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Send all inquiries to: Timothy Leet
timothyleet@gmail.com

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to Andrea, my wife and best friend. From my first fumbling attempts to organize these ideas to resolving the last questionable comma, you have been patient, supportive, and smarter than me. You are my center.

To my girls, Julia and CJ. You carry my heart with you. To my parents. You believed in me when there were a few good reasons not to. And to you, the reader. The future is yours.

Introduction

It's Getting Complicated

Being good used to be pretty simple. It wasn't always *easy*, but it was simple! When you were seven years old, being good meant following rules. It meant sharing, telling the truth, and not hurting other people. Bad and good were as different as night and day.

As you've gotten older, it's gotten complicated. You've learned that doing the right thing sometimes means making people unhappy and maybe even getting in trouble. In fact, many of the Great Women and Great Men of history are considered "great" because they had the courage to break the rules in order to do the right thing. You may have learned that small acts of dishonesty are excusable if they prevent unnecessary hurt. For example, you might compliment the dinner prepared by a friend even if it's not to your liking. Even childhood rules against hurting other people seem to have exceptions as you get older. Law breakers and law enforcers alike sometimes use violence to pursue their goals. You've learned that society permits exceptions to the rule "don't hurt others," as long as the goal being pursued is worthwhile. But who gets to decide which goals are worthwhile? And how much hurt is acceptable?

Rules exert a strong force over children. They are powerful simply because they are rules, and young children don't often call into question the justice of a rule or the authority of the rule makers. This changes during adolescence.

Adolescence is a time of expanding need for control over one's own life. This natural and necessary development challenges the authority of rules, which are often experienced as unwelcome limitations to the amount of control a young

person has over his or her life. Consequently, rules judged to be unfair or "pointless" cease to hold power over many adolescents. This is especially true if the author of those rules is not well respected. In adolescence, you begin to question the rules and authority figures that held power over you in childhood.

Some young people equate *questioning* authority with *rejecting* authority. Questioning and rejecting are not the same thing. When you question, you seek understanding. When done respectfully, questioning authority is healthy exercise for a maturing young mind. Ironically, a person who rejects authority without question reflects the night-or-day, all-or-nothing thinking typical of the very childhood he or she is trying to reject.

Rules and authority figures tend to lose some of their authority over young adults during adolescence. The simple truths and rules of childhood certainly contain elements of profound, timeless wisdom, but the application of those truths to the lives of adolescents - to your lives - is much less simple.

From Good Kid to Moral Adult

If adolescence marks the end of your moral childhood, what can you expect in moral adulthood? Adolescence is a rich period of life valuable for its own sake in many ways. In terms of moral development, though, adolescence is a tricky transition between simple childhood morality and a fully developed adult morality. What does moral adulthood look like? In many ways, that is the question explored in detail throughout this book's twenty chapters. The descriptions below are hardly sufficient to capture the full picture of moral adulthood, but it may at least suggest some general ideas.

- She has a deeply developed moral identity. This identity gives her strength when tough decisions must be made. Society and her personal relationships have helped shape it,

but her moral identity is hers alone. She has thought a lot about it and carefully pursued it. This identity is the source of her character.

- He pursues integrity by aligning his actions with his values. He accepts that perfect integrity may not be possible and understands that all of us are "works in progress."

- She knows that her understanding of the world and the people around her is incomplete. She purposefully tries to improve her understanding by putting herself in the place of others, both intellectually and emotionally.

- He recognizes that he is affected by unconscious biases that distort his understanding of others and also his perception of himself. He takes action to compensate for the impact of psychological biases on his decisions.

- She has learned how to work through difficult decisions. She recognizes when important values are at stake and is careful and skilled at making her decisions.

- He lives in society and is a member of communities of people. He does not live in isolation. He skillfully balances the claims of his citizenship with the call of his own personal conscience.

- She recognizes the debt owed to her community and contributes to its welfare. She respects - but is not a servant to - the values and traditions she has inherited through culture.

- He explores existential questions that take him beyond himself and society. He asks whether there might be something bigger that transcends and connects all people and cultures. He may not ever answer this question, but he is open to its mystery.

Moral adulthood does not arrive at a particular age. It is a self-aware, principled way of living. It does not require that every person share the same thoughts. It does, however, require that you live thoughtfully.

Why Be Good?

Why should you care about being a good person? It's a fair question, and in some ways, only you can answer it for yourself. No book - not even this one - is likely to convince you that a life of honesty and kindness is *better* than a life of scheming and violence.

The desire to be a good person must come from within. Threats of punishment for bad behavior or rewards for acts of goodness are just two different forms of control. Such threats and rewards can produce good actions, but they do not produce good people.

For a moment, consider the footprint you wish to leave on the world. Each of us will leave behind a legacy. How do you wish to be remembered? What words do you want associated with your name? How will they speak of you when you are gone?

At this point in your lives, these questions may seem morbid. Yet, thinking about our lives backwards can bring real clarity to the present. When we can answer the question, "Who do I want to be at the end?," we can then live our lives toward that vision.

People who believe that "The Person Who Dies With The Most Toys Wins" is not likely to have his or her mind changed by a book. For those who believe winning and losing can be measured in such "toys," this book will ring hollow in places.... probably even naive. The "good life" is not rewarded with toys or power or fame. It isn't measured in dollars or in social media "likes." These things may come along the way, but they are not the goal of such a life.

The "goods of the good life" are measured in well-being, life satisfaction, and an ease of conscience. They are measured in the depth and health of relationships and in the gathering of love and meaning.

This book will not try to brainwash you into believing there is only one kind of good person. There are many kinds of good people, and you have the power to choose what kind you will be. Goodness can be "warm" by stressing love and acceptance, or it can be "cool" by emphasizing fairness and impartiality. There is no single type of "good person."

It is also time to abandon the idea that the world is full of people who are either good or bad. You have outgrown that kind of simplicity. Even our great moral heroes, like Dr. Martin Luther King and Mahatma Gandhi, reveal their all-too-human side when examined under the bright lights of historians.

Being a good person is not an achievement. Being a good person is about the direction of our lives and how we choose to invest our time and energy. It is not about scrubbing our character free of all mean and selfishness impulses, but about battling them whenever they appear. Because rest assured, they will appear.

Organization of This Book

The twenty chapters of this book are grouped into four major parts. Each of these parts presents new ideas that build on the previous one. In this way, the book is like a construction project. Rather than building a home, however, this project is the design and construction of your future self.

Part 1. The Design. In the first part, the task is to imagine the adult you would like to be someday. What are the words you hope people will associate with your name? Those qualities of character - those virtues - that you hope to embody can be understood as your "moral identity." In the first part of the book, you will be tasked with finding specific language to describe it. Continuing with the construction project metaphor, this part is like drawing up a design blueprint for a house. Home building begins with careful design, and while identity development through adolescence is more complicated and messy than home design, considering the kind of person you hope to be someday is not a waste of time. It can help bring clarity to many confusing issues that arise during these years.

Part 2. The Foundation. The moral identity you "design" in the first part of this book will be constructed on top of a complex and often mysterious psychological foundation. The process of interpreting information from the outside world is complex. A mature moral adult makes countless big and small judgements every day based on that information. Some judgments are carefully and consciously processed, while others happen quickly, sometimes even without our awareness. Slow or fast, big or small, all judgments are impacted by powerful psychological forces that operate below our level of awareness. Personality, emotion, bias, and irrationality quietly creep into our judgments. It turns out that we are not as objective and rational as we think we are. This is especially important to the study of ethics. Again, continuing with the construction metaphor, understanding our psychology is like understanding the foundation of the house you are building.

Part 3. The Structure. The third part relates to the construction of the house itself. You don't build walls and floors without designing the house first and constructing a reliable foundation. Similarly, you shouldn't study ethical decision making without giving careful thought to the virtues you hope to embody, and also understanding the powerful psychological forces that affect decision making. Ethical decision making is a complex skill that occurs "above ground" (i.e., consciously) and can be learned. For thousands of years, great thinkers have developed theories to help us determine "the right thing to do." Learning to work with these ideas is an essential skill for living in a complex world among people who will not always agree with you.

Part 4. The Neighborhood. The first three parts of this book relate specifically to you as an individual: your moral identity, your psychology, your ethical decision making skills. The fourth and final part of this book deals with your relationships with others. In the same way that new homes usually exist in a larger neighborhood, individuals live within complex communities of other individuals. Inevitably, conflicts will arise between individuals, and

sometimes, between people and the values of the communities to which they belong. Why do good people disagree? How do we "navigate the neighborhood" and find common ground when our conclusions on tough questions are different from our neighbors'? These questions are the subject of the final part of this book.

Construction Notes. This book covers a lot of intellectual territory. As you read, you may find you've lost the thread that connects one part of the book to another. You may wonder how the ideas of one chapter connect to ideas presented earlier. You may find a reference to something discussed earlier in the book that you don't clearly recall. Where these moments have been anticipated by the author, you will find explanatory comments in a box titled, "Construction Notes."

CONSTRUCTION NOTES

This box will contain brief comments to help connect one part of the book to another.

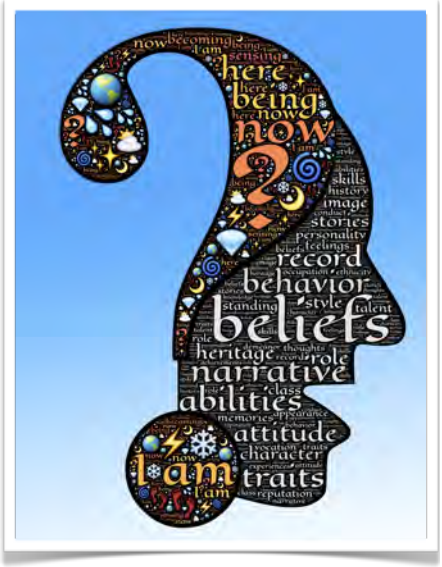
Part 1
The Design

Chapter 1

Identity

1. What are the kinds of questions that our identity is able to answer?
2. What is an “identity crisis” and why is the concept important during adolescence?
3. What two tasks must we engage in order to move toward a secure identity?
4. What are the four identity statuses described by James Marcia?
5. What is moral identity?

Identity and Adolescence



You have probably heard the term, "Identity Crisis." If you are having such a crisis, it means you're struggling with questions like, "Who am I? What do I believe in? What is my purpose?" There's a good chance you've been asking yourself these questions for a few years now.

It is *unlikely* you were asking yourself these questions when you were seven or eight years old. Young children rarely wonder about such things. If a father tells his seven-year-old daughter that she is not allowed to have dessert, she might cry. She might not. Whether she cries or not depends on many factors like her basic temperament, her relationship with her father, what the dessert actually is, how tired she is, etc. What it is <u>not</u> likely to depend on is her answer to the question, "Am I the kind of person who cries when she doesn't get dessert?" She does not ask, "Am I *that* kid?" These are questions we ask when working through deep issues of our **identity**.

In order to contemplate these identity questions, you must be able to "get outside of yourself" and make your Self the object of your own thinking. For the most part, young children can't do this. Adults who remember the so-called simplicity of childhood are often recalling that time when they were not plagued by questions like, "Who am I?" and "What is my purpose?" Identity questions are deceptively simple, but if they are ignored into adulthood, they have a way of sabotaging well-being and undermining long-term happiness.

There may be adults in your life who would be happy to answer these questions for you. Unfortunately, answering essential identity questions is a project you must complete yourself. No one can do it for you.

This is not to say, however, that your family, friends, and community won't play a big part in this project. These core relationships are incredibly important. A healthy Self is not constructed in isolation. Building your identity does not mean you must reject the values

CONSTRUCTION NOTES

Recall the important difference between "questioning" and "rejecting" from the Introduction.

and beliefs of your family. It means that you must freely choose those values and beliefs. They cannot be forced on you from the outside.

According to influential developmental psychologist **Erik Erikson**, the primary developmental task (i.e., growing-up task) of adolescence is identity formation. Erikson believed that there are several important development stages of life, and that each stage has its own primary task. The task of young people approaching early adulthood is to engage and resolve in the construction of a stable identity. The truth, of course, is that identity construction is not a once-and-done project. We ask questions of purpose and value throughout our lifetimes, and our answers to these questions can change at any age. But it is during **adolescence** that these questions surge to the foreground and demand attention for the first time. Questions you never thought to ask three years ago can paralyze you today.

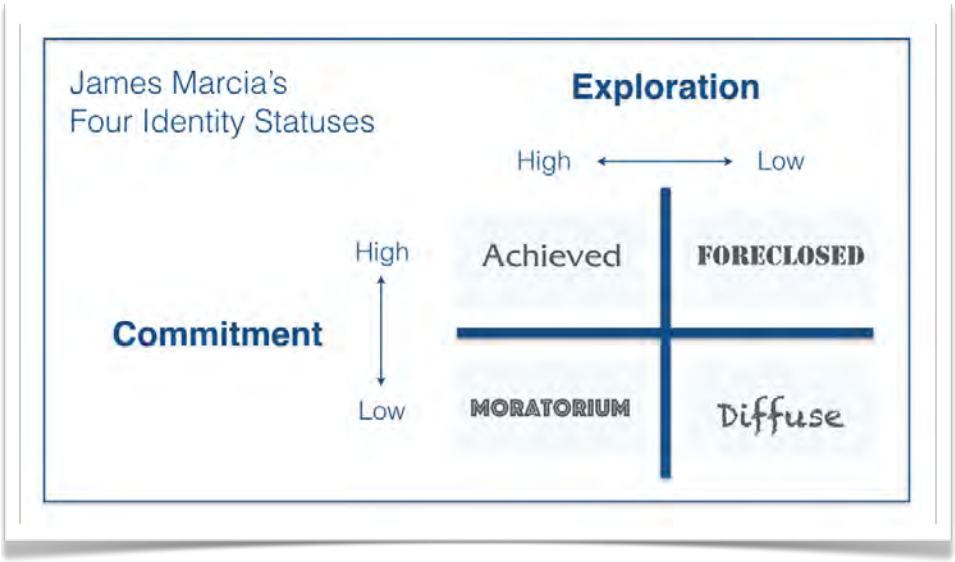
Identity Formation Status

James Marcia was another important developmental psychologist, and he built on the ideas of Erik Erikson. He proposed that mature and secure identity achievement occurs when a person (1) actively explores questions of values, occupation, political ideology, etc. and (2) makes a commitment to particular answers to those questions. For Marcia, secure identity achievement requires both **exploration** *and* **commitment**.

For example, if you are politically conservative simply because everyone in your family is conservative, Marcia would say this aspect of your identity has not be *explored*. It is not *your* identity

because it is merely an extension of other people's commitment. Or, if your political convictions drift and change unpredictably, Marcia would say your political identity is not secure because you lack the consistency that comes with *commitment*.

We can visualize James Marcia's four identity statuses on a two-by-two grid. A two-by-two grid creates four possible combinations, similar to the Punnett squares you may be familiar with from biology. We can be "High" or "Low" in the amount of exploration we have done and the level of commitment we have made. These four combinations are the four identity statuses described by Marcia and shown in the graphic below.



If I am in **Identity Diffusion**, I have not made identity commitments, nor have I even seriously considered important identity questions. Something is considered "diffuse" when it is thin and spread out.

If I am in **Identity Moratorium**, I may be thinking about all of the possible "me's" that I could be. Unlike diffusion, I *am* considering the questions, but I have not yet attached my self-concept to particular answers. Moratorium is a period of wandering, and it is a status typical of adolescence.

If I am in **Identity Foreclosure**, I am secure in my identity but that identity has probably been defined by other people, like parents, teachers, or other authority figures. Foreclosure

is a status of high commitment, but it lacks the depth that comes from personal experience and exploration.

If I have reached **Identity Achievement**, I have done my wandering and explored other ways of being beyond the ways modeled by the important authority figures in my life. More than that, I have found answers and begun to understand myself, my purpose, and my identity in those terms.

Moral Identity

Identity has several dimensions. James Marcia's study of identity development looked at dimensions of political and religious identity. We can extend his study of identity statuses into the dimensions of gender, race, sexuality, and most important to this book, **moral identity**.

Development of the different dimensions of identity does not happen at the same pace. A person could be, for example, in moratorium in terms of political identity but at the same time foreclosed in religious identity. The forces that propel exploration and commitment in identity development are complex, and they vary from person to person. One purpose of this book, specifically, is to stimulate exploration of your moral identity.

Your moral identity is your moral self concept. It is how you think of yourself when you think about your character. Our actions are "authentic" when they come naturally and consistently from our self concept, from our identity.

For example, if honesty is a core piece of my identity, I will respond honestly to a challenging question. The reason for my honesty is *not* a pros and cons calculation of telling the truth versus lying. It is *not* to gain praise for my honesty or avoid the shame of being caught in a lie. The honesty of my answer is a natural extension of my identity. I will respond honestly because I am an honest person.

When our actions do not match our self image - and we have to admit that they sometimes do not! - we often experience guilt, shame, or other unpleasant emotions. These are the feelings we have when our actions do not match up with our self concept. We may try to shrink the guilt by rationalizing our action, or we might distract ourselves with work or play. Much more will be said about this notion of "cognitive dissonance" and our talent for rationalizing our behavior in Part 2 of this book.

The strong alignment between action and identity would be most common for people in an "achieved" moral identity status. During adolescence, however, all dimensions of identity may be under exploration. It is unlikely that the actions of the typical adolescent are consistently driven by an achieved moral identity. Many actions during this time of life are driven by risk-and-reward calculations, loyalty to peers, simple curiosity, and a sense of adventure. However, as identity stabilizes through increasing commitment, a young adult's actions ideally begin to ground themselves in a more consistent moral identity.

Chapter 1 Discussion Questions

1. What are some of the obstacles that can get in the way of doing the exploration required to reach identity achievement? What are some of the obstacles you have encountered?

2. Sometimes we start to think about identity when someone shares an observation he or she has made about us. Have you ever been surprised by an observation someone has made about you? Did that observation prompt you to think more deeply about that part of your identity?

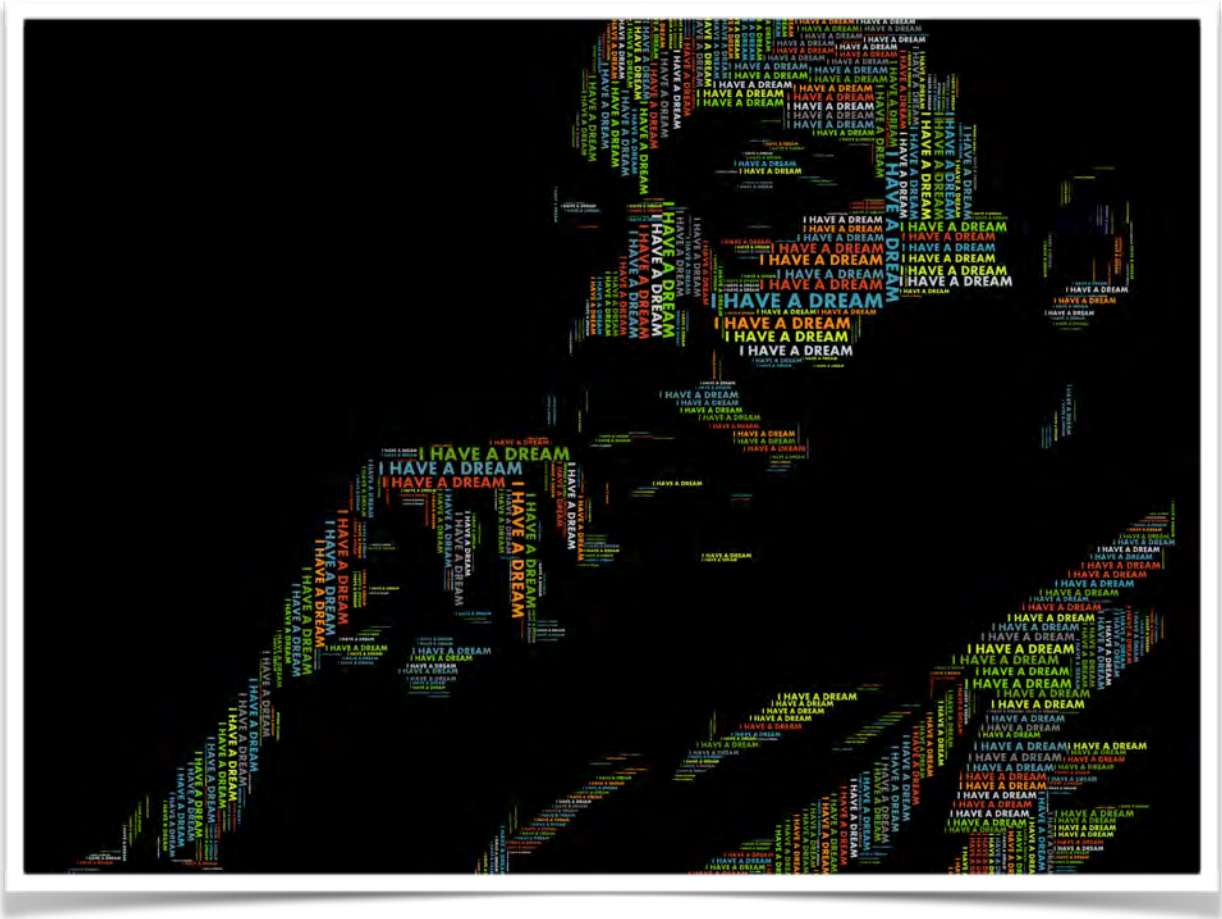
3. Identity exploration can be scary. It is often easier to stay with what is familiar. Who or what in your life gives you the courage necessary to explore unfamiliar territory?

4. Mark Twain is credited with saying, "The two most important days in your life are the day you are born and the day you find out why." Have you considered what the purpose of your life might be?

5. Who are the people in your life who are most important to you as you do the exploration and commitment work required for identity development?

Chapter 2

The Content of Our Character



1. **Why can personality and character both be considered “empty concepts?”**
2. **What is used to fill the empty concept of character?**
3. **What is the difference between a value and a virtue?**
4. **Is there a difference between religious values and non-religious values.**
5. **What is the difference between a religious value and a religious belief?**

The Speech

In August 1963 on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. delivered what has become known as the "I Have a Dream Speech." It is a speech many students have heard or read in its entirety.

The "I Have a Dream Speech" is widely recognized as one of the defining events of the civil rights movement in America. As such, the speech is a common touchpoint in discussions of race and social justice. The speech is not, strictly speaking, a speech about ethics, identity, and character. However, King uses a turn of phrase when he refers to character that is worth some reflection. He says,

> *I have a dream that one day my four little children will live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character.*

Why does King say, "the content of their character" and not simply, "character?" Maybe drawing out the phrase simply improved its rhythm. Maybe he was just taking advantage of the alliteration. It might have meant nothing significant to him at all.

But even if it meant nothing in particular to Dr. King, the suggestion that character has "content" is a useful idea. Character is a word that begs for definition, much in the same way that the word "personality" does.

For example, let's say I meet someone at lunch, and later that evening I try to describe this person to my wife. It would not be very helpful for me to say, "I met someone today at lunch, and he has a personality." Of course he has a personality. Personality is an empty concept until we characterize that personality, until we give the concept "content." Maybe the man I met at lunch is outgoing and funny but not an especially good listener. Or maybe he was quiet but in a still-waters-run-deep kind of way. Only after I've described the "content of his personality" do I begin to get any sense of the nature of the man.

Likewise, **character** is a empty concept. To say that a person has character is to say not very much at all. It is never a question of whether a person has character, but rather, it is a question of the *nature* of that character. Or, as Dr. King phrased it, the "content of that character."

In the everyday usage of the word character, most people assume that a person of character is probably honest and responsible. In other words, we *assume* certain content when we say someone has character. In this example, the content would be honesty and responsibility. This is a contemporary western assumption. In other times and places, character might imply patriotism and industriousness, or perhaps piety and self denial. Throughout this book you will be encouraged to be more careful about the way you use the word "character." After all, if King is right and you are to be judged by the *content* of your character, you will want to pay close attention to what that content actually is!

Think of character as an empty basket. Everyone has character. Everyone has this basket. In the next section we will turn our attention to what you will put in this basket.

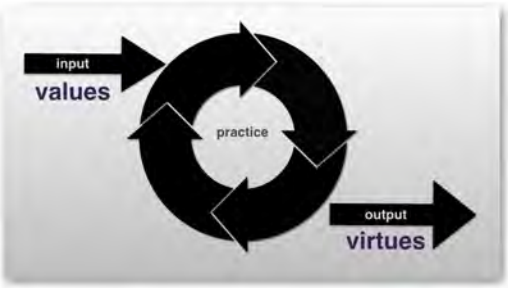
Values

So, what goes in the basket? Our values go in the basket.

Not everything that we think of as important is a "value" in the sense we will use the word here. We value music, good food, and clean air, but these things are not values as we use the word when giving content to the idea of character. **Values** in the sense used here are ideas that serve as ideals for guiding action and shaping relationships. Some examples are honesty, loyalty, determination, and kindness. When values become integrated into one's sense of Self and one's actions consistently reflect those values, we say that the value has become a **virtue** of that person's character.

Let's say I want to become a more compassionate person. Maybe my natural reaction to other people's predicaments is *not* a compassionate one. Maybe I make hasty judgements and assume the worst about them. At this point for me, compassion is a value - an idea that serves as an ideal for future action. Compassion is a value of mine, but I have not yet

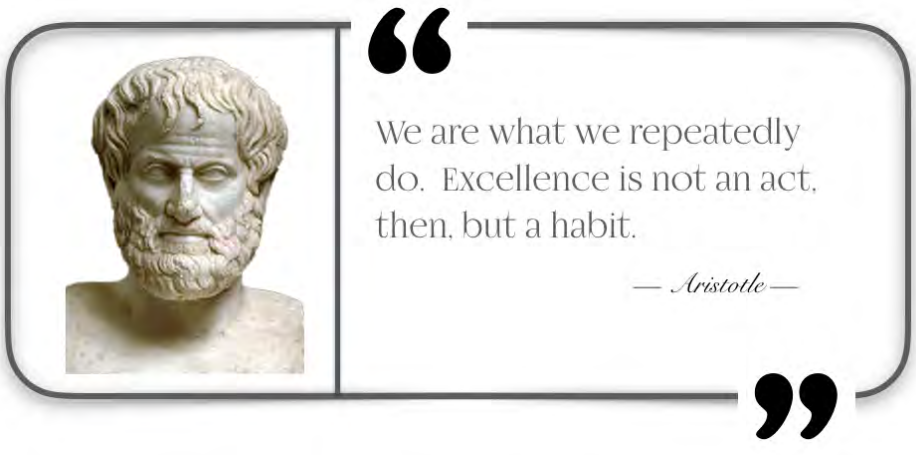
made it a virtue of my character. If I want to become more compassionate, I must engage in a conscious and deliberate project.



Through practice over a long period of time, I may begin to notice I am less quick to judge. Maybe I notice I'm more patient and forgiving. When a value like compassion is integrated into the Self and becomes inseparable from my identity, that value has become a virtue. When this is true, I don't respond to other people with compassion because I am consciously cultivating compassion. I respond compassionately because that is the kind of person I am.

"We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence is not an act, then, but a habit." This quote is widely attributed to Aristotle, a Greek philosopher from the 4th Century BCE. Aristotle's ideas around what it means to live a good life are often referred to as "virtue ethics."

There is a close relationship between "content of character" and moral identity, as described in the preceding chapter. In fact, character and moral identity are two ways to refer to the same internalized commitment to values. The language of "character" is familiar and colloquial, while "moral identity" is a psychological term that researchers work with. These ideas overlap in powerful ways, and so in this book, we may use them interchangeably.



Religious Values

Dr. King's life and work were inspired by deeply held religious beliefs. His commitment to the values of justice, compassion, and equality were inseparable from his faith.

For many people, in fact, it is difficult to contemplate morality without also thinking about religion. The relationship between the two is intertwined to such a degree that some believe that there can be no morality without religion.

The moral life described in this book does not depend on religious faith, but it is not incompatible with religion either. A few remarks about the relationship between religion and the moral life are worth making here.

Religion inspires commitment to religious values. There is a deep moral commitment at the heart of our great religions. It is impossible to collapse the complexities of these traditions into single words, but certain values have been central to their message: justice in Judaism, compassion in Buddhism, love in Christianity, and acceptance in Taoism. These values are embodied in their prophets and elevated in their sacred texts. There can be no doubt that the religious life can inspire commitment to the values that are central to that religion.

Religious values are different from religious beliefs. It is important to distinguish between religious values and religious beliefs. A Buddhist's commitment to compassion is different from her belief in reincarnation. A Christian's commitment to love and mercy is different from his belief that Jesus of Nazareth was the son of God. A Muslim's commitment to humility is different from her belief in the life stories of the Prophet. The term "religious values" is sometimes used loosely to encompass everything that a religious person values *and* believes. For our purposes, it is important to distinguish between the two.

Religious traditions deserve respect. The moral life described in this book might be uncomfortable for readers who believe their faith requires unwavering obedience to their religious leaders. Chapter 1 claimed that open-minded exploration of life's rich possibilities is necessary to develop a mature moral identity. Free and open exploration is simply not consistent with unwavering obedience. It is vitally important to appreciate the difference between *obedience to* authority and *respect for* it.

There is no conflict between respect for authority and the exploration described here. The essential difference between respect and obedience is that respect is freely offered and obedience is a form of control. A religious person might *choose* to follow the teachings of a religious authority out of respect. On the surface, such behavior might look like obedience. However, the fact that it was a "choice made" and not an "authority obeyed" makes all the difference in identity formation.

Religious traditions have a rich history. The moral teachings within a faith tradition have their origins somewhere, and those teachings have evolved over time. Those who draw on a religious tradition as the source of their values should understand that tradition well. It is not disrespectful to seek understanding.

So much of what we consider social progress in justice, fairness, and compassion have been inspired by deeply religious men and women. Religious values are human values. Religious and non-religious ethical conversations only start to diverge when religious beliefs, traditions, and authorities become involved. These disagreements can run deep and become a source of conflict. This is always a sad development because at their core - at the level of religious *values* - there is rarely disagreement.

Chapter 2 Discussion Questions

1. It has been over fifty years since Dr. King's "I Have a Dream Speech." Do you believe our country is closer to judging people by the content of their character than they were in King's time?

2. When someone says, “She is a person of character,” what qualities do you believe that person is claiming she has? In other words, what *content* is usually being assumed in your culture when someone is said to be a person of character?

3. What is a *value* that is important to you that you know you still need to work on in order to turn it into a *virtue* of your character?

4. Some people have a negative reaction to the word “character.” Why do you think that might be?

5. If you are a religious person, what are the values that anchor the moral teachings of your religious tradition? Be careful not to confuse religious values with religious beliefs.

Chapter 3

Integrity and Becoming You

1. **What is the difference between a moral value and a performance value?**
2. **Who is "The Bumbling Saint?" Who is "The "Ruthless CEO?"**
3. **Is identity formation an act of discovery, a creative process, or both?**
4. **What is an iterative process, and how does it apply to identity formation?**
5. **What does it mean to "close the gap," and what is integrity?**

The Halves of Character

In a modern study of character education in American high schools, Thomas Lickona and Matthew Davidson grouped values into two distinct categories. (3.1) The first group contains **moral values**. Moral values describe how we interact with other people. They are "relational values" and include ideals like honest, fair, kind, respectful, etc.

The second of these categories contains **performance values**. Performance values describe how we approach our work and respond to hardships, such as resilient, persistent, creative, curious, etc.

Values from both of these categories are essential in any conversation about character. As this book progresses and our attention shifts to ethics, however, more emphasis will be placed on moral values.

To illustrate just how important building both halves of character is, consider the following portraits of two men, each possessing only one of these two categories.

Moral Values				
Accepting	Friendly	Humble	Peaceful	Understanding
Caring	Generous	Just	Pure	Trustworthy
Compassionate	Genuine	Kind	Respectful	
Cooperative	Gracious	Loving	Responsible	
Courteous	Grateful	Loyal	Selfless	
Empathetic	Helpful	Merciful	Sensitive	
Fair	Honest	Moderate	Sincere	
Forgiving	Hopeful	Patient	Trusting	

Look over the moral values listed in the table, and imagine a man who possesses these - *but only these* - virtues. We imagine a man who radiates warmth and acceptance, one who helps us feel good about ourselves. He is a man we can trust and one we can turn to when we need a compassionate listener. However, we have reason to doubt this man's ability to take action. He lacks the important other half of character, the half that plans action and persists in the face of obstacles. We might feel great affection for this man, but most of us wouldn't want to work with him!

We might call this man **The Bumbling Saint**. From the depths of his character we feel the warmth and compassion of moral virtues, but we can't help but notice the absence of the skills and the will necessary to effectively act on those virtues.

Now, look at the performance values listed in this table, and consider a man possessing these - *but only these* - virtues. Here, it seems, is a man who gets things done. He pushes through obstacles with determination and intelligence. He's a hard worker and is creative in finding new approaches to problems when the traditional approach fails. Unfortunately, he's not especially trustworthy, and when under stress, he turns on people and treats them harshly. He has no tolerance for excuses and appears to lack empathy. He has many associates but no friends.

Performance Values			
Adaptable	Diligent	Imaginative	Prepared
Ambitious	Disciplined	Independent	Proud
Collaborative	Driven	Intelligent	Resilient
Composed	Eloquent	Obedient	Resourceful
Confident	Endurance	Organized	Self Aware
Courageous	Enthusiastic	Passionate	Tenacious
Creative	Entrepreneurial	Perceptive	Thrifty
Curious	Focused	Perseverance	Tough
Dedicated	Fun	Persistent	
Determined	Hard Working	Positive	

We might call this man **The Ruthless CEO**. We can't help but admire the strength and skill demonstrated by such a man, but we also are turned off by his self-centeredness and cold disregard for others.

Character is ideally a deep blend of both moral and performance virtues. We want to be both honest *and* hard working. We want to be both kind *and* focused. During adolescence and any time of intense self exploration, both halves of character must be cultivated.

What are the words you want associated with your name?

Discovery and Creation

The previous section closed with the question, "What are the words you want associated with your name?" If you are able to answer that question, another question quickly pops up: How do you become that person? James Marcia's answer, as we saw in Chapter 1, is a gradual process that combines exploration and commitment. There is another way to think about this process that compliments Marcia's ideas, using language that might be more familiar.

CONSTRUCTION NOTES

Recall that moral identity formation is a process that requires exploration and commitment. Considering the moral and performance values that will become the core of our moral identity is an important part of exploration.

It is common to hear people talk about *finding* themselves or *finding* their purpose, as if these things exist but are waiting to be discovered, like a buried treasure. On the other hand, we are all familiar with stories of people who overcame great hardship in order to "make something of themselves," as if without a lot of hard work a person could fail to ever become someone. So, which one is it? Is the Self something we discover so that we can know our true identity and purpose? Or, is the Self something we have the power and responsibility to create?

Like most of life's Either/Or questions, the answer is "both."

A former student of mine, Zach, had to quit playing football after a dangerous series of head injuries. To occupy himself, he took up ceramics and discovered a passion and talent that he never knew he had. After graduation, he was accepted to a selective arts program where he continued to build on this part of his identity that he "discovered" when other options were closed off.

On the other hand, Zach's classmate Jake deliberately pursued and cultivated his identity as a leader. He looked for opportunities and took on challenges that allowed him to develop this aspect of his identity. With every leadership experience, this piece of his identity grew and became

integrated into his sense of self. In this way, Jake "created" this part of his identity.

Identity formation is a process of *both* **discovery** and **creation**. If we allow ourselves to believe it's all about discovery, our identity exploration will lack the necessary energetic drive. If we allow ourselves to believe it's all about creation, we may overlook the incredible opportunities to take advantage of our natural skills and passions. It might be helpful to think of the process as one in which we actively grow a mature Self from the seeds of skill and interest we discover inside.

This way of thinking applies equally well to our work on moral identity. What are the words we want people to associate with our name? When we look at the list of moral values, we see dozens of possibilities.

The truth, most often, is that we are attracted to some of these virtues more strongly than others. For example, someone drawn to the virtue of mercy is not likely to be equally drawn to the virtue of justice. Likewise, a person powerfully drawn to the virtue of honesty is not likely to be equally attracted to the virtue of loyalty. The fact that we gravitate toward some virtues more than others is evidence that there is something inside of us to discover through Marcia's exploration.

Valuing kindness is one thing, but integrating kindness into an identity is something else. Being drawn to the value of kindness may not be enough to make someone a kind person. Having chosen the value, a person must then take on the project of cultivating kindness in his or her identity and life.

What does this "cultivation" look like? It looks like practicing.

We become kind by practicing kindness. We become respectful by practicing respect. We become hardworking by practicing hard work. It is not too different from anything you've learned to do well, whether it's learning to play a tough piece of music, achieving fluency in a new language, or smoothly performing a layup in basketball.

Each practice session is an **iteration** (e.g., a "practice loop"), and each iteration improves on the one that came before. Each loop drives the behavior deeper into our identity until that behavior is not so much a conscious act but a habit.

James Marcia's commitment should not be thought of as a "vow" or a "promise" a person makes. It is more like a habit of identity that is created through deliberate practice. This is how we "create" ourselves; this is how we commit; this is how we begin to reach a secure, mature moral identity.

Integrity

The word "integrity" is often used as a synonym for "honest" or "trustworthy." We will *not* use the word integrity in this way.

Integrity is a word that suggests wholeness, a state of being complete and undivided. The word comes from the same root that gives us the term "integer" in mathematics. What is an integer? It is a number without any fractions or decimals. In other words, it is a number that is whole.

How might this apply to the concept of character and moral identity? When a person possesses integrity, that person's actions align with the values she claims to hold. There are no leftover pieces in her actions that do not fit within her system of values. Her values and actions align. When a person's value commitments match his or her actions, we say that person possesses **integrity**.

Think of the pursuit of integrity as an attempt to "close the gap" between our values and actions. (3.2) Closing the gap is a lifelong

project and one that we will never perfectly accomplish. To live with integrity every day in every moment requires a purity of heart and clarity of mind that most of us simply do not possess. However, we must not allow this fact to prevent us from trying to make that gap as small as we can. We must not let the idea of perfect defeat the idea of good.

Chapter 3 Discussion Questions

1. This chapter asserts that it is important to cultivate both moral and performance values. Which of these two kinds of values is more important to you, and why?

2. If you could have only one moral value associated with your name, which one would it be and why? If you could have only one performance value associated with your name, which one would it be and why?

3. Have you ever accidentally discovered a talent or passion for something that became an important part of your identity ever since you discovered it?

4. This chapter claims that turning *values* into *virtues* is an "iterative process" - one that requires many cycles of repetition before the desired behaviors becomes habits. Have you ever attempted to master something new and complex that required you to complete many iterative cycles of practice before you mastered it?

5. Ideally, our values and our actions align in all settings of our life, but in reality, maintaining our integrity is easier in some settings than others. In what settings do you find it easiest to be your best self? Where or when is it hardest?

CONSTRUCTION NOTES

This concludes the first part of our construction project: Design. The design ideal is a fully achieved moral identity, one that you explore and begin to commit to during adolescence. What words do you want people to associate with your name? What are the virtues of the adult that you will someday be proud to be? It is with these questions in mind that we now turn to the second part of the book: understanding the psychological foundation on which this identity is being constructed.