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APPEALING TO MORALITY AND VALUES

A Personalized Matching Account

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There are many ways to make a point. Scholars of reasoning have compiled nearly 100 types of arguments (Walton et al., 2008), but humans seem to lean fundamentally on a sense of moral right and wrong. So, appealing to an audience's sense of *morality* may stand out among rhetorical devices. Social scientists often find moral appeals when they sort through the messages people use to communicate their perspectives and shape other people's, including Congressional debates (Mucciaroni, 2011), public health campaigns (Hansen et al., 2018), social media (Wang & Liu, 2021), and organizational diversity statements (Starck et al., 2021).

This chapter defines moral rhetoric and explores its potential for persuasion, particularly when it aligns with meaningful characteristics of the people receiving such messages. Although a rich literature has emerged regarding the intersection of morality and persuasive communication, I will also draw on a related body of work inspired by the psychology of human values. Moral principles and core values overlap considerably (Jung & Clifford, in press; Philipp-Muller et al., 2020); both are abstract goals people find important and are motivated to pursue, which people prioritize idiosyncratically (for general reviews, see Ellemers et al., 2019; Maio, 2010). Critically for this review, both also organize people's attitudes across various issues (Hanel et al., 2021; Koleva et al., 2012). Nevertheless, these literatures have plodded along much on their own over the years despite yielding similar insights about the sorts of messages that prove persuasive in particular populations. Some may quibble that moral values are qualitatively different from other values, but to highlight connections between these typically unlinked literatures, I will generally not discriminate. For efficiency, however, this review defaults to terminology such as "moral rhetoric," given the relatively large recent body of work invoking moral psychology.

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At the heart of this chapter is the idea that moral rhetoric is more persuasive when the moral content of the message is congruent with or "matches" various aspects of the recipient's moral orientation. In other words, moral rhetoric is especially influential when personalized to the recipient. This premise requires understanding two critical factors of communication: (1) the moral content of a message and (2) the varieties of recipients' moral predispositions. Therefore, I begin by highlighting how persuasive messages can contain moral content and the evidence for whether these appeals are relatively persuasive as a general strategy. Then, I review the moral dispositions of recipients to which moral messages can be personalized and the evidence regarding the persuasive advantages of doing so.

The Moral Content of Persuasive Messages

Explicitly versus Substantively Moral Appeals

Here, I define a "moral appeal" (or a "moral message," "moral rhetoric") as a message aimed at influencing the attitudes or behavior of the recipient by suggesting that its advocated position upholds moral principles or values. Messages can do this in at least two ways: (1) drawing explicitly moralized conclusions and/or (2) providing substantively moral arguments.[1]

First, *explicit moral appeals* deliberately characterize the advocated position as morally correct and/or characterize the counter-position as morally incorrect. For example, I would be making an explicitly moral appeal if I presented a talk titled: "The Moral Case for Personalized Persuasion." Similarly, saying that "personalized persuasion is ethically reprehensible" draws an explicitly moralized conclusion. In both cases, the communicator has openly thrown the issue into the moral domain. In principle, value-based rhetoric could be explicit in the same way, directly characterizing a position as value-relevant (e.g., "personalized persuasion upholds our core values").

Second, a *substantively moral appeal* is one that presents arguments relevant to moral principles. Such messages articulate how the advocated position is consistent with particular moral values.[2] Much of the work on these appeals has been inspired by Moral Foundations Theory (MFT; Graham et al., 2013). Although MFT advanced many insights about the nature of human morality, it has perhaps been most influential by tracing the contours of the moral domain. One of its essential claims is that morality is *pluralistic*—no one factor can differentiate right from wrong in all cases. Instead, these judgments emerge from myriad considerations.[3] This provides ample opportunity for moral argumentation. Although MFT has not claimed there is a particular number of unique moral foundations, research in this area routinely emphasizes five discrete values, any of which could be the basis for a persuasive argument.

The "care/harm" foundation concerns the moral responsibility to treat others compassionately and avoid contributing to suffering. Communicators could appeal to this value by arguing that adopting some behavior will help others thrive. For instance, health appeals can articulate how quitting smoking (Lee et al., 2021) or getting vaccinated (Betsch et al., 2017) are worthwhile because they protect other people from harm, rather than simply having personal health and well-being benefits. Advocates of plant-based diets could articulate how meat production harms animals and the environment instead of focusing only on personal health implications (Palomo-Vélez et al., 2018).

The "fairness/cheating" foundation concerns the value placed on equal treatment of individuals. Newer work distinguishes this from the related value of receiving rewards commensurate with one's merit ("proportionality"). Fairness rhetoric appears in diversity advocacy in which communicators argue that diversity and inclusion policies serve to treat people fairly, which is often contrasted with arguments instead focused on diversity's instrumental benefits (Starck et al., 2021; Trawalter et al., 2016).

The "loyalty/betrayal" foundation concerns the importance some people place on their commitment to the groups to which they belong. For example, advertising campaigns often make patriotic appeals, suggesting that purchasing a product or supporting a brand shows loyalty to one's country (Yoo & Lee, 2020). In quite a different domain, appeals to loyalty are common persuasive strategies by terrorist groups (Hahn et al., 2023).

The "authority/subversion" foundation concerns obedience and deference to individuals and institutions in positions of authority. For example, religious appeals that cite Biblical pronouncements (Hertzberg, 2015) can be considered authority-driven persuasion. Appeals to authority can also include messages that point to legal regulations or a leader's command as justification for a course of action.

The "sanctity/degradation" or "purity" foundation concerns the desire to maintain a sense of purity and naturality, eschewing "disgusting" deviations from pristine standards. For example, advocacy against genetically modified foods may argue that they are unnatural instead of arguing about non-moral qualities like their production efficiency (Scott et al., 2018). Pro-environmental rhetoric can also include arguments for maintaining the earth's clean, pristine natural landscapes (Sachdeva et al., 2019).

Some have suggested that "liberty"—valuing the freedom to pursue one's own happiness—is another moral foundation (Iyer et al., 2012). For example, the tobacco industry has long framed smoking as a "freedom of choice" issue to push back on institutional regulations or potential smoking bans (Friedman et al., 2015; Oreskes & Conway, 2011).

MFT is not the only theory in town, however. Another approach, the theory of Morality-as-Cooperation, characterizes morality as a variety of

means by which people cooperate (Curry, 2016). As with MFT, it provides a set of moral principles that can be rendered as persuasive appeals (Misiak et al., 2023).

Other work has similarly considered the role of values in rhetoric without casting it in the domain of morality. Political communication work often considers how media and campaigns can frame issues in terms of particular values (Chong & Druckman, 2007). For example, Brewer's (2003) analysis of gay rights coverage in 1990s American newspapers found a substantial proportion of articles framing the issue in terms of traditionalism or egalitarianism. Gordon and Miller (2004) found that presidential candidates differed in their appeals to several values, including individualism or egalitarianism, in a televised debate. An even more expansive content analysis assessed hundreds of letters to the editor, opinion columns, and editorials in local and national newspapers in the early 2000s, finding that most articles referenced at least one of Schwartz's (1992) core values (Hoffman & Slater, 2007).

Clarifying the Taxonomy of Moral Appeals

Appeals that explicitly moralize an issue and those that provide value-relevant arguments are not meant to constitute two discrete types of moral appeals. Instead, there are two ways a message can be a moral appeal (for a similar account, see Kreps & Monin, 2011). An appeal can be "moral" if it does at least one. It would be perfectly natural for a message to position itself as making a moral case for some position *and* articulate how that position is consistent with specific moral values. Nevertheless, each method for making a moral message could stand alone. For instance, a communicator could characterize their position as morally correct without advancing relevant arguments. Indeed, some studies find that simply invoking the label of morality without further elaboration can affect people's attitudes (Luttrell et al., 2016). Kreps et al. (2017) also found that people responded differently to simple messages from advocates who positioned their views as moral versus pragmatic, even though the message did not elaborate much on those views. On the other hand, a communicator could also provide value-relevant arguments without explicitly presenting their conclusion as moral. Indeed, it is reasonably common for research on moral rhetoric to make arguments relevant to moral values without explicitly referring to their conclusion as moral (e.g., Feinberg & Willer, 2015).

One recent study on moral rhetoric and climate change communication independently manipulated the moral appeals in brief videos arguing against the continued use of fossil fuels. The videos made substantive arguments about harm or purity, and sometimes they also presented explicitly moral conclusions (e.g., "It is unethical…"). In the aggregate, following exposure to these

engaging messages, participants in a nationally representative sample who saw any of these moral appeals became similarly more supportive of renewable energy sources than participants who saw a non-moral, informative message about fossil fuels and renewable energy, and these effects were still evident around 20 days later (Gustafson et al., in press). These findings highlight how moral appeals can reliably affect attitudes on important issues and do so across a variety of ways of making a moral appeal.

Theoretically, however, whether a message appeals to morality explicitly or substantively may be consequential. The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) of persuasion posits several roles variables can play in persuasive communication (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; see also Briñol et al., this volume). One is to act as a "peripheral cue," which offers a simple guide to whether the recipient should accept the message and can be influential especially when the recipient is unwilling or unable to think carefully about the message. Explicitly moral appeals may sometimes work this way, providing an easily understood cue that the message is centering its position in the moral domain, which could appeal to people through simple heuristics about the importance of morality. On the other hand, another role communication variables can play is acting as a central argument, which is typically only appreciated by audiences who carefully engage with the message. Substantively moral appeals contain content that would operate this way, spelling out the morally relevant logic. Indeed, a reader could come to understand that these messages are chiefly about moral concerns, but they would need to process the message to make that connection in the absence of more superficial moral cues.

Prior work has largely not considered the distinction between types of moral appeals but has nevertheless tested a variety of them. However, going forward, it may be fruitful for researchers to be more intentional about defining the sort of moral appeal that would be most appropriate under different conditions and identifying the psychological mechanism(s) driving the effects of different appeals.

Do Moral Appeals Work?

Given the central role of morality in human experience (Gray & Graham, 2018), one might assume that moral appeals are the most impactful vehicle to persuasion. Although moral appeals can produce a variety of outcomes, such as reducing anger (Yun et al., 2008), shifting judgments of the message source (Jung, 2023), and getting recipients to see the issue as more morally relevant (Kodapanakkal et al., 2022), this review is primarily concerned with typical persuasion outcomes: attitudes, intentions, and behavior.

The evidence for the overall effectiveness of moral appeals is mixed. Some relevant work has considered whether messages providing altruistic reasons for adopting a behavior are persuasive. These are moral appeals in that altruistic

arguments are grounded in moral values of helping others, and they tend to be interpreted as moral appeals by recipients (Luttrell & Petty, 2021). These appeals are often contrasted against ones grounded in selfish arguments, which are not generally considered moral. Sometimes, these altruistic appeals are more influential than other appeals (e.g., Grant & Hofmann, 2011; Kelly & Hornik, 2016), but sometimes selfish, "egoistic" arguments are more influential (Isler et al., 2020; White & Peloza, 2009). More generally, other research testing the impact of messages grounded in a variety of moral values finds that such appeals are relatively effective (Abeywickrama et al., 2020; Gustafson et al., in press; Van Zant & Moore, 2015), but sometimes they fall flat or even backfire (Leidner et al., 2018; Täuber et al., 2015).

As is likely a familiar perspective in this volume, it can be misleading to consider whether moral appeals are *generally* effective. Instead, it can be more fruitful to ask: *For whom* are these appeals most persuasive?

When Messages Match the Audience's Moral Orientation

As noted at the outset, a personalized persuasion perspective suggests that persuasion should be heightened when the moral character of a message is congruent with the recipient's moral orientation. However, there are several ways in which a recipient's disposition orients them to moral content, ranging from the degree to which they perceive a moral basis for their current attitude toward the issue in question to how much they moralize a broader category of issues to their general tendency to form morally based attitudes regardless of the issue. Each of these recipient characteristics is reviewed next, including the persuasion implications of matching the use of moral rhetoric to them.

Matching the Perceived Moral Basis of the Target Attitude

Even when individuals hold the same overall evaluation about some topic, they can differ in how *moralized* their attitude is, which refers to how much the person subjectively perceives a moral basis for it (Rozin, 1999; Skitka et al., 2021). For example, two people could be in favor of recycling initiatives to the same degree, with one person seeing it as a reflection of a moral commitment to protecting the environment and the other seeing it as a reflection of a desire to find practical solutions for waste management. Similarly, attitudes vary in their perceived *value basis*, which typically overlaps a lot with perceiving moral attitude bases (Philipp-Muller et al., 2020). Although attitudes can vary in how much they are genuinely connected to a person's moral judgments and important values (Koleva et al., 2012; Philipp-Muller, 2018), the research has typically focused on subjectively moralized or value-based attitudes, which can be influential over and above any true claim to a moral basis (Blankenship et al., 2022; Luttrell et al., 2016).

The prevailing view has been that more moralized or value-based attitudes are relatively "strong" in the sense that they are durable and consequential (Krosnick & Petty, 1995; Luttrell & Sawicki, 2020). Attitudes that feel more rooted in morality and values tend to remain stable over time (Luttrell & Togans, 2021), resist social influence (Aramovich et al., 2012), correspond with relevant behavior (Skitka & Bauman, 2008), and predict advocacy (Philipp-Muller et al., 2020). Most relevant here, however, is evidence that more moralized attitudes resist change in the face of persuasive arguments (Luttrell et al., 2016; Ringel & Ditto, 2019). This apparent rigidity is misleading, however, because the relationship between moralization and longitudinal stability varies across topics (Luttrell & Togans, 2021), and sometimes, more moralized attitudes are not especially resistant to new information (Brannon & Gawronski, 2019).

Rather than signifying a view that will not change, an attitude's moral basis could instead mean that the person sees the moral domain as being of chief importance when it comes to that issue. Therefore, what looks like a stubborn attitude is one that has yet to encounter compelling *morally relevant* reasons to change. For people with moralized attitudes on a topic, non-moral rhetoric would be seen as ultimately irrelevant to their core concerns, producing resistance to the persuasive message. However, a message that implies that its position is more moral (as in explicitly moralized appeals) and/or provides arguments for its position's morality (as in substantively moral appeals) should be especially capable of changing moralized attitudes. In other words, moral appeals should be capable of undercutting the resistance that has come to dominate theoretical characterizations of moralized attitudes, even leading to enhanced persuasion. I will refer to this challenge to conventional work on moralization as the "moral matching hypothesis."

In the first test of this moral matching hypothesis (Luttrell et al., 2019), we designed two comparable persuasive messages arguing against recycling—one message made a moral appeal using both methods described previously. The message drew explicitly moral conclusions (e.g., "recycling is immoral") while articulating several arguments relevant to various moral values such as the harms posed by additional fleets of recycling trucks to the environment and local wildlife. The other message was rated similarly persuasive in a pilot study but instead appealed to practical concerns that make recycling programs costly and inefficient. The results supported a moralization × type of appeal interaction (see Figure 6.1). Responses to the practical appeal were consistent with the typical characterization of moralized attitudes: the more people perceived a moral basis for their initial pro-recycling attitudes, the less they changed those attitudes in response to the practical anti-recycling message. This resistance pattern was not evident in people's responses to the moral appeal. Instead, more moralized recycling proponents changed their attitudes

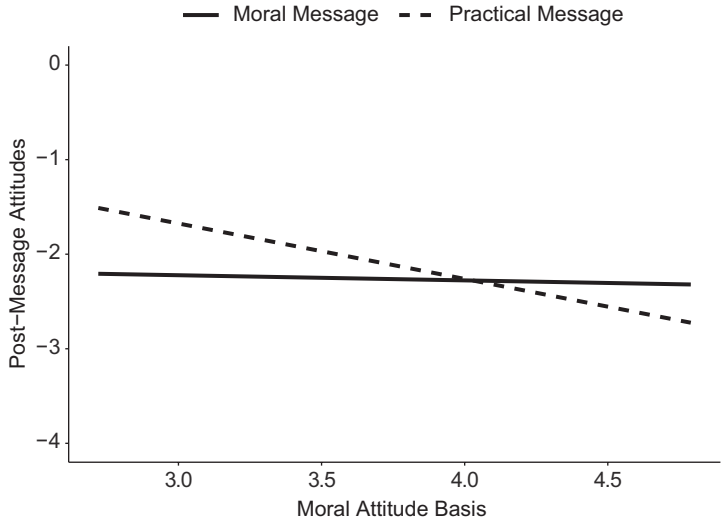

Figure 6.1 The persuasive influence of moral (vs. practical) rhetoric on recycling attitudes depends on how much the recipient moralized their initial attitude on the topic (adapted from Luttrell et al., 2019; Study 1).

more in response to the moral (vs. practical) anti-recycling appeal. The same persuasion patterns emerged when we adapted the design to assess people's responses to moral or practical messages about marijuana legalization. Consistent with the moral matching hypothesis, moralized attitudes could change so long as the message made arguments in the domain of interest—morality.

Other research that documents message type × moralization effects might also be interpreted from this matching perspective. Xu and Petty (2022), for example, showed that people with more moralized attitudes were more open to two-sided messages that addressed both pros and cons about a topic, relative to one-sided messages that only challenge the recipient's pre-existing attitude. People with less moralized attitudes, however, are more open to one-sided (vs. two-sided) messages. Perhaps two-sided messages seem to uphold moral principles of fairness, which resonates particularly with recipients who are prone to appreciate such moral content.

Value-based attitudes are subject to the same analysis. Although value-relevant attitudes tend to be those that people call "important" (Boninger et al., 1995) and that spark more resistance to some persuasive messages (Blankenship et al., 2022; Ostrom & Brock, 1969), they may become relatively susceptible to persuasive arguments in value appeals. Early evidence for this personalization premise comes from Hullett (2002), who examined people's

attitudes toward dating someone with a good personality (as opposed to focusing more on physical attraction in a partner). Because these attitudes had been tied to Rokeach's (1973) value of "loving" (Bazzini & Shaffer, 1995), Hullett measured how much his participants thought their attitudes on the topic were relevant to the value of having a loving relationship. He also developed a message arguing that choosing partners based on their personalities tends to backfire because they do not result in loving relationships, which a panel of pilot participants rated as highly relevant to the value of interest. Overall, Hullett (2002) found that the more people saw their initial attitude as relevant to the value of "loving," the more they rated the value appeal as convincing and the more they changed their attitudes in line with it, becoming less positive toward choosing partners based on their personalities.

In a related vein, when researchers asked people to reflect on either their values or knowledge relevant to inequality by completing questionnaires oriented to either kind of content, the participants who had been induced to consider their need to live up to these values (vs. acquire more information) changed their attitudes toward organ donation more when presented with an appeal tying the issue to inequality values (vs. an appeal presented as informative) (Julka & Marsh, 2005). By making issue-relevant values more accessible, the researchers presumably encouraged participants to perceive their organ donation attitudes as more value-relevant (cf. Luttrell et al., 2016), setting the stage for the personalized matching effect.

An audience's orientation can extend beyond the perceptions of a specific attitude. More broadly, people can perceive a domain of issues as morally relevant. For instance, people can vary in how much they think of "public health" as a moral issue, which would extend to their perspective on a variety of more specific public health topics and moderate the efficacy of moral health appeals. Early in the COVID-19 pandemic, public messaging to convince people to stay in their homes appealed to relatively self-oriented concerns like protecting one's health. Other times, this messaging appealed to more moral concerns like protecting other people's health. Although there was some evidence that moral appeals could be more effective (see also Grant & Hofmann, 2011), it was mixed (e.g., Jordan et al., 2021). According to the moral matching hypothesis, however, moral public health appeals should be particularly effective for people who are already inclined to see public health issues through the lens of morality. Indeed, several studies found that moral appeals to stay home during the early months of the pandemic to protect others were only more persuasive than self-oriented appeals among people who moralized public health more (Luttrell & Petty, 2021).

A similar pattern has been documented for pro-environmental rhetoric. People vary in their core concerns about the environment, some placing more weight on self-interested concerns and others on more moral, altruistic concerns (Schultz et al., 2005). These orientations moderate responses to

pro-environmental messaging about specific eco-friendly behaviors like using public transportation, which can emphasize their personal benefits (e.g., saving money) or moral virtues (e.g., reducing the harms of pollution). People with a more self-interested orientation are more persuaded by non-moral self-enhancement appeals than by moral appeals, and moral appeals are more persuasive to morally motivated audiences than to audiences with a self-interest orientation (Andrews et al., 2017; De Dominicis et al., 2017).

Matching to Chronic Moralizing

An audience's moral orientation could be construed even more generally than an area like politics, public health, or the environment. Although attitude properties like moralization are generally construed as characteristics of individual attitudes, individual people can also differ in their general tendencies to hold attitudes with such characteristics. For instance, although attitude certainty can moderate the strength of individual attitudes (Tormala & Rucker, 2007), DeMarree et al. (2020) find that across topics, some people tend to hold their opinions with more certainty than others.

Perhaps people also differ in their chronic tendency to base attitudes on moral concerns. Reynolds (2008) identified the construct "moral attentiveness," which captures how much individuals chronically adopt a moral perspective to make sense of their experiences and incoming stimuli. Thus, some people may have a general moral orientation, developing attitudes that they perceive as reflecting moral concerns. Across several studies in which each respondent evaluated multiple topics from a bank of dozens, intra-class correlation coefficients from mixed-effect models showed that a significant and substantial amount of the variance in attitude moralization was accounted for by individual differences (Luttrell et al., 2024).

The moral matching hypothesis could suggest that moral appeals about novel topics might especially resonate with audiences who chronically turn to morality when they form attitudes. Two studies presenting people with pro-vegan or pro-reparations messages grounded in moral (e.g., protecting animal welfare; pursuing racial justice) versus instrumental (e.g., improving one's own health; strengthening the economy) arguments were consistent with this hypothesis. Even though these studies never asked people how much they moralized the focal topics, the degree to which people had a chronic tendency to moralize their attitudes and reflect on everyday moral questions, the more persuaded they were by moral (but not instrumental) appeals (Luttrell et al., 2024), see Figure 6.2.

A corollary to people's moral orientation as evaluators is the degree to which their attitudes tend to serve a value-expressive function. *Value-expressive* attitudes help people pursue core values (Katz, 1960; Maio & Olson, 2000), and Snyder and DeBono (1985) suggested that the attitudes of people low

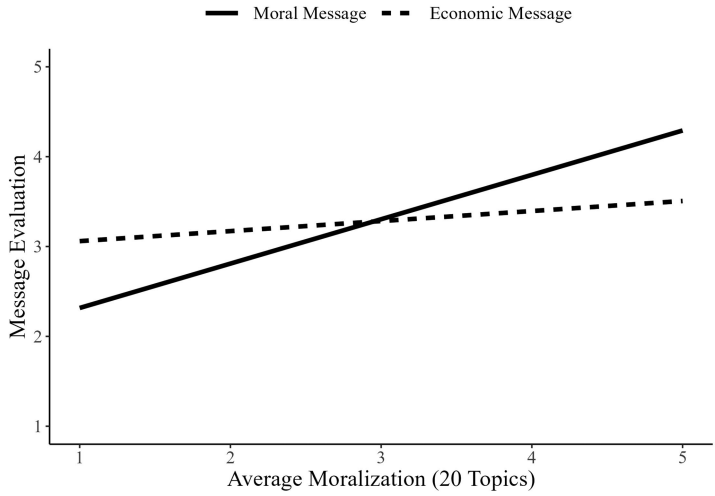

Figure 6.2 People's evaluations of the persuasiveness of moral versus economic arguments for reparations depend on their general tendency to moralize a variety of attitudes (Luttrell et al., 2024).

in dispositional "self-monitoring" would tend to serve value-expressive functions. Indeed, value appeals tend to be more persuasive to low self-monitors than high self-monitors (Bazzini & Shaffer, 1995; DeBono, 1987).

When Messages Match the Audience's Values

Even if an audience is generally amenable to moral rhetoric, there are many ways to construct substantively moral appeals. These messages are unlikely to argue from the perspective of every possible value. Therefore, consistent with the premise of personalized persuasion, the efficacy of a given moral appeal is postulated to depend on how much it emphasizes values that match the recipient's personal value priorities. Therefore, another key set of recipient characteristics in the personalized persuasion dynamic includes the recipient's value priorities.

Tailoring Messages to Specific Values

Political communication researchers have come to appreciate that framing issues in terms of core values does not shape everyone's attitudes similarly. Instead, these messages may only be persuasive when they reach audiences who prioritize those values (see Druckman, this volume). For example, analyses of presidential election campaigns find that some candidates tend to frame issues more in terms of individualist values, and others tend to frame

issues more in terms of egalitarian values (generally mapping onto more conservative and liberal candidates, respectively; Gordon & Miller, 2004). Indeed, everyday citizens prioritizing individualism over egalitarianism favor candidates who adopt individualist frames (Barker, 2005) and vice versa for candidates who adopt egalitarian frames (Gordon & Miller, 2004). Other work experimentally manipulated whether a message framed welfare reform in terms of humanitarian values, emphasizing the need to provide aid to the disadvantaged, or in terms of individualist values, emphasizing welfare's ability to spur economic independence among the poor by providing opportunities to develop self-reliance (Shen & Edwards, 2005). The stronger a person's humanitarian values, the more persuasive the humanitarian message was (but not the individualist message), and the stronger a person's individualism values, the more persuasive the individualist message was (but not the humanitarian message).

Similar patterns emerge within the framework of MFT; arguments appealing to a particular moral foundation are more persuasive for recipients who endorse that foundation more strongly (Feinberg & Willer, 2015; Mastronarde, 2012; cf. Mandel, 2017). Kalla et al. (2022) even developed a canvassing strategy for one-on-one conversations in which Planned Parenthood advocates listened for hints to voters' moral values as they shared their views on abortion. Later, the canvassers would argue for safe, legal abortions using rhetoric consistent with the voters' implied values. Although ordinarily, these kinds of door-to-door conversations can fail to change abortion attitudes (Broockman et al., 2017), when canvassers deliberately personalized their message to the recipients' moral values, these conversations resulted in significantly more pro-abortion attitudes and intentions one week later. Some of the effects were even detectable at a one-month follow-up.

Value Matching by Proxy

Despite the promise of value-matched messages, communicators may not always have direct access to an audience's core values. However, they may still be able to identify the most effective value appeal using other clues. Because various personal traits reliably correlate with values, value matching could operate indirectly via these indicators of a person's beliefs.

For example, *right-wing authoritarianism* is a social ideology capturing people's tendencies to value tradition, security, and obedience to authority (Altemeyer, 1998). In an analysis of how news media framed a Swiss proposal to make immigration procedures more restrictive, Schemer et al. (2012) found that overall, people were relatively convinced by messages arguing against the proposal by framing it as violating human rights and fairness. However, frequent exposure to arguments favoring the policy using an alternative frame

centered on values like social order, tradition, and security resulted in more supportive attitudes among people high in authoritarianism. In other words, value appeals were more persuasive when they matched the audience's values, as implied by their levels of authoritarianism.

Similarly, other work has tested how well messages match people's *system justification* tendencies, which correspond to their preference for the status quo (see Jost, 2020). Although people with stronger system justification tendencies typically reject calls for protecting the environment from climate change, messages that frame pro-environmental behavior as patriotic and supporting ingroup loyalty values are more persuasive to audiences higher in system justification (Feygina et al., 2010).

Perhaps the most substantial body of work in this area considers an audience's political ideology as a conduit to their moral values. The five most studied moral foundations are often categorized into two higher-level moral systems. Care and fairness constitute "individualizing" foundations because they treat individuals as the "fundamental units of moral value." In contrast, loyalty, authority, and purity constitute "binding" foundations because they aim to regulate selfish, immoral behavior by "binding people into larger collectives" (Haidt, 2008, p. 70). Initial studies (Graham et al., 2009) and reams of data following them (see Kivikangas et al., 2021) show that political liberals tend to prioritize individualizing values over binding values, whereas political conservatives tend to hold all five foundations in roughly equal measure.

These consistent correlations between political ideology and moral values mean that different moral appeals should resonate differently for liberal versus conservative audiences, given those audience's likely differences in their moral priorities. Specifically, moral appeals that ground their position in individualizing values should be more compelling to liberals, and moral appeals that ground their position in binding values should be more compelling to conservatives. Indeed, this seems to be the case (for a review, see Feinberg & Willer, 2019). For example, Feinberg and Willer (2015) presented four studies testing this hypothesis across political issues such as military spending and same-sex marriage. They found that liberals became more amenable to typically conservative policies when a message provided arguments tied to individualizing values, and conservatives became more supportive of typically liberal policies when a message provided arguments tied to binding values.

A burgeoning literature continues to test this basic premise as a method for bridging political divides across various domains. Support for value-ideology matching has emerged in pro-environmental rhetoric (Feinberg & Willer, 2013; Hahnel et al., 2020; Hurst & Stern, 2020; Kidwell et al., 2013; Wolsko et al., 2016), health communication (Kaplan et al., 2023; Luttrell & Trentadue, 2024), political campaigns (Voelkel & Feinberg, 2017), and charitable

donations (Kljajić & Feinberg, 2021). Although not explicitly couched in MFT, other work similarly highlights that more liberal versus conservative audiences will be moved more by equality versus hierarchy appeals (C. H. Kim et al., 2018) or individual versus collective moral solutions (Joyal-Desmarais et al., 2022).

Notably, recent work has validated the two-dimensional structure of moral foundations for North Americans but also provides intriguing evidence that this structure is culturally specific (Atari et al., 2023). Data from many countries such as Morocco, Russia, and Argentina are more consistent with a one-factor model, and even though data from Peru supports a two-factor model, purity and fairness values load on one dimension, whereas care, loyalty, and authority load on another. This may have implications for mapping moral values on political orientation across cultures (see also Kivikangas et al., 2021), which means that the "match" between a moral appeal and a political audience may be culturally dependent. Another insight of Atari and colleagues' analyses is that cultures differ in which moral value is most *central*. For instance, "authority" is central in many populations (e.g., Kenya), but loyalty can sometimes be the most central (e.g., Saudi Arabia), and so can fairness or equality (e.g., Belgium). This suggests that different moral appeals likely resonate differently among people from different countries (see Shavitt, this volume).

Along with the string of positive findings in the published record, however, some tests have failed to find that the efficacy of different moral appeals depends on the audience's political orientation (e.g., Arpan et al., 2018; I. Kim et al., 2023; Skurka et al., 2020; Voelkel et al., 2022). Even among positive support, the patterns vary. In reviewing the literature, Feinberg and Willer (2019) observed that most studies found matching effects only for audiences for whom the advocated policy position is not typical (e.g., value framing affected conservatives' climate change attitudes but not liberals'). Newer work has shown the opposite: matching effects were only evident for the political group that already tended to endorse the position (Luttrell & Trentadue, 2024).

Such mixed evidence could signal that the positive evidence is simply spurious. However, given the volume of research on personalized persuasion and moral psychology, the basic premise still seems plausible, so it may be more fruitful to consider methodological and conceptual moderators that enhance or minimize the effects of ideology-matched value appeals. First, message variation could be responsible for the mixed evidence. A fundamental challenge is appropriately operationalizing the construct of interest, and perhaps some messages capture their intended moral values better than others. Most of these studies rely on a single message that targets liberal or conservative recipients, but communication scholars have long advocated for replication designs that measure responses to multiple instances of a particular type of message (Jackson & Jacobs, 1983). Although any single message might indeed highlight relevant moral values, it also implicitly or explicitly conveys other information. Therefore, a strong test of moral value

matching would collect responses across various individualizing messages, for example, to assess their common effects across their many idiosyncrasies.

Second, audience factors could also account for variability in the efficacy of value matching. In the typical case where messages are said to match an audience's values due to the audience's political orientation, this match is one step removed from the match that matters. The correlations between ideology and values seem robust, but they are imperfect. A recent meta-analysis found absolute average correlations between moral foundations and political orientation ranging from .15 (care) to .37 (purity) (Kivikangas et al., 2021). Even in the best case, arguments regarding purity values may only appeal somewhat to conservatives at large, many of whom may not differ from the average liberal in the importance of purity (see also Joyal-Desmarais, 2020).

Even if an audience's political views perfectly matched their values, they may not see politicized issues as morally relevant. Therefore, the *moral matching hypothesis* discussed previously would anticipate that moral appeals—whether rooted in individualizing or binding values—would be persuasive to the extent that the audience is prepared to see the issue through a moral lens at all. One recent study found that consistent with the value-matching literature, liberals and conservatives responded differently to individualizing versus binding appeals; however, this matching pattern was apparent only among people with relatively moralized political views (Luttrell, 2022). This work suggests that moral rhetoric is most impactful when it matches the audience's moral orientation *and* specific moral values.

Open Questions

This review has highlighted the promise of moral rhetoric for changing moralized attitudes, but this may still be somewhat surprising. Moral disagreements are not typically examples of openness and tolerance. Instead, moral disagreements can foster hostility and outrage (Crockett, 2017). Even if messages challenging a person's moral convictions can be effective, this pattern may be tenuous and prone to backfire. Future work in this area should consider what tips the scale between moral rhetoric that unites versus divides.

First, people may bristle at the use of a moral appeal at all, which may include both those who moralize and those who do not. Regarding nonmoralizers, studies on the moral matching hypothesis sometimes find that people who do not already see the issue in a moral light are not more persuaded by moral appeals, but they also are not less persuaded (e.g., Luttrell & Petty, 2021). However, there may be cases when using a moral appeal is counter-productive when communicating to audiences who do not already moralize the issue. Indeed, the more people base their environmental attitudes on self-interest and the less they base them on morality, the more likely they are to respond *negatively* to altruistic appeals (Andrews et al., 2017).

Perhaps in these cases, people see moral arguments as inappropriate and controlling, leading to reactance and polarization (Rosenberg & Siegel, 2018).

Sometimes, moralizers may also react negatively to moral appeals for other reasons. These are people who see morality as the critical concern driving their attitude, which could make a moral appeal personally threatening. Prentice et al. (2019) have suggested that feeling moral is a fundamental human need. So, just as people can register persuasive messages as personally threatening (Correll et al., 2004), moral appeals may be especially threatening by implying that the recipient's moral compass is faulty. As Minson and Monin (2012) argue, according to common perception, "the very fact that do-gooders claim to base their behavior on moral grounds is an implicit indictment of anyone taking a different path" (pg. 200).

Second, even when people are open to moral arguments in principle, framing the message with the wrong value could be worse than avoiding moral arguments altogether. The effects of value matching are often presented as benefits of using the correct value frame for a given audience. However, the research overwhelmingly compares the relative effects of two different moral appeals. Therefore, these findings might signal the benefits of using the correct appeal but could just as well be capturing the boomerang effects of using a mismatched message. Although some preliminary evidence suggested that moral foundation matching worked only via the benefits of matching, mismatching being inconsequential (Kidwell et al., 2013), more recent studies that randomly assigned people to an individualizing appeal, a binding appeal, or a non-moral appeal found some evidence for both—matched messages were more compelling than a non-moral control message, but mismatched messages were *less* effective than ones that avoided either moral frame (Luttrell & Trentadue, 2024; cf. Joyal-Desmarais et al., 2022). Therefore, despite a substantial emerging literature on the persuasive benefits of morally tailored messages, it would be fruitful to consider when and why moral rhetoric fails to outperform other strategies and can even backfire.

Third, future research should consider the distinction between the objective moral basis of recipients' attitudes and their subjective perceptions of moral bases. Moralization has generally been construed as a subjective perception that is typically assessed as it naturally occurs (Skitka et al., 2021). However, research also shows that perceived morality can be manipulated by encouraging people to perceive a moral basis for an attitude, which is ultimately consequential beyond any true moral basis (Luttrell et al., 2016). As noted earlier, such situational prompts can result in personalized matching effects; merely drawing people's attention to values can make value-relevant messages more persuasive (Julka & Marsh, 2005). However, other recent research suggests that the objective moral bases of people's attitudes could be worth understanding in their own right (Philipp-Muller, 2018). This distinction between the objective and subjective moral basis of an attitude mirrors

research on two independent kinds of affective versus cognitive attitude bases. That is, people can perceive that their attitudes are based on emotion or beliefs ("metabases"), and those attitudes may actually have such bases ("structural bases") (See et al., 2008). This distinction has implications for personalized persuasion in that metabases tend to track people's interest in affective versus cognitive content whereas structural bases track their ability to process that content (See et al., 2008, 2013; See & Luttrell, 2021; see also Aquino et al., this volume). A similar distinction may occur for objective versus subjective moral attitude bases.

Finally, although scholars have considered many psychological mechanisms underlying personalized persuasion (see Briñol & Petty, this volume), almost no empirical attention has been given to the processes driving moral matching. Limited evidence has shown that messages appealing to a recipient's specific values can seem clearer (Kidwell et al., 2013), more aligned with their values (Feinberg & Willer, 2015), and more likely to come from the recipient's ingroup (Wolsko et al., 2016) than other messages, which statistically mediate effects on persuasion. Although this evidence does not point to a clear cognitive mechanism, other evidence suggests that value-matching effects can be relatively thoughtful; value-aligned messages lead recipients to produce more supportive thoughts, which are presumably responsible for attitude change effects (DeBono, 1987; Shen & Edwards, 2005). Nevertheless, these findings are a smattering across a variety of studies and types of moral matching, so future research would do well to more carefully consider the conditions under which personalized moral rhetoric evokes different processes that ultimately shape persuasion outcomes.

Conclusion

Messages that invoke morality and core values can be effective in modifying audiences' attitudes and behavior, but their effects depend on how much they match the audience's pre-existing moral orientation and set of personal values. Future research in this area should consider the moderators and mechanisms for these effects and probe their generalizability by considering a more diverse range of moral appeals and message recipients. Given the rapid development of tools to detect moral rhetoric in text (Atari & Dehghani, 2022; Hopp et al., 2021), future research in this area will surely further illuminate the prevalence and impact of moral communication.

Notes

1 It may seem that this review overlooks injunctive norm interventions. Social norms can be *descriptive* when they signal what most people do or think, but they can be *injunctive* when they signal which behavior is most commonly approved by others (Cialdini et al., 1991). Indeed, injunctive norms have been called "the moral rules of the group" (Cialdini et al., 1991, p. 203) or "what one is morally obligated to

do" (Eriksson et al., 2015, p. 59), and messages that appeal to injunctive norms can be persuasive (e.g., Kredentser et al., 2012). However, Turiel (1977) famously distinguished between social conventions and moral principles, and injunctive norms may be either. The social norms work also characterizes injunctive norms as broadly shared across a community instead of idiosyncratic to one person or another, perhaps explaining the dearth of attention to the potential for *personalized* injunctive norm interventions. Therefore, this review focuses on the effects of messages that clearly appeal to morality, although similar conclusions could apply to at least some injunctive norm interventions.

2 In principle, a third approach to moral rhetoric would be to explicitly frame a message in terms of a specific value without offering any relevant arguments (e.g., simply claiming, "This is an issue of loyalty"). Although a conceptually viable form of moral messaging that could resonate more with people who prioritize the value used in the framing, these kinds of messages do not often appear in research, so I simply note this as a notable alternative form of moral appeal for further consideration.

3 Some, however, argue that morality is reducible to a single concern with avoiding harm, for example (Schein & Gray, 2018).

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