# Moral Identity, Moral Integration, and Autobiographical Narrative

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## Abstract

Moral identity theorists argue that moral action is explained by the centrality of moral values to a person's identity. Moral identity theorists refer to moral integration as both the process by which moral values become central to a person's identity and the state an individual is in when a given moral value is central to their identity. While moral identity theorists appeal to autobiographical narratives to determine the state of moral integration in an individual, they have little to say about the role of autobiographical narratives in articulating the process of moral integration. The aim of this paper is to argue that appealing to autobiographical narratives supports the view that moral integration is a learning process the outcome of which is the acquisition of an understanding of moral concepts that is exercised in moral deliberation. Since moral identity theorists argue that moral integration is empirically correlated to a sustained commitment to moral action, the upshot of the argument of this paper is an account that elucidates the relationship between moral identity, moral action and moral deliberation.

## 1 Introduction

Moral identity theory has become prevalent in research on moral development (recent reviews include Lapsley and Stey 2014; Hardy and Carlo 2015; Jennings et al. 2015; Lapsley 2015; Hertz and Krettenauer 2016; Hardy 2017; Hardy et al. 2020). One of the key claims of moral identity theory is that one is motivated to act according to their moral judgement when moral values are central to one's identity. This is captured by a commonly quoted definition of moral identity as 'the degree to which being a moral person is important to an individual's identity' (Hardy and Carlo 2011, 212). Moral identity theorists conceptualise the idea of moral values becoming central to one's identity in terms of moral integration (Blasi 1995; Frimer and Walker 2009; Krettenauer and Hertz 2015). More specifically, moral integration

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refers both to the process by which moral values become part of one's identity and to the state in which an individual is in when a given moral value is integrated in their identity.

Moral identity theory appeals to autobiographical narratives to determine the state, or presence, of moral integration in an individual (Frimer and Walker 2009; Pratt et al. 2009; McAdams 2009; Krettenauer and Mosleh 2013; Krettenauer 2015; Krettenauer et al. 2016; Krettenauer 2020; Hardy et al. 2020). For the purpose of this paper, autobiographical narratives refer to stories that render intelligible components of one's self-definition by appealing both to one's past experiences and semantic knowledge about oneself (Krettenauer and Mosleh 2013). For example, one might define oneself as a person for whom the value of friendship is important. One might then appeal to an autobiographical narrative to explain why the value of friendship is central to one's self-definition. For instance, one might recollect specific experiences that explain why one values friendship. Although moral identity theorists appeal to autobiographical narratives to determine the state, or presence, of moral integration in an individual, they have little to say about the role of autobiographical narratives in understanding the process of moral integration. This motivates the following question: what can autobiographical narratives tell us about the process of moral integration?

This paper answers this question by arguing that appealing to autobiographical narratives supports the view that moral integration is a learning process in which one acquires an understanding of moral concepts that is exercised consciously and explicitly in moral deliberation. Since moral identity theorists argue that moral integration is empirically correlated to a sustained commitment to moral action, the upshot of the argument of this paper is an account that elucidates the relationship between moral integration, moral action and moral deliberation. It is important to clarify from the start the claim of this paper and distinguish it from two possible interpretations. The claim of this paper is that autobiographical narrative, when exercised on a deliberate level, for instance in autobiographical reasoning, uncovers an aspect of what moral integration is. That is, a process by which one acquires an understanding of moral concepts that one can in turn exercise in moral deliberation. This claim should be distinguished from the claim that autobiographical narrative can be a constitutive component of the process of moral integration. I make no claim in this paper regarding what psychological states can constitute the process of moral integration. I leave this question open.[1]

In Section 2, I argue that the concept of moral integration can be interpreted both by theories of moral identity that explain moral action by appeal to implicit and automatic cognitive processes that operate on a subpersonal level and by theories of moral identity that appeal to explicit cognitive processes that are exercised on a personal level. This is important because one of the key questions asked by moral identity theorists is how we should understand the connection between explicit and implicit aspects of moral identity in the explanation of moral action (Hardy et al.

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[1] I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for *Review of Philosophy and Psychology* for pressing me on this point.

2020, 139). In Section 3, I present the argument that moral integration is empirically correlated to a sustained commitment to moral action. In so doing, I present the argument that autobiographical narratives determine the state, or presence, of moral integration. Moreover, this allows me to set out the following constraint: only autobiographical narratives that are empirically correlated to a sustained commitment to moral action can articulate the process of moral integration. In Section 4, I present the argument that autobiographical narratives articulate a learning process in which one acquires an understanding of a moral concept of the kind exercised consciously and explicitly in moral deliberation. In the final section, Section 5, I conclude by coming back to the question of the connection between implicit and explicit aspects of moral identity and argue that the account of Section 4 offers one such account. In so doing, it also offers one way of understanding the relationship between moral identity, moral action, and moral deliberation.

## 2 Moral Integration

Augusto Blasi introduced the concept of moral identity in moral development theory as a reaction to the perceived inefficiency of Lawrence Kohlberg's cognitive-developmental theory to explain moral action (Blasi 1983, 1984). Kohlberg thought of moral development as constituted by stages of increasing sophisticated reasoning abilities (Kohlberg 1984). Kohlberg conceived differences in moral reasoning abilities in terms of the kind of moral concepts appealed to in moral reasoning, the kind of understanding of the moral concepts articulated in one's moral reasoning, and the exercise of perspective-taking abilities. Blasi argues that moral development conceived in terms of these differences in moral reasoning is not predictive of moral action (Blasi 1980). At the same time, Blasi argues that we should not simply reject the idea that moral reasoning has a central role to play in moral development and the explanation of moral action. Rather, Blasi argues, we should reconceive what moral reasoning is in a way that explains its role in the explanation of moral action.[2] Blasi argues that we should reconceive the role of moral reasoning in the explanation of moral action by reconceiving the cognitive process that underlies moral reasoning. Blasi calls this cognitive process moral understanding (Blasi 1995). In part, Blasi conceives moral understanding along the lines of Kohlberg, that is, as the exercise of the ability to judge a given mode of conduct as either morally right or morally wrong. At the same time, Blasi argues that for moral understanding, and thus moral

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[2] Blasi isn't the only one who argues that we shouldn't do away with the concept of moral reasoning. For example, Daniel Hart argues that 'The demonstration that moral emotions and moral actions usually occur outside consciousness has led some empirical psychologists to reject reflection as a significant constituent of moral life. This is a mistake for any number of reasons. It is a mistake in part because none of the traditional issues of moral inquiry—right action, the best possible state of affairs, and good character—can be fully imagined without deliberation. Even virtue theory, with its assumption that moral behaviour directly follows from character traits, has always included an element of reflection' (Hart 2005, 172).

reasoning, to have a role to play in the explanation of moral action, moral understanding needs to be conceived as appropriately related to one's identity.

How does Blasi conceive 'identity'? Blasi conceives identity in the way Erik Erikson (1968) conceives it. That is, as an implicit knowledge of the answer to the question "Who am I?" Let me elaborate to explain how I will understand 'identity' in this paper. The implicit knowledge of the answer to the question "Who am I?" need not be explicitly articulated by the subject nor need it be articulable by the subject. We can conceive someone going through their entire lives without articulating, or being able to articulate, the answer to the question "Who am I?" In light of this, we should think of the ability to explicitly articulate the answer, or parts of the answer, to the question "Who am I?" as a cognitive achievement. To be sure, it is a common cognitive achievement. Nevertheless, we should think of it as an achievement to mark the distinctions between possessing an implicit knowledge of the answer to the question "Who am I?" and exercising the ability to explicitly articulate the answer, or part of the answer, to this question. The cognitive achievement takes us from an implicit knowledge of that answer to self-understanding: the ability to give an explanation why one believes one has a given character trait. As I will argue below in line with moral identity theorists, the explanation of why one takes a given commitment or trait to be part of one's self-definition takes the form of an autobiographical narrative. Autobiographical narrative is the way in which one explains why one takes a given commitment or trait to be part of one's self-definition. Now, when one is able to articulate an answer, or part of the answer, to the question "Who am I?", one can, and often does, mention things that are of value to one, including moral norms and values. As we will see in Section 3, according to moral identity theorists, autobiographical narratives can determine the presence of moral norms and values in one's self-definition. When that is determined, moral identity theorists talk of moral integration.[3]

The concept of moral integration is meant to capture the way in which moral values become a central part of one's identity, that is, of the implicit knowledge of the answer to the question "Who am I?" In the process of moral integration, '[v]alues… are integrated with one's motivational and emotional systems; are made the object of agentic processes, including responsibility; and are finally taken as a basis for the construction of one's self-concept and identity' (Blasi 1995, 231–232). According to Blasi, once a given moral value is integrated in one's identity, then if one's moral understanding appeals to that same moral value in enunciating a moral judgement,

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[3] It is important to acknowledge that autobiographical narratives understood as forms of explaining why one takes a given commitment or trait to be part of one's self-definition can of course involve self-deception. At the same time, as we will see in Section 3, the way in which moral identity theorists avoid the problem of self-deception in their studies is by having independent methods of assessment to check that the subject is actually committed to the mode of conduct they say is part of their self-definition. This means that when moral identity theorists talk of the presence of moral integration in an individual and their autobiographical narratives determining this, they assume that there is evidence that has been independently assessed that shows that the individual is committed to the moral conduct they say they are committed to. For the purposes of this paper, I will therefore set aside the question of the possibility of self-deception.

the individual will be motivated to act accordingly because the moral concern will have become a personal concern. As Blasi puts it, 'it seems likely that the highest degree of moral integration is achieved when one's moral understanding and concerns become a part of one's self-concept, of the specific way one views and defines oneself' (Blasi 1995, 242). Blasi often puts this thought in terms of a moral judgement becoming a judgement of personal responsibility that motivates the individual to the relevant moral action (Blasi 1983, 198–200; Blasi 1984, 132; Blasi 2001, 319; Blasi 2004, 342; Blasi 2009, 423). For example, the moral judgement "one ought to be kind" becomes, after integrating the relevant moral norm in one's self-definition, a judgment of personal responsibility, such as "I need to be kind". After the integration, one is still able to recognise that the judgement 'I need to be kind' involves a moral norm but, now, the moral judgement comes with what some philosophers call practical necessity e.g. I need to act kindly.[4] The practical necessity, according to Blasi, derives from the need to act consistently with one's self-definition so that if one were to violate the moral norm integrated in one's self-definition, one would act inconsistently with one's self-definition (Blasi 1984, 2001, 324). For Blasi, then, moral integration is manifest when the conscious exercise of moral understanding is followed reliably by a sustained commitment to moral action. That is, that a moral norm or value is integrated into a person's identity means that, if the person judges that a given situation requires that one be kind, their behaviour will reliably be consistent with their judgement. Blasi conceives moral integration by appealing to abilities that are exercised consciously and explicitly, that is, the enunciation of moral judgements underlined by one's moral understanding.

Not all views of moral identity conceive the output of moral integration in terms of the conscious exercise of moral understanding. Specifically, the socio-cognitive view of moral identity argues that the concept of moral identity is best articulated by appealing to socio-cognitive schemas that operate automatically on a subpersonal level.[5] The concept of socio-cognitive schemas derives from the socio-cognitive theory of personality development (Cantor 1990; Bandura 2001; Higgins 1999). The socio-cognitive theory of personality development argues that the concept of personality refers to schemas possessed by an individual. Broadly, 'the schema is an organized set of knowledge in long term memory summarizing the gist of an individual's feelings, thoughts, and experience in a specific life domain' (Cantor, 1990, 737). The concept of a schema is conceived in direct relation to the explanation of action. According to the socio-cognitive theory of personality, action is explained by

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[4] See Williams (1993) for a philosophical account of practical necessity that is sympathetic to moral identity theory. Blasi also appealed to the notion of practical necessity. See Blasi (1993, 203). An anonymous referee suggested that, from a psychological perspective, it is better to articulate a judgement of personal responsibility in terms of wanting to perform a given action, for example "I want to act kindly". I don't think there isn't necessarily a tension between "I want to act kindly" and "I need to act kindly". To be sure, there will be cases where the agent will not want to do something but they will nevertheless feel the pull of personal responsibility. Here, the agent will perceive the judgement only as "I need to be kind". But, again, I want to reiterate that this is not in tension with the fact that many times, perhaps most times, the agent will also want to perform the given action.

[5] Blasi rejects explanations of moral action that appeal to subpersonal, automatic processes (Blasi 1980, 1995, 235; Blasi 2009, 409–411).

the activation of a given schema by the perception of relevant environmental stimuli. For example, a person's helping an elderly person carry heavy bags down the stairs is explained by a schema possessed by the person constituted by knowledge that one should help elderly people. The schema is activated by the perception of an elderly person struggling to carry the heavy bag. At one and the same time, schemas are conceived as both cognitive and motivational. On the one hand, schemas are part of the cognitive process by which an individual possessing the relevant schema organises a perceived situation according to the knowledge contained by the schema. On the other hand, schemas are part of the process motivating the individual to act according to the schema. As Cantor puts it, schemas are conceived as 'cognitive carriers of dispositions' (Cantor, 1990, 737).

Moral identity theorists that appeal to socio-cognitive schemas are attracted to the socio-cognitive theory of personality because, they argue, it offers a way of explaining moral action while keeping both cognition central in the explanation and capturing individual motivational differences. In this way, they remain faithful to Blasi's claim that the concept of moral identity has moral cognition, or understanding, at its centre. At the same time, and unlike Blasi, they conceive the role of cognition in the explanation of moral action as occurring on a subpersonal level. Specifically, socio-cognitivists define moral identity in terms of schemas possessed by an individual whose content is knowledge of moral norms, standards and values. Socio-cognitivists argue that moral cognition plays a role in the explanation of moral action by appealing to the idea that some schemas are "chronically accessible" (Higgins 1999; Lapsley and Narvaez, 2004, 197–201; Aquino and Freeman 2009, 377; Narvaez and Lapsley, 2009, 245–248; Boegershause et al. 2015, 162; Lapsley 2016, 43–44). When a schema is chronically accessible, it trumps other competing schemas in the way a given situation is cognised and leads reliably to adopting a mode of conduct in line with that schema. Chronic accessibility, according to socio-cognitivists, is due to a given construct being reinforced in the given individual. Moral identity, then, is understood as referring to schemas with moral content that are chronically accessible by the individual: '[a] person whose moral identity is self-important is someone for whom the moral self-schema is generally available, readily primed, and easily activated for processing social information' (Aquino and Freeman 2009, 378). Socio-cognitivists argue that appealing to schemas has the virtue of explaining moral action by being sensitive to individuals differences because the content of socio-cognitive schemas differ between individuals. For example, one individual might possess chronically accessible socio-cognitive schemas the content of which are related to kindness while another individual might possess chronically accessible socio-cognitive schemas the content of which is related to fairness. Moreover, socio-cognitivists argue that appealing to socio-cognitive schemas offer an explanation of moral action not only in terms of the variability of individuals' personality traits but also in terms of the variability of situational factors. Schemas are conceived as constructs that are activated in relation to the perception of situational factors. Their activation, then, depends both on the socio-cognitive schemas possessed by the individual and on the features of the situation the individual faces.

Moral integration can therefore be conceptualised both by appealing to implicit, automatic cognitive process that operate on a subpersonal level -as socio-cognitivists

do- and by appealing to explicit cognitive processes that are exercised on a personal level -as Blasi does-. This raises the following question, what is the relationship between explicit and implicit aspects of moral identity? As Hardy, Krettenauer and Hunt state, 'it is unclear how the two [i.e. explicit and implicit aspects of moral identity] are developmentally connected…Future research should…better understand explicit and implicit moral identity processes' (Hardy et al. 2020, 139). One of the key questions in moral identity theory is how to understand the relationship between explicit and implicit aspects of moral identity, specifically within the context of the explanation of moral action. In the remainder of this paper, I focus primarily on the conceptualisation of moral integration in terms of explicit cognitive processes that are exercised on a personal level. First, in Section 3, I present the argument that the conscious exercise of autobiographical narratives determines the presence of moral integration. This argument is embedded within the argument that moral integration is empirically correlated to a sustained commitment to moral action. Second, in Section 4, I argue that, for a set of autobiographical narratives, their exercise in explaining parts of one's self-definition shows that moral integration is a learning process in which one acquires an understanding of a moral concept of the kind exercised in moral deliberation. Nevertheless, in Section 5, I set this argument within the context of the question of the relationship between implicit and explicit aspects of moral identity and argue that it offers one way of understanding the relationship between, on the one hand, moral identity as a predictor of moral action and, on the other hand, moral deliberation.

## 3 Autobiographical Narrative, Moral Integration, and Moral Exemplars

One of the most cited set of studies that moral identity theorists appeal to in order to support the claim that moral integration is empirically correlated to a sustained commitment to moral action is with moral exemplars.[6] In these studies, autobiographical narratives are used to determine the state, or presence, of moral integration in the participants. Moral exemplars are defined as individuals who manifest a sustained commitment to moral modes of conduct that are deemed exemplary. In their seminal work on moral exemplars, Colby and Damon (1992) studied the lives of individuals who, for example, set up charities to help disadvantaged people in dangerous places. Colby and Damon studied these individuals via interviews. They argue that what moral exemplars have in common is that they appeal to moral values to articulate how they understand themselves. Moreover, Colby and Damon, following Blasi, argue that moral integration should be understood as the overlapping of moral and personal: '[moral exemplars] seamlessly integrate their [moral] commitments with their personal concerns, so that the fulfilment of the one implies the fulfilment of the other' (ibid., 300). Importantly, Colby and Damon also argue that '[i]

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[6] A second set of studies is on the integration of generativity. See Lawford et al. 2005; Pratt et al. 2008, 2009.

n our exemplars, we have seen processes of integration between self and morality that have much in common with those that all of us experience. Moral exemplars do not form their self-identities in a wholly different manner from other people' (ibid., 301). In other words, according to Colby and Damon, studying moral exemplars brings into sharp relief Blasi's concept of moral integration but it is applicable to anyone.

More recently, Jeremy Frimer and Lawrence Walker operationalised Colby and Damon's claim that moral integration refers to the overlap of moral and personal concerns via their reconciliation model of moral integration (see Frimer and Walker 2009; Frimer et al. 2011; Walker and Frimer 2015; see also Hart and Fegley 1995; Matsuba and Walker 2004, 2005; Walker and Frimer 2007). Their model argues that moral integration is the result of reconciling a conflict between two motivational systems they call agency and communion. Agency refers to the motivational system constituted by self-interested goals. Communion refers to the motivational system constituted by altruistic goals. According to the reconciliation model, moral exemplars reconcile the agency and communion motivational systems. Importantly, Frimer and Walker distinguish their reconciliation model from the 'interference model' (Frimer and Walker 2009, 1670-1). According to the interference model, there are always two contrasting motives: a self-interested motive and an altruistic motive. The solution to the conflict is simply that one wins over the other. By contrast, the idea of the reconciliation model is along what Blasi had in mind. That is, what is at first two conflicting motives become one. This is aligned to Blasi's, and Colby and Damon's, conception of moral integration because the end product of the process is an understanding of a given mode of conduct as both involving a moral norm or value and as being part of one's self-definition.

Crucially, Frimer and Walker introduce a new method to study reconciliation: the values embedded in narrative (VEINs) method. VEIN's involves three parts. First, participants are asked a set of questions that are meant to elicit autobiographical narratives relating to aspects of their self-definition that the participants deemed important. Frimer and Walker devised the Self-Understanding Interview, Transmogrified, which consists in a set of questions that elicit autobiographical narratives in the participants to explain aspects of their self-definition but without cueing them towards moral values (see also Damon and Hart 1988). For example, participants would be asked "What are your major roles and responsibilities?" and "How did you get to be the kind of person you are now?". In the second part of the VEIN's method, Frimer and Walker use a coding system meant to identify the moral values, if any, that the participants appeal to in their autobiographical narratives. The coding system is based on the Schwartz Values Survey (Schwartz 1992; see also McAdams 2001). The coding systems are then used to argue whether a given participant's autobiographical narrative is constructed around a moral value. The coding system works by looking at the concepts that the participant's answer appeals to. As Frimer and Walker explain, 'A chunk [i.e. a portion of the interview being assessed] was coded as a hit on a particular VEIN [i.e. in relation to a moral value] if a concept uttered anywhere within the chunk matched a specific criterion for that particular value in the VEIN coding manual' (Frimer and Walker 2009, 1673). More specifically, what

Frimer and Walker investigated by using this method is whether the participants appealed to concepts that identified values associated both with the agency and communion motivational systems. If so, then the participant is scored highly on the moral centrality scale and, according to this method, the participant is deemed to exhibit moral integration. In essence, VEINs assumes that moral integration is present if the autobiographical narrative is judged to appeal both to the agentic and communion motivational systems without showing any conflict between the two. Here is an example:

> Interviewer: Do you have any habits or unique ways of doing certain things? Participant: Good habits have to do with the way we live our lives. . In any action we take, in any choice we make, we can have a positive or negative impact on the world. . In terms of good habits, treating all people with dignity and respect regardless of their situation in life or how similar or different they may be. . It's the little things that I think of as habits. I'm always willing to help out my neighbor, or help someone carry groceries, or give someone an ear if they need someone to talk to (even if I don't know them), or give some extra food or change to someone in need. Those little habits, I think, make a big difference. (Frimer and Walker 2009, 1678)

According to Frimer and Walker, this is an example in which the participant integrates agency and communion because it shows that the participant appeals to moral values that they see as central to how they define themselves. In the third part of the study, participants were assessed on their moral functioning. This part asked the participants about the frequency with which they engaged in moral behaviour, specifically prosocial or altruistic behaviour, ecological behaviour and whether they engaged in behaviour that prized material possessions over altruism. The responses were then scored from high to low. According to Frimer and Walker, VEIN's showed strong correlations between scores from part two and part three of the study thus providing evidence that autobiographical narratives are correlated to moral integration.

Frimer and Walker's study argues that the presence of moral integration is empirically correlated to a sustained commitment to moral action. Moreover, it appeals to autobiographical narratives to determine the presence of moral integration in the participants. And, as noted, it establishes whether the autobiographical narratives are centred around moral values by looking at the concepts appealed to by the participants. This means that it assumes that the conscious exercise of concepts to explain aspects of one's self-definition is telling of the values that are present in one's self-definition. Frimer and Walker use autobiographical narrative as a methodological tool to assess the level of integration of agency and communion. In what follows, I depart from their use of autobiographical narrative and ask, what can autobiographical narratives tell us about moral integration as a process? I answer that they tell us that the process of moral integration is one way in which one can acquire an understanding of moral concepts, an understanding that can in turn be exercised in moral deliberation.

## 4 Autobiographical Narratives, Mora Integration, and Moral Understanding

In the previous section, I relied on a set of studies on moral exemplars appealed to by moral identity theorists in order to argue that autobiographical narratives can establish the state, or presence, of moral integration in an individual. In this section, I argue that autobiographical narratives can also tell us about moral integration understood as a process. Specifically, I argue that appealing to autobiographical narratives supports the view that moral integration is a learning process in which one acquires an understanding of a moral concept of the sort exercised consciously and explicitly in moral deliberation. As stated previously, the upshot of this argument will be an account of the relationship between implicit and explicit aspects of moral identity in the explanation of moral action, specifically in relation to the connection between the conscious and explicit exercise of moral deliberation and moral identity as a predictor of moral action. I will articulate this upshot in the final section.

I begin by presenting the study by Krettenauer and Mosleh (2013) linking moral identity development, and therefore moral integration, with autobiographical reasoning. Some context is needed. Autobiographical reasoning is defined as the ability to connect past events in one's life into a personal biography with a view both to the present and the future (Habermas and Bluck 2000; Habermas 2010; Habermas and Köber 2014, 2015). The specific focus of the study is on what has been called self-event connections in autobiographical reasoning. That is, the specific ability to appeal to an experienced event in one's past and connect it to one's present self-definition (Pasupathi et al. 2007; Pasupathi and Wainryb 2010; Pasupathi and Weeks 2011). Specifically, Krettenauer and Mosleh are interested in the ability to recollect experiences where one acted morally or immorally and whether one thinks that the recollected experiences have a role to play in how one defines oneself in the present. An instance of this might be someone who recollects lying to someone and then claims that the experience taught them that if they want to be a better person, they need to stop lying, and so they did. In this case, one appeals to a past experience of an immoral action to define oneself as a person that does not lie. Krettenauer and Mosleh appeal to the concept of 'gaining insight' to focus their interest. Gaining insight refers to the ability to appeal to a past experience to explain an aspect of oneself that is generalisable beyond the recollected experience (McLean and Thorne 2003; Thorne et al. 2004; McLean 2005; McLean and Pratt 2006). Gaining insight is distinguished by developmental psychologists from what they call 'lesson learning' (McCabe et al. 1991; Pratt et al. 1999). In lesson learning, one learns a specific lesson from an event that could repeat in the future. For example, in bringing up a topic of conversation that bothers one's parents, for instance whether one can return home in the evening later than the agreed time, one learns that bringing up that topic will anger one's parents. In this case, one learns a lesson, that is, that if one does not want to anger one's parents, one shouldn't bring up that topic of conversation. Although this involves a learning process, it does not involve learning something more general

about oneself. By contrast, gaining insight involves a learning process by which one learns something more general about oneself by appealing to past experiences.[7]

Krettenauer and Mosleh are interested in connecting the ability of gaining insight when recollecting one's past moral or immoral actions with moral identity development. Specifically, their argument is that the ability to gain insight from one's past moral or immoral actions is correlated with moral integration. The study has three parts. In the first part, Krettenauer scores participants on the ability to gain insight when recollecting one's past moral or immoral actions. This is done by appealing to autobiographical narratives. The participants are asked to narrate two examples of past moral actions and two examples of past immoral actions. The participants are then scored on the strength of their self-event connections, and thus whether they exercised the ability of gaining insight. This is measured by using the Strength of Self-Event Connections coding scheme. This scheme distinguishes between 'dismissal' where the participant simply dismissed any connection between a past experience and one's present self-definition; 'no self-event connection' in which the participant did not connect a relevant past experience with the way in which they define themselves in the present; 'implicit self-event connection' where the participants showed some evidence of reflecting on past experiences to explain their present self-definition; and explicit self-event connection where there was explicit evidence that the participant connected a past experience with their present self-definition. In the second part of the study, Krettenauer and Mosleh measured moral centrality by using the Good Self Assessment method. Participants are presented with a list of both moral virtues and morally neutral virtues and are then asked to rate them in order of importance for them by inserting each virtue into a diagram of overlapping circles. The participants are then scored in how important they see each moral virtue for themselves. In the third part of the study, Krettenauer and Mosleh relied on the self-determination theory (SDT) of motivation to assess the level of commitment of each participant to moral behaviour. SDT distinguishes between external and internal moral motivation (Grolnick et al. 1997). External and internal moral motivation are assessed by asking the participants a set of questions regarding why it is important to act morally and then the responses are coded along four types of reasons: external, introjected, identified and integrated reasons. External reasons appeal to external consequences for the agent, for example punishment. Introjected reasons appeal to bad impressions others might have of oneself. Identified reasons appeal to agreement with a given moral norm. Integrated reasons describe a moral norm as part of one's ideal self.[8] SDT argues that while external and introjected reasons identify external moral motivation, identified and integrated reasons identify internal moral motivation. Krettenauer and Mosleh argue that the study determines

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[7] Other authors call the same phenomenon with other names. See, e.g., 'integrative memories' (Blagov and Singer 2004), 'integration' (Bauer et al. 2005) and 'transformational processing' (Pals 2006).

[8] Krettenauer and Mosleh interpret the moral norms or values that the participants claim to be part of their self-definition as ideals. I will not follow Krettenauer and Mosleh in this respect and therefore I will not think of the moral norms or values that the participants claim to be part of their self-definition as ideals.

a correlation between high scores on the self-event assessment, moral centrality and internal moral motivation.

Let me clarify where I agree with Krettenauer and Mosleh and where I depart from their work. This will clarify the argument that I present in the remainder of this section. I agree with Krettenauer and Mosleh on two counts. First, that autobiographical reasoning is an outcome of the process of moral integration. Second, that appealing to autobiographical reasoning, and more specifically, gaining insight, can help understand the process of moral integration. At the same time, and unlike Krettenauer and Mosleh, I argue that by looking at autobiographical reasoning, and more specifically gaining insight, as an outcome of the process of moral integration, we can support the claim that moral integration is a process by which one acquires an understanding of moral concepts of the sort that can be exercised in moral deliberation. In what follows, I present the argument for this claim.

Take the following example from a study run by Blagov and Singer (2004) on the relation between autobiographical reasoning and coping mechanisms as a result of highly stressful or traumatic experiences. As part of the study, a number of participants were asked to recount an important experience from their past that they think defines them in the present. The author of the following passage recounts the following experience:

> When I was 17, my best friend attempted suicide. I went to visit her in the hospital every day, even though we hadn't been talking much for over a year. I was the only one who went, and it has made us stronger friends today. This influenced me, because I learned how important it is to help and be there for people. During that time, I experienced how good it felt to step in and be a true friend. It has lifted my spirits and made me a much better person. (Singer and Blagov 2004, 493)

It is important to distinguish between different psychological abilities exercised by the anonymous author in this passage. First, the anonymous author is recollecting experiences of past events, that is, going to visit their friend in hospital. Second, the anonymous author is picking out a personality trait to define themselves, that is, as a true friend. Third, the anonymous author is appealing to their past experiences to explain why they possess the personality trait of being a true friend. Fourth, the anonymous author is coping with a highly stressful experience had in the past. In these kinds of cases, Blagov and Singer (2004) argue that the way in which one copes with a highly stressful experience had in the past is by exercising the ability to explain why one possesses a given personality trait by appealing to the relevant experiences. This is what the authors referenced above call gaining insight.[9]

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[9]  I don't think of the plausibility of the argument as depending on whether we can generalise from this one example. Rather, I think of the plausibility of the argument as depending on whether it is plausible to think that people often possess and exercise the abilities mentioned in relation to the example i.e. the ones mentioned immediately after the quote of the anonymous participant, and whether it is plausible to think of this as being both a case of moral integration and acquisition of an understanding of moral concepts. I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for *Review of Philosophy and Psychology* for pressing me on this point.

In gaining insight, one's understanding of their past experience of hardship is achieved by articulating how that experience informs their ability to understand themselves as the specific individual they are. The way in which a person understands a past experience of hardship is by explaining why the relevant past experience is connected to one's present ability to identify oneself as the specific person one is. For example, in the case of the anonymous author, the way in which the anonymous author understands the experiences of visiting their friend in hospital after the attempted suicide is by understanding those experiences in relation to their present self-understanding. In their specific case, it is as someone for whom being a true friend means being present for others in times of need. The anonymous author elaborates their past experiences by explaining why being a true friend is part of the way in which they understand themselves in the present. The anonymous author, then, in virtue of exercising their autobiographical reasoning and gaining insight, is able to explain why they appeal to being a true friend in elaborating the specific person they understand themselves as.

Crucially, then, gaining insight gives voice to an understanding of an aspect of the given experience that is applicable beyond the token experience that is recollected. For example, the anonymous author understands their past experiences as instances of the friendship between them and the friend in hospital. That is, the anonymous author understands the difficult experiences of visiting the friend at the hospital by conceptualising them as instances of friendship. Now, not only can the anonymous author elaborate why they appeal to friendship in their present self-definition, that is, by reflecting on their past experience of visiting the friend in the hospital. They at the same time acquire an understanding of an important aspect of friendship that is applicable beyond the token experience reflected on. This is that friendship involves being present in moments of need.

Assuming, as authors working with the concept of autobiographical reasoning do, that autobiographical reasoning and gaining insight is a form of autobiographical narrative, we are now in the position to argue that the exercise of autobiographical narrative is the verbal articulation of a learning process in which one acquires an understanding of a given moral concept. Gaining insight involves the ability to understand aspects of the token recollected experience that are applicable beyond the relevant token experience to any relevantly similar case. And the way this can be achieved is by appealing to a moral concept. For example, the concept of friendship. For example, the anonymous author understands their past experiences as instances of what being a true friend means. The anonymous author acquires an understanding of what it means to be a true friend that moves beyond the token experienced recollected to any instances of true friendship. At the same time, the anonymous author deepens their understanding of the concept of friendship. That is, the anonymous author now possesses a richer understanding of what the concept of friendship refers to. These cases of autobiographical narrative, then, deepen one's understanding of a given moral concept by employing them in understanding an aspect of a recollected experience that generalises beyond the token recollected experience and that one connects with one's present self-definition. The anonymous author's autobiographical narrative is the verbal articulation of their understanding of the concept of friendship which is articulated by linking an aspect of recollected experience that

generalised beyond the token recollected experience and that is used in their present self-definition.

Recall that both Blasi and moral identity theorists who appeal to studies with moral exemplars conceive the outcome of moral integration as the overlap between moral and personal concerns. I want to argue that autobiographical narratives, like the one articulated by the anonymous author, manifest the overlap between moral and personal concerns and therefore should be thought as articulating moral integration. For the anonymous author, the value of friendship has become a personal concern. This is made manifest by the anonymous author articulating his understanding of the value of friendship by connecting it to their present self-definition. If so, then the autobiographical narrative is shedding light on the process by which the value of friendship was integrated in the anonymous authors' self-definition. That is, the experiences had at the time of visiting the friend in the hospital. What the autobiographical narrative is saying is that those experiences were part of the process of moral integration. In turn, if this is correct, then the autobiographical narrative supports the view that moral integration is a learning process the outcome of which is the acquisition of an understanding of moral concepts that is exercised consciously in moral deliberation. Of course, this is not to say that the only outcome of moral integration is the acquisition of an understanding of moral concepts. As Section 2 noted, socio-cognitivists argue that the outcome of moral integration is the formation of socio-cognitive schemas, that is, cognitive processes that operate on a sub-personal and implicit level to explain moral action. Indeed, in the next section I will connect these two accounts.

Importantly, the argument of this section should not be confused with the following three claims. First, the argument is not that exercising this kind of autobiographical narrative is constitutive of the way in which a person acquires a given moral concept. For example, it's not that the anonymous author acquires the concept of friendship by reflecting on their past experiences. The anonymous author already possessed the concept of friendship before engaging in their autobiographical narrative. Rather, the argument is that the autobiographical narrative gives voice to an understanding of the value of friendship that is linked to their present self-definition. Second, the argument is not that articulating this kind of autobiographical narrative is constitutive of moral integration. This is a point I also made in Section 1. For example, the anonymous author does not integrate the value of friendship in their self-definition while articulating the autobiographical narrative. Rather, the argument is that, if it is independently established that a given individual possesses moral integration in regards to a given moral value, then the articulation of an autobiographical narrative points in the direction of where and when the integration occurred and how. That is, at the time of having the recollected experiences. It is then a further question how having a given experience plays a constitutive role in moral integration. Third, this argument needs to be distinguished from arguments to the effect that, in virtue of exercising the ability to articulate an autobiographical narrative, one learns what is morally right and what is morally wrong. This is the argument put forward by Krettenauer and Mosleh (2013). By contrast, the argument of this section is that autobiographical narratives appealed to by moral identity theorists support the view that moral integration is a learning process the outcome

of which is the acquisition of an understanding of moral concepts that is exercised consciously in moral deliberation.

## 5 Conclusion: Implicit and Explicit Aspects of Moral Identity

In this paper, I argued that autobiographical narratives do not only establish the state, or presence, of moral integration in an individual. They can also reveal aspects of moral integration conceived as a process. Specifically, I argued that appealing to autobiographical narratives supports the view that moral integration is a learning process the outcome of which is the acquisition of an understanding of moral concepts that is exercised consciously in moral deliberation. In Section 2, I pointed out that an important group of moral identity theorists do not agree with Blasi that the outcome of moral integration should be investigated only in relation to abilities exercised on a conscious and explicit level. According to socio-cognitivists, the outcome of moral integration is the formation of socio-cognitive schemas with moral content. These are automatic and implicit cognitive processes that operate on a sub-personal level. When activated by the perception of morally relevant environmental stimuli, they motivate moral action. The presence in moral identity theory of both theorists that appeal to implicit aspects of moral identity, like socio-cognitive schemas, and theorists that appeal to explicit aspects of moral identity, like moral deliberation, raises the question of how moral identity theory should conceive the relation between them (Hardy et al. 2020, 139).

I want to conclude this paper by suggesting that the argument of Section 4 offers one possible answer to this question. The key point is that explanations of moral action that appeal to socio-cognitive schemas are not in conflict with explanation of moral action that want to appeal to the conscious exercise of moral deliberation, like Blasi's. One can conceive the conscious exercise of moral deliberation as the conscious manifestation of the outcome of a process that, on a subpersonal level, involves the formation of automatic processes. Ultimately, socio-cognitivists agree that explanations of moral action should appeal to cognitive processes. This is the same claim that is made by Blasi. What allows us to conceive the conscious exercise of our understanding of moral concepts in moral deliberation as connected to automatic processes operating on a subpersonal level is that both emerge from the same process, that is, moral integration. Of course, the claim that moral deliberation is connected to socio-cognitive schemas, and thus to the explanation of moral action, needs an important qualification. Not all cases of moral deliberation will be connected to implicit aspects of moral identity. Rather, the claim refers only to those cases of moral deliberation that exercise an understanding of moral concepts that refer to moral values integrated in one's self-definition. The way to establish whether a given case of moral deliberation is suitably connected to socio-cognitive schemas, and thus to the explanation of moral action, will have to establish whether the understanding of the relevant moral concepts exercised in moral deliberation was acquired in moral integration. This paper argued that moral identity theory has the resources to establish this by appealing to autobiographical narratives.

## Declarations

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