

University of Mississippi

eGrove

Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Graduate School

1-1-2019

Moral agency: a philosophical inquiry into its scientific foundations

MaKensey Sanders

Follow this and additional works at: <https://egrove.olemiss.edu/etd>



Part of the [Philosophy Commons](#), and the [Psychology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Sanders, MaKensey, "Moral agency: a philosophical inquiry into its scientific foundations" (2019). *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. 1782.
<https://egrove.olemiss.edu/etd/1782>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at eGrove. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of eGrove. For more information, please contact egrove@olemiss.edu.

MORAL AGENCY: A PHILOSOPHICAL INQUIRY INTO ITS SCIENTIFIC
FOUNDATIONS

A Thesis
presented in partial fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
in the Department of Philosophy
The University of Mississippi

by

MaKensey Sanders

August 2019

Copyright MaKensey Sanders 2019
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

ABSTRACT

There is a longstanding discussion of what the criteria are to distinguish science from non-science. In section one of this paper, I will focus on four demarcating criteria of a scientific theory: (1) value neutrality; (2) verifiability; (3) falsifiability; and (4) reproducibility. Keeping these criteria in mind, I will turn to the notion of moral agency (focusing on psychopathy, autism, and personal identity) and the question of whether the current way we conceptualize and research it can be deemed as scientific according to the four criteria.

In section two, I will discuss the role psychopathy and autism play in understanding moral agency. It is a popular view that the best way to find the underpinning of normally developed moral agency is to look to two groups diagnosed with deficiencies in rational and affective capacities; psychopathic and autistic individuals. Further, by looking at these three arguments, it is clear that most theorists misunderstand Hume's theory in that they see it as strictly sentiment-driven when, in fact, he argued for a mixed account involving both rationality and sentiment.

In section three, I will discuss personal identity and how it is intertwined with moral agency. There are many theories of personal identity that attempt to answer the metaphysical questions about its nature. This section will not focus on this aspect of personal identity, but rather on the idea that personality is externally shaped through judgements of moral behaviors. I will argue that moral motivation is not only correlated

with personal identity, but also guides our intuitions and judgements of it. There are a few theories I will focus on that, when looked at as pieces of a whole, seem to support the notion that personal identity, and our conceptualization of it, is rooted in our perception of morality.

In the fourth and final section of this paper I discuss whether the conception of moral agency as studied through psychopathy, autism, and personal identity is scientific regarding the four criteria specified in section one. After reflecting on each of the criteria, I conclude that moral agency can be considered scientific.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis is dedicated to my phenomenal Philosophy Department. I could not possibly put into words how grateful I am to everyone for their guidance and patience. I would also not have been able to advance my college career without the departmental assistantship.

To my committee members, Drs. Neil Manson, Deborah Mower, and Donovan Wishon, I appreciate your willingness to help me through this process and I thank you for your continued support. In addition, I thank my department chair, Dr. Steven Skultety for always going above and beyond to support everyone in our cohort and push us to succeed.

Lastly, I acknowledge my cohort. Without all of you, not only would I not have a copious amount of potential band names, but I would not have enjoyed my time in this program quite the same without each of you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iv
INTRODUCTION	1
CRITERIA FOR A SCIENTIFIC THEORY.....	2
PSYCHOPATHY, AUTISM, AND MORAL AGENCY	9
PERSONAL IDENTITY AND MORAL AGENCY	22
ARE MORAL AGENCY THEORIES SCIENTIFIC?	34
REFERENCES	39
VITA	41

INTRODUCTION

Criteria to demarcate science from non-science are essential not only to our improving our standard of life, but to the way in which we conduct ourselves on a moment-to-moment basis. Whether we trust something to be a science or scientifically proven guides us in our various decision-making processes, from healthcare and expert testimony,¹ to how we eat, dress, communicate, exercise, and travel.

Demarcation criteria between science and non-science need to be applied to theories of moral agency due to those theories researching not only normally developed individuals, but also individuals diagnosed with physical and psychological disabilities and disorders. It is crucial that the research being performed in the fields of neuroscience, psychology, sociology, etc., meet the requirements of being scientific to ensure not only that the methods are validated, but that the well-being of the participants is the top priority.

¹ “Science and Pseudo-Science,” in Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (September 2008, revised April 2017), <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/pseudo-science/>.

I. CRITERIA FOR BEING A SCIENTIFIC THEORY

The problem of demarcation raises the question of how to distinguish science from non-science. While there is an ongoing debate of how best to demarcate the two, I will focus on four criteria: (1) value neutrality; (2) verifiability; (3) falsifiability; and (4) reproducibility.

I.1 VALUE NEUTRALITY

Amedeo Giorgi² defines value neutrality as: “a way of trying to handle the problem of researcher bias based upon extra-scientific factors. But, if the values that one wants to advocate have a scientific basis, then one can argue for them based on the evidence. This position obviously assumes the priority of the scientific perspective”.³ Giorgi argues that there is a distinction between neutrality and objectivity. He uses Freund’s definition of “value orientation” to demonstrate this distinction. “...value orientation is the subjective factor which enables the scientist to acquire limited objective knowledge (of the world), always provided that he or she is conscious of this limitation.”⁴ He furthers this notion by adding that rationality is required in this process

² Amedeo Giorgi, "Facts, Values and the Psychology of the Human Person" in *Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology* 6, special ed. (August 2006): 1-17, doi:10.1080/20797222.2006.11433931.

³ Ibid., 4.

⁴ Ibid.

and that personal experience (i.e., personal subjectivity) and “vague emotionality” should be excluded.⁵ The importance of value neutrality in a scientific theory is highlighted by the notions of underdetermination and theory-ladenness.

Underdetermination is the idea that “theory is [...] underdetermined by data in that for any body of observational data, [...] more than one theory can be constructed to systemize, predict, and explain that data, so that no one theory’s truth is determined by the data.”⁶ In other words, for any set of data, two or more competing theories can be supported by the evidence. If this is the case, then it seems that instead of arriving at truth, we are observing data in light of the theory we are presupposing (i.e., our observations and interpretations are theory-laden) and not engaging in Thomas Kuhn’s ideal of “theory choice”.⁷

Theory choice is determining which theory is better supported by the evidence using the criteria of: (1) accuracy; (2) consistency; (3) scope; (4) simplicity; and (5) fruitfulness.⁸ If theory choice is not a rational process that we can engage in, then it appears value neutrality is not attainable. However, turning back to Giorgi and his distinction between neutrality and objectivity, Giorgi argues not that the object of science⁹ should be studied in a non-reductionist manner, but rather that they be studied without the personal values (i.e., beliefs) of the scientists influencing the data.¹⁰ While

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Alex Rosenberg, *Philosophy of Science: A Contemporary Introduction*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2006), 201.

⁷ Thomas Kuhn, “Objectivity, Value Judgment, and Theory Choice,” in *Philosophy of Science: Contemporary Readings*, eds. Yuri Balashov and Alex Rosenberg, (London: Routledge, 2007), 421-437.

⁸ Ibid., 421.

⁹ It should be noted that Giorgi is making this argument specifically regarding psychology as an epistemological (i.e., pertaining to the methods, validity and scope of the field), not a normative/ethical, science (pg. 1, 8).

¹⁰ Giorgi, 1.

some hold that, due to theory-ladenness, theory choice is not an objective process, if we accept that there is a clear delineation between neutrality and objectivity, and that a theory need only be value-neutral and not value-objective or value-free, then the criterion of value neutrality is still viable.

I.2 VERIFIABILITY

Rosenberg defines verification as establishing the truth of a claim through observation.¹¹ Following from this, a criterion that demarcates science from non-science is whether the theory is verified by evidence. Logical Positivists, according to Rosenberg,¹² deemed supportability by meaningful data was the demarcation between science and non-science. To make this distinction, Logical Positivists posited that objective, empirical observations must be made.¹³ Rosenberg argues that such a requirement leads to problems. For example, he points out that no propositions, aside from ones describing instantaneous sensations, can be completely verified through testability.¹⁴ Because of this, complete verification was abandoned and, for Logical Positivists, indirect confirmability was taken up. Alternatively, as that still posed issues, the notion of falsification proved more efficient.

¹¹ Rosenberg, 201.

¹² Alex Rosenberg, "Biology and Its Philosophy," in *Philosophy of Science: Contemporary Readings*, eds. Yuri Balashov and Alex Rosenberg, (London: Routledge, 2007), 22-34.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

I.3 FALSIFIABILITY

According to Karl Popper,¹⁵ “what makes a conjecture a scientific one is that it is open to be tested and perhaps refuted.”¹⁶ The methodology of demarcation is, according to Popper, to “propose theories which can be criticized. Think about possible falsifying experiments—crucial experiments. But do not give up your theories too easily—not, at any rate, before you have critically examined your criticism”.¹⁷

Rosenberg states that for a proposition to be labeled as scientific, it must only be logically possible to show that it is false.¹⁸ He defines falsification as “the demonstration that a statement is false by the discovery of a counterexample”,¹⁹ one counterexample being sufficient for falsification. Science with its increasing approximation to the truth, he claims, is dependent on the falsification of not only tested hypotheses, but on scientists’ responses to them.²⁰ However, he emphasizes that “strict” falsifiability of a general hypothesis is impossible as nothing follows from a general law. One of the examples Rosenberg uses to illustrate this point is “all swans are white”. From this hypothesis, it does not follow that (1) there are such things as swans, (2) if there were such things as swans then all of them are white, or (3) we would be able to identify the swans as being white through observation. These claims, Rosenberg states, are referred to as “auxiliary assumptions”.²¹ The problem that general hypotheses (e.g., all

¹⁵ Karl Popper, “The Problem of Demarcation,” in *Philosophy: Basic Readings*, ed. Nigel Warburton, (London: Routledge, 2005), 247-257.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 247.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 253.

¹⁸ Rosenberg (2007), 28.

¹⁹ Rosenberg (2006), 196.

²⁰ Rosenberg (2006), 117.

²¹ *Ibid.*

swans are white) raise is that we cannot determine through falsifying tests if it is the hypothesis itself that is false rather than one of the auxiliary assumptions. Popper expounds upon auxiliary hypotheses and ad hoc hypotheses as immunizing strategies:

Ad hoc hypotheses—that is, at the time untestable auxiliary hypotheses—can save almost any theory from any particular refutation. [However,] it may become testable; and a negative test may force us either to give it up or to introduce a new secondary ad hoc hypothesis, and so on, ad infinitum. This, in fact, is a thing we almost always avoid. (I say ‘almost’ because methodological rules are not hard and fast.) Moreover, the possibility of making things up with ad hoc hypotheses must not be exaggerated: there are many refutations which cannot be evaded in this way, even though some kind of immunizing tactic such as ignoring the refutation is always possible.²²

With this, Popper clarifies that when a theory contains auxiliary hypotheses, we cannot falsify the theory because we are not able to determine whether it is the theory or the assumptions we are making that are avoiding refutations. In other words, we are not able to test and observe the assumptions we are making. Popper contends that the value of the falsifiability criterion is that it highlights the differences between theories that are laden with immunizing strategies, such that everything is compatible with them (i.e., non-scientific theories), and theories that are highly falsifiable, such that “they exclude an infinity of conceivable possibilities”.²³

²² Popper, 255.

²³ Ibid., 255.

I.4 REPRODUCIBILITY

Reproducibility/replicability can be understood as the universality of empirical tests, as stated by Dan Gezelter.²⁴ Gezelter explains that a theory is not scientific by the standards of the reproducibility criterion unless it is reproducible not only in principle, but also in practice.²⁵ Thus, the tests should be replicable by any scientist, under similar conditions, and result in similar findings; the degree of similarity in the findings will be dependent on how successfully the scientist can replicate the independent variables.²⁶ This is vital to demarcating science from non-science in that without validating the measures and accounting for confounding variables, the tests cannot be regarded as reliable, and therefore do not aid us in accurately researching the topic of interest.

According to Sabina Leonelli, there is a reproducibility crisis that has brought attention to the epistemic significance of reproducibility. Numerous studies are failing to reproduce “well-established, published research...”²⁷ One reason for this, as she points out, might be that due to increasing social and environmental pressures, scientists are becoming sloppier in their eagerness to produce publications. Other possible reasons for this “crisis of reproducibility” are: lack of effective quality control within journals,

²⁴ Dan Gezelter, “Being Scientific: Falsifiability, Verifiability, Empirical Tests, and Reproducibility,” *The OpenScience Project*. (December 1, 2009), <http://openscience.org/being-scientific-fasifiability-verifiability-empirical-tests-and-reproducibility/>.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Sabina Leonelli, “Re-Thinking Reproducibility as a Criterion for Research Quality,” in *Research in the History of Economic Thought and Methodology*. (January 2018) http://philsci-archive.pitt.edu/14352/1/Reproducibility_2018_SL.pdf.

which results in unreliable results; increase in the complexity and scale of measurements and lack of clarity of responsibilities in the publication process; cognitive biases and reinforcement of preexisting beliefs, and setting up research plans and validation procedures in accordance with the biases and beliefs; manipulation of data to fit desired outcome; and lack of transparency and effective criticisms around methods and data.²⁸ “Direct reproducibility,” Leonelli asserts, “works best in research environments characterized by a high standardization of methods and materials, a high degree of control over environmental variability, and reliable and relevant methods of statistical inference.²⁹ She states that it is important to acknowledge that across research fields, the circumstances of reproducibility will differ. Thus, it is imperative to engage in discussions of how to improve research methods and acknowledge the strengths and weaknesses of approaches where reproducibility is impossible or irrelevant. In doing so, we can learn different ways of validating results and where each field varies in investigating scientific inquiries.³⁰

Keeping these criteria in mind, I turn now to the notion of moral agency (specifically focusing on the roles psychopathy, autism, and personal identity play in our understanding of moral agency) and the question of whether the current way we are conceptualizing and researching it in these areas can be deemed as scientific according to the four criteria.

²⁸ Ibid., 3.

²⁹ Ibid., 14.

³⁰ Ibid., 16

II. PSYCHOPATHY, AUTISM, AND MORAL AGENCY

The debate over what the driving force of moral agency is typically falls under one of two approaches, that of Kant or that of Hume. Theorists of moral agency (e.g., clinical psychologists and moral philosophers) propose that Kant's view holds rationality to be the core of moral agency, while Hume's view holds sentiment/affect to be the core. Individuals diagnosed with psychopathy and autism have been at the center of the question of how moral agency develops due to their deficiencies in rationality and/or empathy. By looking at these two groups, it is thought to be the case that we will gain insight as to what the core of moral agency is in normally developed individuals. Theorists seem to take one of two sides in their examination of moral agency in psychopaths and individuals with autism; Kant's or Hume's. A Kantian account of moral agency makes rationality the motivating force of moral concern. In contrast, the commonly misinterpreted Humean view makes sentiment and affect the driving forces of moral concern.

In this section, I will first lay out the argument posed by Jeanette Kennett, who supports a Kantian view of moral agency. Next, I will look at Victoria McGeer, who relies heavily on Kennett's theory, but argues for a "broadly Humean" account of moral agency. I claim that McGeer's account of moral agency is a less "broad" account of Hume's theory than she thinks. Then, I will turn to Shaun Nichols, who also argues for

a “Humean view” by showing the lack of sufficient evidence for two rationalist views. I will conclude first by raising concern about the lack of differentiation between the concepts of “amoral” and “immoral” in psychopathy. Then, I will argue that, of the three theorists surveyed, McGeer comes closest to presenting a full picture of moral agency insofar as she appeals to both sentiment and reason through her responses to Kennett. However, even McGeer incorrectly assumes that Hume’s account is only sentiment-driven. This is a misrepresentation of Hume due to his explicit statement that both sentiment and reason are required in moral deliberations and actions.

II.1 KENNETT, “AUTISM, EMPATHY AND MORAL AGENCY”

Kennett claims that while both psychopaths and those with autism lack empathy, it does not seem to be the case that autistic individuals are amoral, unlike psychopaths. What, then, accounts for the amorality of the psychopath (and not the autistic individual)? Kennett states that “an examination of moral thinking in high-functioning autistic people supports a Kantian rather than Humean account of moral agency,” suggesting that moral agency is a matter of rational capacity in psychopaths.³¹ Kennett first looks at how empathy is characterized in the psychological and philosophical literature, and then turns to the question of how crucial empathy is to moral understanding and agency.

Psychopathic behavior is described as “impulsivity and irresponsibility; they [psychopaths] are habitual liars, are indifferent to the rights of others, and display lack of

³¹ Jeanette Kennett, "Autism, Empathy and Moral Agency," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 52, no. 208 (2002): 340-57. doi:10.1111/1467-9213.00272.

remorse for wrongdoing. When they do something wrong, they do not really see what the fuss is about, and may engage in rationalizations and blame-shifting.”³² These behaviors seem to point to a lack of empathy, a deficit in affective capacity. Those diagnosed as psychopaths are unable to understand the emotions and concerns of others, which is central to moral understanding according to many theorists. Kennett points out Hume’s mirroring process, which is the ability to see another person’s emotions and be susceptible to them, mirroring them and forming an idea about them. In essence, it is having the ability to sympathize with others. Kennett also notes that there is empirical evidence for sympathetic tendencies in developmental psychology and neuroscience, and she claims that this evidence offers support for the Humean account of sympathy. Psychopaths, however, lack this ability to simulate emotions – an ability which seems to be a vital part of moral concern. Kennett argues that without this ability, we fail to become moral agents. This seems to be true of psychopaths, but not individuals with autism. Lack of empathy cannot be the only constituent for the psychopath’s “moral failings” due to the capacity of autistic individuals for “clumsy” moral agency despite their lack of empathy.³³

Kennett refers to the psychiatric literature for a better understanding of autistic behavior in order to find the moral underpinnings of it (or lack thereof). Specifically, on page 346, she cites the DSM3 which lists the following impairments in individuals with autism. She believes these impairments to be relevant to Hume’s theory of moral sentiment and moral motivation:

³² Ibid., 341.

³³ Ibid., 345.

- (i) Specific abnormalities of social behaviour, affecting in particular, reciprocal relating and empathy.
- (ii) Communication difficulties affecting non-verbal communicatory conversational skills (pragmatics) and prosody.
- (iii) Lack of creativity and imagination, as evident in, for example, a paucity of pretend-play and an inability to role-play, this lack of creativity being accompanied by a characteristic rigidity and repetitiveness of behavior.

Due to these impairments, individuals with autism are unable to read social cues and have virtually no social perception. This tendency contrasts with psychopaths who are often regarded as having 'mindreading abilities.' They can predict behavior and are rather socially competent, but autistic individuals are the ones that seem to show moral concerns, though these concerns cannot be grounded in empathy based on the description provided. So, what motivates their moral concerns? Kennett's answer is reason. According to testimonies from various high-functioning autistic adults, they develop moral rules and principles through reasoning derived from experience and enquiry. Jim Sinclair provides an account of an interaction with a grief-stricken person. He reasoned that the appropriate action to take was to console the person through touch. "Sinclair has, it seems, a generalized moral concern, what we might call a sense of duty, or a conscience. His moral feelings are of a Kantian, rather than a Humean, cast."³⁴ Kennett finds this to support Kant's idea that moral feeling does not stem from an emotional connection, but from practicality and a sense of duty to do the right thing.

³⁴ Ibid., 352.

Kennett notes that both Kant and Hume agree that the motivation to act morally comes from feeling. However, Kant believes this feeling arises from reason. The difference between autistic individuals and psychopaths is in the psychopaths' disregard for others. While this may seem to be a problem of affective capacity, Kennett argues that the inability to consider others arises from the inability to find reasons to do so. Autistic individuals are capable of recognizing differences in the behavior of themselves and of others, making sense of them, and acting accordingly to the situation. Kennett argues that in this way, the Kantian account offers full moral agency to autistic individuals as conscientious agents. She claims that "reverence for reason is the core moral motive, the motive of duty."³⁵ Psychopaths do not engage with the environment in this way. They do not feel the need or desire to, so they do not develop a deep sense of self. Their undeveloped sense of self, Kennett argues, is the downfall of their ability to be moral agents.³⁶ From this, she concludes that a Kantian account of moral agency is right and that only conscientious individuals guided and motivated by reason are capable of being moral agents.

II.2 McGeer, "Varieties of Moral Agency: Lessons from Autism (and Psychopathy)"

Victoria McGeer³⁷ responds to Kennett's conclusion that "reverence for reason is the core moral motive" and claims that this debate has been too narrowly focused on empathy. She posits that we need not try to reduce morality to one cognitive capacity

³⁵ Ibid., 355.

³⁶ Ibid., 356.

³⁷ Victoria McGeer, "Varieties of Moral Agency: Lessons from Autism (and Psychopathy)," in *Moral Psychology, Volume 3: The Neuroscience of Morality: Emotion, Brain Disorders, and Development*, ed. Walter Sinnott-Armstrong (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008), 227-257.

or affective disposition. McGeer focuses on the question of whether our moral capacities are rooted in sentiment or in rationality. Do our affective states guide us, or does reason channel our affective states? McGeer, like Kennett, looks to the abnormalities in cognitive and affective capacities in those with autism and psychopathy for insight on what constitutes moral agency.³⁸

McGeer claims that “moral nature is shaped by (at least) three different tributaries of affectively laden concern”:

- (i) Concern or compassion for others, growing out of the attachment system and fostered mainly by a capacity for emotional attunement between self and other, although later also supported by perspective-taking skills.
- (ii) Concern with social position and social structure, growing out of the need to operate within a hierarchically organized communal world and fostered by our highly-developed perspective-taking skill.
- (iii) Concern with "cosmic" structure and position, growing out of the need to view ourselves in intertemporal terms.³⁹

The moral motivation of normally developed individuals falls mostly under the first sphere, but they can certainly act out of a combination and reflection of all three types of concern. Psychopathic behavior stems from the second sphere (concern for social position), and autistic behavior from the third sphere (concern for order and structure). These concerns, McGeer argues, produce systems of value that shape our moral being.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

These concerns can also be influenced by affective and cognitive impairments that are seen in individuals with both psychopathy and autism.

A lack of empathy is both an emotional/affective and a cognitive deficit. It is emotional in that it deprives one of the ability to empathize and affectively shift perspective. It is cognitive in that it prohibits one from seeing why other people's concerns should matter. While psychopaths are able to shift perspective, and recognize motives in others' actions, they are not able to understand *why* others' motives and emotions should matter to them. They are not affected by other people's suffering and condemnation.⁴⁰ McGeer asserts that this lack of affective responsiveness is an impairment to their moral capacity and that they cannot distinguish between moral and conventional transgressions. Individuals with autism, however, are deeply motivated to do what they preconceive as the right thing based both on observation of others' behaviors and emotions and on their learning history in responding to others' behaviors and emotions.

Autistic individuals show a deep need for order. McGeer argues that this passion for reason and order is affective in nature, supporting a Humean account of moral agency. From Kennett's argument, it follows that reason is sufficient for moral agency when affective capacity is not developed. McGeer, however, points out that we do not know the extent to which autistic individuals are driven by moral concern. Though they do, in fact, act on a need for order and reason, we do not know whether such behavior is morally driven or if they are able to determine that at all. It appears they have a naïve moral sensibility, but as of now we cannot assert whether they would eventually become

⁴⁰ Ibid., 230.

autonomous moral agents.⁴¹ McGeer agrees with Kennett that many high-functioning autistic individuals do become autonomous moral agents in that they are “able and willing to govern their own behavior and to judge the behavior of others by reference to a deeper, more reflective consideration of the ends such behavior might be thought to serve”.⁴²

However, I am not sure whether we can assert that this is an autonomous moral agency, or if this is just a very complex system of rule-following which seems to be a very taxing process. McGeer highlights the case of Temple Grandin in this issue. Grandin, an autistic individual, used *Star Trek* to develop rules to assist him in navigating the social world. He referred to this process as “strictly logical”.⁴³ The question remains if reverence for reason is the moral motivation for individuals with autism, or if, as McGeer suggests, this is a passion for reason which is based in affect.⁴⁴ McGeer argues that due to this passion, autistic individuals follow rules as a mean of maintaining order in and of itself, allowing them to develop moral agency. Further, McGeer disagrees with Kennett that we must find a common feature in the affective profiles between individuals with autism and normally developed individuals. We should not expect to find such a common feature due to their reasons for affective behavior being different (i.e., the need for order for people with autism).⁴⁵ In this way, individuals with autism act in accordance with the third sphere of concern, the need for structure.

⁴¹ Ibid., 237.

⁴² Ibid., 242.

⁴³ Ibid., 232.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 244.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 247.

Psychopaths, too, act in accordance with one of the three spheres of concern, although the sphere is distorted. They are not concerned with the emotions of others, nor with the “cosmic” structure, but rather with their own standing in society. Kennett speculates that while this concern does not operate in the same way that it does in normal moral agency, it allows them to “mind read” and manipulate others. Therefore, psychopaths are better at “passing for normal” than those with autism. McGeer asserts that, due to this resemblance in affective capacity through the spheres of concern, moral agency is rooted in affect. Though the differences in affective profiles are vast, she holds in a “broadly Humean way” that affect is the essence of morality, though reason is a prerequisite.

II.3 NICHOLS, “HOW PSYCHOPATHS THREATEN MORAL RATIONALISM”

In Shaun Nichols’ paper, “How Psychopaths Threaten Moral Rationalism: Is it Irrational to be Amoral?” he attacks two views, which he refers to as Conceptual Rationalism and Empirical Rationalism.⁴⁶ He argues that while a Kantian approach to moral agency is appealing, due to threats posed by psychopaths, it is implausible as an account of what constitutes moral agency.

The Conceptual Rationalist claim, as stated by Nichols, is that morality is conceptualized as though moral requirements are requirements of reason.⁴⁷ The problem psychopaths pose to this claim, Nichols asserts, is that they can judge an

⁴⁶ Shaun Nichols, “How Psychopaths Threaten Moral Rationalism: Is it Irrational to be Amoral?” in *Moral Psychology: Historical and Contemporary Readings*, ed. Nadelhoffer et al. (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 73-83.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 73.

action as something that is morally required, but they do not feel motivated to take that action. Nichols links this to Hume’s “sensible knave” and Brink’s argument that one may be capable of moral judgments while being a rational amoralist.⁴⁸ I will expound upon my problem with this statement in the section summary. The idea, however, is that psychopaths do not fit our concept of morality because they do not make moral judgements, they merely make ‘moral’ judgements – the difference being that their motivation is not to act morally.⁴⁹ What Nichols suggests is that these claims posed by Conceptual Rationalists are not claims about psychopaths, but rather are claims about our concept of morality in relation to psychopaths.⁵⁰

The Empirical Rationalist claim is that moral judgements stem from our rational capacities, not our affective capacities nor our concept of morality.⁵¹ What Nichols argues here is that psychopaths do not pose a problem for the claim that rational capacities are the basis for morality, but that the psychopath’s deficiency in moral judgement can be explained by a deficiency in affective response.⁵² To further the objection against the Empirical Rationalist, the claim that the moral deficit lies in the inability to shift perspective does not stand. This is due to evidence suggesting that psychopaths are able not only to understand the motives of others, but to use their understanding to manipulate others (e.g., what the previous sources refer to as “mind reading”). Also, individuals with autism have been shown to lack this ability, yet we do not attribute to them a lack of moral judgement.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 75.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 76.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid, 79.

The solution to understanding the differences between psychopaths, autistic individuals, and normally developed individuals, Nichols asserts, lies in finding a deficit present in psychopaths and not autistic individuals.⁵³ Due to the non-rationalist explanation of the lack of responsiveness in psychopaths to the harm done to others, the evidence points towards a Humean account. Thus, Nichols concludes that the moral deficiency in psychopaths is to be found in affective capacities.⁵⁴

II.4 SECTION SUMMARY

One problem with these arguments provided by Kennett, McGeer, and Nichols that none explicitly address is that of the reason that psychopaths are deemed amoral rather than immoral. The term “rational amoralist” is used by Nichols, but he does not differentiate between amorality and immorality. Amorality is conceptualized as the inability to differentiate between right and wrong, whereas immorality is conceptualized as knowing what is right versus wrong, but not being motivated to act accordingly. Psychopaths, as described in each of the sources, seem to fit the idea of being immoral rather than amoral in this way. They can understand the motivations and emotions of others, but they do not care to engage with others in a way that is motivated by their well-being. The views posed by these authors fail to address this matter, thus leaving an opportunity for an otherwise unnecessary criticism.

⁵³ Ibid., 78.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 82.

Another shortcoming of Kennett, McGeer, and Nichols is that they attempt to offer a reductive argument for moral agency. This is surprising of McGeer in that she explicitly states that we need not reduce morality to one cognitive capacity or affective disposition, as we do when we so narrowly focus on empathy as the source component. Yet, she still settles on a deficiency in affect as the contributing source of amorality. She does so by arguing that rationality is rooted in affective capacity (i.e., the *passion* for reason and order in autistic individuals). Psychopaths, she asserts, are lacking in affective responsiveness in that they are not able to empathize with others, accounting for why we label them as amoral but not those diagnosed with autism. While McGeer claims that her view is a “broadly Humean” account of moral agency, I believe that due to her careful considerations and modifications of Kennett’s assertions, she is unknowingly advocating for a less “broad” and more precise depiction of the Humean account (although she still fails to recognize this). Kennett finds rationality to be the essence of moral agency, as we see through her claim that, while empathy is an affective capacity, the lack of empathy lies in the inability to *rationalize why* it is important to empathize with others. Nichols also points to the psychopath’s lack of affective responsiveness as evidence against a Kantian/rationalist view of moral agency. He argues that while there are both rational and affective deficits in psychopaths and autistic individuals, the affective deficits offer non-rationalist explanations for amorality. Why not acknowledge that both rationality and sentiment are constituents of moral agency, rather than attempt to reduce one to the other?

With these views and question in mind, I argue that the mentioned theorists work with a misrepresentation of the Humean account by failing to understand it as a mixed

theory of moral agency. Hume's view is not strictly grounded in sentiment as they seem to suggest. In fact, he argues that a purely rational or purely sentiment-based hypothesis alone cannot account for what constitutes moral agency. Hume states that, "reason and sentiment concur in almost all moral determinations and conclusion [...] There are just grounds to conclude [...] that moral beauty partakes much of this latter species, and demands the assistance of our intelligent faculties".⁵⁵ These debates offer evidence in support of Hume's theory that both features are required of moral agency. The differences in individuals that are autistic, psychopathic, and normally developed show that a one-sided view cannot account for the entirety of moral agency across all human beings due to the array of motivations in the behavior of affective and rational profiles.

⁵⁵ David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*. Edited, and with an Introduction, by J. B. Schneewind (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1983); 15.

III. PERSONAL IDENTITY AND MORAL AGENCY

Personal identity is largely thought to be a construct. However, this does not mean that no aspects of personal identity have been empirically validated, but only that further validation is needed. While some components of personal identity can be shown to have generating mechanisms in the brain, personal identity seems to also be an externally validated social construct. That is, it not only relies on one's self-conception, but on the assessments and perspectives of others. I argue that the construction of personal identity is a socially interactive process in which others act as a reflection of an individual's perceived moral motivation. By using others' perceived image of ourselves, we can adjust and move towards an intended self. This section will focus on a few theories that support a larger picture of personal identity: a neurobiological account, which suggests that social engagement helps to shape and construct personal identity, and a direction of change/multiple identity view that also supports the requirement of external validation for personal identity.

I will first define the terms "self", "personhood", "personality", and "personal identity" to distinguish them as distinct, but dependent on one another. Then, I will present empirical evidence suggesting the interdependency of the brain and personal identity. Then, I will rely on a study of expatriates' experience in ethically challenging situations to support my assertion that social engagement helps to shape and construct

personal identity and personality. Next, I will argue that, within personal identity, there are multiple identities that we attribute to an individual, and that we rely on the direction of change a personality takes to guide our intuitions and judgements. This supports the idea that personal identity is externally validated. Lastly, I will argue that these considerations point towards an understanding of personal identity as correlated to and rooted in moral agency and motivation.

III.1 DEFINING THE TERMS

Rabins and Blass⁵⁶ define these key terms as follows:

Personhood refers to the notion that an individual's (person's) life has a value because it is a living being.

Self refers to the experience of the individual.

Personal identity includes not only one's self-conception, but also the views/observations of others.

Traits are specific descriptive characteristics that can be observed in all human beings. They are universal and individuals differ in the amount of any given trait.

Personality is the constellation of these traits that is unique for each individual. It is relatively stable throughout one's life and can

⁵⁶ Peter V. Rabins & David M. Blass, "Toward a Neurobiology of Personal Identity," in *Personal Identity and Fractured Selves: Perspectives from Philosophy, Ethics, and Neuroscience*, eds. Debra J. H. Mathews, Hilary Bok & Peter V. Rabins (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 39-49.

predict patterns of future behavior. Personality is both heritable and environmentally shaped. It “identifies an aspect of personal identity that is observed in others and can be permanently altered by injuries or degenerative diseases of the frontal lobes of the brain”.⁵⁷

Similarly, Guimaraes-Costa and Pina e Cunha define *identity* as a process enacted in social context, so that the individual is not solely responsible for identity construction. Others reflect an image of the individual to which the individual responds by acting in such a way as to align their intended identity and reflected image, thus resulting in a relatively stable identity.⁵⁸ In this way, identity is thought to be grounded in [moral] motivation, which I will further expound upon in subsection four.

III.2 The Neurobiological Account

The neurobiological view of personal identity offers empirical evidence suggesting that personal identity is directly linked to regions and functions of the brain. The evidence comes from cases that show damage to a specific region or function and the effects of said damage. Certain aspects of personal identity such as narration, rational agency, intentionality, personality, and self-perception have been shown to be localized as types of generating mechanisms in regions/functions of the brain. However, its proponents acknowledge that the neurobiological view is not satisfactory

⁵⁷ Ibid., 43.

⁵⁸ Nuno Guimarães-Costa, Miguel Pina e Cunha, & Arménio Rego, "Building Yourself: A Sensemaking Approach to Expatriates' Adjustment to Ethical Challenges," in *Journal of Global Mobility: The Home of Expatriate Management Research*, Vol. 2, Issue 1, (2014): 53-84. doi.org/10.1108/JGM-04-2013-0020.

for all of the components of our concept of personal identity, such as the idea that there are different kinds of identity (logical, numerical, practical, moral, legal, etc.). They also acknowledge that it does not offer a complete construct of all aspects of personal identity, e.g., the phenomenological aspects.

Evidence suggests that aspects of personal identity can be localized, but that personal identity requires the “interaction among a distributed set of brain locations and systems”.⁵⁹ Cases of brain injuries and disorders show that understanding the proper functioning of certain regions of the brain is necessary for explaining aspects of personal identity such as: (1) self-perception; (2) sensory data processing; (3) changes in personality due to injury, disorders, and the environment; (4) memory; and (5) narration. These features also align with the notion that personal identity requires external validation.

The left hemisphere has been found to be linked to the narrative element of personal identity through activation during self-recognition. It constructs a narrative by connecting facts, past events, and experiences together to create a “unique, comprehensive, and comprehensible narrative”,⁶⁰ and it is organized to make sense of sensory input. The ability to accurately connect memories into a meaningful and unique construct is thought to be necessary for personal identity according to multiple theories. This supports the idea that personal identity is not only internally validated, but also externally validated in that the memories must be accurately connected. If our

⁵⁹ Rabins & Blass, 41.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 45.

memories are not true to our reality, then a region or function of our brain is not working properly.

Rational agency has also been argued to be necessary for personal identity and has been found to be linked to the medial frontal lobe. It is also thought to be an externally validated component of personal identity. The proper functioning of the medial frontal lobe is necessary for the persistence of a unique personality. Personality is thought to be a required element of personal identity and damage to the frontal lobes has been shown to lead to drastic change in personality. Damage to the frontal lobes leads to the loss of inhibition and/or a more apathetic state.⁶¹ Due to evidence from cases of injury or degenerative diseases to this region of the brain, Rabins and Blass conclude that undamaged frontal lobes are a “necessary contributor to externally observed personal identity”.⁶²

Rabins and Blass assert that intentionality is required for personal identity. Intentionality is also generated by the frontal lobes. Intentionality refers to the idea that personal identity comes from within. It is sometimes referred to as self-reflection or the idea that one’s sensory experience is unique to one’s body. It enables one to act voluntarily with the environment.⁶³

While the neurobiological view might not be a complete picture of personal identity, accepting it as part of a larger picture enables us to further analyze the implications cases of brain injury and degenerative disorders have regarding the role the brain plays in non-abnormal cases. To have a better understanding of personal

⁶¹ Ibid., 42.

⁶² Ibid., 43.

⁶³ Ibid., 49.

identity and our intuitions of it, we need to account not only for the brain's role, but also for the different types of identity we attribute to an individual such as logical, numerical, practical, moral, legal, and so on (especially after they have undergone damage to the brain), the interactive process between the individual and the [social] environment, and moral motivation's role.

III.3 THE CORRELATION BETWEEN SELF-CONCEPTION AND OTHERS' PERCEPTION

Guimaraes-Costa and Pina e Cunha, in their article "A Sensemaking Approach to Expatriates' Adjustment to Ethical Challenges," assert that expatriates undergo a sensemaking process when they are faced with ethical challenges posed by the culture to which they are trying to adjust.⁶⁴ From this research, they also posit that attitudes and personalities are justified by ascription of meaning and legitimized by intended future identity.

On their account, personal identity – similarly to the neurobiological view – is dependent upon others' perception and attribution of personality, as well as on the individuals' self-conception, alignment of their image, and intended future identity. It is a "process that is being continuously enacted in a social context."⁶⁵ Intended identity, according to Guimarães-Costa et al., relies on context and identity construction, each of which consist of assumptions; their research shows evidence of the existence of these assumptions. Context is determined by the following: (1) previous expectations, which

⁶⁴ Guimarães-Costa et al.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 107.

shape current actions, (2) intentions, which are reflected in actions, (3) actions, which are based on perceptions, and (4) social position and power, which influence the intentions of actions.⁶⁶ Identity construction is determined by the following: (1) personal history that is a source of identity formation, (2) personal history that shapes intentions of action, (3) self-image which concurs to define action, (4) the future self, which concurs to define intentions of action, and (5) other individuals, who project an image that is reflected back.⁶⁷ As described, personal identity is constructed through social interaction and intentionality.

The expatriates' adjustment to their new culture is a sensemaking process that happens "when the current state of the world is perceived to be different from the expected state of the world, or when there is no obvious way to engage the world".⁶⁸ The expatriates use past events and compare them with the present situation to give it meaning and decide their course of action. This process has similarities to the narrative view of personal identity and is rooted in social interaction. The neurobiological theory also describes this process and finds that the narrative center of the brain is in the left hemisphere.⁶⁹

Identity construction through social interaction is the basis of this sensemaking process. When facing an ethical challenge in a foreign social context the expatriates try to understand it and ascribe meaning to it through retrospection. "The meaning ascribed to the situation (plausible story), which originates a response (action), depends

⁶⁶ Ibid., 148.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 106.

⁶⁹ Rabins and Blass, 45.

on their past experiences (identity), of the current unfolding events (on-going) and the way they interact with them (enactment), as well as on their future intentions (identity enhancement) as expatriates and individuals”.⁷⁰ This process shows that when constructing personal identity, we rely not only on our self-conception, but on the perceived image others have of us, and we try to plan our course of action in order to take on that image or to alter it. The neurobiological view also supports this process with its findings of narration in the left hemisphere, rational agency in the frontal lobe, and intentionality in the frontal lobe. Both the intended future-self view and the neurobiological view assert that there is a “persisting, externally measurable contributor to personal identity”⁷¹ and that the validation of personality [and moral motivation] is thus necessary to its shape and construction. To further the idea of external validation which relies on personality and moral motivation, let us turn to the notion of attribution of multiple identities, which is distinct from dissociative identity disorder.

III.4 THE NOTION OF NUMEROUS IDENTITIES

In “Personal Identity and the Phineas Gage Effect,” Kevin Tobia argues that it is possible, and (empirical evidence shows) intuitive, that it is not simply the magnitude of dissimilarity between a person at Time-1 and Time-2 that affects judgements of personal identity, but also whether the person’s personality has “improved” or “deteriorated”.⁷²

⁷⁰ Costa et al., 107.

⁷¹ Rabins & Blass, 49.

⁷² Kevin P. Tobia, “Personal Identity and the Phineas Gage Effect,” in *Analysis*, Volume 75, Issue 3 (1 July 2015): 396–405. doi.org/10.1093/analys/anv041.

Tobia conducted several experiments to test the hypothesis that the magnitude of dissimilarity is not the main deciding factor in the identity relation. He found that “deteriorations” are considered to be “identity-severing” whereas “improvements” generally are not. In other words, when someone’s personality and moral agency deteriorates, the person is considered to be “not the same person” anymore, whereas when they seem to have an improved personality, moral character, set of behaviors, etc., they are still considered to be “the same person” – just an improved version of themselves. Thus, it is not the magnitude of dissimilarity that we use to make judgements about someone’s personal identity, but rather the direction of change in his/her personal identity after having undergone damage to their brain.⁷³ Direction of change affects our intuitions because we use it to determine the personal identity relation between Time-1 and Time-2.

It might also be the case, he asserts, that the person is numerically non-identical, but identical in other ways, if we accept that there are various types of identity such as numerical, practical, narrative, legal, and moral. Under this assumption, some identities could be affected by the direction of change while other identities are not. For example, in the case of Phineas Gage, who underwent massive damage to his frontal lobe and whose friends and family said he “was not the same person,” the deteriorated Phineas could be numerically non-identical to the pre-accident Phineas, while they are legally identical (for tax and property purposes).⁷⁴ Further, in a thought experiment of a Russian nobleman asking his wife to follow certain moral responsibilities and honor his

⁷³ Ibid., 10.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 12.

current wishes, not his future ones, it seems that moral and legal properties are voided. So, if we hold that certain legal and moral properties do not depend on the direction of change but that numerical identity does, it seems that numerical identity is separate from legal identity and moral identity. Thus, personal identity consists of multiple identities that rely on external judgement and validation.

If direction of change is relevant to personal identity as Tobia suggests, then other normative ideas of identity will have consequences for moral and legal responsibilities. The suggestion and intuition that normative notions are correlated to personal identity further supports the requirement of external validation and influence on the construction of personal identity – an identity that is rooted in moral behaviors and personality.

III.5 TYING IT ALL TOGETHER: PERSONAL IDENTITY AND MORAL BEHAVIOR

Our intuitions of personal identity stem from whether the person in question is behaving in accordance with others' perception of the individual's personality and previous behaviors. In most cases, this perception focuses on the individual's moral/ethical behaviors. Tobia suggests that it is not only the magnitude of dissimilarity between a person at Time-1 and at Time-2, but also the direction of change their personality went (i.e., whether the individual's personality seemed to improve or worsen).

An example Tobia uses is an episode of Star Trek when Captain Kirk gets split between his "positive side" and his "negative/evil" side. The crew referred to his "good"

side as “Captain Kirk” and his “evil” side as “the imposter”.⁷⁵ Tobia reviewed multiple scenarios in which the participants judged whether the character before and after brain injury, surgery, or old age was the “same person”. His findings support the notion that if a person behaves in a morally better manner than they previously did, others still consider him to “be the same person”. On the other hand, if he seems to be more callous, apathetic, or morally deficient, then others no longer consider the person in question to “be himself”. In cases such as this, an individual might be considered legally identical (Tobia uses tax obligations in this sense) at Time-2 but non-identical in other ways such as numerically or morally. In the case of Phineas Gage, we might also assert that he is numerically identical, but practically non-identical, at Time-2 to Gage at Time-1.

This research suggests that we rely on several types of identities to form a conceptualization of personal identity and to guide our decisions about people who have undergone drastic change to their brain functioning and to the moral aspects of their personalities. Further, and as a prerequisite, this implies that moral agency and personal identity are closely related due to personal identity consisting not only of an individual’s self-conception, but the image others form of that individual. Thus, a close review of the literature on personal identity points towards the view that it has generating mechanisms in the brain that interact between the individual and the environment. These mechanisms form judgements of personality and moral motivation that reflect back to the individual, guiding his/her actions toward an intended identity.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 8.

As such, personal identity is a social construct in which others form judgements based on past and present moral behaviors and assessments of moral agency.

A possible objection to a view such as this can be found in Eric Schwitzgebel's article "Self-Ignorance."⁷⁶ He asserts that, "Of general features of our stream of conscious experience, of our morally most important attitudes, of our real values and our moral character, of our intelligence, of what really makes us happy and unhappy, about such matters I doubt we have much knowledge at all."⁷⁷ The problem this view could pose is that if we are less knowledgeable than we think of our conscious experience, morals, values, etc., then how can we act with intentionality and form an intended future self in light of which we plan our course of action? A possible response could be that even if we are less knowledgeable than some philosophers give us credit for, we have enough knowledge to form our self-conceptions and act with or against others' perceptions of our moral behaviors towards an intended personal identity. Another possible response could be one on the side of behavior analysis. Whether we act with intention, our [social] environment reinforces and punishes our behaviors to shape our personal identity. This would support the idea that personal identity is externally shaped and validated, but a case would still need to be made for intentionality as a necessary component of personal identity.

⁷⁶ Eric Schwitzgebel, "Self-Ignorance," in *Consciousness and the Self*, eds. JeeLoo Liu & John Perry (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 1-23.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 17.

IV. ARE MORAL AGENCY THEORIES SCIENTIFIC?

After discussing four demarcating criteria of a scientific theory and ways in which moral agency is currently being conceptualized and researched, as pertaining to psychopathy, autism, and personal identity, we can now turn to the question of whether theories of moral agency are scientific.

IV.1 CAN THEORIES OF MORAL AGENCY BE LABELED AS VALUE-NEUTRAL?

As moral agency is researched predominantly within the field of psychology, I find this excerpt from Giorgi to be notable in the discussion of moral agency as value-neutral.

The position is upheld that psychology as a human science intentionally should not be absolutely value free in the sense that human reality has to be studied in a non-reductionistic manner and thus methods of study must be respectful of the full ethical sense of humanness. This is simply meeting the phenomenological requirement of “fidelity to the phenomenon”. However, psychology can be value free in the historical sense of the term properly understood because it refers to the fact that the personal values of the scientists ought not to be conflated with scientific findings.

Giorgi's assertion that the science of human psychology reflects our notions of value and our ethical deliberations aligns with the idea that a motivator to study psychology is to better understand our differences in thought, behavior, and values, and also concerning our constant aim for the validity and reliability of empirical data. However, it seems as though he is using value free and value neutral synonymously. I do not think that anyone would argue that science need be value-free, at least in the sense that the research inquiries scientists make are often ones they are passionate to investigate. Surely, no one is arguing that scientists must be free of values, ethics, and beliefs. He refers to the fact that in the pursuit of truth through empirical observation, scientists should remain unbiased in their findings (and reports therein) and exclude any personal values or beliefs. In other words, they should not presuppose personal beliefs or manipulate the data to make misconstrued and false claims.

As theories of moral agency rely on ethical considerations, I argue that while they may not be value-free or value-objective, it is possible for them to be value-neutral. To claim this would not be adopting a universalist perspective of ethics. Rather, it is claiming that the study and research of moral agency can be conducted in such a way that it is oriented to identify values in the studied individuals, and not make unfounded claims reflect the data.

IV.2 ARE THEORIES OF MORAL AGENCY VERIFIABLE?

I think one issue concerning verifiability is that the terms "verified" and "validated" are used synonymously. Further, "validated" can be misleading if you do not know what

it refers to, which is the degree that a test, method, assessment, etc., measures what it is intended to. It does not guarantee accuracy or mean that the test is the only way or best way to measure whatever it is measuring. Rosenberg's definition of verification as the Logical Positivists define it is establishing the truth of a claim through observation.⁷⁸ This is problematic because even a large number of observations cannot establish the truth of a claim because there are infinite variables and possibilities that we cannot observe. Thus, I can use theories to predict outcomes with high degrees of certainty through empirical observation, but I cannot verify it as true given every circumstance, or even given one, through empirical observation. Therefore, verification is not a strong criterion for demarcation between science and non-science. Theories of moral agency, then, need not meet the criterion of verifiability in order to count as a scientific.

IV.3 ARE THEORIES OF MORAL AGENCY “SCIENTIFIC” AS DEMARCATED BY FALSIFIABILITY?

Conjectures are scientific if they are open to be tested and perhaps refuted, according to Popper.⁷⁹ They must be capable of conflicting with possible, or conceivable, observations. Thus, a theory should not have explanatory power in which all observations are irrefutably compatible. I do hold the research into moral agency through studies of its development in individuals diagnosed as psychopathic or autistic to be falsifiable, as well as the research regarding individuals who have suffered trauma resulting in changes to personal identity. The most prominent theories look to

⁷⁸ Rosenberg, 201.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 247.

deficiencies in either rational and affective capacities or to trauma to specific areas of the brain to determine what the motivating factor of moral agency is in individuals without diagnosed disorders. However, with further advancement of brain scanning technology, we could find that deficiencies in other capacities or activity/lack thereof in different areas of the brain are correlated with moral agency.

IV.4 CAN THEORIES OF MORAL AGENCY BE REPRODUCED/REPLICATED?

Not just in theory, but also in practice? Yes. There are numerous validated assessments that measure rational and affective capacities, aspects of identity, judgements of morality, helping behaviors, empathetic and sympathetic capacities, functions and regions of the brain associated with personal identity and moral agency, etc. This is not to say that all theories of moral agency meet the criterion of reproducibility. The vast majority of personality tests, for example, are not empirically validated and do not reproduce similar results, even across multiple baselines of single case studies. Further, it is not until after analyzing the data that researchers are aware of confounding variables. Additionally, it might be the case that it is the assessments of certain psychological capacities that are reproducible and not the theory as a whole. This could play into Leonelli's notion that conditions of reproducibility differ across fields of research.

IV.5 CONCLUSION

Criteria to demarcate science from non-science guide us in our everyday lives by aiding us in decision-making processes about whether we trust various claims to be scientifically accurate. As previously mentioned, demarcation criteria between science and non-science should be used in theories of moral agency due to those theories' research involving individuals diagnosed with physical and psychological disabilities and disorders. Not to say that only theories involving the testing and assessment of humans, or even more generally living creatures, are the only theories deemed worthy of holding the title "scientific", but rather that this research meeting the requirements of what it is to be a scientific theory is the best way to ensure not only that the methods are validated, but that the well-being of the participants is the top priority.

The ability to demarcate moral agency theories as scientific or not is essential so that those seeking psychological assistance and those providing it are knowledgeable of which methods and assessments have higher degrees of validity and reliability. Through the philosophical and psychological study of science and moral agency, it is clear that to have a comprehensive understanding of any particular theory, it is necessary to acknowledge that different fields not only inform one another, but are correlated.

LIST OF REFERENCES

REFERENCES

Section I

- Gezelter, Dan. "Being Scientific: Falsifiability, Verifiability, Empirical Tests, and Reproducibility," *The OpenScience Project*. December 1, 2009.
<http://openscience.org/being-scientific-fasifiability-verifiability-empirical-tests-and-reproducibility/>.
- Giorgi, Amedeo. "Facts, Values and the Psychology of the Human Person." In *Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology* 6, special ed. (August 2006): 1-17.
doi:10.1080/20797222.2006.11433931.
- Kuhn, Thomas. "Objectivity, Value Judgment, and Theory Choice." In *Philosophy of Science: Contemporary Readings*, eds. Yuri Balashov and Alex Rosenberg, 421-37. London: Routledge, 2007.
- Leonelli, Sabina. "Re-Thinking Reproducibility as a Criterion for Research Quality." In *Research in the History of Economic Thought and Methodology*, (January 2018):
http://philsci-archive.pitt.edu/14352/1/Reproducibility_2018_SL.pdf.
- Popper, Karl. "The Problem of Demarcation." In *Philosophy: Basic Readings*, ed. Nigel Warburton, 247-257. London: Routledge, 2005.
- Rosenberg, Alex. "Biology and its Philosophy." In *Philosophy of Science: Contemporary Readings*, eds. Yuri Balashov and Alex Rosenberg, 22-34. London: Routledge, 2007.
- Rosenberg, Alex. *Philosophy of Science: A Contemporary Introduction*, 2nd ed., 1-201. New York, NY: Routledge, 2006.
- "Science and Pseudo-Science," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (),
<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/pseudo-science/>.

Section II

Hume, David. *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*. Edited, and with an Introduction, by J. B. Schneewind. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1983.

Kennett, Jeanette. "Autism, Empathy and Moral Agency." *The Philosophical Quarterly* 52, no. 208 (2002): 340-57. doi:10.1111/1467-9213.00272.

McGeer, Victoria. "Varieties of Moral Agency: Lessons from Autism (and Psychopathy)." In *Moral Psychology, Volume 3: The Neuroscience of Morality: Emotion, Brain Disorders, and Development*, edited by Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, 227-257. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008.

Nichols, Shaun. "How Psychopaths Threaten Moral Rationalism: Is it Irrational to be Amoral?" In *Moral Psychology: Historical and Contemporary Readings*, edited by Nadelhoffer et al., 73-83. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.

Section III

Guimarães-Costa, Nuno, Pina e Cunha, Miguel, & Rego, Arménio. "Building Yourself: A Sensemaking Approach to Expatriates' Adjustment to Ethical Challenges." In *Journal of Global Mobility: The Home of Expatriate Management Research*, Vol. 2, Issue 1, (2014): 53-84. doi.org/10.1108/JGM-04-2013-0020.

Rabins, Peter V. & Blass, David M. "Toward a Neurobiology of Personal Identity." In *Personal Identity and Fractured Selves: Perspectives from Philosophy, Ethics, and Neuroscience*, eds. Debra J. H. Mathews, Hilary Bok, & Peter V. Rabins, 39-49. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009.

Schwitzgebel, Eric. "Self-Ignorance." In *Consciousness and the Self*, edited by JeeLoo Liu & John Perry, 1-23. Cambridge University Press, 2012.

Tobia, Kevin P. "Personal Identity and the Phineas Gage Effect." In *Analysis*, Volume 75, Issue 3 (1 July 2015): 396–405. doi.org/10.1093/analys/anv041.

VITA

EDUCATION

Hinds Community College, Raymond, MS August 2013 – May 2015
Associate Degree
Major: Psychology

- GPA: 3.78

University of Mississippi, Oxford, MS August 2015 - May 2017
Bachelor of Arts – Psychology
2nd Major - Philosophy

- GPA: 3.72

University of Mississippi, Oxford, MS August 2017 - August 2019
Master of Arts – Philosophy

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Teaching Assistant August 2016 – December
2017
Course: Learning and Behavior (PSY 309)
University of Mississippi
Oxford, MS
Instructor: Kate Kellum, PhD.
Instructor: Emmie Hebert
Internship

- Assist students with class material
- Grade tests and homework
- Input grades
- Assist in management of Black Board
- Maintain personal and professional accountability

Teaching Assistant/Research Assistant

August 2017 – May 2018

Course: Honors Intro. to Philosophy,
University of Mississippi
Oxford, MS

Instructor: Timothy Yenter, PhD.

Graduate Assistantship

- Assist instructor with preparing class material
- Assist professor with research for current projects
-

Executive Director of Professional Development

May 2018 – May 2019

Graduate Student Council

University of Mississippi

Oxford, MS

- Develop the university's first graduate student journal
- Organize the university's annual Research Day for graduate students

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

CITI Training Certified

**Cognition Underlying Behavior Lab
Developmental Psychology Research**

January 2016 – May 2017

University of Mississippi

Oxford, MS

Supervisor: Stephanie Miller, PhD.

Researcher

Study: Divergent Thinking

January 2016 – May 2016

Abstract: The object of this study is seeking to understanding the fourth-grade slump in creativity through language, executive function and mindset

- Assist in research design, data input and analysis, and other research duties
- Collect information and data for research projects
- Recruit parents and children for projects

Study: Little Philosophers (Honors Thesis)

August 2016 – May 2017

Abstract: The purpose of this study was to see if there are links between cognition and the consideration of philosophical ideas in both children and adults, and if philosophical questioning influenced the ability to challenge conformity.

- Develop research design
- Train research assistants to run the study
- Collect data
- Input and analyze data
- Supervise research assistants for weekly duties

- Recruit parents and children for study
- Academic writing, including experimental research papers and posters

Mississippi Contextual Psychology Lab

August 2016 – August 2018

University of Mississippi

Oxford, MS

Supervisor: Kate Kellum, PhD; Kelly Wilson, PhD.

Researcher

- Manage researchers' weekly hours and duties

Study: Human Learning and Politics

Abstract: The objective of this study is to investigate the Implicit Relational Assessment Procedure (IRAP) as a potential measure of political ideology and examine the relationship to several survey questions.

- Assist in data input and other research duties
- Collect information and data for research projects

Study: Cognitive vs Psychological Flexibility

- Train research assistants to run the study
- Collect and input data

PRESENTATIONS

Behavior Analysis Association of Mississippi Conference 2017 –

“Behavior Analysis & Tactical Urbanism in a Not-so Urban Area: Analysis of a Pop-Up Complete Street” (poster)

Association for Behavior Analysis International Conference 2017 – “Little Philosophers: Assessing and Prompting Philosophical Reasoning within Children” (poster)

Research Day at The University of Mississippi 2017 - “Little Philosophers: Assessing and Prompting Philosophical Reasoning within Children” (symposium)

Association for Behavior Analysis International Conference 2018 – “Teaching Curiosity: Discussion of Behavioral Approaches to Fostering Creativity and Philosophical Skills” (panelist)

Association for Behavior Analysis International Conference 2019 – “I Bet You Think this Talk is About You: Philosophical and Practical Perspectives on the Self in Solitude and in Society” (symposium)

MEMBERSHIP IN SOCIETIES

Phi Theta Kappa – International Honor Society

Golden Key – International Honor Society

Psi Chi – International Honor Society in Psychology

Phi Sigma Tau – International Honor Society in Philosophy

Association for Psychological Science - Professional organization for the advancement of scientifically oriented psychology

Association for Behavior Analysis International - Organization for those interested in the philosophy, science, application, and teaching of behavior analysis.

AWARDS AND HONORS

Hinds Community College

- Distinguished Honors Graduate
- Magna Cum Laude
- Phi Theta Kappa Scholar
- 3E Outstanding Student Award
- Who's Who Award
- Marvin and Virginia Riggs Foundation Scholarship
- Dean's Scholar Award
- President's Scholar Award
- ACT Deans Scholarship
- Honors Institute Scholarship

University of Mississippi

- Chancellor's Leadership Scholarship
- Lucky Day University Scholarship
- Academic Excellence Award
- Phi Theta Kappa Scholar
- Golden Key Scholar
- Who's Who Award
- Graduate Assistantship