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Comparative moral principles: justifications, values, and foundations

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The article compares three influential theories used in sociology and psychology to categorize types of morality—Luc Boltanski & Laurent Thévenot's *justification theory*, Shalom H. Schwartz's *basic human values theory*, and Jonathan Haidt's *moral foundations theory*—to simplify the complexity presented by three different categorizations, while retaining necessary nuance, and to translate the concepts of each into the language of the other two. A comparative table is presented to evaluate which categories of the three theories correspond to each other and where do theories make distinctions that are lacking from the other two. This summary framework of Comparative Moral Principles (CMP) consists of eight principles to compare, explain, and interpret practices of moral motivation and meaning-making: Liberty, Inspiration, Safety, Community, Care, Equality, Deservingness, and Competition.

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Introduction

Various theoretical categorizations of values and moral principles exist on the fields of psychology and sociology, not to mention philosophy. This article compares three influential ones used for empirical research, in the hopes of facilitating a transdisciplinary comparative understanding of morality: Luc Boltanski & Laurent Thévenot's *justification theory*, Shalom H. Schwartz's *basic human values theory*, and Jonathan Haidt's *moral foundations theory*. By morality, I refer to the varying conceptions people have of right and wrong, not in terms of correct/incorrect ('is'), but in normative terms of preferable/contemptible ('ought'). Morality is both an individual and a social phenomenon since it is most probably partly innate (Haidt, 2012) and partly learned from others and society at large (Schwartz, 1992). Individuals also care whether others agree with them on moral issues: this is what separates morality from mere preferences, habits, or personal life goals (Skitka, 2010). People want others to do what they themselves consider to be right, and communities often punish wrongdoing. These three theories are to my knowledge the three most cited¹ theories on the fields of psychology and sociology according to which the spectrum of values or morality is discrete and may be divided into four to ten recurring categories, into which empirically occurring instances of motivations and justifications can be classified, and they are theories I claim have sufficiently compatible premises for fruitful comparison. These theories aim to *describe* rather than *prescribe* human morality and are based on moral pluralism; they strive to constitute non-normative frameworks for analysis (Hansen, 2016). They argue that there is no single principle underlying morality, but neither is just *anything* morally valuable to people living in societies, empirically; certain principles recur.

In moral foundations theory, the proposed number of foundations was originally four (Haidt and Joseph, 2004), but several others have since been proposed and empirically observed, leading to the publication of various versions of the framework with five or more categories (Atari et al., 2022; Haidt and Graham, 2007; Iyer et al., 2012). The same has happened with basic human values theory (Schwartz et al., 2012) and justification theory (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2018; Thévenot et al., 2000). A similarity between morality theories seems to be the tendency to add more and more categories over time, as research programs progress and expand. This undoubtedly makes these models more nuanced and better fit empirical reality, as new types of morality are 'found', but as we add more and more categories, the utility of each model in *simplifying* the world diminishes (Healy, 2017). Thus, this article attempts to go in the other direction; presenting a simplification of a complex world is after all one of the central purposes of theory (ibid.). A map of a territory in the scale of 1:1, as large as the territory itself, with all the detail of the territory, ceases to be useful (Borges, 1946). Are there sufficient grounds for each distinction between categories in these theories, both within and across the different frameworks? Of course, the categorization here may prove obsolete in the future if new moral categories are indeed found. The categorization aims to facilitate such discovery: I try to express the necessary categories of each theory in terms of the other theories, to help scholars working within each of these traditions identify which aspects of morality have been considered by each, and which ones, perhaps, not.

Thus, in addition to *simplification* (Healy, 2017), the other central guiding principle in this article is *translation* (Luhtakallio, 2012: pp. 3–6). To an extent, the theories describe similar features of morality. But each theory makes differing claims about the origin, characteristics and meaning of moral categories and is used by scholars on different fields, familiar with differing literatures, with little dialog between them. In essence, the theories are different languages used to describe the same empirical

reality, using different vocabularies. Despite this, can the categories of each be translated into the language of the others, supplementing lacks by drawing from the vocabularies of the other two theories? For example, can the moral-foundational category of liberty (Iyer et al., 2012) be expressed in a way that is understandable to justification-theoretical scholars, so that they could employ the category in their analyses, to understand moral claims based on liberty, for which the justification-theoretical framework has thus far been inadequate? I will argue that this is possible and useful. Each of the theories has certain blind spots that can be illuminated by the other theories. This means that scholars currently employing any of the three theories could learn something from the others, perhaps look at their data in a new light or try if a modified categorization would fit their data better. Rather than proposing readily measurable constructs or testable hypotheses, this article is an exploratory step in finding theoretical compatibilities and conflicts.

My ultimate aim is, through comparisons, to better explain and understand moral action—that is, action in which conceptions of right and wrong play a role, either by motivating the action or justifying it (Vaisey, 2009). Morality motivating action means that morality causes people to act, that is, it shapes behavior: action can be causally explained by researchers using concepts of morality; a perspective more often taken by psychologists. Morality justifying action means that morality gives meaning to action: morality is used by people to weigh, measure, evaluate, deliberate, consider, justify, judge, and debate actions of themselves and others in social interaction such as discourse; a perspective more often taken by sociologists. Both are necessary perspectives (ibid.).

To be clear, I do not suggest replacing any of the three previous frameworks with the one presented here. I merely suggest that scholars working with one of the three theories may benefit from getting to know the other two and how the three correspond to each other.

Justification theory

Boltanski & Thévenot's moral sociology is especially concerned with justification. In so-called critical moments, or crises, whenever social actors realize that the previous course of action must change for whatever reason, there is an imperative to justify: to give an account of why a certain course of action should be chosen next (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1999: pp. 359–361). From such situations, explications of morality emerge: people give statements of the moral basis they believe should motivate their next actions. An example would be a pair of colleagues writing a book, who one day erupt into a fight over the division of tasks: 'It is always me who does the xeroxing and all the chores, while you read exciting books sitting comfortably in in your armchair' (ibid., 361), one of them angrily exclaims. Such a remark already implicitly contains the idea that exciting and boring tasks should be divided *equally* between colleagues—the morality of equality—which may be explicitly said aloud during the argument that is likely to ensue. It is such moralities, how they are constructed in social action using their social, philosophical, political, and physical scaffolding, and the conflicts and compromises between them, that moral sociologists working under Boltanski & Thévenot's framework are interested in.

Boltanski & Thévenot present six *'higher common principles* to which, in France today, people resort most often in order to finalize an agreement or pursue a contention' (2006: 71, emphasis in original). These are cultural conventions often articulated discursively in public. Sets of material objects, often created/organized by humans, also concretely uphold these cultural

orders. Consider the example of a factory: the physical building is organized to serve the principle of efficiency, and the existence of physical things such as production lines and efficiency-optimized machines stabilizes the social principle. The six categories (and the central principle of qualification for each) are Civic worth (equality), Domestic worth (authority), Industrial worth (efficiency), Market worth (price), Inspired worth (creativity), and the worth of Fame (celebrity) (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1999: p. 368). The list is based on contemporary empirical fieldwork as well as classical texts of political philosophy; for example, Civic worth is based on Rousseau's *The Social Contract*, and Market worth on Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*.

A central assumption of justification theory is that whether the purpose of justification is 'to finalize an agreement' (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006: p. 71) or 'pursue a contention' (ibid.), that is, politicization (Luhtakallio 2012: pp. 7–9), people using certain justifications use them because they assume the justification is commonly considered legitimate; justifications are based on 'common good' (Thévenot et al., 2000: p. 229). But this 'common' is not precisely defined: what is the community of reference (Eranti, 2018: p. 47)? Moreover, this assumption is somewhat in conflict with the evident fact that the motivation of moral arguments is not always agreement, even remotely so (through politicization and an eventual potential closure, see Ferree et al., 2002). People commonly use justifications they *know* others *disagree* with, simply because they themselves feel they are right and wish to say so. One could even say that most public debates in contemporary societies, whether in parliaments or social media, do not in fact aim at 'legitimate agreement' (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1999: p. 363), but is merely moral grandstanding (Tosi and Warmke, 2020) or *virtue signaling*. A justification scholar might argue that such debates are not within the purview of justification theory, which only studies situations where eventual agreement is pursued. But what use is a theory of morality that only applies to very specific and rare, even utopian, situations?

Despite the elusiveness of persuasion, individuals do care whether others share their moral principles. This is the essence of morality: unlike personal preferences, morality extends to others; you would like others to agree on what you believe is right (Skitka, 2010). But individuals' moralities vary significantly. As Rai & Fiske (2011: p. 57) put it: 'Genuine moral disagreement exists and is widespread.' Sometimes, people must agree to disagree rather than pursue persuasion:

[T]here are legitimate moral perspectives that cannot be directly or systematically reconciled with each other... some acts and practices that some people perceive as evil actually have a moral basis in the psychology of the people who commit them. We do not have to condone these practices, but if we are to have any hope of opposing them, we do have to understand them for what they are: morally motivated acts, not simply errors in judgment, limitations of knowledge, or failures of self-control... recognizing the moral motives of all parties is the first step toward resolution of disagreements, because it enables opposing parties to understand their competing moral perspectives rather than condemn each other with reference to social-relational frameworks that are incongruent or unrepresentative of the actual motives underlying judgment (Rai & Fiske, 2011: pp. 58–69)

In this view, competing moral positions often cannot be reconciled by agreeing on a moral worth and then measuring various people, objects, or arrangements on that scale, as the justification model asserts (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006: pp. 40–42). Still, the categories and insights of justification theory are useful, as has been shown by a large comparative empirical

literature based on them, although the possibility of legitimate disagreement *not directed towards closure* must be better acknowledged (Ferree et al., 2002).

Basic human values theory

While justification theory, above, is interested in how people justify their actions, and less with causally explaining action, basic human values theory claims that values both 'motivate action' and 'function as standards for judging and justifying action' (Schwartz, 1994: p. 21). It defines values as 'belief[s] [...] pertaining to desirable end states' (Schwartz, 1994: p. 20). They are 'the criteria people use to select and justify actions and to evaluate people (including the self) and events' (Schwartz, 1992: p. 1).

For Schwartz, values are 'acquired both through socialization to dominant group values and through the unique learning experiences of individuals' (ibid.)—that is, they are cultural constructions (variably) internalized by people. Values are the 'underpinnings of beliefs' (Schwartz et al., 2012: p. 663), that is, they are longer-lasting and more fundamental than beliefs, which Schwartz sees as more situational and fleeting (beliefs are formed on the basis of values in situations).

In Schwartz's theory, there are four 'higher-order values' (ibid.: 3), which can be arranged as pairs of opposites: the value of conservation (stability) is the opposite of openness to change (progress), and the value of self-enhancement (selfishness) is the opposite of self-transcendence (care for others). These four main values can then be divided up to 10 (Schwartz, 1994), 11 (Schwartz, 1992), or 19 (Schwartz et al., 2012) more specific categories. The 10-category version (Schwartz, 1994: p. 22) consists of Power, Achievement, Hedonism, Stimulation, Self-direction, Universalism, Benevolence, Tradition, Conformity, and Security. The reasoning behind the categorization is that these values represent 'responses to three universal requirements with which all individuals and societies must cope: needs of individuals as biological organisms, requisites of coordinated social interaction, and requirements for the smooth functioning and survival of groups [...]' For example, the motivational type *conformity* was derived from the prerequisite of smooth interaction and group survival' (ibid., 21). As such, basic human values theory and moral foundations theory, presented next, are functionalist theories; they explain morality in terms of what it does, what it is for. Schwartz (1994) provides survey evidence that these values are distinguished in dozens of countries around the world.

To employ the Schwartzian scheme for comparative study of public moral justifications—admittedly not what the theory is for—a central issue would be that people may be motivated by wholly different values than they use for justifying action (Vaisey, 2009). Schwartz primarily understands values as individual traits that motivate action. They are measured by the survey question: 'Here we briefly describe some people. Please read each description and think about how much each person is or is not like you' (Schwartz et al., 2012: p. 56), answered on a numerical scale. These measurements are closer to individual traits than moral values in a social and societal sense. This is not a criticism against Schwartz's theory per se, which is indeed meant to measure basic personal values irrespective of how they are used in public arguments, but a point about what needs to be modified for it to work for the study of public justifications. For example, it is quite possible for someone to feel they are 'like' a person who 'avoid[s] anything that might endanger his safety' (ibid.: 57) while not necessarily advocating a society where the personal safety of people is one of the primary societal values. Someone who feels that 'He is always looking for different kinds of things to do', or 'Having a good time is important to him' (Schwartz et al., 2012: p. 56), does not

necessarily advocate for a society in which their (or others') possibilities to engage in these acts is a guiding principle.

Thus, morality as a societal phenomenon is not reducible to personal values. Morality is prescriptive; most people care what others think and do, that is, they have *moral conviction* (Skitka, 2010). As Haidt and Joseph (2004: p. 58) put it: 'The hallmark of human morality is third-party concern: person A can get angry at person B for what she did to person C.' The stronger someone's moral conviction about an issue is, the less willing they are to compromise and bargain about it—people put their individual *interests* aside when morality obliges (Ryan, 2014).

Schwartz proposes that five out of ten values are 'moral'; those 'concerned with actions that affect the welfare of others directly or indirectly' (Schwartz, 2007: p. 712). But there is now considerable evidence from moral foundations theory that defining morality as the avoidance of harm is much too narrow a view of morality, and biased towards Western, liberal morality: values such as authority are considered moral by many irrespective of whether harm is involved (Haidt, 2012: pp. 111–130; Haidt and Graham, 2007; Sverdluk et al., 2012). And as shown by Ryan's (2014) work on moral conviction, while there is variation between issues in how well they lend themselves to moral judgment, there is also considerable variation between individuals in how much they care about others' moral transgressions. In fact, many contemporary political debates are about the extent to which people should be free to pursue acts others deem immoral (Iyer et al., 2012).

Thus, rather than a priori excluding parts of empirical reality as irrelevant for morality, I am interested in studying what is *made moral* in societies and how. I propose that arguments about the extent to which others should, or need not, adhere to the morality of the group or society, can be categorized as arguments about individual freedom, LIBERTY, in my comparative framework. Take one of the interviewees in Bellah et al. (1985: pp. 6–7), who describes his morality as follows:

one of the things that makes California such a pleasant place to live, is people by and large aren't bothered by other people's value systems as long as they don't infringe upon your own. By and large, the rule of thumb out here is that if you've got the money, honey, you can do your thing as long as your thing doesn't destroy someone else's property, or interrupt their sleep, or bother their privacy, then that's fine.

For us to meaningfully understand something as a moral argument, someone needs to give it moral meaning, to argue that it is right or wrong in a social context, as the interviewee does in the quote above. Similarly, Skitka proposes that morality can be distinguished from mere preferences by whether the issue is 'socially regulated' (Skitka, 2010: p. 268). She gives the example that 'one family's preference to vacation at the beach instead of the mountains is a matter of taste [...] not right or wrong' (ibid.). But while this may be true within a community of Californian university professors, Bourdeausian sociology gives myriad examples of moral judgments—social regulation—people make of matters of taste and consumption, such as vacationing at the beach or the mountains, since choices like this convey class status, intertwined with morality. In times of climate catastrophe, beach vacations in the global South, previously glorified, are now morally condemned by many in Northern Europe and America; a matter of taste has been made a matter of morality in public discourse (Lönnqvist et al., 2020). We cannot distinguish moral and non-moral issues a priori, the yardstick needs to be whether or not the issue is *made moral* in social interaction by arguing that it is right or wrong. This may also be termed as *politicizing* the

issue or raising its level of generality and/or publicity (Eranti, 2018; Luhtakallio, 2012: pp. 7–9).

Thus, similarly to Ryan (2014), I propose that the distinction between moral and other values is an empirical rather than theoretical matter; values are not inherently moral or not, rather they may be given moral meaning in interaction and used in public moral argumentation. For Schwartz's value statements to be understood as moral, they need to be converted to prescriptive statements: for example, the statement 'Caring for the well-being of people he is close to is important to him' (ibid.: 58) can be formulated as 'People *should* care for the well-being of people they are close to'. It is then transformed from a trait to a moral value, which are describable as 'should' ('ought') statements.

Moral foundations theory

Moral foundations theory argues that there are certain foundational human capacities for moral cognition, which have evolved via natural selection over millennia. Contemporary societal debates appeal to humans' innate moral foundations in various ways. The original 'triggers' which these foundations evolved to respond to differ from issues that 'trigger' these moral responses now: for example, humans have evolved a tendency to strive for purity and cleanliness because it has been evolutionarily beneficial for avoiding infectious diseases. This makes portraying immigrants as 'dirty' in contemporary anti-immigrant political discourse a particularly salient way of framing the issue—humans have an evolved propensity to respond to such a trigger. The foundations are Harm/Care, Fairness/Reciprocity, Ingroup/Loyalty, Authority/Respect, and Purity/Sanctity (Haidt and Graham, 2007), derived from previous moral-psychological work such as Schwartz's theory presented above, as well as Richard Shweder's work on 'moral systems' (Shweder et al., 1997), and numerous empirical experimental and survey studies.

In addition to explaining moral motivations, moral foundations theory has also been utilized for studying moral justification in public discourse (e.g., Hoover et al., 2019; Smith, 2021; Wendell and Tatalovich, 2021). From a justification theory point of view, much of this work seems to conflate justifications and intuitions by arguing that we can derive knowledge about intuitions from data about justifications. Haidt argues that moral intuitions drive our later justifications: first, a moral stance is chosen intuitively, and we later rationalize it, if necessary (Haidt, 2012: pp. 61–108). But justifications do not necessarily correspond to motivations: for example, people may lie about or simply be unaware of their motivations. The link from justifications to motivations must be shown by other data than public texts (perhaps brain-imaging, see e.g., Haidt, 2012: pp. 188–189).

To further elaborate on mismatches between motivations and justifications, justification theorists (e.g., Eranti, 2017; 2018) usually draw a clear epistemological line between justifications they can actually observe and what Haidt (2012: p. 314) calls 'inside-the-mind stuff', because political and other actors arguing about issues in the public are often insincere about their true motives. People themselves even sometimes come to believe their later explanations: think of people who, after being lauded for doing things that have benefited others, start lauding themselves for their altruism, when their original motivation was self-enrichment. Or consider the NIMBY ('not in my backyard') homeowner, a character rather typical and even somewhat legitimate in US political culture (Thévenot et al., 2000: pp. 249–252), who opposes a nearby housing development on the grounds that the proposed lot is a habitat for an endangered species of plant/animal (Eranti, 2017; Eranti, 2018). Some such arguments are insincere, not motivated by environmental values,

the actual motivation being something else, such as economic self-interest. Or think of a car dealer who argues at length in favor of a government bailout of the car company he represents—which would save him economically—despite his strong political convictions ‘about individual responsibility for success and failure’, which run counter to his economic interest, requiring ‘considerable mental gymnastics’ to justify his position (Bellah et al., 1985: p. 176). People are awesomely adept at thinking up justifications for their positions and actions, justifications, which may be socially acceptable but not have much to do with what motivated the action. As Moody and Thévenot (2000, p. 273) note: ‘connection to a collective or general good is a necessity of public debate about public problems (even in cultures where self-interest is often a legitimate motive for action)’. Thus, we must remain critical of what people *report* about their morality and look at both how people act and how they justify their actions, keeping in mind that these may differ. Justifications, their social acceptability or lack thereof, and how they are used to pursue goals, build communities and hold societies together, are studied by many justification scholars without any attempt to move from the level of public argumentation to the cognitive. After all, despite being strategic and possibly at times dishonest, moral argumentation is ‘constrained [...] by the cultural repertoire’ (Moody and Thévenot, 2000: p. 275). For example, in US environmental movements, versatility shown by using varying justifications can be interpreted not as insincerity but ‘savviness’ and ‘professionalism’ in furthering one’s agenda (ibid., 280), while in France sticking with a single mode of engagement is typically taken as a sign of sincerity and, as such, a merit (ibid., 281).

Comparative moral principles (CMP)

In this section, I construct a matrix comparing the categories of each theory (Table 1), which I will elaborate. I call it Comparative Moral Principles (CMP) here because it is created by comparing three previous frameworks and because its primary purpose is comparative empirical research, broadly understood (Luhtakallio, 2012: pp. 3–6). It is based on foundational theoretical texts of the three theories (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1999; 2006; Haidt 2012; Haidt and Joseph, 2004; Haidt and Graham, 2007; Thévenot, 2007; 2014; Schwartz, 1992; 1994; Schwartz et al., 2012). Through the comparison, I have attempted to produce categories that encapsulate the central principles of each included category. I refer to the integrative categories I propose in ALL CAPS, and the categories of the source theories as Capitalized. I propose a framework of eight principles of morality: LIBERTY, INSPIRATION, SAFETY, COMMUNITY, CARE, EQUALITY, DESERVINGNESS, and COMPETITION. The word principle is drawn from justification theory, which posits that justifications are based on ‘higher common principle[s]’ (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006: pp. 140–141), in terms of which moral positions are considered. Moral debates also often deal with which is the appropriate principle to employ. Principles motivate and give moral meaning to action.

Arguments *against* moral principles are moral arguments, too: one can criticize the excessive restraints posed by COMMUNITY, the detrimental ramifications for others of LIBERTY, and so on. Instead of Schwartz’s and Haidt’s models, which have explicit counter-categories for each category, e.g., the opposite of Care is Harm (Haidt, 2012: p. 146), and the opposite of Self-Direction is Tradition (Schwartz et al., 2012: p. 72), I follow the justification-theoretical empirical observation that ‘[j]ustifications can involve positive “arguments”, claims, or position statements, but might also be critical “denunciations” of opposing views ... such as the denunciation of bureaucratic planning from a market flexibility perspective, for instance’ (Thévenot et al., 2000: p. 237)—that is,

not only the ‘opposite’ category of each can be used for criticism, but others too, which is why I do not suggest ‘opposite’ categories. I have omitted Schwartz’s categories Power, Stimulation and Hedonism, which are difficult to formulate as ‘should’ statements, as discussed previously, and are not considered moral by Schwartz (2007).

Let us begin with the moral principle of LIBERTY, which is strangely missing altogether from the original justification theory (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006), with a form of individualism recognized later (Eranti, 2018; Thévenot, 2007; 2014). It is also missing even from some recent versions of moral foundations theory (Atari et al., 2022), despite being recognized by Iyer et al. (2012) as morality emphasizing individual liberty, based on the enlightenment philosophy of John Locke, John Stuart Mill and others, including ‘a general opposition to forcing any particular moral code upon others’ (Iyer et al., 2012: p. 2). So-called libertarians tend to relate to morality rather rationally as opposed to emotionally, and have an individualist disposition as opposed to a collectivist one, emphasizing their ‘right to be left alone’ (Iyer et al., 2012: p. 3). Here, based on J. S. Mill’s classic work (1859), I define LIBERTY as absence of constraints (negative liberty); freedom to pursue any interests as long as it does not harm the pursuits of others. Conceptions of ‘positive’ freedom (the freedom to do certain things) are varied and multiple, and I argue they can mostly be understood as combinations of LIBERTY with other categories, such as EQUALITY (e.g., the right to basic needs).

Schwartz (1992; 1994) includes in his model a value of ‘self-direction’, which corresponds to LIBERTY, measured by descriptions such as ‘It is important [...] to make [one’s] own decisions about [one’s own] life’ (Schwartz et al., 2012: p. 56), which can be formulated as the principle *people should have the freedom to make their own decisions about their own life*. Liberty empirically correlates strongly with Schwartz’s self-direction (Iyer et al., 2012).

The depiction that comes closest to LIBERTY in later justification theory literature is called Interests, as formulated by Veikko Eranti (2018), based on what Thévenot (2007; 2014; 2015) calls the ‘grammar of individuals operating in a liberal public’, in turn based on a ‘regime of plan’, a cognitive orientation towards a goal, pursuing of interests. Whereas Eranti (2018: p. 57) proposes dropping the term ‘liberalism’ because of its ambiguous definitions, I propose bringing the concept of LIBERTY back in as crucially necessary for understanding morality in contemporary societies. For example, a famous sociological empirical project on morality (Bellah et al., 1985) laments that contemporary Americans are allegedly unable to verbalize their moral worlds to the researchers, while quoting at length interviewees who in fact do exactly that; they describe the moral category of LIBERTY, which the authors inexplicably refuse to consider is a kind of morality, instead describing it as ‘not justified by any wider framework of purpose or belief’ (ibid.: 6):

What is good is what one finds rewarding. If one’s preferences change, so does the nature of the good. Even the deepest ethical virtues are justified as matters of personal preference. Indeed, the ultimate ethical rule is simply that individuals should be able to pursue whatever they find rewarding [...] In a world of potentially conflicting self-interests, no one can really say that one value system is better than another. (Bellah et al., 1985: p. 6)

What is derided by Bellah et al. as deficiencies of this value system are in fact its core tenets. LIBERTY is justified by the wider belief-framework of individualism, the worth of individuals and their unique preferences, which makes classical liberalism inherently a type of individualist pluralism, even value relativism (Deneen 2018). It is a fundamental category in understanding

Table 1 Comparative moral principles (CMP).

Basic human values theory	Moral foundations theory	Justification theory			Comparative moral principles (CMP)
'Self-direction: Independent thought and action – choosing, creating, exploring.' (Schwartz 1994: 22)	Liberty: Individual freedom (Iyer et al. 2012).	Interests: Legitimate pursuit of goals by individuals (Eranti 2018; Thévenot 2007; 2014).			LIBERTY: Freedom to pursue any Interests as long as it does not harm the pursuits of others (Mill 1859, Clark & Elliott 2001).
		Inspiration: Illumination felt in the presence of something sacred (Boltanski & Thévenot 1999: 370).			INSPIRATION: Effervescence felt in the presence of something sacred.
'Security: Safety, harmony and stability of society, of relationships, and of self.' (Schwartz 1994: 22)	Sanctity: Avoidance of contaminants, purity, which 'bind[s] individuals into moral communities' (Haidt 2012: 174). Security and Tradition.	Familiarity: Being surrounded by familiar people, objects, and milieu enables a feeling of comfort and safety (Thévenot 2007; 2014).			SAFETY: There is no liberty to pursue goals without 'confidence that one's expectations concerning the safety of person and property as well as the fulfillment of promises and contracts are upheld' (Clark & Elliott 2001: 476).
		Authority: Respect of hierarchy (Haidt 2012: 142). Tradition and Conformity.	Domestic worth: worth on the basis of status in community (Boltanski & Thévenot 1999: 370). Tradition, Conformity, Sanctity, Loyalty and Authority.		
Loyalty: Group cohesion, solidarity, community (Haidt 2012: 140). Conformity and Benevolence.	Domestic worth: worth on the basis of status in community (Boltanski & Thévenot 1999: 370). Tradition, Conformity, Sanctity, Loyalty and Authority.				
	'Tradition: Respect, commitment and acceptance of the customs and ideas that traditional culture or religion provide.' (Schwartz 1994: 22)	Care: Avoiding and ameliorating the suffering of others, promoting their well-being (Haidt 2012: 131). Benevolence (care for close ones) and Universalism (care for everyone).	Civic worth: equality, solidarity and welfare within a collective (Boltanski & Thévenot 1999: 371). Rousseauian general will, renouncing individuality in service of the community. COMMUNITY, CARE, and EQUALITY.		
'Conformity: Restraint of actions, inclinations, and impulses likely to upset or harm others and violate social expectations or norms.' (Schwartz 1994: 22)	Fairness: Not cheating, playing by the rules (Haidt 2012: 158–161). Divides into EQUALITY and DESERVINGNESS, following Atari et al. (2022).		Civic worth: equality, solidarity and welfare within a collective (Boltanski & Thévenot 1999: 371). Rousseauian general will, renouncing individuality in service of the community. COMMUNITY, CARE, and EQUALITY.		
'Benevolence: Preservation and enhancement of the welfare of people with whom one is in frequent personal contact.' (Schwartz 1994: 22) Divided here into COMMUNITY ('people with whom') and CARE ('preservation and enhancement of [...] welfare').		Fairness: Not cheating, playing by the rules (Haidt 2012: 158–161). Divides into EQUALITY and DESERVINGNESS, following Atari et al. (2022).	Civic worth: equality, solidarity and welfare within a collective (Boltanski & Thévenot 1999: 371). Rousseauian general will, renouncing individuality in service of the community. COMMUNITY, CARE, and EQUALITY.		
'Universalism: Understanding, appreciation, tolerance and protection for the welfare of <i>all</i> people and for nature.' (Schwartz 1994: 22, emphasis in original.) CARE and EQUALITY. Also, some versions of DESERVINGNESS overlap with Universalism.	Fairness: Not cheating, playing by the rules (Haidt 2012: 158–161). Divides into EQUALITY and DESERVINGNESS, following Atari et al. (2022).		Civic worth: equality, solidarity and welfare within a collective (Boltanski & Thévenot 1999: 371). Rousseauian general will, renouncing individuality in service of the community. COMMUNITY, CARE, and EQUALITY.		
'Achievement: Personal success through demonstrating competence according to social standards' (Schwartz 1994: 22). Market, Fame and Industry. COMPETITION and DESERVINGNESS.		Market worth: Price determined through competition (Boltanski & Thévenot 1999: 372).	Fame: Celebrity, renown, recognition, others' opinion (Boltanski & Thévenot 1999: 371). Market logic measured in fame rather than money.	Industry: Efficiency, competency (Boltanski & Thévenot 1999: 372).	

Grey areas represent 'blind spots', morality not recognized by that theory.

morality in society because it is about *the extent to which you think others should, or need not, adhere to the morality of the group or society*. LIBERTY is a principle of significant importance in US political culture (Thévenot et al., 2000; Moody and Thévenot, 2000), and we might hypothesize its importance in other societies is increasing as well due to US cultural influence.

Moving on from the foundationally important category of LIBERTY to a much rarer and more idiosyncratic category, justification theory's Inspiration is described as the worth of 'illumination [...] the experience of an inner movement that takes over' (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006: p. 159), for example in 'the highly emotional, even spiritual experience [people] have in the wilderness' (Thévenot et al., 2000: p. 253), highlighting the 'sacred value of nature' (ibid.). This justification does not seem to have much community-binding power (unlike Haidt's Sanctity and Boltanski & Thévenot's other categories) because of being described as based on an individual experience; it is 'completely independent of recognition by others' (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1999: p. 370). Thévenot et al. (2000: p. 252) note: 'these sorts of arguments often lead to the critique that they are unable to be discussed or challenged as general (more than personal) claims, and that they are irrational or unreasonable'. Indeed, Inspired arguments are empirically rare. Including experiences of collective effervescence (Durkheim, 1912/1995) would enhance the usability of this category, for example in understanding how symbolic elements such as songs are used to arouse feelings of nationalism (Ylä-Anttila, 2017). Thus, I have included it in Table 1 as INSPIRATION, including the possibility of collective effervescence, not just individual enlightenment. Perhaps it can illuminate a blind spot in some work—for example, INSPIRATION in its individual form is largely unaccounted for by moral foundations theory, although Sanctity somewhat corresponds to *collective* inspiration.

Getting back to more commonly recognized morals, like LIBERTY before, the moral worth of SAFETY can also be derived from J.S. Mill's work. As Clark and Elliott (2001: p. 476) paraphrase his thought: some 'confidence that one's expectations concerning the safety of person and property as well as the fulfillment of promises and contracts are upheld' (Clark and Elliott, 2001: p. 476) is necessary for LIBERTY. There is no direct reference to safety in justification theory, but it comes up in Thévenot's later work as the *feeling of safety* offered by Familiarity: being in familiar surroundings, interacting with familiar people and objects, without having to engage on a higher cognitive level (Lonkila, 2011; Thévenot, 2007; 2014). This is somewhat analogous to what Anthony Giddens (1984) named ontological security and can be understood as the cognitive state of security fostered by 'actual' situational or societal security (although societal security is clearly not *sufficient* for ontological security). SAFETY, I suggest, includes these both sides of the coin, cognitive and situational, like the Security category of basic human values theory: 'Safety, harmony and stability of society, of relationships, and of self' (Schwartz, 1994: p. 22).

Interestingly, moral foundations theory defines safety only through safety of the community, as Sanctity (Purity), referring to avoiding contaminants and drawing a line between 'us' and 'them' (Haidt, 2012: p. 174). Schwartz makes a distinction between Tradition and Security (Schwartz, 1994: p. 22), and Thévenot's (2007; 2014) distinction between Domestic worth and Familiarity closely corresponds to it: both distinctions are between traditions and comfort. Considering this, my comparative framework distinguishes between SAFETY and what I call COMMUNITY, which includes also other elements besides just Tradition or Domestic worth, explained next.

The basic constituent of COMMUNITY can be defined as defining 'us' as 'pure' and favorable, 'others' as 'unclean' and

secondary (what Haidt calls Sanctity). There are endless depictions of a similar dynamic in philosophical, sociological, and psychological literatures, from Henri Tajfel's (1970) work on intergroup discrimination to Ernesto Laclau's (2005) definition of populism as the discursive construction of a people against a constitutive outside. We morally favor members of our in-groups, whether that be our family, sports team, or political 'tribe'. The most obvious example is that we have to have rules against such behavior in non-family social settings: it is called *nepotism* and frowned upon in business and politics. But with family and close friends, it is *expected* that people take the side of their close ones in any dispute; it is called *loyalty* and not doing so is *betrayal*. Boltanski & Thévenot's Domestic worth includes elements from Haidt's Sanctity, Authority and Loyalty, as well as Schwartz's Tradition and Conformity, but COMMUNITY also already touches on Boltanski & Thévenot's Civic worth, which includes the ideal of working for the benefit of a community.

As you can see, the matrix of moral theories becomes quite densely crowded when we come to issues of COMMUNITY, and the various elements are difficult to disentangle. Many moral rules are obviously about life in communities. It can be hard to even imagine authority without loyalty and conformity without tradition. If one takes any one of these elements, one is usually *morally obliged* to adhere to the others as well, which is why I have subsumed them under the umbrella of COMMUNITY, although there may be analytical utility in some cases to consider the different components.

CARE—the morality of avoiding and ameliorating the suffering of others and promoting their well-being—is undeniably a central pillar of human morality across cultures. CARE means that it is good to be kind to others, treat others like they like to be treated, and not harm them. Basic human values theory includes two categories of care: Benevolence, caring for close ones, and Universalism, caring for the whole world. Justification theory does not acknowledge CARE as such, only the morality of working for a collective (Civic worth). One would think this means that Civic worth is only Benevolence (care for community), not Universalism (care for all beings universally), but no: 'Collective beings themselves are included within other, larger collectives, embedded in sets of which the most inclusive is humanity itself' (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006: p. 185). Justification theory, thus, always defines care through communities. Boltanski & Thévenot argue that 'In the civic world, one attains worth by sacrificing particular and immediate interests, by transcending oneself, by refusing to place "individual interests ahead of collective interests."' (ibid.: 190) Indeed, Care is 'self-transcending' (Schwartz, 1992; 1994). But this is true even when caring for just one other living thing; one puts the interests of the other ahead of oneself. A collective is not a necessary precondition of CARE—unless one defines two-person dyads collectives, of course.

Traces of EQUALITY are also present in Civic worth, collectives advocating for their rights in a common front (general will) (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1999: pp. 371–372). But equality also has a more minimal and individualist definition, which I adopt here: the equal treatment of each individual (Clark and Elliott, 2001: p. 276). Other, more comprehensive conceptions of equality can be built on this, if one so wishes—similarly to how I defined LIBERTY as negative freedom previously, ready to take on conceptions of positive freedom if desired. For example, Boltanski & Thévenot's description of Civic worth as collectives acting for justice can be understood as a combination of EQUALITY and COMMUNITY. But EQUALITY does not necessitate collective solidarity or distributive justice, which are separate phenomena, and much more controversial than simple equal treatment of individuals—and in the case of Civic worth, specifically French in

tradition. Schwartz's basic human values theory, on the other hand, recognizes Universalism, which refers to care for the whole world—but, again, EQUALITY (of treatment) does not logically necessitate CARE (promoting others' well-being), *unless* one wishes to advocate for a more extensive definition, e.g., equality of outcomes.

Moral foundations theory previously only included a specific type of 'equality': so-called Fairness, which refers to playing by the rules, since Haidt (2012: p. 182) claimed that 'people don't crave equality for its own sake; they fight for equality when they perceive that they are being bullied or dominated' (when another principle of fairness is violated). But Atari et al. (2022) have recently proposed, on theoretical and empirical grounds, to divide Fairness into Equality ('balanced reciprocity, equal treatment, equal say, and equal outcome', *ibid.*: 58) and Proportionality ('rewards and punishments to be proportionate to merit and deservingness', *ibid.*). This is useful, since the principle of Proportionality is lacking from justification theory and basic human values theory as well. However, to incorporate a wider variety of morals, I propose a wider definition of Proportionality: DESERVINGNESS is the principle that each should get what they *deserve*, whether that is defined by their contributions as in Proportionality (Atari et al., 2022), or their needs, as in the Marxist slogan, or even their birthright, kin, or caste; although the latter is considered unfair by most modern societies. DESERVINGNESS is a distribution of resources, rights, status, or recognition—not only material things—according to a set of rules and procedures deemed fair in a society or community. Such rules can be and in fact often are based on other moral categories, such as EQUALITY, COMMUNITY, LIBERTY etc.: for example, an argument that wealth should be divided equally relies on the principles of DESERVINGNESS and EQUALITY, whereas a *laissez-faire* argument about letting markets allocate wealth relies on DESERVINGNESS and COMPETITION.

Whereas CARE is about considering the well-being of others, DESERVINGNESS is about following rules of distributing rewards. CARE is unconditional and usually directed towards loved ones, whereas DESERVINGNESS is rules-based and usually invoked regarding larger groups of often unknown people: for example, whether or not immigrants deserve the same rights, duties and opportunities as the autochthonous population (Andersen and Bjørklund, 1990; Hochschild, 2016). Distributing rewards in a family based on DESERVINGNESS rather than CARE and COMMUNITY is considered cold, whereas CARE for criminals is considered naïve and soft-hearted.

The principle of COMPETITION most closely corresponds to justification theory's Market worth, partly modeled on the classic business how-to manual *What They Don't Teach You at Harvard Business School* (McCormack, 1984, see Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006: p. 156). Markets define price competitively, which is then considered a *fair valuation*, a type of morality. When combined with DESERVINGNESS, the principle of COMPETITION forms meritocratic ideology, in which those who are most successful compared to others should be rewarded most handsomely, and this corresponds to Schwartz's value of Achievement. When DESERVINGNESS is defined in terms of needs rather than contributions, it does not match Schwartz's Achievement or Boltanski & Thévenot's Market, of course; rather, it overlaps with Schwartz's Universalism.

Fame (or 'Renown') is moral worth 'which comes exclusively from the opinion of others' (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006: p. 178), that is, 'popularity' (Thévenot et al., 2000: p. 241), whereas the central principle of Market worth is competition, and worth determined by price (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1999: p. 372). Even though Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) describe celebrities, famous people, as most worthy in terms of Fame, and successful

businesspeople as most worthy in Market terms, the markets and media publicity are merely different arenas on which to compete in popularity. Popularity is demand and demand is what drives prices: 'desires ... [for] rare goods' (*ibid.*: 196) in the case of Market worth, 'attention' (*ibid.*: 179) and 'recognition' (*ibid.*: 182) in the case of Fame. Indeed, Boltanski & Thévenot emphasize the importance of 'success' both for Fame (e.g., *ibid.*: 179, 181) and the Market (e.g., *ibid.*: 197). Celebrity is valuation through competition, even though the resource being competed for is recognition rather than money. Fame is, for those vying for it in the public arena, a currency. The goods and services that command high prices in the Market world do so 'by attracting, by interesting' (*ibid.*: 201), which are features of Fame. The difference of Market and Fame worth is one of arena, not of valuation logic. Boltanski & Thévenot (*ibid.*: 193) write: 'The market world must not be confused with a sphere of economic relations', since according to them economic relations utilize both Market and Industrial principles. Following this guidance of not confusing Market worth with the economic sphere, we must recognize when Market logic is used in 'celebrity markets', that is, the sphere of public renown, rather than mistaking such usage for its own logic. Thus, I collapse Fame under COMPETITION.

The category of Industrial worth in justification theory is based on the principles of efficiency and productivity: optimizing production of useful goods and services is considered good (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006: pp. 203–211). Since efficiency or productivity cannot be measured without comparison to others—measuring what is the *most* efficient or productive option—I have here included it, too, under COMPETITION, with Market worth and Fame. However, if the distinctions between Fame, Industrial and Market worth are necessary for a particular analysis, they can of course be employed.

Discussion

In this article, I have presented a theoretical framework that I call Comparative Moral Principles (CMP), a comparison of three theories of morality commonly employed in sociology and psychology.

The most obvious application for CMP is cross-cultural comparisons of morality, which have been previously conducted using justification theory (e.g., Gladarev and Lonkila, 2013; Thévenot et al., 2000), human values theory (e.g., Schwartz, 1994) and moral foundations theory (e.g., Atari et al., 2022). Armed with the extensive comparative framework, a more diverse and comprehensive set of moral acts and justifications could be detected in what I have called blind spots of each theory (Table 1).

To recap, CMP includes the moral principle of INSPIRATION, from justification theory, which in its individual version (personal enlightenment) has been lacking from moral foundations theory, likely due to the theory's community-focused definition of Sanctity. Understanding individual moral sentiments of inspiration may help explain moral arguments such as nature preservation based on personal enlightening experiences felt in the wilderness (Thévenot et al., 2000: p. 253). On the other hand, an understanding of group enlightenment (collective effervescence) has been curiously lacking from justification theory and basic human values theory, and could facilitate empirical discoveries about nationalist animus, for example (Ylä-Anttila, 2017). Moreover, CMP complements justification theory's previously lacking understanding of LIBERTY with Eranti's (2018) and Thévenot's (2007; 2014) recent work, as well as Iyer et al.'s (2012) moral-foundational work, all of which correspond somewhat to Schwartz's (1994: p. 22) value of Self-direction, which should be highly pertinent as libertarian moralities typical of US political culture seem to be gaining in popularity all over the world and

political sociology has historically had trouble analyzing them (Bellah et al., 1985). Furthermore, the moral field of DESERVINGNESS is complex. I have argued that Schwartz's values theory lacks DESERVINGNESS based on contribution, due to its focus on Universalist rights, whereas moral foundations theory lacks DESERVINGNESS based on birth (e.g., right-wing welfare nationalism, Andersen and Bjørklund, 1990) and based on needs (e.g., the classic Marxist slogan 'from each according to their ability, to each according to their needs').

Many moral claims are defined in terms of COMMUNITY: Haidt's Sanctity but also Authority and Loyalty, Schwartz's Tradition, Conformity and Benevolence, and Boltanski & Thévenot's Domestic and Civic worth. It may be useful to recognize all these different forms of COMMUNITY morality, but also to recognize that not all moral claims require COMMUNITY; e.g., CARE can be directed towards individuals, and LIBERTY is quite separate from COMMUNITY and still a legitimate moral principle.

In reality, there is always some overlap and convergence, and moralities do not fit neatly into boxes. But overlap of moral categories does not mean the disappearance of genuine moral disagreement either, simply that those disagreements can be discussed using vocabularies the other side understands. Haidt describes this understanding by quoting Isaiah Berlin (2001: pp. 11–12): '[I]f a man pursues one of these values, I who do not, am able to understand why he pursues it or what it would be like, in his circumstances, for me to be induced to pursue it.' (Haidt, 2012: p. 369). Empirically, it has been found that moral argumentation is effective in persuasion when it is launched from a world that is understood by the recipient of the argument (Feinberg and Willer, 2015). This is not the case when groups 'actively reject [each others'] concerns as immoral' (Haidt, 2012: p. 334). Moral deliberation based on mutual understanding is the minimum requirement for communicative reasoning about right and wrong, that is, any fitting together of positions not based simply on power or money. In relations based on power or money, each side needs to make little evaluation of the morality of each other's claims, just fight or make a deal. In cultural, social, and political disputes, we can hopefully do better.

Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated or analyzed during the current study.

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Note

1 At time of writing in February 2023, the publications cited in this article by Schwartz (1992, 1994, 2007, et al., 2012) had been cited 35,612 times according to Google Scholar. Publications cited by Boltanski and Thévenot (2006, 1999) and Thévenot (et al., 2000, 2007, 2014, 2015) had 17,011 citations and Haidt (2012, with Graham 2007, with Joseph 2004) had 12,979. Many other publications from each author could be included in such a count. The point here is not to measure which theory is most popular but to show that these are among the most influential categorizations of values and morality.

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