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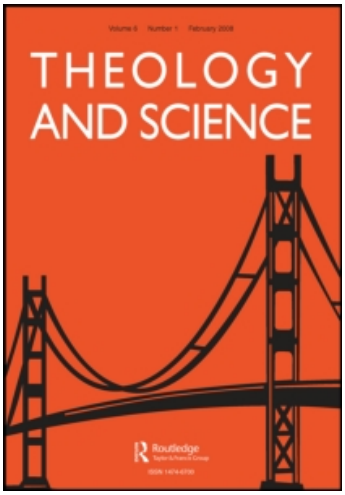

Theology and Science
Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t713709314

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Gregory R. Peterson ; Michael Spezio ; James Van Slyke ; Kevin Reimer ;Warren Brown

Online publication date: 06 May 2010

To cite this Article Peterson, Gregory R. , Spezio, Michael , Slyke, James Van , Reimer, Kevin andBrown, Warren(2010) 'The Rationality of Ultimate Concern: Moral Exemplars, Theological Ethics, and the Science of Moral Cognition', Theology and Science, 8: 2, 139 — 161
To link to this Article: DOI: 10.1080/14746701003675520
URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14746701003675520

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Theology and Science, Vol. 8, No. 2, 2010

The Rationality of Ultimate Concern: Moral Exemplars, Theological Ethics, and the Science of Moral Cognition

GREGORY R. PETERSON, MICHAEL SPEZIO, JAMES A. VAN SLYKE, KEVIN REIMER and WARREN BROWN

Abstract *This paper argues that consideration of moral exemplars may provide a means for integrating insights across philosophical ethics, theological ethics, and the scientific study of moral cognition. Key to this endeavor is an understanding of the relation of cognition and emotion in ethical decision-making, a relation that is usually understood to be oppositional but which in proper circumstances may be understood to be quite the opposite. Indeed, a distinctive feature of moral exemplarity may consist in the ability to properly integrate the emotions into the moral life, and reference to and imitation of exemplars may involve a referencing and imitating of the emotions of the exemplar.*

Key words: Virtue; Neuroscience; Agape; Emotion; Brain; Neuroeconomics; Neuroethics

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In January of 2007, the world witnessed an unusual act of heroism when Wesley Autrey jumped in front of an oncoming subway train to save a man who, unexpectedly suffering from convulsions, lost control and fell onto the tracks in front of the arriving train. Spontaneously, Autrey leapt down and covered the man with his body as the train rolled over the both of them. Unharmed, Autrey called out to his two daughters, present on the platform, to let them know he was fine. When asked about his actions, Autrey said, ''I don't feel like I did something spectacular; I just saw someone who needed help. I did what I felt was right.''[1]

Wesley Autrey's action is striking, both because of the physical courage involved and for a total, in this case almost reckless, risking of his own life for the sake of a complete stranger. Although Autrey's heroism may be seen as extreme, it has good historical company. Those who rescued Jews from the Holocaust during World War II and the Freedom Riders of the Civil Rights era are but two prominent examples of individuals who put their own lives at risk for the sake of helping others. No less important is the helping and caring that occurs in innumerable ways on a daily basis. Why do some people engage in such behavior, while others do not? Furthermore, what is the basis of regarding such behavior as morally commendable, even exemplary?

ISSN 1474-6700 print/ISSN 1474-6719 online/10/020139-23
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DOI: 10.1080/14746701003675520

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

In philosophical ethics, moral exemplars have tended to play only a marginal role in ethical theorizing. In the modern period, the primary goal of ethical theorizing has been to develop universal principles that can guide and determine right action and to resolve moral disputes. On this approach, consideration of moral exemplars is seen to be largely peripheral, since they are not understood to play a role in the process of moral decision-making, and the empirical fact that some people are better at carrying out ethical action may be interesting from the point of view of psychology but has little direct relevance to ethical theorizing. The major exception, of course, has been virtue ethics approaches, which have often placed moral exemplars at or near the center of the theory.

A positive role of emotions in ethical decision-making has similarly been neglected, at least until recently. This issue may seem independent of that of understanding moral exemplars more generally, but the two may be significantly linked. Indeed, a key feature of moral exemplars may involve the way emotions are integrated in their moral lives, and an important reason why the referencing of moral exemplars is an important component of the moral life is that from exemplars we learn not only right action but also the right way to express and regulate emotions.

To the extent that these issues have been treated in philosophy and theology, they have been treated largely independently of advances in the cognitive sciences, including social and affective neuroscience. Scientific understandings of emotional processing have advanced significantly, advances that have yet to be fully incorporated in scientific accounts of moral cognition. Our proposal is that a fuller consideration of the importance of both exemplars and emotion in the moral life will yield fruit for our understanding of moral decision-making, including both theological ethics and for the scientific study of ethical decision-making.

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Exemplarity and emotion in moral philosophy

For much of the modern period, neither moral exemplarity nor the emotions have been major categories of consideration. For the great moral philosophers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, focused as they were on absolute principles of rational conduct, reflection on moral exemplars could be seen to be beside the point. John Stuart Mill, in what is generally recognized as one of the most representative works in utilitarian ethics, hardly even references any examples of moral exemplarity, and argues that the emotion and motivation a person brings into a morally relevant action must not be considered in the moral evaluation of the action.[2] Mill, drawing on the utilitarian theory of Jeremy Bentham, distinguishes sharply between motivation and intention, associating the former with emotion and the latter with the *will*: ''The morality of an action depends entirely upon the intention—that is, upon what the agent *wills to do* [emphasis in original]. But the motive, that is, the feeling which makes him will so to do, when it makes no difference in the act, makes none in the morality …''[3] Mill's meaning here derives from a separation of emotion from judgment, or decision-making. While emotion and motivation may be viewed as driving forces,[4] Mill was less

concerned with emotion than with the intellect when it came to understanding moral character, a deficiency that was remarked upon by his student, Alexander Bain,[5] and not at all concerned with emotion in relation to what is and is not moral.

A similar case can be made with respect to the other great figure of modern moral philosophy, Immanuel Kant. Like Mill, Kant's major works on ethics do not place even minimal consideration on moral exemplarity, nor do they give any significant reference to moral exemplars in the course of the arguments put forth. Immanuel Kant's vision of moral action is also typically taken to leave emotion out of characterizing the virtuous act. Kant does say that the power of human judgment, which is ''the faculty of subsuming under rules ... or not,''[6] even in its aesthetic form, remains ''always still barbaric when it needs the addition of charms and emotions for satisfaction, let alone if it makes these into the standard for its approval.''[7] Kant focuses on one motivation, that of duty alone, as the sole criterion for judging moral value.[8]

Although moral exemplars and emotions have not played a central role in modern ethical theory, both find an important place in virtue theory.[9] In contrast to both utilitarian and deontological approaches, virtue ethics places primacy on character rather than action. Instead of focusing on the question, ''What should I do?,'' virtue ethics asks, ''What kind of person should I be?'' Action flows from an individual's character, and the rightness of action is primarily defined in terms of the motives that gave rise to it.

On Aristotle's account, virtues are plural, and in the *Nichomachean Ethics* he lists several, including temperance, justice, and courage. In turn, Aristotle's notion of a moral exemplar is related to his broader understanding of the moral life, which places considerable emphasis on his concept of *eudaimonia*. *Eudaimonia* is commonly translated as ''happiness'' or ''the good life,'' and on Aristotle's account the virtues are those excellences of character which contribute to and are constitutive of *eudaimonia*. Moral exemplars are precisely those persons with virtuous character traits that are consistent with human flourishing. A life lived in pursuit of the virtues of *eudaimonia* would bring about happiness: ''But if happiness consists in activity in accordance with virtue, it is reasonable that it should be activity in accordance with the highest virtue; and this will be the virtue of the best part of us.''[10]

For Aristotle, moral virtues are not learned like other intellectual pursuits; virtues must be practiced, as an artist or craftsman learns a particular skill. According to Aristotle, this involves a process of habit formation, not through intellectual instructional learning. The habituation thesis of Aristotle suggests that in most cases, the moral life is not one characterized by conscious decision-making. Rather, virtuous action flows from the character of the virtuous agent quite naturally, so that the ideal case of virtuous conduct is one where little reflective thought is required. Habitual characteristics of virtue are acquired by watching and imitating the actions of persons who exemplify particular virtues. Moral exemplars provide a template for the correct application of the moral virtues and demonstrate the right types of decisions and actions in a particular moral situation. Further, virtuous action is accomplished not through the

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following of a rigid set of rules, but through application of practical wisdom, *phronesis*, understood to be ''concerned with action in relation to the things that are good for human beings.''[11] That moral life is not simply characterized by the following of a few simple moral principles suggests why moral exemplars loom large in Aristotle's theory, for if we cannot rely on a simple moral code for a full account of the moral life, then referencing moral exemplars becomes crucial for understanding what the moral life consists in.

The failure of modernist approaches to ethics to fruitfully engage the positive role of emotions in the moral life has come to be more widely recognized. Justin Oakley, in Chapter 3 of his *Morality and the Emotions*, advances a sustained argument against this deontological viewpoint, largely based on what Oakley considers the erroneous philosophical and psychological views of the categories of emotion and motivation held by Kant and his deontological followers.[12] Thus, the dominant interpretations of Kantian ethics rest in part, Oakley finds, on outdated and scientifically incompatible views of human emotion and motivation (e.g., the unreliability of emotions, their non-cognitive nature, etc.). To the degree to which this is the case, constructing dialogue between theology and science by starting from Kantian ethics faces considerable challenges.

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Much of the impetus for re-evaluating the role for exemplars and emotion, however, comes from contemporary advocates of virtue ethics. An important element in the renewed interest in virtue ethics stems from the seeming inability of act-oriented approaches, whether in deontological or utilitarian forms, to provide a satisfying account of the moral life. In particular, deontology and utilitarianism share an approach that involves the application of one or more universalizable and consciously explicit rules that, in principle, apply to all moral situations that are equivalent in morally relevant features. But not only do deontology and utilitarianism conflict in terms of the rules they recommend, it has also been the case that each approach seems unable to systematize its own rules in such a way as not to result in actions or consequences that seem unethical on intuitive or other grounds.[13] Furthermore, the emphasis on consciously explicit principles can seem to be artificial, as the actual practice of ethical action is often immediate and in a significant sense unpremeditated. Had Wesley Autrey stopped to consider whether the greatest good for the greatest number would be achieved by leaping to save a life, it probably would have been too late. This is not to say that rules play no role in the ethical life, only that they are derivative from character rather than preceding it. To the extent that Autrey might be said to be acting according to a rule, it would be one that has already become part of his character, formed by habit and imitation. The category of phronesis, consequently, has been important to virtue ethicists because it suggests a third way, acknowledging that ethical decision-making is rational but that it is more complex than the explicit rule-based approach characteristic of ethical theory in the modern period. But since not all of us have such practical wisdom, we must look to exemplars for guidance as to what constitutes the virtuous life.

A recent attempt to philosophically flesh out the concept of moral exemplars, emotion, and phronesis within the framework of virtue ethics has been put forth by Linda Zagzebski. We select Zagzebski's account not only because of its depth,

but also because of its relevance for interpreting some of the results of the science of moral cognition. Zagzebski's account is a normative one—she is presenting an argument about what we should expect the characteristics of exemplars to include. At the same time, her approach has an important empirical component to it in that exemplars are defined not by theoretical considerations but empirically. She writes:

> Good persons are persons like that, just as gold is stuff like that. The function of an exemplar is to fix the reference of the term ''good person'' or ''practically wise person'' without the use of any concepts whether descriptive or non-descriptive. An exemplar therefore allows the series of conceptual definitions to get started.[14]

The fact that we can reliably identify exemplars, Zagzebski takes as a given. Once we have identified moral exemplars, the question arises as to what we might expect to find. For Zagzebski, exemplars are distinguished by their exercise of practical judgment, *phronesis*. While Zagzebski does not eliminate the category of flourishing, she chooses instead to emphasize the category of motive. What makes a moral exemplar different from the rest of us, argues Zagzebski, is that they characteristically have the right motives at the right times, as well as being able to carry out the appropriate action in accordance with the motive in question. Motives in turn are understood as emotions—Autrey said that he did what he *felt* was right. Rather than divorcing reason and emotion, Zagzebski significantly unites the two categories. Cognitive and affective states cannot be separated from each other; for each emotion there is a corresponding thick concept that represents the intentional object of an emotional state.[15] Emotions enable persons to see a concrete situation from a particular moral perspective; it places the person in an affective state that readies him or her for action based on that emotion. Emotions are the basic constituents of exemplary action; for example, when a compassionate person sees a person in need, their emotions are attuned in such a way as to ready them to assist. Zagzebski writes,

> The emotions of exemplars are trustworthy, and what make them trustworthy is that they fit their intentional objects. Exemplary persons are also exemplary in their practical reasoning and in their subsequent actions, but I propose that the genesis of correct moral behaviors is the experience of emotion.[16]

Emotions eventually become dispositions that form the basis of a person's character; these dispositions are the enduring moral traits that motivate certain types of action in different contexts. The formation of emotional dispositions leads to the development of a person's character that produces reliability in the moral actions of the exemplar. This reliability promotes consistency in action regardless of the context in which a person finds herself. Morality cannot be separated from other aspects of life such as cultural norms, laws, or economic decisions because the exemplar cannot help but act in a certain way when the context calls for it whether that situation is considered ''moral'' or not. Emotional dispositions develop according to the feedback provided by the outcomes of moral actions. When the outcome of an action is not the expected intention of the emotional

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disposition, actions may be revised or the associated emotion can be modified to lead to a different action. For example, a mother may feel compassion for her child who does not know how to tie her shoes and then do it for her, but this causes the child to become frustrated and angry. Upon realizing her mistake, the mother may try to work together with the child to *teach* her how to tie her shoes. Thus, the feeling of compassion in this situation becomes coupled with the knowledge that her child needs help getting her shoes tied but also needs support in becoming autonomous.

An exemplary person exercising phronesis has an ability to integrate virtues with the correct corresponding emotional state. These emotions become integrated into the person's character in such a way that after a certain amount of time they become automatic affective reactions to different situations. Exemplars are able to understand their own emotions in such a way that they do not simply hijack the goals that are intrinsic to their virtues, but the emotion becomes linked with the virtue in such a way as to enable the person to act it out. At work here is a process of identity formation in the exemplar, where the proper motives and networks of understanding become part of who one is. Thus, a virtue characterizes a particular way of perceiving and acting in a given situation, one in which the cognitive and emotional aspects of both moral decision-making and action are well integrated. This insight suggests an interpretation of the common claim made by Autrey and other exemplars that their behavior was unremarkable and that anyone would have done as they did. It's not that Autrey had no reason to do what he did, but rather that the reasons had become so a part of who he was that they were no longer readily accessible. One might as well have asked him why he sees the sky as blue. Autrey's moral dispositions, his perceptions and his actions, were themselves the result of a long formative process, not the rote learning of ethical codes that presume to cover all situations.

Although Zagzebski's work is strongly focused on what an exemplar is, it is less clear on how exemplars function in moral cognition. Clearly, if moral exemplars are to be central to moral cognition, then imitation and simulation stand to play important roles. Zagzebski herself highlights the role of imitation. For Zagzebski, virtue is a ''success term;'' to genuinely have a virtue is not just to have a motive, but to also have the ability to successfully carry out that motive under appropriate circumstances.[17] To imitate an exemplar is to properly imitate the motives that the exemplar would have in the relevant situation. But to have a virtue is also to successfully imitate the kind of action that the exemplar would perform. Embedded in the concept of phronesis, however, is the understanding of the complexity of life in a way that cannot simply be stated in a finite set of rules. If accurate, this would suggest that the role of the exemplar is not simply one of imitation—have the motive that moral exemplar Y had in situation X and do something like what moral exemplar Y would do in situation X—but also simulation: have the motive that moral exemplar Y would have had in situation X had moral exemplar Y ever encountered that situation even when moral exemplar Y has never been in situation X. Since there are vastly more moral situations than those specific situations encountered by exemplars, simulation must be a

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significant element of moral cognition. Exemplars can thus be understood as paradigms of motive and action, from which we draw inspiration by inference, by analogy, and a process of feedback, trial and error, and transformative extension. In this sense, the usefulness and importance of exemplars are tested on a daily basis.

Critically, we mean by simulation, an effortful attempt to internalize and develop within oneself the motivations, intentions, emotions of the exemplar. This understanding is represented in the work of Alvin Goldman, a leading philosopher of the simulation theory of mind.[18] So the one whose moral cognition is simulated no longer remains simply an external object to be imitated, but rather is actively taken in, such that the attempts to recreate within oneself the intentions, emotions, etc. of the exemplar result in actually changing one's own intentions, emotions, motivations, and so on. Over time and practice, such active simulation is less needful, and the exemplary forms of information processing and action become more and more simply a part of one's own way of perceiving and acting in the world. Exemplars properly speaking never remain cold icons, but are deeply, personally engaged in the process of developing moral cognition.

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Two important addenda may be added in support of the foregoing argument. First, Richard Hare, in arguing for his influential, broadly rule-utilitarian approach called objective prescriptivism, affirmed that ''utilitarianism also has a substantial element. In order to decide what we ought to do, we have, according to the utilitarians, to study not only the logical properties of the moral words, but the preferences of the people whom our actions will affect; and it is an empirical question what these are.''[19] Hare believed this so strongly that he devoted an entire chapter, entitled ''Another's Sorrow,'' to the topic, where he again states explicitly, in answer to the question of what must be known for proper judgment in moral action toward others, that we must know ''What it is like to be those people in that situation.''[20] This kind of knowing requires, as the preceding argument made clear, emotional/affective processing in order to provide new *information* (i.e., about another person's mindset) in judgment, and not simply to provide a set of drives that judgment may choose from. So virtuous emotions can be thought to be intrinsic to virtuous emotional perception, or information processing, in seeing what it is like to be the person affected by one's own actions. The fact that a utilitarian as influential as Hare makes minding the other central—albeit without knowing the fuller empirical story about emotion—lends additional weight to the argument that virtue theory, which holds emotion to be central, has much to offer for a social neuroscience of moral action.

The second addendum comes from the work of Barbara Herman, an important interpreter of Kant's moral philosophy who argues for abandoning the view that Kant is a deontologist who ''seems to claim that a dutiful action can have moral worth only if it is done from the motive of duty alone.''[21] Rather, Herman argues that deontology must be left behind for a proper understanding of Kant's ethics, replaced with the central notion that Kant's moral philosophy rests on valuation done according to a good will, which is also primary in Kant's view.[22] Herman explicitly proposes a ''deliberative field'' model of moral judgment and action that

so internalizes the moral constraints of duty, linking them inseparably with other motives such as sympathy, that the virtuous exemplar ''takes the fact of morality to be constitutive of herself,'' such that ''the normalization of desires and interests is a way of making them her own.''[23] Thus, what Herman is arguing for is a central place for moral motivations and emotions in the perception and carrying out of the virtuous act. She explicitly denies the idea that Kantian ethics proceed by squeezing out any motivation aside from doing that which is one's duty, and identifies as errors, both in reading Kant and in understanding the complexity of human emotional life, any interpretations of Kant that require a single-minded focus on the motivation from duty.[24] Herman instead envisions an agent's deliberative field consisting of an intricate weaving together of motivation for acting on duty with other motivations for action. This emphasis on identity and the complex interweaving of emotional (e.g., sympathy) and motivational inner life has much in common with the virtue-theoretic approach. That one of Kant's most influential and respected defenders makes this emphasis a central part of her argument is further evidence that a virtue-based approach to moral action, with its own emphasis on self-identity, suggests that some common ground may be found between contemporary interpreters of Kant and Aristotle.

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Theology, exemplars, and ethics

Zagzebski's virtue-theoretic model of moral cognition provides a rich starting-point for considering the significance of exemplars in the moral life: exemplars not only play a role in the learning of what it is to be virtuous, they also play a role in decision-making, acting as paradigm cases through whom we can simulate, sometimes tacitly, appropriate moral actions, responses, and behaviors. Although contemporary theological ethics has been influenced by the new interest in virtue ethics, the role that moral exemplars may play in moral cognition from a Christian theological perspective deserves increased attention than has recently been the case. Virtuous exemplarity and virtue theory could play a role in helping to link ongoing concerns in Christian reflection.[25]

That reflection on moral exemplars should play a role in theological ethics has some historical grounding. Language of imitation and conforming to the image of Christ, for instance, can be found explicitly in the Pauline epistles.[26] At least some of Jesus's parables may be taken as implying imitation of an exemplar, such as the parable of the Good Samaritan, followed by the command to ''go and do likewise.''[27] Likewise, the ideas *of imitatio dei* and *imitatio Christi* have been important themes in the history of Christian thought. Zagzebski herself traces elements of this, noting its presence in Irenaeus, who states, ''It is by becoming imitators of His actions and doers of His words that we have communion with Him.''[28]

It is noteworthy that this approach has much in common with the continuing emphasis on narrative and story found in much of Christian ethical reflection and perhaps most clearly exemplified in the work of Stanley Hauerwas. On Hauerwas' account, Christian ethical reflection is necessarily embodied in the ongoing life of

the Christian community, which in turn is understood as participating in the ongoing Christian story. To be Christian is to be part of a community living out the Christian narrative as set out in the scriptural narratives; thus, Hauerwas speaks of the life of the Christian community, the church, as one characterized by journey, even adventure.[29] On Hauerwas' account, exemplarity is understood in the context of narrative and includes not only imitation—something that Hauerwas sees at the very least in the context of Christian formation—but also reflection on and working through the lives of the exemplars themselves. Thus, Hauerwas argues that we are called not simply to mimic Jesus, something that we cannot do, but to be like Jesus, leading the kind of life he exemplifies, one of nonviolent love and compassion. Hauerwas' emphasis on narrative suggests a central role for consideration of exemplars, although on Hauerwas' account exemplarity seems to be a subordinate category, as the meaning of any given action and the significance of any given individual must be always understood in the context of the broader story in which it is set.

A greater emphasis on exemplarity can be found in the work of James William McClendon. Like Hauerwas, McClendon argues that the basis of Christian ethics is found in narrative and story rather than in individualistic decision-making. The Christian narrative provides a shared context of moral stories, convictions, principles and experiences about our relationship to God, our relationship to one another, and our relationships to the earth. Our shared narrative provides a particular grammar through which the Christian community trains itself for moral action. This is not at the expense of the individual, but the individual comes to realize that their participation in moral action is part of a larger story which preceded them and continues after they have passed on.[30]

On McClendon's account, moral exemplarity is not in any way foreign to a narrative approach to ethics; in fact, it is simply a different term to explain something very common within narrative ethics. One of McClendon's earlier works, *Biography as Theology*, reveals this understanding: the best way to understand how to live the Christian life is to look at the stories of others, especially those who have done it well.[31] Thus, in *Ethics*, McClendon uses the lives of John and Sarah Edwards and of Dorothy Day as exemplars of different aspects of the intertwining strands of the Christian life.[32] Although Christ serves as the primary exemplar, McClendon emphasizes that throughout the Christian tradition stories have been told that embodies the ethical life in Christian understanding. It is also worth noting the affective component involved in these narratives. It is difficult to impossible to tell a story without referencing emotions, and through narratives we learn not what rules the exemplar followed, but how the exemplar acted and reacted, felt and responded. Further, the very act of participating in a narrative initiates an emotional connection to the exemplar and the exemplar's actions. Moral learning thus becomes not simply something that engages the intellect by memorizing and attempting to internalize a set of rules, but rather something that engages the whole person.

Focusing on exemplarity and emotion may thus help to understand the importance of narrative for the moral life. A second category of reflection to which consideration of exemplars may be relevant is that of justice. Classically, justice is

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concerned with issues of fairness, equality, and proportionality. Already in Aristotle we find an extended discussion of justice in terms of equality and proportionality, categories that continue to be important in contemporary theories of justice.[33] The language of rights is pre-eminently framed in terms of equality, with the Lockean tradition arguing that such rights are natural and as such shared equally by all.[34] Equality and proportionality also play large roles in intuitions about retributive justice, thus the Biblical injunction of an ''eye for an eye'' (Exodus 21:24) and Immanuel Kant's argument defending proportional retribution as a form of justice.[35] In contemporary debates about distributive justice, concerns about how and when to apply principles of equality and proportionality are typically at the center. The disagreement between the classic statements of justice in modern political philosophy—John Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* and Robert Nozick's *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*—can be understood precisely in terms of a debate over the proper domain of justice, with Nozick limiting considerations of justice to the history of uncoerced transactions and Rawls employing the difference principle to potentially limit inequality in the current distribution of goods in society at any given time.[36]

Although theological ethics is not insensitive to categories of equality and proportionality—found not least in the Hebrew prophets' denunciations of the rich and their neglect of the poor, the orphan, and the widow—it is noteworthy that the concern is expressed rather differently. In Christian ethics, considerations of justice are linked to biblical categories of love, creation, sin, redemption, and eschatology in a way that subverts straightforward appeals to equality and proportionality.[37] Reinhold Niebuhr's theological ethic exemplifies this tendency, for although Niebuhr recognized the importance of equality as a regulative principle, he nevertheless argued that its application is attenuated in practice. On Niebuhr's account, human nature's radical sinfulness makes impossible the application of pure ethical categories, giving rise to a Christian realism in the social and political spheres.[38] Nor is Niebuhr unique among mid-twentieth-century theologians in his rejection of deontic implementations of justice. Paul Tillich, like Niebuhr, recognized the categories of equality and proportionality, but argues that these are insufficient for an adequate concept of justice. Rather, Tillich calls for a third category, that of creative or transforming justice that can transcend the rule-bound categories implied by equality and proportionality. Such a transforming justice does not necessarily negate principles of equality and proportionality, but goes beyond them and contextualizes them.[39]

Given this bracketing of formal concepts of justice, how does one learn what justice is? How does one become just? On an exemplar-based account, justice is learned by doing, specifically by referencing and simulating justice exemplars. To some extent, the influence of narrative approaches has moved many theological ethicists in this direction. This tendency is already found in Karen Lebacqz's touchstone work, *Justice in an Unjust World*, in which Lebacqz relies extensively on personal, biblical and third-person narrative to develop an understanding of the demands of justice.[40] Thus, in her analysis of the justifiability of revolt in the face of oppression, Lebacqz begins not with theory but with narratives of oppression in Latin America and elsewhere. These in turn lead to reflection on biblical

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narratives, notably that of Exodus, which provides resources for reflecting on the justifiability of resistance and, further, what kind of resistance is justifiable.[41] Although Lebacqz's employment of narrative is closer to an exemplar-based approach, she is not necessarily aware of her reliance on exemplars and exemplarity. The narratives of oppression themselves do not provide moral exemplars but rather paradigm cases to which justice reasoning may be applied. Exemplarity is found rather in the biblical narrative, though not always in the expected place. Thus, Lebacqz finds moral inspiration in the acts of the Hebrew midwives, as they lied to Pharaoh, suggesting the permissibility of lying to oppressors in present-day contexts.

Such examples seem straightforward: situation A is similar to situation B, and in situation A an exemplar did X, so it makes sense to do X in situation B as well. Such cases involve imitation. Many cases, however, require not simply imitation, but simulation. A prime example of this can be found in efforts to implement restorative justice, where the concern is to right past wrongs, but not by means of a rigid proportional retribution. Rather, restorative justice seeks to bring reconciliation in the form of encounter between victim and perpetrator, the acknowledgement of narrative of suffering, and a communal approach to determination of sentencing or making amends.[42] The premier example of restorative justice is perhaps the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, formed in the wake of apartheid to make public the wrongs that were done. Although there were many who were opposed to the Commission's granting of amnesty to perpetrators of human rights abuses under the apartheid regime, the Commission was implemented in order to avoid further national splintering and violence that implementation of retributive justice would have likely provoked.[43]

Although restorative justice may proceed by analogy to past cases, it also requires, as Tillich argued, an element of creativity, since it is the uniqueness of the case that is often of crucial importance. One cannot simply refer to what exemplar X did in situation A, since situation A and situation B are not similar enough for the action of the exemplar in situation A to carry over to situation B. For the exemplar to be relevant for situation B, one must be able to project what exemplar X would have done in situation B if the exemplar X had encountered situation B. But how does one do that? Such projection would require an intimate understanding of the exemplar's life and character. In the case of an exemplar that is known personally, this is conceivable, though to know an exemplar well in this fashion may require the kind of personal judgment that those of us who are non-exemplary lack. Reference to exemplars whom are not known personally but are known of primarily through narrative and communal remembrance would seem to require something more: a community of interpretation that provides some framework and norms of interpretation.

Note that, throughout this discussion, the implication is not that there is just one exemplar who applies optimally in every situation. In the Christian context, this might be the intuitive move, with Jesus as exemplar. But the narratives of Jesus are rather sparse: many of Jesus' activities as narrated in the Gospels (e.g., teaching and healing) are not the kinds of activity that would be obviously relevant to

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every instance of the moral life, although the content and context of the teachings and healings may have wider application. Exemplar reference is necessarily multiple, including not only those of the past, but also those in the present who, among other things, serve to illuminate the ways that the lives of those in the past are relevant for us today. The complexity and nuance required for creative acts of restorative justice also suggest another way in which living exemplars in context of community are important, as the kind of wisdom required for such judgment is not the kind that can simply be taught by rote. For most of us, the role of family and community in forming wise and creative judgment is crucial for proper character formation and cannot be faked or gotten on the cheap. And while our ability to understand the emotional states and reactions of literary and scriptural exemplars may be limited, this will be less true for living exemplars in the community, who provide models for how to respond to insult with grace and injustice with righteous anger rather than futile vindictiveness or despair. For Christian ethics, this role of living exemplars is highly suggestive, for it indicates that ethics is not simply extrapolating from the narratives in the Bible, but rather about participating in an ongoing communal formation that provides a normative framework of interpretation and application.

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These arguments are necessarily schematic, but suggest possible avenues of exploration for the theologian. We might note here two related theses, one descriptive and one normative. On the descriptive side, there are claims about how people do in fact behave and think when it comes to moral categories and that such behavior and thinking is to some extent captured by proposals concerning exemplars and emotion. On the normative side, we are making the claim that a moral framework informed by a virtue-theoretic approach to exemplarity and emotion is both useful and important, and that much might be gained by further reflection on these categories for theological ethics. Some of this work is ongoing in the form of religious biography and narrative, but has yet to be tied to a broader theological and ethical framework. But, arguably, much has yet to be explored, because these strands have not previously been brought together.

There is a further element, however, and that is the role that the sciences might bring to bear on the same material. Much moral theorizing has been conducted without reference to the natural and biological sciences. There are important historical reasons for this. Scholars of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries did not have a mature scientific biology to refer to, and the cultural milieu of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries conspired to produce moral theories that were typically repugnant in their results.[44] The cognitive revolution, abetted by the growth of new fields of neuroscience, have changed the situation, however, and intriguingly may provide some consilience with an exemplar-based approach to ethics that is informed by a rich account of the emotions.

Virtue theory, exemplars, and social neuroscience of moral action

As the preceding considerations indicate, there are good philosophical and theological grounds for reconsidering the role of exemplars and the emotions in

the moral life, and for viewing these grounds as having some independence from the sciences. If we turn to the sciences, we find, not coincidentally, that some of the same kinds of considerations that inform current philosophical and theological debates about ethics are also present in debates in cognitive science concerning the emotions and moral functioning. While these debates may be understood to be merely parallel, we suggest that they need not be understood as merely coincidental, and that rather the account of emotion and moral exemplarity may lend support to, and in turn be supported by, ongoing work in cognitive science and, in particular, social and affective neuroscience.

There has been little prior work on engaging virtue, exemplarity, emotion, and neuroscience. We argue that virtue theory, particularly as found in the work of Linda Zagzebski (reviewed above), shares several key commitments with social and affective neuroscience, thus making virtue theory and an exemplar-based approach to moral action a preferred way of beginning dialogue between theology and science on moral action. This argument presents evidence for a major emphasis that social neuroscience and virtue theory both share. If this amount of conceptual overlap holds, then it is clear that virtue theory has distinct advantages for fully engaging religion and science on questions of moral action. We show that social neuroscience draws strongly on the adaptive function and content relevance of the emotions, which is something that virtue-theoretic approaches also do and something that deontological and utilitarian ethical theories generally lack.

We can also identify two other main areas of overlap between exemplar-driven virtue-theoretic approaches (in theological ethics), though space limitations preclude us from developing these further. The first of these is a close attention to the importance of human development, especially in childhood and adolescence, with a critical role being given to social learning. While it is true that virtue theory explicitly stresses exemplarity (i.e., the role of learning from those who provide the morally best examples) and social neuroscience does not as yet do this, the emphasis on social learning within social neuroscience[45] is quite amenable to exemplar theory. Another area of overlap that we note for future development is that between the emphasis of *eudaimonia* in virtue-theoretic approaches to understanding exemplarity, and the central role that social functioning is being given within social neuroscience and human evolutionary theory more broadly considered, most clearly in the ''social brain'' hypothesis.[46] This hypothesis states that humans, and nonhuman primates in general, have the kind of brains they have due to the need to function socially within a community. While it is important to remember that this is a descriptive and not a normative claim, and to refrain from reading any statement about human purpose into the scientific claims of social neuroscience in relation to the social brain hypothesis, it is nonetheless useful to examine the concepts of *eudaimonia* and exemplarity in relation to the evolution of social bonding and altruism. Taken together, these convergences point to areas of fruitful work in the future.

Two mainstream approaches to moral action within social psychology and neuroscience, those developed by Joshua Greene[47] and Jonathan Haidt,[48] are based in teasing out the tension between utilitarian and deontological approaches.

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Both advance a strong dichotomy between reflective, deliberative cognition on the one hand and reflexive, automatic emotion on the other. Greene's central contentions are 1) that such a ''dual process model'' (see below) is the only way to interpret experimental findings,[49] and 2) that moral intuitions deriving from emotional processes are nearly always at odds with rational, clear-headed, utilitarian moral judgment. Greene's larger program aims at convincing people that all or nearly all emotionally grounded moral intuitions (i.e., ''common sense morality'') are ultimately destructive of human community and need to be abandoned in favor of more reasoned, utilitarian-based judgment.[50] Haidt shares Greene's view that moral action is fully and nearly exclusively grounded in irrational emotional processes, but while Greene holds that rational, utilitarian judgments can ultimately prevail, Haidt argues that moral reasoning (separated from emotional processes) ''is more commonly performed in the service of social goals as people navigate their gossipy worlds.''[51] Haidt's program revives the views of David Hume and fleshes them out from a perspective that is well informed by the dominant model relating cognition and emotion in social psychology. Haidt's rejection of moral rationalism is as extreme as that seen in Hume,[52] for both find no place for the adaptive interplay of reason and emotion, and indeed little role for reason, in understanding the grounds of morality. Indeed, Haidt's view is possibly more extreme, since he finds that what reasoning primarily adds to the moral domain is a way of rationalizing one's actions to ensure the good functioning of the dominant social order at a given level (a scientific view he terms the ''social-functionalist'' perspective[53]). Both Greene and Haidt, in contrast to virtue-theoretic approaches, hold emotion in contempt, cleanly separate emotion from reason, and find no way of integrating emotion and cognition for moral, or virtuous, action. Their approaches are extremely scientifically motivated and well-argued, but at the same time they are difficult to reconcile with some of the central findings within social neuroscience, findings that show emotion to be anything but detrimental to adaptive decision-making and action in the social domain.[54]

Traditional models of human thought, feeling and judgment, as we have seen here, make use of two dichotomies whose influence has weighed heavily on all subsequent scientific approaches seeking to bridge them. The two dichotomies in mind here are those between controlled and automatic processing and between cognition and emotion. To the degree to which these dichotomies are not used as heuristics but are reified in hard theoretical distinctions, they are false. Yet, despite the careful, bridge-building work of many scholars in social neuroscience, these dichotomies still wield considerable conceptual power. A brief consideration of these dichotomies and their problems is useful to help recognize their influence and perhaps avoid them in future theory-building.

The first dichotomy—indeed, dualism—we examine is that between controlled and automatic mental processing, generally instantiated in ''dual process'' models of human cognition.[55] Dual process models in psychology and neuroscience state that there are two cognitive and/or neural systems mediating the top-down or goal-directed or endogenous control of thought and activity and mental processing that is not controlled, labeled bottom-up or automatic or exogenous,

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respectively. Yet, as noted by Feldman Barrett and colleagues,[56] controlled processing need not always be under conscious control.

While there is clear experimental evidence for some distinction between behaviors that are influenced by conscious control and those that are not, postulating separate systems hardly aids in understanding the systems behind the data. For example, the controlled focus of attention in recalling a specific memory involves millions of changes in the brain that are not under the conscious control of the person doing the remembering. Further, dual-process models neglect the role of controlled processing in activating and modulating automatic processing, as would be the case when someone tries to remember a person she likes versus a song she cannot stand, or the positive versus the negative qualities of a candidate for whom she did not vote. Controlled processing can have clearly observable effects on the processing of stimuli such as words or faces or memories, even though the control does not extend to the millions of brain events in such processing. Recently, some authors have acknowledged the intricate interplay of controlled and automatic processing, and have called for ''drastically revising the dual-process story as we now know it.''[57]

The second dichotomy is between cognition and emotion. There has been some evidence that psychology and neuroscience tend to devalue emotional processes in human judgment, in comparison to thought or cognition,[58] and to divide emotional processing from ''cognition'' remains in a manner such that newer models of human judgment perpetuate, perhaps unintentionally, this division and devaluation. Emotion has been typically characterized as automatic (vs. deliberative), maladaptive (vs. useful), innate (vs. learned), and so on, making it appear threatening to any systematic account of reasoned deliberative thought. Although work has progressed from viewing emotions as ''non-problem-solving non-behaviour''[59] to the point now where treating cognition as separate from and independent of emotional processing is construed by some as a ''sin'' against social and affective neuroscience,[60] recent theoretical interpretations, as we have seen, still draw sharp distinctions between, and even maintain the independence of, emotional processing and cognition. While it is clear that emotional processing often will interfere with adaptive judgment and decision-making, an unintentional or uncritical, heavy reliance on the received constructs described above will yield theoretical constructs that make no room for the possibility that emotional processes also function in ways that are necessary and adaptive.

The last word on moving beyond the dichotomy between cognition and emotion should belong to a pair of classic papers in psychology that yielded one of the laws of psychology, in this case one relating emotion and behavioral performance.[61] The law in question is the Yerkes–Dodson Law, which simply states that performance depends on the level of emotion—often defined as arousal—such that performance is low at very low and very high levels of emotion, and optimal somewhere in between. Easterbrook advanced the conceptual framework of the Yerkes–Dodson Law to unify a literature showing both adaptive and maladaptive effects of emotion on various measures of performance. Interactionist models of cognition and emotion may draw upon the

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large literature surrounding this classic work in psychology in supporting a view that accounts for adaptive functions of emotion within cognition. There is increasing evidence for such an adaptive account within social and affective neuroscience, and we may note three studies among others that provide evidence for a view of emotional processing as not separated from cognition, and not merely providing a drive upon which cognition may act, but as contributing real information for judgment in the social domain.[62]

The first study was done by Bar-On and colleagues,[63] and tested six participants with bilateral focal lesions of anterior and posterior ventromedial prefrontal cortex (an area known to be involved in experiencing emotions[64]), three participants with unilateral lesions of the right insular and somatosensory cortices (areas known to be involved in sensing disgust and pain[65]), and three participants with unilateral lesions of the amygdala (an area associated with emotionally evocative events like fear[66]) on emotional intelligence[67] and social functioning.[68] They compared performance of these groups with a group of control participants who had lesions that did not involve the ventromedial prefrontal cortex, the right insula and somatosensory cortices or the amygdala. The study found no differences between any of the experimental groups and control group on full IQ, executive function, perception or memory, nor any indications of psychopathology. But each experimental group was significantly impaired on emotional intelligence compared with the control group. Combining all three experimental groups yielded significant deficits in social functioning compared with controls, specifically in tasks that required information processing, careful reflective thought, and judgment in the social domain. Lesions in areas associated with one's own emotional states are thus implicated in providing necessary information and or processing for social judgment.

A second study showed that bilateral amygdala lesions that occur after the age of 50 severely impair function in inferring another person's mindset (i.e., ''minding the other,'' via the implicit and/or explicit, imaginative construction of a ''theory of mind'' about another person).[69] Two participants with bilateral amygdala lesions were asked to identify social faux pas and to attribute feelings and thoughts to other persons from seeing their eyes alone. These participants were significantly worse at these tasks, which clearly involve judgment and information processing, based on verbal and visual prompts. Another study testing the recognition of social faux pas, as well as the presence of empathy, found that a group of 12 participants with lesions to the ventromedial prefrontal cortex were much more impaired than controls in these tests.[70]

These experimental studies provide examples of the kind of work in social neuroscience linking emotion and adaptive decision-making and action in the social domain. They are also suggestive in their implications for thinking about moral exemplarity and the role of exemplars in moral theory. Classical accounts of deontology and utilitarianism largely mirror the dual-process account of the relation of reason and emotion, a view that in turn supports the marginalization of exemplars in moral theory, for if moral theory is simply about reasoning well, then referencing of exemplars does not have great importance. But to move beyond the dual-process view requires a similar shift in moral theory from a stance that

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contrasts cognition and emotion to one that integrates them. But how does one do this? What would seem to be required is the adoption of a view that the moral life is defined not only by reasoning well, but by emoting well. That is, the emotions themselves have to be trained. Exemplars provide one key for learning how this can be done, and the sciences can provide an important role in empirically understanding this process.

Theology, neuroscience, and ethical theory: Creative mutual interaction

It is typical to understand the relationship of religion and science, and by extension theology and science, to be one of conflict, or, barring that, one in which the direction of influence is one-way, with scientific results understood to require theologians to reconsider prior claims about natural history and ontology. The approach we are recommending here, however, follows more closely a proposal laid out in some detail by Robert J. Russell, called creative mutual interaction.[71] As the label implies, Russell envisions the relation of theology and science to be one not of conflict, nor one where science simply dictates to theology the content which is acceptable or unacceptable. Rather, it is understood that scientific theories can and should influence theological constructions, and that theological frameworks can and should impact upon science, especially at the level of theory formation. Our approach is slightly different, in that a third form of inquiry, that of philosophical ethical theory, also plays an important role. Indeed, in our approach reflection on the role of exemplars and emotions in ethical theory leads to reflection on their possible role in theological ethics as well as to reflection on the resources that neuroscience may provide.

On our account, the initial motivation for examining exemplars and emotions is largely independent of any reflection on the sciences, but instead derives from primarily philosophical reflection, including a reflection on the deficiencies of standard modernist approaches to ethics as well as the promise that current virtue-oriented approaches provide. There are good philosophical reasons for moving to focus on moral exemplars and emotion. Although we do not fully argue it here, there are also good theological reasons for such a focus, and these theological reasons are reinforced by the resources that contemporary virtue-theoretic approaches have to offer. Among other possibilities is that of re-envisioning how we approach issues of justice from a theological perspective.

Given that there are prior philosophical and theological reasons for moving to the consideration of exemplars and emotional processing, the role of science in our argument is slightly different than is sometimes the case. Rather than moving from a scientific theory to a philosophical or theological claim, we note that supporting evidence for our approach may be found in contemporary affective and social neuroscience. In doing so, we also note that there are in neuroscience and, more broadly, cognitive science, ongoing debates and differences of view among scientists as to how best to interpret the data, and

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that these debates are not independent of the prior philosophical claims, for the work of both Hauser and Haidt (among others) is deeply informed by debates between deontologists and utilitarians. On scientific grounds, we argue that emotional processing is, contrary to some contrasting views, integral to moral decision-making and serves a positive and not merely negative function. Against dual-processing views, there is evidence to support a more integrated approach to cognition and emotion.

There is a sense, then, in which the philosophical and theological arguments do not need the scientific ones, and the scientific arguments do not need the philosophical and theological ones. Each has their own supporting reasons. Yet, each may be understood to provide supporting reasons for the other. The scientific data provides empirical support for the philosophical and theological work, and the philosophical and theological frameworks provide motive for continued pursuit of empirical work.

Yet, a stronger case can be made, one that sees a stronger form of interaction between philosophy, theology, and science, one in which a philosophical and theological approach to exemplarity and emotion in the moral life directly inspires and supports a scientific research program. Current scientific research on moral cognition seeks to understand normal moral functioning, and so by its very nature eliminates from consideration those who deviate from the norm, including exemplars. To understand optimal moral functioning, however, would require study of those who best demonstrate the requisite qualities: moral exemplars. There exist already significant studies of moral exemplars, although these have yet to be integrated into neuroscience.[72] Together with the philosophical and theological frameworks, these works may provide an initial direction for the scientific research program, which if successful would provide support for and new insight to the philosophical and theological reflections which inspired it.

Such neuroscientific research may also be motivated by specifically theological considerations. As noted above, an exemplar-based approach to ethics resonates with important themes in theology and theological ethics. Further, taking a theological perspective would suggest that for at least some exemplars, specifically theological or religious motivations play an important role in their moral lives. Understanding why and how theological commitments affect the lives of moral exemplars, and why they play a role in some of our most prominently shared exemplars (Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., Mother Theresa), may yield important results, both in scientific terms and in terms of future theological and philosophical reflection. We may note that the role that religion plays in the form of narrative and the relation between religious narrative and emotional processing may also provide motivations for research with the possibility for promising results.

These are, admittedly, only possibilities, but they suggest the kind of opportunities that are available for a fruitful interaction and exchange between philosophy, theology, and science, one in which each discipline is a fully active and respected participant, with each benefiting mutually from the interaction and engagement.

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Conclusion

Why did Wesley Autrey risk his life for the sake of a stranger? More generally, why do those whom we identify as moral exemplars—those who risk their lives for others, whose care and support community and even for strangers exceeds the normal, those who provides visions of the good and help us to attain it—act as they do? Equally important, what enables them to act as they do? Putting such questions to the forefront of ethics can help us to think concretely about the content and practice of ethics, and do so in ways that connect philosophical and theological approaches to ethics to scientific ones. Doing this can serve to change the way we think about the interaction of science and theology, while at the same time providing new insights in both fields of inquiry. Acknowledging this is also to recognize that there is much yet to discover and explore, and that we are merely at the beginning of the road to fully understanding moral exemplarity, and have by no means reached its end.

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Acknowledgements

Gregory R. Peterson, James Van Slyke, and Michael Spezio are primary authors and contributed jointly and equally to the paper. The authors would like to thank the generous support of the Center for Theology and Natural Science through the Science and Transcendence Research Series, without which this collaboration would not be possible.

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for that matter, were they designed to promote peace and happiness in the world for which they were designed, the world of our hunter-gatherer ancestors.'' – J.D. Greene (http://www.wjh.harvard.edu/~jgreene/). Also, see his Ph.D. dissertation: ''The Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Truth about Morality and What to Do About It,'' Princeton University, 2002; and J.D. Greene, ''From Neural 'Is' to Moral 'Ought': What are the Moral Implications of Neuroscientific Moral Psychology?'' *Nature Reviews Neuroscience* 4 (2003): 847–850.

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Biographical Notes

Gregory R. Peterson is Associate Professor of Philosophy and Religion at South Dakota State University. He is also the chair of the Religion, Science and Technology section of the American Academy of Religion. Professor Peterson teaches in areas such as Ethics, Philosophy of Mind, and Religion and Science. He is the author of *Minding God: Theology and Cognitive Sciences* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005).

Michael Spezio is Assistant Professor of Psychology at Scripps College in Claremont, California. Previously he was a postdoctoral scholar in social and affective neuroscience in the Division of the Humanities and Social Sciences and at the Brain Imaging Center at the California Institute of Technology. He obtained a doctorate in biochemistry from Cornell University, a doctorate in cognitive/systems neuroscience from the University of Oregon, and a Master of Divinity degree with a concentration in ethics from the Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. His work focuses on brain networks involved in the experience of emotions and in social judgment and decision-making.

James A. Van Slyke is Assistant Research Professor at the Travis Research Institute, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, California.

Kevin Reimer is Professor of Psychology at Azusa Pacific University, Azusa, California.

Warren Brown is Professor of Psychology at the Graduate School of Psychology, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, California.