first and foremost, drive moral decision-making, while the reasoning comes afterward to justify the initial emotional response. First, you have a gut reaction about something being right or wrong, and then you go through the mental process of morally evaluating it. Haidt explains,

> In a moral judgment interview, a participant is asked to decide whether or not an action is right or wrong and is then asked to explain why he thinks so. However, if people have no access to the processes behind their automatic initial evaluations then how do they go about providing justifications? They do so by consulting their a priori moral theories. *A priori moral theories* can be defined as a pool of culturally supplied norms for evaluating and criticizing the behavior of others.[41]

The inability to provide a justification for a moral belief is known as "moral dumbfounding," and this phenomenon is quite a significant finding in moral psychology to date. It reveals that there are times when moral reasoning comes into play only after the moral decision has already been made, as opposed to guiding us to the correct moral decision. We reason after the fact to explain or rationalize our belief. Haidt provides examples of eating your dog once it has died or cleaning a toilet with your country's flag.

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[40] Haidt, *The Righteous Mind,* 41.
[41] Haidt, "The Emotional Dog and Its Rational Tale," 822.

When subjects were asked if this would be okay, most of them were quick to claim it would definitely be wrong. However, their justifications for why they took this position were lagging behind their immediate conclusion of wrongness. Many claimed potential harm in regard to eating the dog, and a feeling of guilt using the flag. Most justifications were easily refutable, causing subjects to look for other reasons against it. Objectively, it does not seem worse to eat a dog than to eat a chicken. However, eating the dog simply feels wrong to the subject, likely because of the way that dogs are viewed in American culture as opposed to other cultures. If an experiment similar to Greene's trolley/footbridge experiment were to be run on subjects being asked a question about eating a dog versus a chicken, I imagine that the emotional responses would be much higher for the dog scenario. These cases of moral dumbfounding further prove the influence of the emotions on our moral decisions and how our moral-emotional makeup is often shaped by cultural norms. For some, I think it might be frightening to think that we often cannot provide justifications for moral beliefs that we feel very strongly about. While examples of moral dumbfounding reveal that people often are flabbergasted when asked to explain their habitual moral beliefs, this does not necessarily imply that there are never valid justifications for these beliefs.

Haidt refers to his theory as the *social intuitionist* model of morality. It demonstrates that our immediate response to a moral scenario isn't immediately directed towards a rational explanation. Often times we do not question our instinctual responses and conclusions of rightness or wrongness. We rely on intuitions, which Haidt defines as "the best word to describe the dozens or hundreds of rapid, effortless moral judgments and decisions that we make every day."[42] Moral intuitions are split-second responses that we

[42] Haidt, *The Righteous Mind*, 45.

might have about a moral scenario; they occur "quickly, effortlessly, and automatically, such that the outcome but not the process is accessible to consciousness."[43]

Haidt's model is certainly not without flaws. Haidt does not account for all types of moral decision-making; I have experienced times when I have to weigh a moral outcome using what seems like just as much reasoning as emotion. Moral decisions are not always so black and white. Sometimes, we might feel divided about which outcome is most desirable, and while intuitions certainly play a strong role when it comes to moral decisions, they are not necessarily the guiding force behind all of our moral decisions. There are ways in which reasoning can control the intuitions "by shaping the sorts of intuitions that occur and by controlling the situations that would elicit these intuitions."[44] The social intuitionist model makes a lot of sense when you look at how much emotions guide our moral decisions, but it's a bit frightening to think that our intuitions have that much control over us. I can think of several instances in which I had an immediate intuitive feeling about a situation, and had to reason my way out of that particular feeling. David A. Pizarro and Paul Bloom, in their article "The Intelligence of the Moral Emotions: A Comment On Haidt," describe how we can have "control over the input" of certain intuitions.[45]

Pizarro and Bloom mention the ability to overcome biases in implicit attitudes. Implicit association tests are a good illustration of how reasoning can overpower intuition. These tests present a series of positive and negative words paired with pictures associated with different groups or belief systems. For example, one test pairs positive and negative

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[43] Haidt, "The Emotional Dog and Its Rational Tale," 818.
[44] David A. Pizarro and Paul Bloom, "The Intelligence of the Moral Intuitions: A Comment on Haidt," *Psychological Review* 110 (2003): 195.
[45] Ibid., 194-195.

words with pictures of Caucasian and African American individuals. Once presented with the picture, the subject quickly pairs the picture with either the positive or negative word. The majority of people who take this test, myself included, have a harder time matching positive words with African Americans than they do matching positive words with Caucasians. This reveals an implicit bias against African Americans, but this does not imply that all subjects are racist. While this is something that may be engrained in our society's consciousness, thankfully this does not mean we cannot use our individual reasoning capabilities to conquer this bias. While our intuitions are certainly powerful and influential in shaping the way we think and act, they are not the sole guiding force. Claiming that our intuitions make our decisions for us is putting our decision-making capabilities on roughly the same level as animals, and this surely isn't what Haidt is trying to do.[46] He is trying to show that we as humans have underlying moral intuitions. These intuitions are shaped by culture and genetics, and at the core of deciding what is right and what is wrong is an innate instinctual emotions signaling "yes, this is right" or "no, this is wrong."

Even though the psychological rationalist approach and the social intuitionist approach claim different sources to be at the root of our moral-decision making, both approaches can benefit from one another. It's undeniable that emotions play a significant role in our moral choices because without them we would feel indifferent to moral scenarios, just as the patients with ventromedial prefrontal cortex damage did, and this almost seems to contradict the very definition of what a moral scenario is. For a scenario to be moral, certain emotions should elicit a particular feeling about the matter at hand.

[46] Animals, too, might have some moral sensibilities, as they are capable of emotional instincts in a similar manner. While this paper is not concerned with investigating animal morality, it's an important related topic, especially when considering environmental issues and animal ethics.

The patient with the damaged ventromedial pre-frontal cortex and his lack of ability to make functional moral choices reveals that emotional indifference to moral scenarios can be highly problematic and disastrous for an individual. Emotional capacity needs to be involved in these scenarios to a certain degree. At the same time, it cannot be argued that reasoning plays a crucial role as well, specifically in how we might go about solving moral problems or arguing about ethical issues.

Joshua Greene is another prominent figure in the study of moral psychology. Along with his notable findings about the trolley dilemma and emotional responses, he presents a way that emotional processes can be reconciled with reasoning in his 2013 work *Moral Tribes.* He argues for a dual-process model in which we consult emotional intuitions when we make common everyday moral decisions, similar to Haidt's thesis, but that we also have moral reasoning capabilities beyond these intuitions that we use for more practical purposes. Sometimes we're confronted with a moral issue and might second-guess our emotional response, as with the Implicit Association Tests. We have the tools to reason our way to what we think is the best choice, trying our best to ignore the emotional impulses. Greene illustrates this concept by comparing the dual-process theory to using automatic or manual mode on a camera:

> The moral brain is like a dual-mode camera with both automatic settings (such as 'portrait' or 'landscape') and manual mode. Automatic settings are efficient but inflexible. Manual mode is flexible but inefficient. The moral brain's automatic settings are the *moral emotions*...the gut-level instincts that enable cooperation within personal relationships and small groups. Manual

mode, in contrast, is a general capacity for practical reasoning that can be used to solve moral problems, as well as other practical problems.[47]

Greene's dual-process theory provides an appealing and interesting way to match both our emotional wiring with our ability to reason about moral situations. Haidt would likely agree to some extent with Greene's notion that when it comes to moral decision-making, we are not simply slaves to our emotions. We can and do employ "manual mode" at times. I will return to these theories from Haidt and Greene regarding morality and emotion in Part III as I explain that emotional intuition may be absent in moral scenarios pertaining to the environment. When morally evaluating environmental problems, our practical reasoning skills might be especially needed if we lack emotional reactions to environmental degradation.

Morality and Culture

Though it is not difficult to see how the emotions influence morality, we need to address another complex question about how we come to have certain moral dispositions and be emotionally wired in different ways. Morality can be looked at through an evolutionary lens as a way that individuals in a society learned to build group cohesion. The ability for individuals to cooperate with one another and protect each other's interests would be essential for tribes and cultures to thrive throughout human history. Thus, morality is often very culturally specific. This is directly related to the discussion in Part I about the various cultural forces that influence our moral beliefs. Several examples from Part I, including differences between Eastern and Western societies and conservative and liberal ideologies, will be especially relevant in the following discussion as I explain how

[47] Joshua Greene, *Moral Tribes: Emotion, Reason, and the Gap Between Us and Them*, (New York: The Penguin Press, 2013), 7.

culture can shape our moral beliefs by way of the emotions. It's important to understand that when discussing the emotional roots of morality, emotions themselves correspond to physical body and brain states, while feelings correspond to how the emotions are interpreted. Emotions pertain to a more visceral reaction, while feelings reveal how these emotions translated in a cultural context.

Several moral psychologists have proposed theories of how moral systems are structured to allow for a range of beliefs across cultures. Richard Shweder proposed that a culture's moral systems could be broken down into the "big three of morality," the categories of autonomy, community, and divinity. In his article "Why Cultural Psychology?" he writes, "There is an 'ethics of autonomy,' which strongly emphasizes harm, rights, and justice. There is an 'ethic of community,' which emphasizes such issues as duty, hierarchy, and interdependency. And there is the 'ethics of divinity,' in which the emphasis is on issues such as the sacred, pollution, sin, sanctity, and so forth."[48] Cultures that value autonomy value the power of the individual in making the decision that is best for her. Cultures that value community value decisions that strengthen the community above individual interests. Cultures that value divinity live in accordance with that specific divinity's wishes. Shweder's "big three" is an interesting model, and is relevant to the distinctions described in Part I about WEIRD cultures and non-WEIRD cultures. Collectivist cultures stress the ethic of community, while individualistic cultures stress the ethic of autonomy.

Jonathan Haidt proposed a more developed theory known as the Moral Foundations Theory. According to Haidt, moral decisions are generated by five factors:

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[48] Richard Shweder, "Why Cultural Psychology?" *Ethos* 27 (1999): 69.

1. *Care/Harm:* corresponds to our evolutionary desire to promote kindness and compassion and to avoid suffering.
2. *Fairness/Cheating*: corresponds to our sense of justice and to the concept of reciprocal altruism.
3. *Loyalty/Betrayal*: corresponds to our inclination to support and promote the interests of our in-group.
4. *Authority/Subversion*: corresponds to respect for hierarchal structures within society.
5. *Sanctity/Degradation*: corresponds to our preference for cleanliness and purity and our aversion to behaviors that cause contamination or disgust.[49]

For example, a group whose moral "taste receptors," as Haidt calls them, are particularly inclined toward compassionate emotional responses might place more emphasis on the care/harm foundation. These taste receptors help to wire an individual's emotional response to moral scenarios. He explains, "We created [the MFT] by identifying the adaptive challenges of social life that evolutionary psychologists frequently wrote about and then connecting those challenges to virtues that are found in some form in many cultures."[50] Haidt believes that the MFT, when applied to different cultures and subcultures, will reveal that these groups innately value the five foundations differently. Valuing one set of moral foundations over another might help explain specific group or individual moral beliefs.

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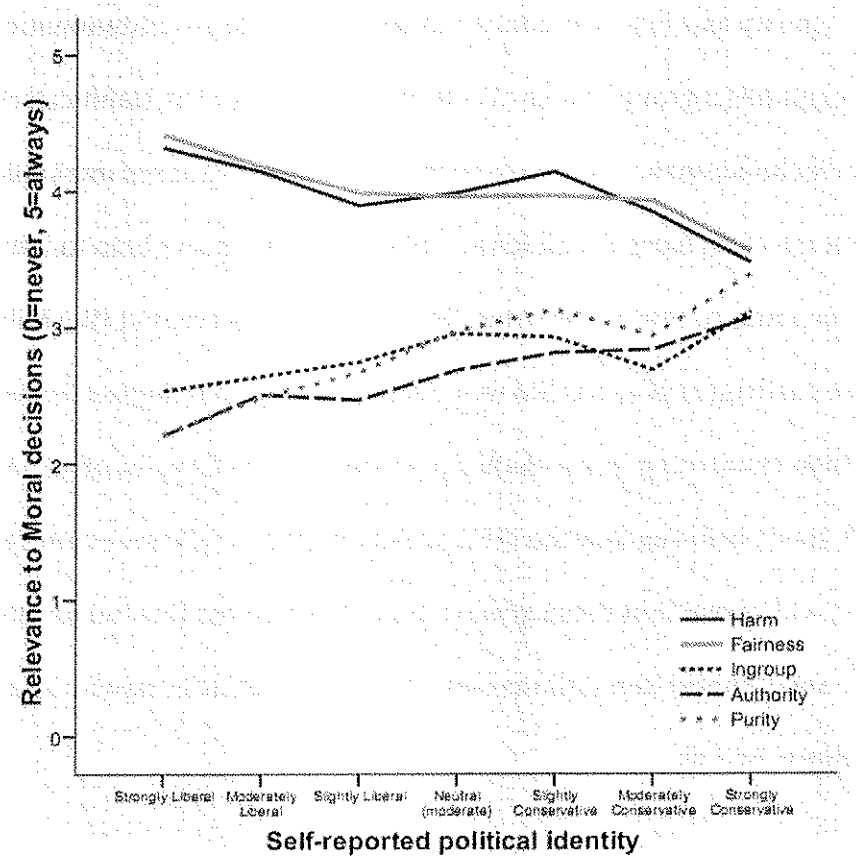
[49] "Moral Foundations Homepage," Moralfoundations.org, last modified August 11, 2013, http://www.moralfoundations.org/.

[50] Haidt, *The Righteous Mind*, 124.

For example, studies conducted in 2009 by Graham, Haidt, and Nosek revealed that liberals and conservatives assessed the five moral foundations in different ways. Liberals tended to value harm/care and fairness/cheating above the other categories of loyalty/betrayal, authority/subversion, and sanctity/degradation. Conservatives tended to consider the foundations more equally. They conclude, "The moral thinking of liberals and conservatives may not be a matter of more [morality] versus less but of different opinions about what considerations are relevant to moral judgment."[51] The following graph illustrates how the five foundations vary with political affiliation.[52]



[51] Jesse Graham, Jonathan Haidt, and Brian A. Nosek, "Liberals and Conservatives Rely on Different Sets of Moral Foundations," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 96 (2009): 1033.

[52] Ibid., 1033.

The conclusions gathered by Graham, Haidt, and Nosek make sense if you think of the discussion in Part I about the partisan political climate that exists in the United States. Liberals typically advocate for causes that promote the wellbeing of large groups of people, even when this comes with a slight cost for themselves and others, e.g. advocating for welfare programs for those in poverty at the cost of higher taxes for other citizens. If Graham, Haidt, and Nosek are correct, this may be because liberals feel more of moral obligation towards securing wellbeing and justice to all groups of people. Conservatives are often accused of being primarily driven by self-interest, yet this may simply be a byproduct of their greater emphasis on loyalty/betrayal, authority/subversion, and sanctity/degradation when compared to liberals.

It's important to note that cultural belief systems are not going to perfectly mesh with models such as MFT or the "big three." It is impossible to precisely deconstruct culture in terms of these black and white classifications. In an article for the *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience*, Christopher L. Suhler and Patricia Churchland present valid critiques of Haidt's MFT. They claim that there is an element of ambiguity in Haidt's description of the moral foundations being "innate," while also suggesting that there may be other foundations that his theory leaves out. Sulher and Churchland explain, "On one hand, too strong a notion of innateness is likely not to be applicable to cognitive and behavioral traits, of any complexity, morality included, because so much learning is involved. On the other, too weak a notion may apply to far too *many* cognitive and behavioral traits."[53] Sulher and Churchland emphasize the danger in making claims about innateness. They also argue that other cultural beliefs regarding industry and modesty

[53] Christopher L. Sulher and Patricia Churchland, "Can Innate, Modular 'Foundations' Explain Morality? Challenged for Haidt's Moral Foundations Theory," *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience* 23 (2011): 2105.

might qualify as additional foundations for the MFT and mention that in some instances the foundations can overlap with one another.[54]

While Shweder's and Haidt's models are not free from error, they, especially Haidt's, illustrate facets of morality that cultures and individuals value differently. It seems indisputable that moral norms are culturally specific, but that the capacity for morality is universal in humans. Each of us has the ability to feel emotions and act on gut-reactions when confronted with a moral scenario, but how we feel and react is heavily influenced by culture context. In their article "Moral Universals and Individual Differences," Liane Young and Rebecca Sax discuss how culture can shape behavior on an individual level. They write, "Individual differences in disgust sensitivity partially account for cultural differences in moral views: political conservatives are more sensitive to disgust that liberals...disgust sensitivity also predicts certain moral and politicized attitudes."[55] Morality is inextricably linked to our emotional processes, and culture is to some extent responsible for this emotional wiring. Thus, culture influences our moral capabilities by influencing the emotions.

One of the major claims Haidt makes in his work is that our beliefs and ideologies about right and wrong aren't in our control as much as we may think. They are highly influenced by a combination of culture and genetics. These two forces shape our worldview, in Haidt's words, they *bind* us to a belief system, while at the same time *blinding* us from fully taking on other perspectives. Trying to sever yourself from the cultural belief system you were raised in may be harder than you think. I can trace certain aspects of my moral beliefs to the strict Catholic upbringing I had at school. As a child I was very fearful

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[54] Ibid., 3-4.

[55] Liane Young and Rebecca Sax, "Moral Universals and Individual Differences," *Emotion Review* 3 (2011): 2.

of breaking the rules, no matter what the rules were. Even to this day, no matter how frivolous a rule rationally seems to me, sometimes I hesitate and struggle to go against it simply because it's a *rule*, and breaking rules was something that I believed as a child was wrong in itself.

Haidt doesn't want to say it's all a result of upbringing, however. Genetics play a significant role as well. He cites the famous twin studies of the 1980s as evidence that nature is just as much a part of the puzzle as nurture. These studies revealed that identical twins raised in different households turned out to be significantly more alike than same-sex fraternal twins raised in separate households.[56] General interests and ideological beliefs were not simply matters of cultural environment, but also of genetic inheritance. Haidt writes, "To understand the origins of ideology you have to take a developmental perspective, starting with the genes and ending with an adult voting for a particular candidate or joining a political protest."[57] Inheriting interests and ideological beliefs may work in a similar way to inheriting addictive personality traits, in that you aren't necessarily going to inherit certain behavioral traits of your parents, however, if exposed to a certain environments and stimuli, you may be more likely to adopt certain beliefs and interests because of your genetic makeup. This evidence about genetic dispositions and the various cultural belief systems that exist in our world lead one to conclude that morality is a very complex facet of the human mind, and makes it easy to see how such a wide range of moral beliefs are possible.

Haidt's examples emphasize the role that culture plays in determining an individual's moral concerns, and connect with Joshua Greene's hypothesis regarding the

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[56] Haidt, *The Righteous Mind*, 277.
[57] Ibid., 278.

second prominent feature of human moral psychology—that we are molded into certain belief systems by the culture in which we are raised. Greene believes that human morality evolved to help us to cooperate with others, but at the same time it allows us to draw lines between those in our group and those outside of the group. Green explains, "We humans pay exquisitely close attention to where people reside in our egocentric social universes, and we tend to favor people who are closer to us."[58] Greene's ideas about in-group and out-group mentality, or "moral tribism," go along with Haidt's suggestions about the impact of culture on group and individual moral decisions.

Moral tribism is the basic idea that birds of a feather flock together—that you are likely to stick to the beliefs of your group or "tribe." Each of us has some sort of belief system, many of us feel very *righteous* about these belief systems, and we typically surround ourselves with others who share similar beliefs. In *Moral Tribes*, Greene writes, "anthropological reports indicate that in-group favoritism and ethnocentrism are human universals."[59] He describes what he refers to as the "Tragedy of Commonsense Morality" and illustrates this concept with the "The Parable of the New Pastures." In this parable, he describes four different tribes, each with their own values and ways of life. Some tribes are more egalitarian in nature; each of its members receives the same amount of land and resources. Other tribes reward the most productive members of society, and thus not everyone is on equal ground. A nearby forest burns down one summer, and eventually this land becomes extremely fertile. Each of the four tribes wants to claim this land as their own. They fight, each tribe whole-heartedly believing that they have the right to it. Many

[58] Greene, *Moral Tribes*, 50.
[59] Ibid., 69.

people die in this process. Whose to say which tribe truly deserves this land? Greene writes,

> Despite their fighting, the herders of the new pastures are, in many ways, very similar. For the most part, they want the same things: healthy families, tasty and nutritious food, comfortable shelter, labor-saving tools, leisure time to spend with friends and family....What's more, even as they fight one another, their minds work in similar ways. What they perceive as unjust makes them angry and disgusted, and they are motivated to fight, both by self-interest and by a sense of justice.[60]

Greene's parable and description of moral tribism highlights how culture affects our moral wiring and how this inevitably leads to conflict. This will be especially relevant to the discussion in Part III regarding how our tendency to be promote in-group beliefs can affect our ability to critically think about environmental issues. We are bred to promote the goals and values of the group with which we identify and to see through a specific cultural lens. However, Greene specifically notes that we are not *hardwired* this way.[61] Luckily, we have the ability to adapt to new ways of thinking; we are not necessarily closed off from other views.

Conclusions from Part II

The role of emotion and culture in shaping our moral identities should be of crucial importance in understanding the root of conflict over environmental issues. In this section, I have reviewed several theories put forth by moral psychologists including a brief introduction to Piaget and Kohlberg's psychological rationalism, Haidt's social-intuitionist

[60] Ibid., 4.
[61] Ibid., 55.

and MFT model, and Greene's dual-process model and moral tribism. From the empirical discussions about human morality, we can grant that we as humans may aspire to hold certain moral principles, but when it comes to how we behave in reality we often act in accordance with our emotions and in the interests of the in-group. Psychologically, we can have different conceptions of right and wrong. We are representative of no singular ethical theory, but each of us, as individuals and members of larger groups, has sets of beliefs and values that are extremely meaningful in our lives.

It isn't necessary to have a universal psychological moral model in order to make progress. We can work with the knowledge we do have about human morality to understand one other and constructively solve critical issues. In doing so, we can employ what Greene calls a "metamorality."[62] A metamorality would recognize different cultural moral systems and individual moral values and work within these frameworks to solve debate.

The environmental crisis is an example of a current topic embedded in much controversy. The roots of this debate involve religious, political, and economic dimensions, among others. The reasons that people are divided on such issues can be examined through a framework of moral psychology to help us better understand how culture and the emotions impact perspectives as well as how we might be able to move beyond these cultural and emotional constraints and make future environmental progress. The final section of this paper will address several psychological barriers that hinder environmental progress, and relate them back to the emotional and cultural components discussed in this section as well as the environmental approaches discussed in Part I.

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[62] Ibid., 26.

Part III
Psychological Barriers to Environmental Morality

The final section of this paper, in contrast to Part I and Part II, takes a position in favor of environmentalism. A defense for including the environment into the realm of moral concern is not the purpose of this section, as it could constitute another paper on its own. However, I will briefly outline a few positions from writers and philosophers who have advocated for an environmental ethic. In the following discussion, it is not necessary to adopt an environmentalist outlook in the very strongest sense, but rather an approach based on a basic respect for the natural world. The primary purpose of the final section is to present various obstacles that provoke conflicting arguments about environmental issues, assuming that we have an obligation to be concerned about these issues, and to consider ways in which we might foster environmentally friendly behavior. Along with what has been presented about moral psychology, these barriers will serve to further demonstrate why so many different perspectives exist, and how all groups of people, regardless of culture or ideology, may face difficulty in assessing the environment from a moral perspective.

We can apply the biological and psychological aspects of morality to the different philosophies that different groups of people have towards nature. In Part I, I presented just a few philosophies that different groups hold towards the environment. The disagreements between these groups arise from a variety of religious, political, and cultural beliefs. The disagreements can be troubling, and can raise some skepticism about the issue at hand. With so many people asserting their own beliefs with such conviction, it can be hard to correctly assess or come to any sort of truth on the matter. Because people feel so *righteous* about their own beliefs, how are we to get them to see eye to eye and achieve a

metamorality? These are legitimate questions, but it is my hope that, when it comes to environmental issues, understanding the psychology of this conflict can help us understand different viewpoints on issues such as climate change, sustainable energy, energy efficiency, etc., and in this understanding, to overcome these barriers.

In assuming an environmental perspective, the idea is not to claim that groups with a stronger environmental ethic are somehow *better* than ones who do not have such an ethic. It would be contradictory to present various environmental views, as I have done, and then claim that one group is inherently privileged. It might be better to think of the environmental position I advocate for in Part III as a sort of moral law removed from human minds. In doing so, no one group is privileged, but some groups come closer to obtaining this environmental ethic than others. My goal is to show how we as humans, with various values and beliefs, might have trouble perceiving of environmentalism as the morally significant problem that it is. Granting that much of the science is correct and that we need to be conscious of how human actions impact the health of the planet, people ought to be concerned with environmental issues and should not dismiss them. Environmental health is something to be morally valued. However, as we have shown, it is not simple enough to tell someone that she *ought* to do X and have her make sense of X as some sort of moral obligation. This is where moral philosophy faces an issue. If we really ought to so something—if it is really in our best moral interest, then we need to do more than just make intellectual claims. The reasoning involved with an intellectual claim doesn't directly transfer to a motivational desire to change behavior. We need to actually demonstrate to people why and how this affects them.

In an ethical controversy involving both human and nonhuman subjects, there are bound to be difficulties hindering the way that people cognitively register the pressing ethical nature of such an issue. Take climate change, for example, arguably the most critical environmental issue we face today. Some people simply deny the significance of it, and even those who believe it to be a serious problem might have a hard time understanding how to do anything to help the cause. Because environmental issues like climate change are such large-scale problems, it can be quite difficult to fathom the facts. It's much easier and less cognitively draining not to think about them.

In "Climate Change and Moral Judgment," Ezra M. Markowitz and Azim M. Shariff present six psychological barriers that prevent humans from recognizing climate change as a moral issue. They explain that climate change might be morally *non-intuitive*. This is because "climate change possesses very few features that generate rapid, emotional visceral reactions."[63] We might care about the environment, but unless we have directly been affected by extreme weather conditions caused by climate change, we might not be able to feel strongly about it in the way a woman might feel very strongly about her right to have an abortion.

Other factors contributing to this cognitive barrier involve the fact that in most cases people are not intentionally choosing to worsen climate change. Markowitz and Shariff write, "Studies suggest that unintentionally caused harms are judged less harshly than equally severe but intentionally causes ones."[64] The third factor involves an individual trying to avoid guilt by denying that she is contributing to the problem. Another barrier is

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[63] Ezra M. Markowitz and Azim F. Shariff, "Climate Change and Moral Judgment," *Nature Climate Change*, 2 (2012): 244.
[64] Ibid., 244.

that people tend to be optimistic about climate change when they lack an understanding of the magnitude of the threat it poses. The fifth factor is the tribalistic tendency to go along with what your group believes on a particular issue, regardless of the facts. The sixth and final factor is the idea that because many of climate change's major effects will take place in the future and might not take place in the areas we live, there is a "spatial and temporal distance" when we try to think of climate change in terms of an urgent moral concern.[65] Each of these distinct, but related, factors helps us to see how an individual may have trouble in conceiving of climate change as a moral imperative the same way that she might view poverty, abortion, or more "pressing" black and white matters of threatened wellbeing. Unless we live in a region where the effects of climate change are plainly evident, we are not forced to confront climate change on a daily basis.

I will elaborate on two specific difficulties that may be encountered in inciting pro-environmental behavior and relate them to the discussion of moral psychology from Part II. I will use examples from the perspectives presented in Part I regarding religion, politics, and culture. The specific psychological barriers I will explore are 1.) the non-intuitive aspect of environmentalism, which will relate to the discussion of morality and emotions and 2.) the tendency to abide by in-group beliefs and promote in-group interests, which will correspond to the discussion of morality and culture.

The Emotion-Environment Disconnect

One significant barrier to environmentalism is the non-intuitive nature of environmental issues and the consequence that nature is not as easily included in our realm of moral concern. Many do not consider the natural environment, perhaps even

[65] Ibid., 244.

including animals, to have moral status in the way other humans do. Another way to say this is that humans tend to be anthropocentric. Though it is somewhat of an unfortunate aspect of human nature, an individual often does not come to care about something until she recognizes it as affecting herself or the group with which she identifies. People need to understand how environmental issues are relevant to their lives before they are going to ascribe moral status to these issues.

Many writers and environmental philosophers have attempted to describe the importance of nonhuman nature. In, "Walking," Henry David Thoreau writes,

> I wish to speak a word for Nature, for absolute freedom and wilderness, as contrasted with freedom and culture merely civil...I believe in the forest, and in the meadow, and in the night in which the corn grows...The civilized nations—Greece, Rome, England—have been sustained by the primitive forests which anciently rotted where they stand. They survive as long as the forest is not exhausted.[66]

In "Walking," Thoreau illuminates civilization's reliance on wilderness and nature. Moral philosophers have also presented arguments regarding nonhuman nature. In some cases, these arguments further the concept of anthropocentricism and promote the view that moral duties extend only to humankind. However, this is not always the case. Immanuel Kant argues that we are obligated to treat animals and nature with respect on the basis that it will foster the fair and benevolent treatment of humankind.[67] In Kant's view, the obligation to treat nature respectfully is not grounded in the intrinsic value of nature but

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[66] Henry David Thoreau, "Walking," in *Environmental Ethics: The Big Questions*, ed. David R. Keller, (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 93-94.

[67] Immanuel Kant, "Indirect Duties to Nonhumans," *Environmental Ethics: The Big Questions*, ed. David R. Keller, (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 82.

rather its instrumental value. Other philosophers, most prominently contemporary environmental ethicists, have argued that we should extend our moral concern to nonhuman nature. In "The Land Ethic," Aldo Leopold claims, "A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise."[68] For environmental ethicists, the natural world qualifies as an object of moral concern. While there are undoubtedly disputes among these philosophers about what is right and wrong concerning the natural world, I think the general claim that we ought to protect environmental interests, either for the sake of the environment itself or for the sake of humanity, is incontrovertible. Yet, human actions do not always reflect this concern. While we are likely to intellectually accept this claim, we are less likely to act in accordance with it.

As has been demonstrated in Part II, emotions play a significant role in guiding our moral behavior. However, our moral emotions might be less responsive to environmental situations. Markowitz and Shariff explain, "Moral judgment is...strongly driven by emotional responses to objects in the environment...In contrast, analytical reasoning about moral issues tends to be slow, cognitively effortful and strongly influenced by our moral intuitions."[69] This passage incorporates the theories put forth by Haidt and Greene. Under Haidt's social-intuitionist model, we may not have strong environmental moral intuitions that give us signals about what is right and wrong in regards to nature. Evaluating environmental issues might require us to use the "manual mode" that Greene describes in his dual-process model in which our reasoning takes precedent to our emotional—in this

[68] Aldo Leopold, "The Land Ethic," *Environmental Ethics: The Big Questions*, ed. David R. Keller, (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 200.
[69] Markowitz and Shariff, "Climate Change and Moral Judgment," 244.

case lack of emotional—response. Our reasoning abilities become the predominant moral faculty in the absence of an emotional involvement. We can reason about environment concerns more easily than we can *feel* strongly about them. We can read a nice passage from Thoreau or from an environmental ethicist, appreciate and agree with what they are saying, and yet still not *feel* motivated to change our behavior.

This presents a significant barrier for environmentalism. It's easier for us to feel strongly about issues on a human-to-human level rather than a human-to-nature level. If I see a tree being cut down, I'm not going to have as intense of an emotional reaction as I would if I saw someone intentionally getting hurt. I don't empathize with trees and natural objects in the same way that I empathize with other people. An experiment similar to the trolley/footbridge dilemma experiment conducted by Greene et. al would likely not elicit a strong emotional response if individuals instead were presented with scenarios involving air pollution or a description of the process of fracking. Undoubtedly, some individuals might have stronger emotional reactions towards destruction of nature and cruel treatment of animals; perhaps there is a spectrum within and across cultures.

The recent field of environmental psychology tries to understand who supports environmental efforts and why. What makes someone pro-environment, and what makes someone indifferent to the cause? Some studies have presented findings that come across almost as obvious. In "Environmental Activism and Moral Schemas," Jason Farrell says, "We rely on social constructions of moral phenomenon to explain how people believe and act...How individuals and social groups relate to the environment is also deeply tied to moral beliefs about what is good and right vis-à-vis the environment."[70] Very much in line

[70] Justin Farrell, "Environmental Activism and Moral Schemas: Cultural Components of Differential

with the emotional underpinnings involved with morality, studies conducted by Kals, Schumacher, and Montada have found that "Nature-protective behavior, like reduced energy consumption, is not purely based on rational decisions, but is flanked and motivated by emotions such as feelings of self blame because one has contributed to wasting energy and its detrimental effects."[71] To get a better understanding of why we might be less inclined to feel for the environment and change our behavior accordingly, we should examine a few of the environmental approaches addressed in Part I.

The underlying religious components of environmental philosophies may be one reason for a lack of moral emotion regarding nature. If an individual adopts an attitude of superiority over nature, as some in the Judeo-Christian view do, then this may entail an emotional disconnect from the environment. The environment may lie outside her realm of moral concern in virtue of the fact that the fair treatment of nature is not necessarily a prerequisite for salvation. We often accept this view implicitly in Western culture, with or without a religious influence. In the United States, we are accustomed to a cycle of production and consumption. This cycle is inherently degrading the natural world. Because of a reliance on—potentially even an addiction to—excessive consumption, we may be blinded from the detrimental effects it has on the biosphere. It becomes unquestioned second nature in our daily lives. If our societal wellbeing is determined by this consumption, then we may prioritize it at the cost of environmental health. This view is consistent with the fact that people in individualistic Western culture tend to focus more on the individual, and less on relationships than do people in non-WEIRD societies. We see

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Participation," *Environment and Behavior* 45 (2011): 400.

[71] Elisabeth Kals, Daniel Schumacher and Leo Montada, "Emotional Affinity toward Nature as a Motivational Basis to Protect Nature," *Environmental Behavior* 31 (1991): 179.

ourselves as more removed from our surroundings than do people in non-Western cultures, and this may make it more challenging to feel connected to the natural environment as we engage in this cycle of consumption.

Yet, as a WEIRD society, many people in the United States are highly educated. To a certain extent, they can grasp that the methods of production in our country often cause significant environmental damage. They can infer that we do not have an unlimited supply of natural resources, and yet, understanding these concepts does not guarantee that action will be taken. It cannot be disregarded that Western, educated individuals are often the driving force in environmental movements. In *Break Through*, Nordhaus and Shellenberger discuss potential reasons for this and point to the affluence of the U.S. population as a primary factor, specifically in regards to the rise of the environmental movement in the 1950s and 1960s. They write, "Once we meet our material needs, we all experience a variety of post-material needs that are no less strongly *felt* than our material needs for sustenance and security...Environmentalist values, such as the strong desire to protect ecosystems, largely spring from higher-order, post-material, and inner directed needs."[72] They relate this to Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Once an individual has her basic survival needs met and can become self-actualized, then she has the ability to acquire new needs and concerns, some of which may pertain to the environment. However, environmental health is not a primary concern; rather, it is a result, perhaps a privilege, of other more pressing needs being met. This explanation provides some insight into why environmental movements have become so popular in the United States within the past decades.

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[72] Nordhaus and Shellenberger, *Break Through*, 27-28.

In contrast to the Judeo-Christian religious and the Western cultural views, the Eastern religious and cultural view reinforces the concept of humanity's interconnectedness with the natural world. As we can recall from the discussion of Eastern religions in Part I, Zen Buddhism promotes a philosophy of non-violence towards nature. Eastern traditions revolve around a holistic view of nature in which humanity lives in harmony with the natural world and does not exploit it.

If an individual adopts this worldview, then she might be more inclined to feel affected by harsh treatment of the environment, simply because she sees the world as composed of many interrelated parts. What affects the natural world, affects her as well. Her wellbeing is reliant on the wellbeing of her surroundings and environment, and vise-versa. In *The Geography of Thought*, Nisbett explains that people in Eastern cultures are less likely to categorize the world in the way that Western cultures do, and that because of this, Easterners are more likely accept that humans are not inherently superior to other beings.

> The obsession with categories of the either/or sort runs through Western intellectual history...And it's been suggested that the distinction between 'human' and 'animal' insisted upon the by Westerners made it particularly hard to accept the concept of evolution...Evolution was never controversial in the East because there was never an assumption that humans sat atop a chain of being and somehow had lost their animality."[73]

In Eastern collectivist cultures, people might experience less of an emotional disconnect with nature because an individual does not draw a strict distinction between herself and

[73] Nisbett, *The Geography of Though*, 154.

her surroundings. The divide between "us," as humans, and "them" as nonhuman nature is not as black and white. Environmentalists in Western cultures, though, may still see a definite separation between humans and the environment because they "reverse the hierarchy, arguing that humans are still separate from but *subordinate* to nature."[74]

Aside from cultural circumstances, other attributes of environmental issues may contribute to this emotional disconnect. For example, one of Markowitz and Shariff's six factors that limit moral judgment about climate change is the fact that the most extreme effects of climate change may not occur in our lifetimes. Taking action to lessen these effects requires care and moral consideration for future generations. The benefits of acting in environmentally friendly ways are not always immediate. In the case of climate change, we might not even get to reap the benefits of our action. Instead, future generations will. We may feel that we do not have a moral obligation to those not yet in existence, even though we might be able to reason that it would be for the wellbeing of the planet to reduce carbon emissions, invest in alternative energies, etc. However, since it won't directly affect our wellbeing, and might even *harm* our wellbeing, through monetary costs and sacrifices to material goods, we might not feel an emotional inclination to take action. We might even feel more of an emotional response in favor of not taking action.

If we examine this in terms of Haidt's five moral foundations, the problem of delayed gratification and helping future generations might not register on our care/harm or fairness/cheating scale. We simply find it harder to care about a future time, and don't fully comprehend the harm that might be done at some indefinite point in the future. We might feel uncertain about the long-term environmental effects of our behaviors. Further,

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[74] Nordhaus and Shellenberger, *Break Through*, 135.

because we may be harming our own current wellbeing for the benefit of future wellbeing, this makes it even more difficult to give moral weight to the issue. We also might not feel that we're being unfair by fulfilling our present needs.

Several studies have revealed our preference for self-interest in the present over delayed gratification at some future time. Markowitz and Shariff write, "Past research provides indirect evidence to suggest that the more dissimilar and socially distant the victims of climate change seem to be—be they members of faraway communities or, perhaps, future generations—the less morally obligated people will feel to act on their behalf."[75] How can we expect people to sacrifice their present needs and have faith that they will be rewarded down the road? I use the term "have faith" because there is an element of uncertainty that surrounds issues such as climate change. There is conflicting data, some claiming the effects of climate change will affect us in the near future, others claiming it will happen much further down the road, and others claiming it should've already happened. While it's clear that human actions can have very detrimental effects on the biosphere, the extent of this damage is often unclear.

In an interview for the website *Edge.org*, Joshua Greene presents an example that relates to this emotional disconnect in terms of delayed rewards. The example involves an individual who can make a donation to a charity that would potentially save at least one life in a distant country, or she can decide to buy an expensive new item of clothing instead. It's unlikely that she is going to be judged very harshly if she chooses the new clothes. Most people would probably do the same thing. Greene explains,

[75] Markowitz and Shariff, "Climate Change and Moral Judgment," 245.

> I think that this may be a case of emotional under-reacting. And it makes sense from an evolutionary perspective. That is, we have emotional responses that are going to tug at our heartstrings when someone's right in front of us...Another example is what we're doing to the environment. If environmental damage that we're doing...not just to plants and atmosphere, but to our great-great-grandchildren, who we hope are going to live in the world...if that felt like an act of violence, we would probably be responding to our environmental problems very differently.[76]

We face countless examples of this in our daily lives—times when we could've made a more sustainable choice, could've bought the organic product, could've walked instead of driven, could've made more of an effort to recycle. When we don't make these choices, we are usually not plagued with an overwhelming sense of guilt, nor are we harshly judged for these choices. These decisions are part of our daily routine. Recall Greene's Parable of the New Pastures from Part II, in which four separate tribes each believed that they had had the right to the newly fertile land. This example was adapted from the Tragedy of the Commons, a dilemma that Garrett Hardin presented in his 1968 article "The Tragedy of the Commons."[77] This dilemma results from individuals acting out of their rational self-interests, but in doing so actually harming group interests in the long run. Hardin writes, "The individual benefits as an individual from his ability to deny the truth even though society as a whole, of which he is a part, suffers."[78] These seemingly trivial decisions we make in our daily lives often have environmental consequences that we are not fully

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[76] Joshua Greene, "A New Science of Morality, Part 2," *Edge* 2010. Web. 31 March 2014.
[77] Garrett Hardin, "The Tragedy of the Commons," *Science* 164 (1968): 1244.
[78] Ibid., 1244.

cognizant of, and this might further Hardin's tragedy of the commons. This conflict certainly relates moral tribism, the next psychological barrier to environmentalism that I will discuss. When it comes to the environment, we may have more of a concern for *us* in the here and now rather than for *them* in the future.

Moral Tribism

Another particularly relevant factor that Markowitz and Shariff describe is Greene's concept of moral tribism. As discussed in Part II, it is not uncommon that our moral beliefs about a particular issue are largely influenced by the group with which we identify, and that this can hinder us from being open to other views. Markowitz and Shariff note, "Individuals derive self-esteem and a sense of belongingness from exhibiting the values of their in-group."[79] This concept of moral tribism is related to Haidt's moral foundation of loyalty and betrayal, the desire to stick with the beliefs of our group. It is also especially relevant to the discussion about United States politics from Part I. Liberals and conservatives generally hold opposing viewpoints when it comes to environmental issues. While both sides have arguments for these viewpoints, often an individual's liberal or conservative stance on an environmental issue is based simply on the fact that she identifies with liberalism or conservatism, as opposed to being based in the facts of the issue.

It's certainly not news that we as humans have a desire for acceptance amongst our peers, friends, and family members, but that this impacts our moral behavior is significant. It makes it that much harder to accept climate change as a moral issue if it requires us to exit the comfort of cultural constructs. The same thing can be said for the opposite view: it

[79] Markowitz and Shariff, "Climate Change and Moral Judgment," 244.

may be harder to be skeptical about climate change if our close friends and family are climate change supporters. In *Moral Tribes,* Greene describes a study conducted by Dan Kahan that highlights the role that group affiliation has on climate change:

> It is definitely in our collective interest to face the facts on climate change and act accordingly. But for some of us, as individuals, the payoff matrix is more complicated. Suppose you live in a community in which people are skeptical about climate change—and skeptical about people who *aren't* skeptical. Are you better off as a believer or a skeptic? What you, as a single ordinary citizen think about climate change is very unlikely to have an effect on the earth's climate. But what you think about climate change is rather likely to have an effect on how you get along with the people around you [80]

Kahan's studies revealed that factors such as scientific literacy, which naturally seems like it would be a predictor of support for climate change, was not the most important factor for individuals in determining their stance on climate change. Kahan first tested a group of adults to gage their scientific literacy, and then inquired about their views on climate change. Greene notes, "Scientific literacy and numeracy were not very good predictors of people's beliefs about the risks of climate change. Instead, their beliefs were well predicted by their general cultural outlooks."[81] This may surprising, or maybe even alarming, because you would expect those that can make sense of the empirical data confirming climate change would undoubtedly support endeavors to lessen humanity's impact on the environment. This is another prime example of the disparity between understanding climate change on an intellectual level and being motivated to care about

[80] Greene, *Moral Tribes,* 91-92
[81] Greene, *Moral Tribes,* 93.

the issue or act in ways that reflect this understanding. This study reinforces the influence that culture has on our environmental outlook. Being immersed in a culture that believes X is true makes it harder to believe X is false, no matter what the facts say. "People invoke moral connotations congenial to the judgments of their group," writes Geoffrey Cohen in his article "Party Over Policy: The Dominating Impact of Group Influence on Political Beliefs."[82] It's easier to go along with the established cultural beliefs to maintain in-group status. Often with political views, whichever group you belong to already has a variety of ready-made defenses for that particular viewpoint. Each group is relying on data that they interpret to prove their own arguments, despite the fact that there may be conflicting data that proves just the opposite.

The tendency to conform to the beliefs of group makes it difficult to justly evaluate the facts behind an ethical issue like climate change. It also makes it difficult to harshly criticize someone for holding certain views. Despite being on opposite ends of the political spectrum, both liberals and conservatives are both essentially upholding beliefs that promote their values and in turn the values of their respective groups. It goes back to Greene's Parable of the New Pastures; both groups hold beliefs that they consider to be wholly justified. Greene details several biases that prevent people from seeing eye to eye on controversial issues. Liberals and conservatives, or any groups drawing from different sets of values are going to make arguments using evidence that support their own positions. They are unlikely to be persuaded by arguments from each other's sides simply because they are speaking separate ideological languages. "As long as people's starting points are asymmetrical," writes Greene, "people will be tempted, unconsciously if not

[82] Geoffrey L. Cohen, "Party Over Policy: The Dominating Impact of Group Influence on Politic Beliefs," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 85 (2003): 808.

consciously, to tailor their conceptions of fairness to suit their interests."[83] Clearly the political spectrum represents just one way that people may divide themselves into groups. There are other cultural factors that divide people into opposing groups with different values.

It's worth exploring why these separate ideological foundations exist, just as we investigated why an emotional disconnect may exist in Western culture. What is the reason for the asymmetry between liberals and conservatives? In terms of MFT, Haidt and colleagues discovered that liberals tend to value harm/care and fairness/cheating above the other categories of loyalty/betrayal, authority/subversion, and sanctity/degradation. Conservatives tended to consider the foundations more equally. In "The Moral Roots of Environmental Attitudes," Matthew Feinberg and Robb Willer apply these findings about the Moral Foundations Theory to their own study. They emphasize how political attitudes, especially in regards to the environment, can be shaped by moral beliefs. Citing an abundance of related research, they claim that "moral appeals about environmental issues tend to be more successful than nonmoral appeals about environmental issues...especially when the moral principles invoked resonate with the individuals targeted by the appeal"[84] They hypothesized, based on Haidt's five moral foundations, that liberals view the environment through more of a moral lens than do conservatives. They conducted surveys to determine political ideology in which subjects could rank their position on a certain issue on a scale of 1 (extremely liberal) to 7 (extremely conservative). Subjects were presented with videos and newspaper clippings pertaining to issues such as air pollution

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[83] Greene, *Moral Tribes*, 86.

[84] Matthew Feinberg and Robb Willer, "The Moral Roots of Environmental Attitudes," *Psychological Science* 24 (2013): 57.

and climate change. Because liberals emphasize the harm/care foundation of morality more so than conservatives, media content about environmental issues that stressed the harm/care component of the issue was primarily appealing to them. Feinberg and Willer note that much of the information in the media intended to persuade individuals to take a stance on environmentalism assumes a harm/care perspective. For example, environmentalist groups may appeal to a responsibility to protect the health of the planet and avoid harm for future generations. However, when they presented environmental messages that appealed to the purity/sanctity foundation of morality, conservatives were more likely to support a pro-environment stance. Feinberg and Willer conclude that the way environmental problems are portrayed have a significant impact on which groups are on board with the cause. This supports the idea that in order for progress to be made, appealing to the interests of a specific group involved is critical.

In Part I, I described how the economic philosophies of liberals and conservatives differ. This is relevant to environmentalism because the cost involved with environmental endeavors can be a major drawback to committing to sustainable practices, such as buying an energy efficient vehicle. A simple cost benefit analysis might allow an individual to conclude that the sustainable route is not the way to go. Conservatives, in evaluating the moral foundations more equally, may think it unfair in this scenario to go out of the way financially for the sustainable option. They may not feel motivated to make this choice because of the fact that it does not appeal to their ideological foundations. They also might believe that it is not worth it to invest in a cause like climate change where some uncertainly is involved. Contrastingly, a liberal might emphasize the fact that in choosing the environmentally sustainable option, some harm is being avoided. This appeals to her

moral sensibilities about the environment. As Feinberg and Willer suggest, conservatives may be more drawn to approaches that stress how environmentally friendly behavior promotes health, purity, and cleanliness, as opposed to ones that stress the obligation to care and promote fairness when it comes to nature. This example, along with Feinberg and Willer's study, demonstrates how liberals and conservatives, or any group, are more willing to commit to a cause so long as it complements their interests and concerns.

Practical Solutions

It is not so difficult to see how our perspectives on critical issues, whether it be poverty, abortion, animal rights, or environmentalism, are shaped by culture through cognitive processes including both emotional and reasoning capacities. This is not to say that no one raised in a Republican household ever grows up to be Democrat. It is by no means out of the question that people can come to hold quite opposite views from their family, community, and culture. This happens rather regularly; different circumstances and experiences can lead cause one to develop their own beliefs outside of the in-group. However, once one is a member of that particular in-group, the individual is likely going to advocate for the beliefs of that group at the risk of being biased in evaluating arguments from outside groups. The question then becomes how to get people and groups with different values and beliefs to agree on constructive action and how to avoid alienating separate groups along the way.

From the evidence presented so far, we've gained an understanding of how our moral inclinations can lead to conflict over environmental issues. Without emotional moral intuitions regarding the environment, it will be more challenging to realize the significance of environmental problems. If we do not include nature within the realm of our moral

circle, then we're going to be less able to emotionally connect with it. Because the benefits of pro-environmental behavior aren't right in front of us, it can be difficult to motivate people to action. Additionally, in defending our own moral views, in promoting the beliefs of our in-group we often clash with others. What can we do about this? How can we make environmentalism a concern for everyone?

Environmental philosopher Warwick Fox advocates for a branch of deep ecology that he entitles "transpersonal ecology." Adopting transpersonal ecology means understanding the connection between human beings and nature, not from arguments and discourse, but through a natural psychological process. Fox writes, "Transpersonal ecologists are not concerned with the question of the *logical* connection between the fact that we are intimately bound up with the world and the question of how we should behave but rather with the *psychological* connection between this fact and our behavior."[85] According to this approach, it's not enough to prove through arguments our human obligation to the environment; instead we must seek experiences that will allow us to develop an environmental ethic naturally. Get outside, watch the sunset, see new places—these types of things are going to get people caring about the environment more than scientific literature about climate change.

This branch of deep ecology, a sect of environmentalism that stresses the intrinsic value of nature, might seem a bit radical. However, I think Fox makes some valid points about the limits of argumentation when it comes to getting people to place value on the environment. It goes back to the emotional roots of morality and the fact that we don't always have argumentative proofs to justify our moral beliefs. Sometimes a scenario just

[85] Warwick Fox, "Transpersonal Ecology," in *Environmental Ethics: The Big Questions*, ed. David R. Keller, (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 250.

feels right or wrong. If you simply *feel* a genuine concern for the environment, then you will not require a justification for your moral environmental beliefs, though you may still have one. You will simply sense injustice at environmental degradation, and be compassionate about environmental wellbeing. Fox is encouraging individuals to restore a psychological, emotional connection with nature, a connection which "follows naturally" from immersion into and appreciation of the natural world.[86] Nordhaus and Shellenberger describe the concept of "biophilia," a concept originally coined by biologist and environmentalist E. O. Wilson. Wilson describes biophilia as an "innate tendency" to be enchanted by the natural world, to feel certain pleasures when exposed to nature.[87] In an ideal world, maybe it would be simple to send people to see the world's most exotically beautiful sites and have them return with a renewed perspective of their place in the world, feeling gratitude for nature, perhaps even a bit more conscious of the interrelatedness of humans and nature. Experiences like this might lessen the emotional disconnect. If these sorts of "experiential invitations," as Fox calls them, are not always possible, and if argumentation and presentation of facts are not guaranteed to help, how can we appeal to diverse groups of people and get them to care about environmental issues?

Markowitz and Shariff list several other tactics that might encourage placing a higher value on the environment. Promoting positive emotions such as pride and gratitude in conjunction with environmentally friendly choices might provide an incentive for people to make more of these choices to gain a greater sense of wellbeing. It might make sense that inducing feelings of guilt when ignoring climate change would work just as well. Kals, et. al write, "Self-blame, indignation, and anger within this context of nature protection can

[86] Fox, "Transpersonal Ecology," 250.
[87] Nordhaus and Shellenberger, 143.

all be explained by cognitive models of emotions...All three emotions...are substantially correlated with the willingness for commitments and behaviors that are positively or negatively related to ecological conservation."[88]

The idea of developing emotional responses to environmental behavior is necessary, especially when considering the theories from Haidt and Greene about how the emotions guide morality. It appears that many people in contemporary Western culture suffer from a lack of emotional connection with nature. In his article, "Do Our Kids Have Nature-Deficit Disorder?" American journalist Richard Louv coined the term "nature-deficit disorder," which he describes as "not a medical diagnosis, but a description of the growing gap between human beings and nature, with implications for health and well-being."[89] Nature-deficit disorder may sound kind of silly, but when you think of the technology and media that children have access to, it's not difficult to see how this could take away the need and desire to explore the outdoors. If you place more emphasis, more emotional wellbeing on your online virtual persona, you might be uninterested developing a respect and appreciation for nature. Louv provides some suggestions for establishing environmental interest in children; some of his ideas include incorporating nature education into school curriculums and supporting legislation in support of environmental education and outdoor learning.[90] For Louv, encouraging an environmental ethic in children is not only beneficial to the children themselves, but also to the wellbeing of future generations.

In E.O. Wilson's *The Creation: An Appeal to Save Life on Earth*, he explains, "The ascent to nature begins in childhood...Every child is a beginning explorer naturalist.

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[88] Kals, Elisabeth et. al, "Emotional Affinity towards Nature," 181.
[89] Richard Louv, "Do Our Kids Have Nature Deficit Disorder?" *Educational Leadership* 2009: 24-30.
[90] Ibid., 28-29.

Hunter, gatherer, scout, treasure seeker, geographer, discoverer of new worlds, all of these are present at the child's inner core, rudimentary perhaps, but straining for expression."[91] Appealing to cognitive psychology, Wilson explains that encouraging positive reinforcement in natural settings will develop a "naturalist" outlook in children, one in which they are curious and open-minded about nature. He believes that each of us, especially children, have within us the desires to learn more about our natural surroundings. However, in line with Fox's philosophy, he notes that "becoming a naturalist is not like studying algebra or learning a foreign language."[92] It should follow from the child's exploration of nature on her own terms, rather than from deliberate instruction about the environment.

Wilson's philosophy complements the notion that it is easier to gain an environmental ethic by developing an emotional interest in the natural world, one in which one *feels* intrigued, interested in, or connected to nature, than to reason your way to a naturalist outlook. He suggests taking trips to various geological sites, National Parks, zoos, aquariums, museums. He also mentions rock collecting or using a basic microscope as simple kid-friendly activities that might spark environmental interest. Wilson's ideas about experiential education could help bridge the distance between an individual and her environment by sparking genuine curiosity and potentially concern for the wellbeing of nature. The philosophies presented by Fox, Louv, and Wilson together might help foster more environmental moral intuitions and effectively break down some of the barriers to environmental morality.

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[91] E.O. Wilson, *The Creation: An Appeal to Save Life on Earth*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006), 139.
[92] Ibid., 142.

The importance of instilling an interest and appreciation for nature in children should not be underestimated, as they have a good chance of holding this interest their whole lives and growing up to be environmentally conscious adults. However, there might be other ways to encourage sustainable behavior in adults as well. Both Markowitz and Shariff and Feinberg and Willer advocate for framing environmental issues in a way that corresponds to a wider range of value systems. Markowitz and Shariff write, "When environmental degradation is framed in terms of human profaning the sanctity of the natural world...both liberals and conservatives respond with higher levels of concern, moral engagement and policy support."[93] This is consistent with Feinberg and Willer's conclusions about appealing to different values when trying to get support from liberals and conservatives. The care/harm moral foundation is especially motivating for liberals, while other foundations such as sanctity/degradation are more appealing for conservatives. Showing how an environmental initiative, e.g. green energy, is both beneficial to the environment and to the health of human beings by decreasing pollution might increase environmental interest from a wider range of groups. Feinberg and Willer also suggest that from a religious perspective, it is important to frame environmental issues in terms of an obligation to care for God's creation.[94] Showing groups, whether political, cultural, or religious, how environmental issues are relevant to them will trigger more of an emotional investment to these issues.

Other tactics for promoting pro-environmental behaviors include stressing economic benefits of sustainable endeavors.[95] Providing economic benefits, such as tax

[93] Markowitz and Shariff, "Climate Change and Moral Judgment," 245.
[94] Feinberg and Willer, "The Moral Roots of Environmental Attitudes," 6.
[95] Markowitz and Shariff, "Climate Change and Moral Judgment," 245.

reductions on energy efficient products, might be one way to gain support on sustainable practices from individuals who are less willing to support the cause when it comes at a personal cost. However, Markowitz and Shariff appropriately mention that promoting economic incentives for certain behaviors "can crowd out pre-existing intrinsic attachments to that behavior."[96] In other words, offering economic incentives is not going to necessarily entail that individuals develop a concern for nature for the sake of nature; rather, the concern would be based in the economic reward. However, it could be argued that sustainable behavior rooted in these benefits is better than no sustainable behavior at all. We'd rather improve environmental health with financial incentive than worsen it by taking less action.

It's quite evident that people want to act in ways that both comply with their values and promote positive emotions and increased wellbeing. In trying to promote environmental health it's essential to understand these motivating factors that drive human behavior. It's also important to keep in mind that the goal is not to manipulate individuals into acting in a certain way. This brings to light issues pertaining to marketing ethics that are often involved with persuading individuals to see a certain point of view. Although I will not present a full discussion of the potential marketing ethics issues involved, it is important to be aware of them. The goal is to show how the facts of the environmental issues at hand matter to specific individuals and groups. As long as people are presented with the most up-to date and unbiased facts about the issues, I don't think it can be considered unethical to show individuals how these facts affect them. The problem is that these facts can be skewed and biased. However, the overall environmental approach

[96] Ibid., 246.

that I have adopted for in this final section is a rather non-controversial one, encouraging a basic respect for the environment. This could be rooted in holding a concern for environmental health for the sake of nature or for the sake of humanity. Ultimately, I think it is indisputable that humans should have this basic concern, for it is foolish to believe that environmentally degrading actions will not negatively affect nature and in turn humanity. This does not mean that a person is never justified in acting in a way that may not be environmentally friendly. There are times when individual interests may take priority over these concerns. However, a general environmental outlook that recognizes the dependency that humans have on the environment, and from this, a concern for environmental wellbeing is what I have been primarily advocating for in the preceding discussion.

In Part III, I have investigated two psychological barriers that are especially relevant to our ability to view environmental issues through a moral lens. The lack of an intuitive emotional connection to nature might be one reason that people often fail to see environmental issues as morally pressing. The tendency to promote in-group beliefs may be another factor hindering environmental progress. Since environmentalism is more appealing to some groups more than others, there is inevitably conflict between these groups. I have also presented various methods about how to promote more pro-environmental outlooks, including making an effort to experience and connect with the natural environmental, framing environmental issues in more appealing ways to different groups, and offering incentives for sustainable behavior.

Conclusion

Through investigating the different perspectives surrounding the natural environment and the inner workings of our moral minds, we can better understand why people have certain views, why these views can be difficult to alter, and how we might be able to achieve the difficult task of showing that an issue such as environmental health is relevant and significant to each being on the planet, regardless of culture, religion, political or moral beliefs. I began this paper with a presentation of various views of the environment, including religious perspectives from the Judeo-Christian and Buddhist traditions, political perspectives from liberals and conservatives in contemporary U.S. society, and cultural perspectives from WEIRD and non-WEIRD societies. In Part II, I explored the importance of emotions and culture to human morality. Part III served to bring together the themes from Part I and Part II, to reveal how environmental issues might not elicit strong moral emotions and how our group interests often prevent us from thinking rationally about these issues. I hope that I have provided readers with a greater understanding of the motives behind environmental philosophies, as well as a few productive solutions about how to encourage respect for the environment across all groups and cultures.

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