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Beyond Dominance and Competence: A Moral Virtue Theory of Status Attainment

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Abstract

Recognition has grown that moral behavior (e.g., generosity) plays a role in status attainment, yet it remains unclear how, why, and when demonstrating moral characteristics enhances status. Drawing on philosophy, anthropology, psychology, and organizational behavior, I critically review a third route to attaining status: *virtue*, and propose a moral virtue theory of status attainment to provide a *generalized* account of the role of morality in status attainment. The moral virtue theory posits that acts of virtue elicit feelings of warmth and admiration (for virtue), and willing deference, toward the virtuous actor. I further consider how the scope and priority of moralities and virtues endorsed by a moral community are bound by culture and social class to affect which moral characteristics enhance status. I end by outlining an agenda for future research into the role of virtue in status attainment.

Keywords

social status, morality, admiration, culture, social class

Since the age of 11, Malala Yousafzai, a Pakistani school girl, has advocated for girls' rights to education. Her activism defies the Taliban's ban on girls from attending school in Northwestern Pakistan. On October 9th, 2012, Yousafzai was shot by two Taliban gunmen on a school bus while returning home. She narrowly survived. Two years after the attempted assassination, Yousafzai became the youngest-ever Nobel Prize laureate for her heroic struggle against oppression and for the rights of girls to education (Nobelprize.org, 2014). It is remarkable that, at the age of 17, Yousafzai has been named one of the most influential people in the world, alongside Vladimir Putin, the President of Russia, and Mary Barra, the CEO of General Motors (Time.com, 2014). How did Malala Yousafzai attain such high status and influence? Why was not she accepted and admired in her own culture?

Research has identified two major routes to status: a *dominance* route, based on coercion that induces fear, and a *competence* route, based on demonstrations of task ability that earn respect (Cheng, Tracy, Foulsham, Kingstone, & Henrich, 2013; Levine & Moreland, 1990). Indeed, many people seem to attain status and influence through dominance (e.g., Vladimir Putin) and/or competence (e.g., Mary Barra). Neither dominance nor competence, however, seems to have been the path that landed Malala Yousafzai such high status. In this article, I review, as well as theoretically develop, a third route through which people attain status: the *virtue* route.

Scholars have long suggested that moral behavior and motivation may play a role in status attainment (e.g., Hollander, 1958; Ridgeway, 1982). But moral characteristics have usually been considered a *component* or *modifier* of the competence route, despite the well-established notion that competence and morality are two distinct social dimensions (e.g., Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002; Goodwin, Piazza, & Rozin, 2014). Evidence is beginning to accumulate that certain types of moral behavior and motivation—namely, altruism and generosity—can independently enhance a moral actor's status (e.g., Flynn, 2003; Hardy & Van Vugt, 2006; Willer, 2009a). Yet extant theories seem inadequate to fully explain the relationship between morality and status attainment, and many questions remain. For example, how and why does signaling group motivation lead to status conferral toward a generous actor (e.g., Willer, 2009a)? Can moral characteristics other than altruism and generosity, such as humility (Tangney, 2000) and purity (Haidt, Koller, & Dias, 1993), also enhance status? If yes, what desirable traits do expressions of these different forms of moral values signal?

To address these questions, I provide a critical review and integration of the research on morality and status attainment. Drawing on ideas from Mencius (trans. 2009), one of the most influential Chinese philosophers and Confucians, and recent developments in anthropology, psychology, and organizational behavior, I propose a moral virtue theory of status attainment to provide a more generalized treatment of the

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role of morality on status attainment. The moral virtue theory posits that demonstrating (moral) virtue leads to status through garnering *admiration* from others, and that culture affects which moral characteristics or acts are most likely to be deemed virtuous and elicit admiration.

Literature Review

Social Hierarchy

Status. Following a long tradition in social psychology, I define status as an individual's relative standing or rank in a group in terms of prominence and influence (Anderson, Willer, Kilduff, & Brown, 2012; Berger, Rosenholtz, & Zelditch, 1980; Cheng, Tracy, & Henrich, 2010; Levine & Moreland, 1990; Martin, 2009; Rosa & Mazur, 1979). Individuals with higher status attract more attention (e.g., Graffin, Bundy, Porac, Wade, & Quinn, 2013; Ratcliff, Hugenberg, Shriver, & Bernstein, 2011), and are more influential (e.g., Berger, Zelditch, & Cohen, 1972; Cheng et al., 2013), than those with lower status.

Status is thus conceptualized as an ordinal variable with deference and influence as key components, akin to the concept of status rank (e.g., Anderson, Willer, et al., 2012) or social rank (e.g., Cheng & Tracy, 2014). It is related to, but separable from, the definition of status adopted by some scholars (e.g., Blader & Chen, 2014; Magee & Galinsky, 2008) as respect and esteem one has in the eyes of others, primarily in task-oriented groups. With an emphasis on influence broadly, my conceptualization of status is appropriate to understand status attainment in social groups *generally*, including groups that are not oriented to pre-set (collective) tasks (e.g., Martin, 2009).

Status is distinguishable from other related hierarchical concepts, such as power, socio-economic status (SES), and reputation, in at least two important ways. First, unlike power, which refers to relative control over important outcomes or resources (Emerson, 1962; Fiske & Berdahl, 2007; Magee & Galinsky, 2008), status is socially conferred or accorded by others in the group (e.g., Brescoll & Uhlmann, 2008; Gould, 2002; Halevy, Chou, Cohen, & Livingston, 2012). In other words, status is less of an objective property of an individual, and more of a subjective social attribute, compared with power (see Blader & Chen, 2012). Consequently, status and power have different effects on social perceptions (Fragale, Overbeck, & Neale, 2011; Hays, 2013) and behavior (Fast, Halevy, & Galinsky, 2012), sometimes even in opposite directions (Blader & Chen, 2012).

Second, status differs from SES by being a *locally* defined, or a context-specific, characteristic, rather than a *globally* defined characteristic based on one's position in the market and society more generally (Frank, 1985; Krieger, Williams, & Moss, 1997; Weber, 1946). Status is an emergent quality inseparable from human interactions within a shared culture (Gould, 2002; Weber, 1946), group, or situation (Anderson, John, Keltner, & Kring, 2001; Chatman, Boisnier, Spataro, Anderson, & Berdahl, 2008; Owens & Sutton, 2002). This contextual feature distinguishes status from SES (Adler et al., 1994; Anderson, Kraus, Galinsky, & Keltner, 2012), typically defined by a combination of income (e.g., Wilkinson, 1997), consumption (Frank, 1985), education (e.g., Snibbe & Markus, 2005; White, 1982), and occupational prestige (e.g., Knigge, Maas, van Leeuwen, & Mandemakers, 2014; Sewell, Haller, & Ohlendorf, 1970). For example, a university professor may have relatively high SES in society but nevertheless rank at the bottom of the "pecking" order in his or her department. Status has an important impact on a variety of outcomes, such as subjective well-being (Anderson, Kraus, et al., 2012) and turnover (Hambrick & Cannella, 1993), over and above SES. This article confines attention to the attainment of status, instead of the attainment of SES, which has received much attention in sociology (e.g., Dimaggio & Mohr, 1985; Knigge et al., 2014; Lin, Ensel, & Vaughn, 1981; Mare & Maralani, 2006; Ritchie & Bates, 2013; Sewell et al., 1970). Nevertheless, I treat SES as a crucial boundary that affects the relationship between moral characteristics and status attainment, which will be discussed in depth later.

Finally, status is also distinctive from reputation defined as "public information that summarizes how a person behaves towards others" (Pfeiffer, Tran, Krumme, & Rand, 2012, p. 2791). In contrast to status, which is locally acknowledged within a social group, reputation consisting of publically held information regarding one's past behavior can readily diffuse outside one's social group through gossip or other means (e.g., Feinberg, Willer, Stellar, & Keltner, 2012; Semmann, Krambeck, & Milinski, 2005). In addition, despite being influential in status maintenance and attainment (e.g., Flynn, Reagans, Amanatullah, & Ames, 2006; Stewart, 2005), a good reputation (for competence or virtue) does not necessarily precede a high status. Status can emerge rapidly among strangers who interact face-to-face with each other briefly (e.g., Cheng et al., 2013; Tiedens & Fragale, 2003), before reputational information can be formed and communicated within the group. On the flip side, the formation of reputation based on past behavior is substantially affected by one's status (Anderson & Shirako, 2008). It is difficult for low-status individuals, regardless of their actual behavior, to develop a reputation (for competence or virtue) due to the little attention they receive within their group. In sum, status is socially conferred and emergent from a specific social context. Despite being often interrelated, status and other important hierarchical constructs including power, SES, and reputation are distinguishable.

Status hierarchy. A social order based on status is pervasive in human organizations, serving adaptive functions such as *coordination* and *motivation* (Anderson & Brown, 2010; Halevy, Chou, & Galinsky, 2011; Magee & Galinsky, 2008; Tiedens, Unzueta, & Young, 2007). Status hierarchies

provide clear lines of direction for people's social behavior corresponding to their relative standings (Fiske, 2010; Fiske & Berdahl, 2007). By definition, a lower status individual is expected to defer or submit to a higher status counterpart when disagreements or conflicts occur (e.g., Berger et al., 1972). By providing social order, status hierarchies reduce uncertainty embedded in social life and facilitate coordination. Status hierarchies also provide material and psychological incentives for people to aspire for status (Magee & Galinsky, 2008). Although individuals tend to agree on status in (experimental) small group settings (e.g., Anderson, Srivastava, Beer, Spataro, & Chatman, 2006), status hierarchies, in reality, are often unstable and conflict-prone (e.g., Bendersky & Shah, 2012; Gould, 2003; Jordan, Sivanathan, & Galinsky, 2011; Sapolsky, 2005). Insofar as upward mobility is allowed, status hierarchies constitute a central venue for aspiring people to fulfill or satisfy their intrinsic desire for status (Gruenfeld & Tiedens, 2010). Scholars have identified two major routes to status—dominance, based on the use of intimidation and coercion to induce fear, and competence, based on the demonstration of task skills and expertise to gain respect.

Routes to Status

> People may oppose you, but when they realize you can hurt them, they'll join your side. (Condoleezza Rice, cited in Pfeffer, 2010, p. 87)

Dominance: The "default" route. Dominance and antagonistic encounters are, perhaps, the "default" route through which people "negotiate" their relative statuses in social hierarchies (e.g., Barkow, 1975). It appears to be inherited from our ancestors' general primate tendency to use physical intimidation and threat to gain social supremacy, which we still share with many of our primate "cousins" (Sapolsky, 2005). Aggression and intimidation often lead to submission and deference from others by inducing the belief that a (dominant) actor is capable of inflicting harm, thus eliciting fear, anxiety, or other discomfort (Mazur, 1985; Mazur & Booth, 1998). There is, furthermore, an implicit expectation that once status is conferred to a dominant actor, the dominant actor will withdraw the use of force. In other words, people "join your side" to avoid or alleviate stress or discomfort that you are capable of imposing on them. Unfortunately, a large proportion of human violence is the consequence of dominance struggles among people seeking superior status (e.g., D. Cohen, Bowdle, Nisbett, & Schwarz, 1996; Daly & Wilson, 1988; Gould, 2003). Dominance struggles are especially prone to occur in symmetric or ambiguous relationships, because people similar in social status strive to achieve superiority over each other (Gould, 2003).

A social hierarchy based on dominance is likely dysfunctional for performance in task-oriented groups because dominant people may not have the task skills or expertise required to lead their groups (Ridgeway & Berger, 1986). Empirical research, nevertheless, shows that dominance tactics, often manifested as psychological and subtle forms of aggression such as verbal abuse and ostracism, are widely employed to not only maintain but also attain or enhance status in task-oriented contexts (Bendersky & Hays, 2012; Berdahl, 2007; Brass & Burkhardt, 1993; Kipnis, Schmidt, & Wilkinson, 1980; Pfeffer, 2010; Yukl & Falbe, 1990). For example, Bendersky and Hays (2012) found that dominance struggles were a major form of conflict over relative status in MBA student study groups. Despite impairing task performance, dominance behavior enhanced students' status within study groups over time (Bendersky & Shah, 2012).

Laboratory studies also support the dominance route to attaining status in task-oriented contexts, particularly when face-to-face interaction is allowed (Lee & Ofshe, 1981; Mazur, 1985; Rosa & Mazur, 1979). For example, Mazur and colleagues (1980) found that dominant mutual stares accompanied by lowered brows (i.e., stare-downs) caused stronger stress responses, indicated by greater physiological arousal, than gazes accompanied by raised brows; discomfort experienced during the stare-down, furthermore, negatively predicted one's status in a subsequent decision-making task. In a more recent study, Cheng et al. (2013) asked undergraduates to interact face-to-face with same-sex unacquainted others (i.e., four to six individuals per group) to complete a group task. The use of dominance tactics by each person during the task was assessed using the Dominance and Prestige Peer-Rated Scales (Cheng et al., 2010). Examples of the dominance scale include "I enjoy having control over others" and "I am afraid of him/her." Indeed, peer-rated dominance was positively associated with both perceived and behavioral measures of status.

Competence: The functional route. Unlike dominance, status gained from demonstrating task-relevant skills or expertise is generally considered the functional, or meritocratic, route to attaining status. Competence is defined as skills, expertise, ideas, or information that are unambiguously valuable to achieve specific task goals (Anderson & Kilduff, 2009a; Berger et al., 1980; Ridgeway & Berger, 1986). Demonstrating (outstanding) task skills or expertise induces the belief that a (competent) actor is instrumental in accomplishing collective task goals, and elicits *respect for skills* (e.g., Wojciszke, Abele, & Baryla, 2009), leading further to status conferral toward the competent actor. Importantly, it is implicitly expected that conferring status to a competent actor secures the competent actor's future task contributions to the group, according to the expectation states theory (Berger et al., 1980). Conferring status to a competent actor also allows others to gain proximity to that actor, enabling them to learn from or "copy" the competent actor's superior task skills, according to the information goods theory (Henrich & Gil-White, 2001). Note that both of the two theoretical accounts involve a *direct* reciprocity process in which groups award

status to competent members in direct exchange for their superior task skills or contributions (Emerson, 1962; Frank, 1985; Shechtman & Kenny, 1994; Trivers, 1971).

The competence route to attaining status has received general support from field research. For example, Kipnis and colleagues (1980) asked part-time MBA students to report an incident in which they succeeded in getting their boss, a coworker, or a subordinate to do something they wanted. One of the most frequently employed tactics reported was to demonstrate competence. Moreover, social network research finds that competence-based tactics are generally effective in status attainment (Klein, Lim, Saltz, & Mayer, 2004; Lin, 1999), though their effectiveness may be influenced by certain boundary conditions (e.g., Casciaro & Lobo, 2008; Treadway et al., 2013). For example, demonstrating competence, when combined with positive interpersonal affect (e.g., being liked), can help individuals attain a central network position and status (Casciaro & Lobo, 2008). In contrast, demonstrating competence, when combined with negative interpersonal affect (e.g., being disliked), becomes irrelevant in a person's choice of partner for advice and problem solving.

Laboratory studies also provide evidence for the competence route to attaining status. Early research on the status characteristics theory (e.g., Berger et al., 1972) found that prior beliefs about and evaluations of various status characteristics (e.g., gender, age, and race) were differentially associated with perceptions of competence traits (e.g., intelligence), and led to status differences among strangers who differed in these status characteristics (see review by Berger et al., 1980). More recent studies, furthermore, have found supportive evidence that the associations between status characteristics and actual status are indeed mediated by perceived competence (e.g., Anderson & Kilduff, 2009b; Brescoll & Uhlmann, 2008; Fragale, 2006; Tiedens, 2001).

Instead of relying on status characteristics as proxies of competence, Wojciszke et al. (2009) manipulated information on a target's competence directly, and found that competence was a strong and positive predictor of (affective) respect (i.e., "I respect her," "She deserves admiration," and "She could serve as an example to others") that the target received.[1] In another study that directly manipulated competence, university students were recruited to participate in a problem-solving task in four-person groups (Ridgeway, 1981). One group member was in fact a confederate whose competence was manipulated by varying the number of correct solutions he or she offered to the group. Actual competence was positively associated with perceived competence, and more importantly, with a behavioral measure of status (i.e., the number of trials in which the group adopts the confederate's solution).

Remaining issues. There has been some debate about the relative prominence of the dominance and competence routes. Advocates of the dominance route criticize the rational and meritocratic assumptions behind the competence route, and suggest that performance expectations may be post-hoc constructions to justify the emerging or existing social hierarchy (Lee & Ofshe, 1981). In response to this critique, advocates of the competence route argue that many dominance demeanors or tactics are task cues that give information about one's competence (Ridgeway, Berger, & Smith, 1985). Both sides provide supportive evidence for their own arguments (Driskell, Olmstead, & Salas, 1993; Lee & Ofshe, 1981; Mohr, 1986), but there has not been convincing evidence that favors one over the other (Levine & Moreland, 1990). Recent research suggests that dominance and competence are distinct and that both are effective routes to attaining status (Cheng et al., 2013).

Yet this two-route model of status attainment seems inadequate to capture the "big picture" of how people get ahead in social hierarchies. Results from meta-analyses show that influence tactics related to dominance (i.e., assertiveness) and competence (i.e., rationality) have only weak positive impacts on extrinsic success at work (e.g., income and promotion; Higgins, Judge, & Ferris, 2003), and that the correlation between intelligence, a crucial component of task competence, and leadership, a formal position of status, is only slightly higher than .20, much lower than previously believed (Judge, Colbert, & Ilies, 2004). Furthermore, using factor analyses, Kyl-Heku and Buss (1996) found that half of the 26 status tactics they identified could not be explained by either a dominance factor (e.g., derogate others) or a competence factor (e.g., display knowledge). Indeed, two of the most likely employed tactics to attain status, "display positive social characteristics (e.g., caring)" and "help others," were among the unexplained. In *Give and Take*, Grant (2013) argues that many successful people, such as Adam Rifkin, George Meyer, and Bob Gross, to name a few, attained superior status through *giving* more than *taking*. If the two-route model is inadequate to explain much of status attainment, is there a third route, distinct from dominance and competence, to attaining status?

Morality: A third route to status. Aside from dominance and competence, there has been a relatively small but burgeoning literature on the role of morality on status attainment (e.g., Grant, 2013), which is the focus of the present review. Morality is defined as a system of "interlocking sets of values, virtues, norms, practices, identities, institutions, technologies, and evolved psychological mechanisms that work together to suppress or regulate self-interest and make cooperative societies possible" (Haidt, 2012, p. 270). Despite often being used interchangeably (e.g., Bazerman & Gino, 2012; T. R. Cohen & Morse, 2014; Rachels & Rachels, 2007), morality and ethics are distinct in that the former is *descriptive*—telling us what people in a certain group or community believe *is* right or wrong, whereas the latter is *prescriptive*—telling us what *ought* to be considered right or wrong according to philosophers and ethicists (Bauman, 1994; Spohn,

1997; Weiss, 1942). For example, Weiss (1942) argues, "A man is moral if he conforms to the established practices and customs of the group in which he is. He is ethical if he voluntarily obligates himself to live in the light of an ideal good" (p. 381). The descriptive approach to morality has its roots in anthropology and cultural psychology; the prescriptive approach to ethics has its roots in philosophy. This article adopts the first approach as I draw mainly on theories and evidence from anthropology and psychology with an eye toward social and contextual, rather than absolute, evaluations of a person's virtue.

Hollander (1958, 1960) was one of the first researchers to propose moral behavior as a source of status, in addition to competence and diffuse status characteristics (e.g., gender and race). He argues that conformity to group norms serves to maintain and increase one's status through increasing one's positive impressions (i.e., "idiosyncrasy credits") in the eyes of others. Acknowledging Hollander's idea that "good citizens" are awarded with status, Ridgeway (1981), nevertheless, argues that conformity to group norms is insufficient to status attainment because conformity behavior is often motivated by the pressure of group social sanctions (i.e., the desire to appear moral), rather than by intrinsic commitment to the group (i.e., being ethical). As a result, group members are unlikely to consider conformity indicative of genuine moral motivation, and are unlikely to confer "idiosyncrasy credits" to them. In an experiment following Hollander's (1960) original study design, Ridgeway (1981) manipulated conformity by varying the degree to which a confederate in a four-person task group conformed to or deviated from group norms. The results showed that conformity did not effectively communicate group orientation and failed to enhance status, supporting Ridgeway's argument.

Instead, Ridgeway (1981, 1982) argues that perceived motivation—self-oriented or group-oriented—affects a group's decision to accept one's contribution and grant status in the group. In a follow-up study, Ridgeway (1982) manipulated group-oriented versus self-oriented motivation and found that group-oriented members were generally more respected and influential than self-oriented ones. This research (Ridgeway, 1981, 1982) was one of the first to address the crucial role of moral motivation in status attainment. Ridgeway, however, considers competence, or performance expectations, to be the primary basis of status in task-oriented groups. According to her, moral motivation only plays a role in moderating the relationship between performance expectations and status attainment. Berger, Balkwell, Norman, and Smith (1992) also suggest that moral characteristics may function in the same way as status characteristics to affect performance expectations and status conferral. Following this tradition in the status characteristic theory, moral characteristics have been usually considered a *component* or *modifier* of the competence route (e.g., Bingham, Oldroyd, Thompson, Bednar, & Bunderson, 2014; Cheng et al., 2013; Goldstein, Griskevicius, & Cialdini, 2011; Podolny, 2005; Torelli, Leslie, Stoner, & Puente, 2014), instead of an *independent* route to status. For example, Cheng and Tracy (2014) recently argue that only when coupled with culturally valued skills or expertise do moral characteristics promote status.

Yet recent research seems to favor Hollander's position that moral characteristics and acts may be a distinct source of status (Ellemers, Pagliaro, Barreto, & Leach, 2008; Flynn et al., 2006; Hardy & Van Vugt, 2006; Pagliaro, Ellemers, & Barreto, 2011; Willer, 2009a; Wojciszke, Bazinska, & Jaworski, 1998). First and foremost, there is convincing evidence that people form perceptions and judgments of others along two distinct and fundamental dimensions: warmth and competence (Abele & Wojciszke, 2007; Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2008; Fiske et al., 2002). The warmth dimension captures one's perceived intentions for good or ill (e.g., sociability, agreeableness, and kindness). The competence dimension captures one's perceived ability (e.g., intelligence, efficacy, and skills) to pursue these intentions. In general, warmth-based information plays a more central role in forming global impressions of others compared with competence-based information, which appears to only serve as a weak modifier of impression intensity (Abele & Wojciszke, 2007; Wojciszke et al., 1998). More recent research (Brambilla & Leach, 2014; Goodwin et al., 2014), furthermore, suggests that the warmth dimension consists of both sociability (e.g., funniness and friendliness) and morality (e.g., generosity and charitableness) characteristics, and that it is the moral component of warmth that predominates in social and interpersonal judgment.

In addition, research on heroism suggests that moral excellence is the defining characteristic of heroes, who rank among the most prominent people in human societies (Franco, Blau, & Zimbardo, 2011; Goethals & Allison, 2012; Goode, 1978). Although heroes are often competent, competence is not necessary to make heroes. People without superior competence can become heroes by representing the ideal of civic virtues, which often includes physical peril or self-sacrifice. For example, a person who confronts terrorists to save others' lives but is killed due to lack of skills of fighting and using weapons may still be hailed as a hero for his or her courage and self-sacrifice to protect others (e.g., McCormack, 2014).

Undoubtedly, heroes are outliers among us. Nevertheless, sacrificing more than others for collective interest seems a key to enhance one's status (Grant, 2013). Among a sample of engineers working in teams, perceived generosity, measured by peer-reported imbalance in favor exchange, was positively associated with individual status in the team (Flynn, 2003). Furthermore, perceived generosity partially mediated the effect of self-monitoring, a personality trait, on status attainment in a follow-up study (Flynn et al., 2006). In other words, high self-monitors attain status partly by building up a reputation of generosity—high self-monitors tend to refrain from asking for favors from others but are willing to

give help when they are approached by others. This research hence shows that giving more to others than taking from them may be a crucial source of status in organizations. The rationale behind this research is rooted in a *direct* reciprocity or exchange account (e.g., Emerson, 1962) that people confer status and influence to those whose favors they are not capable of returning.

Moreover, experimental research is also accumulating evidence of the positive effects of moral behavior on status attainment. Two studies found that contributing a greater proportion of one's resources to the group in economic games enhanced status (Hardy & Van Vugt, 2006; Willer, 2009a). Even outside observers who did not play the economic games allocated higher status to high contributors than to low contributors. Similarly, Milinski, Semmann, and Krambeck (2002) found that public donations to charity (e.g., UNICEF) increased the donors' income received from other members of their group and the number of votes the donors received in the election for the students' council. Note that these findings cannot be fully explained by direct reciprocity theories (e.g., Emerson, 1962; Flynn, 2003; Frank, 1985; Trivers, 1971), according to which people only confer status to those who have given them direct benefits, nor by indirect reciprocity theories (e.g., Alexander, 1987; Boyd & Richerson, 1989; Nowak & Sigmund, 2005), according to which people confer status to those who have benefited others in their social group.

Instead, costly signaling theories (Roberts, 1998; Smith & Bird, 2000; Willer, 2009b; Zahavi & Zahavi, 1997) seem to provide a better explanation for the aforementioned findings, positing that generosity and altruism serve as costly but effective means to signal underlying desirable traits. Hardy and Van Vugt (2006) suggest that "people who display altruistic actions might be seen as possessing a broad class of desirable traits and qualities" (p. 1411), such as task ability, resourcefulness (or resource potential), and commitment. Willer (2009a, 2009b) substantially extends this research by explicitly theorizing and empirically demonstrating that generosity signals group motivation—the extent to which people value a group's interests relative to their own, which in turn leads to status conferral. Confining its attention to collective action situations "where a group of individuals shares an interest in producing a public good, but are also motivated to free-ride" (Willer, 2009b, p. 139), this line of research focuses on altruism and generosity—two moral traits that are crucial to these situations.

To summarize, extant research has provided preliminary evidence that individual moral behavior and motivation may play an important and, possibly, distinct role in status attainment. It is, however, still unclear how exactly and under what conditions moral behavior and motivation is related to status attainment. Neither reciprocity theories nor costly signaling theories seem adequate to fully explain the positive effects of moral characteristics on status attainment, and many questions remain. For example, how and why does signaling group motivation lead others, particularly outside observers, to confer status and deference to a generous actor? Moreover, extant research tends to focus on a narrow scope of morality, primarily regarding altruism and generosity in collective action situations. Recent research (e.g., Haidt, 2012) on cultural and moral psychology reveals that descriptively moral domains include not only altruism and generosity but also loyalty, obedience to authority, humility, and purity, to name a few. We know little about whether these other forms of moral characteristics enhance status. If they do, what desirable traits are signaled and when do expressions of these different moral values affect the attainment of status?

The Moral Virtue Theory of Status Attainment

To address these questions, I propose an integrated theory of the effects of morality on status attainment—the moral virtue theory. Incorporating ideas from classic Chinese philosophy and recent developments in anthropology, psychology, and organizational behavior to the existing literature on morality and status, the moral virtue theory aims to provide a *generalized* account of how, why, and when demonstrating moral characteristics serves as a distinct and independent route to attaining status.

Defining Virtue

First and foremost, I define *virtue*, the key concept in the moral virtue theory, as "characteristics of a person that are morally praiseworthy" (Haidt & Joseph, 2004, p. 61). Virtue is thus conceptualized as "virtues of character," in Aristotle's (trans. 2014) term, that represent human excellence specific to the *moral* domain, and exclude intellectual virtues, such as creativity and curiosity (see Dahlsgaard, Peterson, & Seligman, 2005; Peterson & Seligman, 2004), and personal virtues, such as fortitude (Gert, 2004), which mainly benefit their possessors (i.e., are amoral).

To be morally praiseworthy, virtue, inevitably, involves *voluntary* self-sacrifice for the good of others, beyond conformity to moral norms (e.g., Pagliaro et al., 2011) or (normative) moral character (e.g., guilt-proneness and agreeableness; T. R. Cohen, Panter, Turan, Morse, & Kim, 2014). For example, though generosity is a widely, if not universally, valued virtue in human societies, we are generally not expected to give more than we take from others (e.g., Gouldner, 1960). Indeed, most of us are "matchers," who strive to equate what we give and what we take in the long term (Grant, 2013). In a normative sense, "matchers" conform to the norm of reciprocity, and should be deemed moral but not necessarily virtuous. Only "givers," who voluntarily and consistently give more than they take from others, embody the virtue of generosity.

In addition, virtue is based on a *prescriptive* system of moral regulation that focuses on approach motives to do something

good, in comparison to conformity or guilt-proneness seemingly rooted in a *proscriptive* system of moral regulation that focuses on avoidance motives not to do something "bad" (Janoff-Bulman, 2011; Janoff-Bulman, Sheikh, & Hepp, 2009). There may be a tipping point above which moral characteristics or acts become seen as virtuous. Yet excessive or conspicuous giving is not necessarily deemed virtuous because it is often mixed with self-interested intentions to show off one's wealth and reap reputational benefits (e.g., Berman, Levine, Barasch, & Small, 2015; Griskevicius, Tybur, & Van den Bergh, 2010). This conceptualization of virtue hence is consistent with the Aristotelian "Golden Mean"—the mean of two extremes, those of deficiency or excess.

Virtues in this article deviate from those defined in positive psychology (Dahlsgaard et al., 2005; Peterson & Seligman, 2004) and in political philosophy (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006) in that the virtues under investigation are not necessarily ubiquitous or universal. To be consistent with the aforementioned definition of morality, I adopt a *relativistic* perspective of moral virtue, again in a descriptive, rather than a prescriptive sense (e.g., Mele & Sanchez-Runde, 2013). Without arguing whether there is a "universal truth" or "foundational principle" in morality (e.g., Colby, Kohlberg, Gibbs, & Lieberman, 1983; Kohlberg & Gilligan, 1971), this descriptive form of relativism merely posits that different groups or communities have different moral codes and virtues, and the moral codes and virtues endorsed by a group or community dictate what is believed to be right or wrong within that collective. There is considerable empirical evidence supporting this account (e.g., Haidt et al., 1993; Miller & Bersoff, 1992; Rai & Fiske, 2011; Rozin, Lowery, Imada, & Haidt, 1999; Shweder, Much, Mahapatra, & Park, 1997).

Shweder and colleagues (1997) identified three major moral codes: autonomy, community, and divinity. Autonomy "aims to protect the zone of discretionary choice of 'individuals' and to promote the exercise of individual will in the pursuit of personal preferences" (p. 138) and captures concerns about harm, justice, and human rights. Community "aims to protect the moral integrity of the various stations or roles that constitute a 'society' or a 'community'" (p. 138) and emphasizes regulative concepts such as (communal) duty, hierarchy, and interdependence (or relationship). Divinity is centered on the idea that the body is a sacred temple that must remain pure and relies on concepts such as sacred order, traditions, and pollution. Among these "big three" moralities, only the morality of autonomy closely resembles the justice-based moral principles dominant in the West. The moralities of community and divinity seem more relevant in Eastern cultures and much of the rest of the world than in North America and Western Europe.

This relativistic view of virtue recognizes that different groups or communities develop different moral codes gradually from the specific experiences in dealing with moral conflict or problems prominent within their local contexts (e.g., Walzer, 1983). Each of the "big three" moralities is characterized by a set of unique virtues that uphold the corresponding moral domain. For example, the morality of divinity features virtues such as purity, chastity, and cleanliness; these virtues, despite manifesting differently, all capture the essence of the moral domain that "aims to protect the soul, the spirit, the spiritual aspects of the human agent and 'nature' from degradation" (Shweder et al., 1997, p. 138). Originally, purity, chastity, and cleanliness might be developed to serve as a defense function against the dangers posed by pathogens (e.g., malaria and tuberculosis), particularly in regions that have historically higher prevalence of pathogens (Fincher, Thornhill, Murray, & Schaller, 2008; Schaller & Murray, 2008). Note that this relativistic account of virtue does not oppose the idea that there may be a small set of ubiquitous or universal virtues (e.g., Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Some virtues such as generosity and charity are probably ubiquitous (e.g., Campbell, 1975); others such as chastity or sexual purity are likely to be specific to certain social contexts and times (e.g., Haidt et al., 1993).

Virtues are relatively stable, but still modifiable (Dunning, 1995) traits that are both innate and socially constructed (Haidt, 2012; Haidt & Joseph, 2004). Aristotle (trans. 2014) has long argued that "nature gives us the capacity to acquire them (i.e., virtues), and completion comes through habituation" (p. 23). Recently, Haidt and colleagues (Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009; Graham et al., 2011; Haidt & Joseph, 2004) extended the Aristotelian idea and proposed the moral foundation theory (MFT), arguing that there are a small set of (innate) intuitions, or moral foundations, in the human mind resulting from evolution. Based on these moral foundations, people develop moral characters and virtues through learning (e.g., from parents and peers) cultural institutions and practices (or ethos). The Harm/Care, Fairness/Reciprocity, and Liberty/Oppression foundations, in combination, resemble the morality of autonomy; the In-Group/Loyalty and Authority/Respect foundations capture two important components (i.e., duty and hierarchy) of the morality of community; and finally, the Purity/Sanctity foundation corresponds to the morality of divinity (Rai & Fiske, 2011).

Virtues, once acquired, discipline one's faculties so that one is capable of reacting properly to morally relevant events or situations, particularly, in an intuitive or habitual manner (Haidt & Joseph, 2004). For example, in response to hearing screams for help, Leo Moody, a virtuous bystander, did not hesitate to jump into freezing water to save an infant trapped in an overturned car from drowning (The Associated Press, 2014). Undoubtedly, moral deliberation or reasoning plays a role in shaping virtues. Indeed, moral intuition or habituation may be the consequence of moral reasoning in the first place. Yet recent research shows that deliberation and reasoning can, sometimes, overshadow altruistic moral intuition and undermine virtues (Paxton, Ungar, & Greene, 2012; Rand, Greene, & Nowak, 2012; Swann et al., 2014; Zhong, 2011).

Importantly, virtues are distinct from task skills and other competence traits (e.g., intelligence) valuable to achieving

specific task goals. Despite being highly valued within a moral community, virtues do not necessarily facilitate goal-achievement in a specific task-oriented context. For example, enacting purity virtues (i.e., cleanliness and order), despite having some beneficial effects on healthy choices and charitable behavior, can impair performance in a creativity task (Vohs, Redden, & Rahinel, 2013). Moreover, "givers" who spend too much time helping others may end up experiencing burnout and failing their own tasks (Bendersky & Shah, 2012; Grant, 2013).

In sum, following a tradition in anthropology and cultural psychology (Haidt et al., 1993; Miller & Bersoff, 1992; Rai & Fiske, 2011; Rozin et al., 1999; Shweder et al., 1997; Shweder & Sullivan, 1993), I conceptualize virtue as relativistic, in a descriptive sense, such that different groups or communities have different moral codes, as well as different sets of virtues corresponding to and upholding these moral codes. Virtue involves the prescriptive system of moral regulation—focusing on approach motives to do something good—and hence goes beyond conformity to norms or (normative) moral character (e.g., guilt-proneness) related to the proscriptive system of moral regulation—focusing on avoidance motives not to do something "bad." Virtues are modifiable traits, shaped by both innate intuition and cultural learning or habituation, and enable virtuous actors to respond properly to morally relevant events or situations. In contrast to competence traits, virtues do not necessarily enhance, and can sometimes hinder, goal-achievement in task-oriented contexts. Virtue, therefore, is the *general* desirable trait uniquely signaled by (outstanding) moral behavior and motivation, which may manifest in a broad scope of moral domain.

Moral Judgment of Virtues

Moral psychologists previously believed that moral judgment is primarily the result of reasoning and reflection (e.g., Kohlberg & Gilligan, 1971; Turiel, 2006). In other words, we are all "amateur" judges who search for relevant evidence, weigh evidence, and infer a moral conclusion (Haidt, 2001). This rationalist approach, however, is inconsistent with recent findings (Bargh & Chartrand, 1999; Greene, Sommerville, Nystrom, Darley, & Cohen, 2001; Haidt, 2001; Haidt et al., 1993; Rozin et al., 1999). Instead, Haidt (2001; Haidt & Bjorklund, 2007) proposes the social intuitionist model, arguing that moral judgment of a person's characteristics and actions is primarily the result of moral intuition defined as "the sudden appearance in consciousness of a moral judgment, including an affective valence (good–bad, like–dislike)" (p. 818). Like reasoning, moral intuition and the appraisals associated with moral emotions are cognitions; unlike reasoning, moral intuition runs fast, effortlessly, and automatically with only the outcome but not the process accessible to consciousness. In other words, we feel flashes of approval or disapproval upon encountering or observing virtues or vices, and these flashes of intuition and emotions dominate our moral judgment. Even pre-existing, or experimentally induced, emotions can affect evaluations of virtues. For example, experimentally inducing disgust caused harsher judgment of purity-violating behavior (e.g., "Being sexually promiscuous") and amplified approval of behavior upholding purity (e.g., "Refraining from consuming drugs, cigarettes, and alcohol"; Horberg, Oveis, Keltner, & Cohen, 2009). Although moral reasoning may still play a role in evaluating virtues, the social intuitionist model suggests that it matters mainly in a post-hoc manner to justify already-formed intuition and emotions (Haidt, 2001).

Admittedly, (intuitive) moral judgment and evaluations of virtues can be sometimes flawed (e.g., Kahneman & Klein, 2009). On the one hand, virtues may be feigned to gain personal interests (e.g., promotions; Grant & Mayer, 2009; Hui, Lam, & Law, 2000). The authenticity of virtues can be difficult to determine, especially when social interaction is brief and infrequent. Perhaps appearance does have more influence than reality, as told by the ancient Greek sages (Plato, trans. 2007). "Faked" virtue can bring about personal benefits (i.e., status) insofar as observers perceive it indicative of outstanding moral standards and admirable. Nevertheless, a recent study (Donia, Johns, & Raja, 2015) showed that supervisors were relatively accurate in detecting "fakers" among their subordinates in the workplace. It is especially difficult to feign virtue in the long term as "fakers" inevitably leak clues of selfishness (Grant, 2013).

On the other hand, authentically virtuous acts may sometimes be seen as instrumental or as impression management intending to gain personal interest, particularly when witnesses' moral self-image is at stake. For example, whistleblowers who demonstrate virtue by standing up against wrong-doings are often questioned and resented because their virtuous acts (in the eyes of in-group members) implicitly condemn the witnesses who did not take the stand. Whistleblowers hence present a threat to the witnesses' moral self-image (Monin, Sawyer, & Marquez, 2008; Stouten, van Dijke, Mayer, De Cremer, & Euwema, 2013; Sumanth, Mayer, & Kay, 2011). The intentionality of virtuous acts may also be more likely seen as dubious when the virtuous actors are out-group members than when they are in-group members (Piazza, Goodwin, Rozin, & Royzman, 2014; Uhlmann, Pizarro, Tannenbaum, & Ditto, 2009). The tendency to make motivated moral judgment, nevertheless, is constrained by plausibility—"people only bend data and the law of logic to the point that normative considerations challenge their view of themselves as fair and objective judges" (p. 314)—and hence limited in situations where moral behavior and motivation is ambiguous (Ditto, Pizarro, & Tannenbaum, 2009). Again, in the long term, it is difficult to "distort" judgment against actors who consistently demonstrate virtue.

After defining what virtue is and delineating how virtue is evaluated, I draw on Mencius's classic ideas, as well as recent research in psychology and organizational behavior,

to explain how and why demonstrating virtue can lead to status attainment in the following section.

The Social Psychological Mechanism: Admiration for Virtue

> When one uses force to make people submit, they do not submit in their hearts but only because their strength is insufficient. When one uses *virtue* to make people submit, they are pleased to the depths of their hearts, and they sincerely submit. (Mencius, trans. 2009, p. 33)

Mencius, who lived in the 3rd Century BC, proposed a virtue route to attaining status in an attempt to provide an alternative to the use of force for ambitious rulers. Importantly, virtue, in Mencius' terms, covers a broad scope of moral domain, including sympathy–benevolence (*ren*), deference–propriety (*li*), shame/disgust–righteousness (*yi*), and approval/disapproval–wisdom (*zhi*; Flanagan & Williams, 2010). There are two parts of Mencius' thesis. First, he argues vividly that acts of virtue please our hearts, just like delicious food pleases our mouths. In other words, observing acts of virtue is pleasant, if not desirable, to us. This part of Mencius' thesis is consistent with the social intuitive model (Haidt, 2001), which argues that moral judgment is primarily intuitive and affective. Similarly, Hume (1739-40/1969) pointed to the pleasure arising from witnessing outstanding moral conduct or intentions as the defining feature of virtue. Second and, perhaps, more importantly, Mencius posits that the pleasure elicited by observing virtuous acts leads to sincere deference or submission toward a virtuous actor. As far as I know, Mencius was the first to argue that pleasure, or positive emotions—in addition to fear—can make people submit and confer status to an actor. In combination, Mencius laid out the first draft of the virtue route to attaining status.

Yet Mencius never elaborated on *why* virtue and the pleasure it elicits can lead to status for the virtuous actor. To extend Mencius' thesis, I propose that demonstrating virtue is likely to induce the belief that this (virtuous) actor is willing to sacrifice his or her interest to uphold the ideal of morality and elicit pleasant feelings in others. The cognitive appraisal and the subsequent positive feelings, in turn, lead to the expectation that the virtuous actor will advance the good of others and the collective even at his or her own expense and that conferring deference to the virtuous actor and accepting the virtuous actor's influence is in one's best interest. This cognitive process probably does not operate at the conscious level (Ridgeway et al., 1985) and is likely intuitive (Haidt, 2001). It is important to note that, in reality, conferring status to a virtuous actor is not necessarily in one's best interest because, as aforementioned, virtues do not necessarily facilitate goal-achievement in specific task-oriented contexts. In other words, virtuous individuals may be accorded higher status and influence, even beyond their domain of excellence (Henrich & Gil-White, 2001).

Neither did Mencius elaborate on the nature of the pleasure elicited by virtue. Fortunately, recent research points to *admiration* as a primary candidate of the virtue-elicited pleasure (Schindler, Zink, Windrich, & Menninghaus, 2013; Sweetman, Spears, Livingstone, & Manstead, 2013; van de Ven, Zeelenberg, & Pieters, 2011). Admiration, referring to delighted or astonished approbation, captures the emotional responses to others' goodness or excellence in moral or nonmoral domains. Given its broad scope, admiration is considered an umbrella term for "other-praising" emotions including admiration for virtue or elevation (Algoe & Haidt, 2009), (affective) respect (Henrich & Gil-White, 2001), inspiration (Thrash & Elliot, 2004), and awe (Keltner & Haidt, 2003).

Soren Kierkegaard (1849/2008) was probably right that admiration is happy self-surrender. A social functional perspective of emotions suggests that admiration may play a crucial role in directing individuals to define and negotiate their statuses (Keltner & Haidt, 1999; Sweetman et al., 2013; van de Ven et al., 2011). Feeling admiration toward an actor informs the subject of the actor's superiority, and forms the expectation that it will be in the subject's best interest to defer to the superior actor. At the group level, admiration may facilitate coordination within the existing hierarchy and motivate lower status members to "copy" higher status members' competence or virtue to improve their performance and social standing (Henrich & Gil-White, 2001; Sweetman et al., 2013). Importantly, admiration is associated with the action tendency to praise or honor the outstanding other by giving deference or submission (Schindler et al., 2013). For example, Sweetman et al. (2013) found that admiration induced by high levels of competence and warmth increased self-reported deference. Therefore, admiration seems to function as an emotional trigger to give deference to superior others.

This psychological mechanism (i.e., admiration) underlying the virtue route appears to overlap with that underlying the competence route (Anderson & Kilduff, 2009a; Cheng et al., 2013; Cheng et al., 2010). As aforementioned, like virtues, outstanding competence or skills are capable of eliciting admiration in others and subsequently enhancing a competent actor's status. It is, nevertheless, important to keep in mind that admiration is an "umbrella" term summarizing the "other-praising" family of emotions, and emotions under the admiration umbrella are related but distinct in multiple ways (Schindler et al., 2013).

There is accumulating evidence that *admiration for virtue*, or moral elevation, and *respect for (excellent) skills* are, indeed, distinct emotions (Algoe & Haidt, 2009; Diessner, Iyer, Smith, & Haidt, 2013; Haidt, 2003). For example, Algoe and Haidt (2009) randomly assigned members of a university community to watch one of the three videos: (a) virtue: a boy who established a homeless shelter in Philadelphia; (b) excellent (task) skills: basketball star Michael Jordan "flying" through the air to dunk a basketball; and (c) amusement: clips

of three stand-up comedians. They found that both the virtue and the (task) skills videos induced higher levels of subjective feelings of admiration and respect than the amusement video. Yet admiration for virtue and respect for skills differed in two important ways. First, witnessing acts of virtue was associated with higher levels of physical sensations characterized by feelings of warmth in the chest and lumps in the throat compared with witnessing acts of superior skills. Second, admiration for virtue was associated with a stronger desire to emulate the virtuous acts and to engage in virtuous behavior than was respect for skills.

Perhaps the strongest evidence for the distinction between admiration for virtue and respect for skills comes from neuropsychology (Englander, Haidt, & Morris, 2012; Immordino-Yang, McColl, Damasio, & Damasio, 2009; Immordino-Yang & Sylvan, 2010). For example, in an fMRI experiment, Immordino-Yang and colleagues (2009) found that admiration for virtue and respect for skills were associated with different neural networks. Admiration for virtue recruits more of the inferior/posterior posteromedial cortices (PMC) and the anterior middle cingulate; whereas respect for skills involves more of the sector of PMC connected with lateral parietal cortices.

Admiration for virtue, furthermore, affects a variety of important outcomes, such as moral judgment and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), that are unlikely to be affected by respect for skills (Cox, 2010; Erickson & Abelson, 2012; Schnall, Roper, & Fessler, 2010; Strohminger, Lewis, & Meyer, 2011; Thomson & Siegel, 2013; Vianello, Galliani, & Haidt, 2010). First, admiration for virtue affects moral judgment involving moral dilemmas. Specifically, admiration for virtue makes people adhere to moral principles and decrease permissiveness for deontological violations; whereas another positive emotion, mirth, has the opposite effects (Strohminger et al., 2011). Second, organizational behavior research finds that admiration for virtue indeed increases prosocial behavior at work. For example, Vianello et al. (2010) found that admiration for virtue elicited by leaders' virtuous behavior, in turn, increased subordinates' OCB and organizational commitment at a public hospital in Italy.

To summarize, I extend Mencius' original thesis by elucidating the general cognitive process underlying the virtue route—virtue induces the belief that a virtuous actor is willing to sacrifice his or her self-interest to fulfill moral ideals and elicits a pleasure in the hearts of others; this belief and pleasure, in turn, leads to the expectation that the virtuous actor will advance their interest when conferred status and influence. Moreover, I identify admiration for virtue as the virtue-elicited pleasure, referred to by Mencius, which leads to sincere submission toward a virtuous actor. Admiration for virtue is distinct from respect for skills in terms of antecedents, physical sensations, motivational states, neural correlates, and cognitive and behavioral consequences. We not only are capable of distinguishing virtue from competence, but also appreciate and react to virtue and competence in different ways. Insofar as observers feel admiration for virtue toward an actor, they will sincerely defer and confer status to the actor, regardless whether direct social interaction is involved (e.g., Willer, 2009a). Admiration for virtue hence seems the missing link between virtue, the general desirable trait that is costly signaled by (outstanding) moral behavior and motivation, and status conferral in costly signaling theories (Roberts, 1998; Smith & Bird, 2000; Willer, 2009b; Zahavi & Zahavi, 1997).

The aforementioned mechanism underlying the virtue route (please see Figure 1) can be considered to be integrated "suites of subjective feelings, cognitions, motivations, and behavioral patterns that together produce certain outcomes" (Cheng et al., 2013, p. 106), similar to those underlying the dominance and competence routes. The cognitive components (i.e., beliefs and expectations), however, are likely intuitive, operating at the subconscious level (Haidt, 2001; Ridgeway et al., 1985). Following Mencius, I focus on the subjective feelings elicited by virtue, and hereafter simply use the term *admiration for virtue* to refer to the overall mechanism underlying the virtue route as depicted in Figure 1. Thus, I propose that admiration for virtue mediates the relationship between an actor's demonstrations of virtue and the status conferred to the virtuous actor. In other words, an actor who demonstrates virtue is more admired than an actor who does not demonstrate virtue. Admiration for virtue, in turn, leads to status conferral to the virtuous actor. According to this theory, Malala Yousafzai's advocacy for girl's rights, despite death threats and sanctions from the Taliban, may demonstrate her virtue, garner admiration, and advance her status.

Relationships Among the Three Routes to Status

It is worthwhile to discuss the relationships among the dominance, competence, and virtue routes to status attainment. From an evolutionary perspective, dominance seems the "default" path that we inherit from our ancestors to attain status; competence and virtue might later evolve, uniquely among the human species, from the general primate trait of dominance to provide evolutionarily advantageous alternatives to attaining status and maintaining self-esteem (e.g., Alexander, 1987; Barkow, 1975; Boehm, 1999b).

I consider the three routes to attaining status distinct but not mutually exclusive. First, the dominance and the virtue routes appear to overlap when it comes to warrior-ship, at least in some human groups or societies (e.g., Libyan Bedouin; Abu-Lughod, 1986). Yet the two routes are distinct in terms of the underlying psychological experience (i.e., fear vs. admiration). Fighting for a cause may be seen as virtuous and admirable in the eyes of in-group members, but vicious and terrifying in the eyes of out-group members (e.g., Piazza et al., 2014). For example, Malala Yousafzai is likely seen as courageous and virtuous in the eyes of girls and women who want to receive education in Northwestern

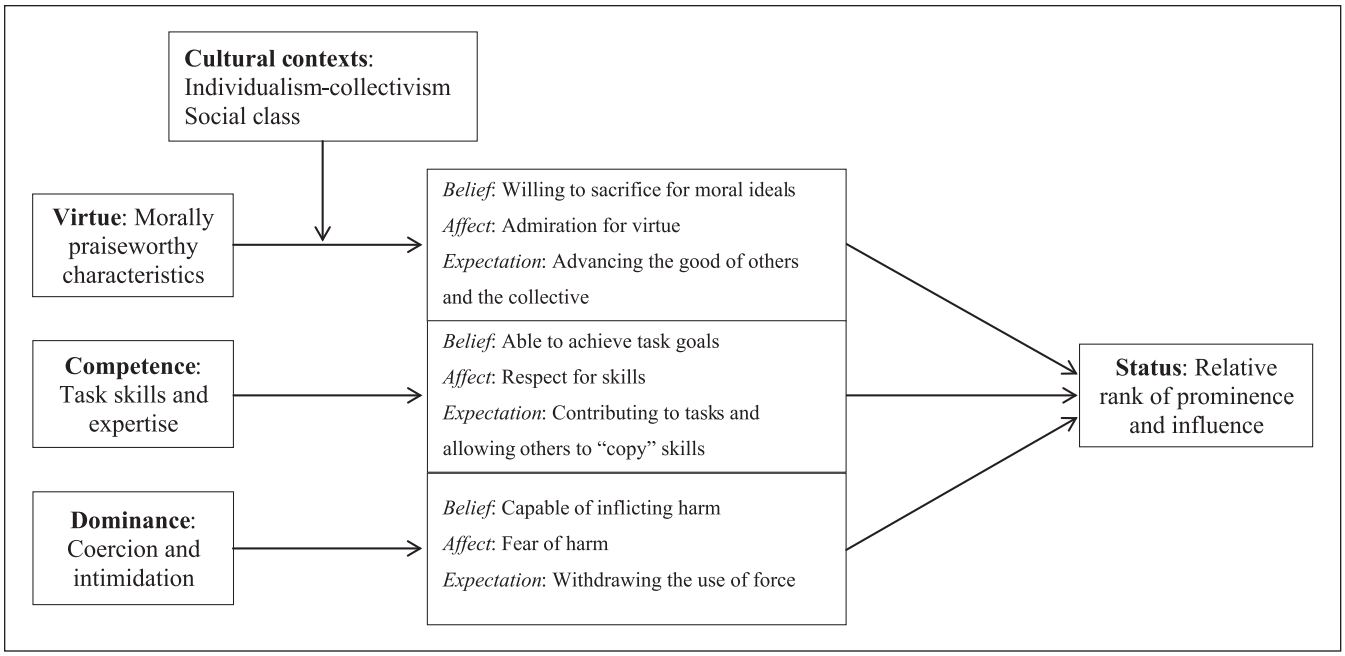

Figure 1. Three routes to status attainment.

Pakistan, but likely induces (ideological) threat and fear in the Taliban.

In addition, the desire to "wash away" the sins associated with using dominance may even motivate people to enact certain virtues (e.g., purity and charity; Zhong, Ku, Lount, & Murnighan, 2010; Zhong & Liljenquist, 2006). For most, if not all, of us, morality is central to our self-identities (Aquino & Reed, 2002; Strohminger & Nichols, 2015). Using dominance to advance status may present a threat to one's moral self-image. This threat, in turn, can activate a desire to act virtuously to restore moral integrity. On the flip side, demonstrating virtue may license an actor to use dominance to maintain or enhance status. According to the moral licensing theory (e.g., Effron & Monin, 2010; Klotz & Bolino, 2013), demonstrating virtue may accrue moral licenses to carry out moral transgressions, including dominance behavior, often without significant damage to the transgressor's reputation. For example, a fighter of social justice, such as Julian Assange, may feel licensed to occasionally mistreat followers. The licensing effect of virtue, nevertheless, should be rather limited; overusing dominance may elicit resentment from the rank and file, undermine admiration for one's virtue, and ultimately damage one's status.

Second, the dominance route appears to be somewhat entangled with the competence route. As reviewed earlier, it has been debated whether dominance demeanors or tactics are merely task cues that form performance expectations (Ridgeway et al., 1985). For example, Anderson and Kilduff (2009b) found that individuals high in personality trait dominance were perceived to be more competent and conferred higher status, even when they actually lacked task competence. Cheng et al. (2013), however, pointed out the possibility that dominance demeanors or tactics might function simultaneously through both the dominance and the competence routes to affect status. In other words, it seems possible that a dominant individual (e.g., Donald Trump) may be seen as intimidating and fearful as well as competent and respectable at the same time. In addition, individuals who have attained status through the competence route may easily become hubris, which in turn increases dominance behavior. For example, McFerran, Aquino, and Tracy (2014) found that authentic pride, an emotion elicited by possessing superior task skills, was associated with a heighted desire to make luxury purchases, which in turn elicited hubris pride, an emotion that motivates the use of dominance (Cheng et al., 2010).

Third and finally, it seems possible that some virtues (e.g., generosity) can help accomplish certain task goals (e.g., maximizing the public good in collective action), and therefore function through the competence route to enhance status. Nevertheless, the moral virtue theory posits that even virtues (e.g., cleanliness) irrelevant to task achievement can enhance one's status by eliciting admiration for virtue. Relatedly, the virtue route may be particularly effective to enhance status for people stereotypically seen as incompetent (e.g., women; see Ridgeway, 1982). Keep in mind that competence and virtue both lead to different forms of admiration for an actor. There may be a ceiling effect that, at a high level of competence, demonstrating virtue ceases to substantially increase admiration (for virtue) and status conferred to a highly competent actor. In contrast, demonstrating virtue may help an actor who otherwise lacks competence to gain more admiration (for virtue) and therefore status,

compared with an equally incompetent actor who does not demonstrate virtue. The competence route, however, may be discounted by immoral conduct, even when the conduct is task irrelevant (e.g., Casciaro & Lobo, 2008; Piazza et al., 2014). For example, Ridgeway (1982) theorizes that a group will not accept a member's task contributions, even if competent, if the member is perceived as self-oriented. After all, a competent but greedy person (e.g., Martin Shkreli), when given status, will be the most detrimental to a group. There may be a minimum level of morality for the competence route to be effective, but not necessarily vice versa (Piazza et al., 2014). In other words, the competence route may become effective to attain status only after a certain threshold of morality is fulfilled.

In sum, there are three routes to attaining status that are distinct but not mutually exclusive, and actors may follow two or more routes simultaneously to enhance their status. Importantly, the moral virtue theory posits that virtue is a distinct route to attaining status, regardless of a virtuous actor's levels of competence.

Culture

After delineating the virtue route to attaining status, I will address the question asked at the beginning of this article: Why did Malala Yousafzai's advocacy for girls' rights to receive education not lead to admiration and status but rather to hatred and violence against her in her own culture? The answer to this question, I argue, is that the virtue route is culturally bound. Consistent with the aforementioned relativistic view of virtue, morality does not derive from a universal set of standards or principles but rather develops gradually from the specific experiences of a moral community in dealing with specific moral conflict or problems determined by its cultural context (e.g., Walzer, 1983). The cultural context hence affects whether and to what extent a moral characteristic or act is deemed virtuous and admirable.

Note that I acknowledge that culture may also affect the other routes to attaining status. For example, Torelli et al. (2014) recently found that individuals with an individualistic cultural orientation associated competence traits with status to a greater degree than those with a collectivistic cultural orientation. My goals, however, are first to review and establish virtue as a distinct and independent route to attaining status, and second to define the cultural boundary under which the virtue route to status is more or less effective. A comprehensive review of how culture affects status attainment through the other routes is beyond the scope of the present article.

Morality, as defined earlier, is a defining component of culture, which provides the context to interpret the meaning of moral acts. Scholars (e.g., Boehm, 1999a; Geertz, 1973; Rai & Fiske, 2011) have argued that morality can only be studied and understood when its full and often intricate cultural context is taken into consideration. The moral virtue theory of status attainment embraces this perspective, and proposes that culture determines the scope and priority of moralities endorsed by a community (e.g., Walzer, 1983), affecting whether a certain moral characteristic or act is deemed a virtue or a vice. In the following sections, I will elaborate on how two important cultural forms—individualism–collectivism at the national level and SES at the within-nation level—affect the virtue route.

Individualism–collectivism. Individualism refers to "a social pattern that consists of loosely linked individuals who view themselves as independent of collectives; are primarily motivated by their own preferences, needs, rights, and the contracts they have established with others" (Triandis, 1995, p. 2); collectivism refers to "a social pattern consisting of closely linked individuals who see themselves as parts of one or more collectives (family, co-workers, tribe, nation); are primarily motivated by the norms of, and duties imposed by, those collectives" (Triandis, 1995, p. 2). In general, the West (i.e., North America and Western Europe) tends to be more individualistic, and the East (i.e., primarily East Asia, South Asia, and Southeast Asia), as well as much of the rest of the world, tends to be more collectivistic (Triandis, 1995).

Research in anthropology, cultural, and moral psychology generally finds that in collectivistic cultures, people *moralize* a broader scope of issues—not only harm avoidance and justice, but also loyalty, obedience to authority, and purity—than those in individualistic cultures (Graham et al., 2011; Haidt et al., 1993; Miller & Bersoff, 1992, 1994; Shweder et al., 1997; Vauclair, Wilson, & Fischer, 2014). For example, Miller and Bersoff (1992, 1994) found that Indians tended to moralize interpersonal responsibility (e.g., helping a friend), whereas Americans tended to view interpersonal responsibility as a matter of personal preference. In addition, disgusting and disrespectful actions (e.g., cleaning one's toilet with a national flag and eating one's dead pet dog), even when perceived as harmless, are more likely to be moralized and disapproved of in more collectivistic cultures (e.g., Brazil) than in more individualistic ones (e.g., the United States; Haidt et al., 1993). Though people across cultures generally value and care about justice and (human) welfare, Vauclair and colleagues (2014) found that rights-based moral concerns (e.g., being open-minded and critical) were more relevant among participants from a more individualistic culture (i.e., Germany), compared with among those from more collectivistic cultures (i.e., Philippines and Brazil). Consistent with Shweder et al.'s (1997) findings, people in collectivistic cultures rely on all of the "big three" moralities, whereas people in individualistic cultures focus on the morality of autonomy.

The cultural difference in individualism–collectivism is, perhaps, most salient and influential when different sets of moral codes are in conflict. For example, Mazar and Aggarwal (2011) found that the degree to which a national

culture is individualistic versus collectivistic increased the propensity to offer a bribe to an international business partner. Specifically, participants primed with a collectivistic mindset believed that the decision to offer the bribe was made in the best interest of the organization, and hence considered themselves less accountable for the bribe, than those primed with an individualistic mindset.

Moreover, moral acts involving moral dilemmas or conflict often present opportunities to demonstrate virtue and earn admiration because substantial self-sacrifice is often required to resolve conflict (e.g., Rai & Fiske, 2011; Waytz, Dungan, & Young, 2013). For example, pro-collective crimes (see review by Vadera & Pratt, 2013), such as honor killings of "impure" women (Rai & Fiske, 2011), may be seen as virtuous when they are committed to advance collective interest at one's own expense, in some highly collectivistic cultures. In contrast, whistleblowers (e.g., Hugh Thompson Jr.) who choose to sacrifice friendship or in-group loyalty to promote justice and human rights may be seen as particularly admirable and virtuous—although it may take time for their virtue to be recognized—in individualistic cultures.

Note that the aforementioned studies do not suggest that justice and human rights, pertaining to the morality of autonomy, are morally irrelevant in collectivistic cultures, nor do they suggest that loyalty and purity, pertaining to the moralities of community and divinity, are irrelevant in individualistic cultures. Indeed, bribery is considered an unethical business practice across cultures (e.g., Husted, Dozier, McMahon, & Kattan, 1996), and there are people (e.g., American conservatives) who deeply care about loyalty and purity within individualistic cultures (e.g., Graham et al., 2009). This line of research simply suggests that in collectivistic cultures people are more likely to prioritize the moralities of community and divinity over the morality of autonomy compared with people in individualistic cultures, who are more likely to prioritize the morality of autonomy over the moralities of community and divinity.

Finally, individualism–collectivism may also determine the degree to which people pay attention to others' virtuous acts and respond to them emotionally (Kitayama, Markus, & Kurokawa, 2000; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Easterners tend to attend more to others than their Western counterparts, who attend more to themselves. Consequently, Easterners may experience other-focused emotions, including admiration for virtue, more frequently than Westerners, who may be more likely to feel ego-focused emotions (e.g., pride and anger; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Hence, individualism–collectivism may affect the degree to which individuals are attuned to others' moral characteristics and acts and the likelihood to respond with admiration for virtue.

In sum, individualism–collectivism affects the scope and priority of moralities endorsed by a moral community, and consequently determines whether a certain moral characteristic or act is deemed a virtue or a vice. Specifically, people in collectivistic cultures tend to rely on a broad moral domain that covers all of the "big three" moralities, and to emphasize the moralities of community and divinity; people in individualistic cultures tend to focus on and prioritize the morality of autonomy. Hence I propose that moral characteristics upholding the moralities of community (e.g., loyalty and humility) and divinity (e.g., purity and cleanliness) are more likely to lead to admiration for virtue and status attainment in collectivistic cultures; whereas moral characteristics upholding the moralities of autonomy (e.g., justice and human rights) are more likely to lead to admiration for virtue and status attainment in individualistic cultures.

Admittedly, the cultural distinction of moralities based on individualism–collectivism is rather general. Research has documented both between- and within-nation cultural variances in the East, as well as in the West (e.g., Fincher et al., 2008; Talhelm et al., 2014; Varnum, Grossmann, Kitayama, & Nisbett, 2010). Focusing on only one, although arguably the most important, form of culture may run the risk of being *reductionistic* and over-simplifying the cultural boundary affecting the virtue route (e.g., Greenfield, Keller, Fuligni, & Maynard, 2003). It is hence crucial to consider other forms of culture and social structures that may influence the admiration for different forms of virtue. Below I will consider SES as a cultural boundary that affects the virtue route within a nation.

Social class: Rich versus poor. Social class or SES—referring to one's position in the society in terms of objective (economic) resources (e.g., wealth and capital; Weber, 1946), as well as corresponding subjective perceptions of one's social rank (Côté, 2011; Kraus, Piff, Mendoza-Denton, Rheinschmidt, & Keltner, 2012)—is another crucial component of the cultural context that affects the scope and priority of moralities and virtues endorsed by a moral community (e.g., Walzer, 1983).

The idea that morality and virtues differ across classes dates back to Plato (trans. 2007). In *The Republic*, Plato proposes four core virtues of the ideal city—wisdom, courage, self-constraint, and justice, among which, he argues, wisdom is a virtue belonging to the ruling class, whereas courage is a virtue belonging to the soldier class (Dahlsgaard et al., 2005). Nietzsche (1887/2007) also argues that there are two fundamentally different moralities and virtues: one for the masters (i.e., master morality), including the virtues of pride and nobility, and the other for the slaves (i.e., slave morality), including the virtues of kindness and humility. According to Nietzsche, the latter was invented by the slaves, driven by their "*ressentiment*" toward the masters, to justify their sufferings and to be able to see themselves in an affirmative manner. Slave morality, hence, is the opposite of master morality. More recently, Lamont (1996, 2002) extends Nietzsche's idea by arguing that moralities form crucial social boundaries between classes. Specifically, she proposes that moral criteria are unevenly valued across classes, and members of one class often judge members of other classes

to be morally inferior based on the moral codes the former value the most. For example, in *The Dignity of Working Man*, Lamont (2002) documented that White American workers cherished the virtues of integrity and straightforwardness to socially distance themselves from their upper class counterparts who the workers believed lack these virtues.

Kohn (1977) also argues that lower class people attach greater values to conformity to external authority (e.g., parents, teachers, and church) whereas upper class people attach greater values to self-direction or autonomy. For example, obedience (to parents and teachers) and neatness were more valued in the working-class than in the middle-class in both the United States and Italy (Pearlin & Kohn, 1966). In contrast, self-direction or autonomy and (personal) happiness were more appreciated in the middle-class than in the working-class in both countries.

Recently, Kraus, Keltner, and colleagues (Kraus, Côté, & Keltner, 2010; Kraus, Horberg, Goetz, & Keltner, 2011; Kraus, Piff, & Keltner, 2011; Kraus et al., 2012) propose the social cognitive theory of social class, arguing that because of abundant resources and elevated social rank, upper class individuals, compared with their lower class counterparts, are less dependent on others to survive and achieve valued life goals, and tend to focus more on "one's own internal states, goals, motivations, and emotions" (Kraus et al., 2012, p. 546). In contrast, lower class individuals, because of lack of resources and low social rank, are more dependent on others—particularly in-group members—and tend to "attach greater value to concerns related to group safety and purity" (p. 557).[2]

According to this line of reasoning, lower class individuals tend to moralize issues related to the moralities of community (e.g., family and hierarchy) and divinity (e.g., purity and cleanliness); whereas upper class individuals are more concerned about the morality of autonomy (also see Hitlin, 2006; Longest, Hitlin, & Vaisey, 2013). Results from recent empirical studies, in general, support this account (see Trautmann, van de Kuilen, & Zeckhauser, 2013, for an exception). In the aforementioned study by Haidt and colleagues (1993), social class was even a stronger predictor of moral judgment than national culture in individualism–collectivism. Regardless of national culture, lower class individuals were more likely to moralize and condemn disgusting and disrespectful actions, whereas upper class individuals were more likely to see these actions as acceptable and personal choice. In another study, lower class individuals made harsher judgments about purity violations (e.g., keeping an untidy and dirty living space) and (marginally) more positive judgments of purity virtues (e.g., being a vegetarian), compared with their upper class counterparts (Horberg et al., 2009). Lower class individuals hence seem more likely to value and conform to the moralities of community and divinity than their upper class counterparts. It, however, appears less clear how social class is related to the morality of autonomy (e.g., Côté, 2011). Two recent studies using self-reports showed that lower class individuals valued the morality of autonomy as highly as their upper class counterparts did (Horberg et al., 2009; McAdams et al., 2008). These findings indicate that individuals from across classes endorse justice, rights, and autonomy in general. To summarize, lower class individuals, like those in collectivistic cultures, tend to moralize a broader scope of moral domain, than their upper class counterparts.

Class differences in the morality of autonomy, nevertheless, become clear when it is in conflict with other moral codes. A longitudinal study using moral judgment interview—including hypothetical moral dilemmas (e.g., should a man steal a highly priced drug that he cannot afford to save his dying wife)—found that young men of upper class origin were more likely to make utilitarian judgments based on the principles of justice or proportionality, compared with their lower class counterparts (Colby et al., 1983). Similarly, in the footbridge dilemma (Greene et al., 2001), upper class individuals were more likely to consider it appropriate to push a large stranger off the footbridge to stop a trolley, which will kill the large stranger but save the lives of five workers who would otherwise be killed by the trolley, compared with their lower class counterparts (Côté, Piff, & Willer, 2013). Reduced empathy in part explains the utilitarian tendency among the upper class individuals, and may allow upper class individuals to withhold moral intuition and engage in deliberate moral reasoning that prioritizes concerns about the morality of autonomy (e.g., justice and proportionality).

Ironically, upper class individuals may only apply the morality of autonomy to judge others, instead of guiding their own actions (i.e., moral hypocrisy; Batson, Kobrynowicz, Dinnerstein, Kampf, & Wilson, 1997; Batson, Thompson, & Chen, 2002). For example, a recent study revealed that social class increased moral hypocrisy such that upper class individuals imposed more strict moral standards when judging others, but engaged in less strict moral conducts themselves (Lammers, Stapel, & Galinsky, 2010). The rationale is that social class, on the one hand, increases feelings of entitlement to judge others in the moral domain, and on the other hand, reduces sensitivity to social disapproval and potential sanctions.

Central to the virtue route to status is that membership in the upper classes decreases reliance on the moralities of community and divinity, but prioritizes concerns about the morality of autonomy (at least when evaluating or judging others). Hence, I propose that moral characteristics and acts upholding the moralities of community (e.g., loyalty and humility) and divinity (e.g., purity and cleanliness) are more likely to lead to admiration and status for the virtuous actor in the lower classes, whereas moral characteristics and acts upholding the morality of autonomy (e.g., rights) are more likely to be admired and facilitate status attainment for the virtuous actor in the upper classes.

To summarize, I argue that the cultural context—individualism–collectivism and social class—affects the scope and

priority of moralities endorsed by a moral community (e.g., Walzer, 1983), and determines whether a certain moral characteristic or act is deemed a virtue or a vice within that community. In other words, the effectiveness of the virtue route in status attainment relies on the degree to which a moral act or conduct is recognized and valued in a specific cultural context. The same act may be seen as virtuous and admirable in one culture, but deviant and blameworthy in another. In Yousafzai's case, taking culture into account helps us understand why she fails to garner recognition and honor in her own culture but succeeds to do so in Western cultures—her advocacy for gender equality in education deviates from, if not challenges, tradition, communal order, and religious order endorsed and prioritized in many collectivistic cultures and perhaps particularly in the lower classes.

Before moving forward, it is important to point out that the moral virtue theory of status attainment takes a dynamic perspective of culture. Culture, as well as morality, represents adaptations to past environments (Campbell, 1975; Greenfield, 2009; Holton, 2000). As the environment changes, cultures evolve correspondingly over time, though it may sometimes take generations to complete the process of cultural adaptation. For example, as the West underwent urbanization over the last 200 years, individualistic values (e.g., choice and personal possessions) gradually grew, whereas collectivistic values pertaining to duties and religion gradually declined (Greenfield, 2013). Importantly, culture and morality—"representing wisdom about past environments" (p. 1123)—may no longer be compatible with current environments and become maladaptive (Campbell, 1975). This dynamic view of culture explains why throughout history, moral rebels whom we now deem exceptionally virtuous were resented and even persecuted in their own times (e.g., Socrates, Jesus, Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, Hugh Thompson Jr.; Minson & Monin, 2012; Monin et al., 2008).

Furthermore, the evolving cultural context may also play a decisive role in the divergence of the competence and the virtue routes. According to Mencius, there are only two routes to attaining superior status—dominance and virtue, and competence seems to be a minor component of virtue. The ancient Greeks emphasized the unity of intellect virtues (e.g., wisdom and creativity) and virtues of character (i.e., justice and generosity), insisting that it is impossible to have one without the other. I speculate that the competence and the virtue routes began to diverge as it became possible for individual task skills and expertise, independent of (moral) virtue, to determine resource accumulation and consequently survival. The industrial revolution and increasing division of labor, in the West, may be a catalyst for this divergence, as the industrialization process erodes the strength of a traditional moral community based on the moralities of community and divinity, and replaces it with a free market system that emphasizes individual profit-maximization and autonomy (Greenfield, 2013; Hirschman, 1986). As a result, competence may become based more on the ability to accumulate resources (e.g., money and financial assets) than on making contributions to groups or societies, particularly among the upper class (Lamont, 1996). The overemphasis on the competence route with little concern for others' and collective interests in capitalistic societies may have even contributed to the Great Recession recently experienced in Western cultures (Stiglitz, 2013). The proposed moral virtue theory, nevertheless, points out that culturally realigning the competence and the virtue routes may potentially address these problems.

Conclusion and Discussion

In the preceding pages, I have reviewed the broad literature on status attainment with an emphasis on the role of morality. Drawing on the ideas from Mencius (trans. 2009) and recent developments in anthropology, psychology, and organizational behavior, I present a more *generalized* treatment of the existing morality-status research, suggesting that demonstrating a broad class of moral characteristics can enhance status by costly signaling a general desirable trait—*virtue*. In contrast to competence traits (e.g., intelligence), virtues do not necessarily facilitate, and can at times hinder, collective task achievement. Following a tradition in anthropology and cultural psychology (Haidt et al., 1993; Miller & Bersoff, 1992; Rai & Fiske, 2011; Rozin et al., 1999; Shweder et al., 1997; Shweder & Sullivan, 1993), I conceptualize virtues as culturally relativistic (e.g., Mele & Sanchez-Runde, 2013) and propose that they can manifest in a variety of forms—not only as generosity and altruism, but also as humility, purity, and (advocating for) rights (Barkow, 1975; Haidt, 2012; Shweder et al., 1997; Tangney, 2000; Zhong & Liljenquist, 2006).

My central argument is that witnessing acts of virtue elicits a positive other-praising emotion—admiration for virtue or elevation (Algoe & Haidt, 2009; Haidt, 2003)—toward a virtuous actor, consistent with the social intuitionist model (Haidt, 2001). Furthermore, this elicited emotion by witnessing virtue, as Mencius (trans. 2009) suggests, leads witnesses to confer status and defer to the virtuous actor. Importantly, the rationale underlying this virtue route to status, I propose, is that demonstrating virtue leads to the belief that an actor is willing to forgo self-interest to uphold moral ideals, which further induces the expectation that the virtuous actor, when conferred higher status and influence, will advance the good of others and the collective even at his or her own expense. This cognitive process is likely intuitive, and admiration for virtue hence plays a crucial mediating role in guiding individuals to confer status to the virtuous actor.

Furthermore, I argue that the virtue route to attaining status is culturally bound. The relativistic view of virtue posits that different groups or communities develop different virtues gradually from the specific experiences in dealing with moral issues prominent within their local cultural contexts (e.g., Walzer, 1983). The cultural context, in terms of

individualism–collectivism (e.g., Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005; Triandis, 1995; Varnum et al., 2010) and social class (e.g., A. B. Cohen, 2009; Kraus, Piff, et al., 2011), determines the scope and priority of moralities endorsed by a moral community, and therefore influences which moral characteristics or acts are deemed virtuous and admirable. Specifically, I propose that virtues related to family and community (e.g., loyalty and humility) and to religion (e.g., purity and cleanliness) are more admirable and relevant for attaining status in collectivistic cultures and in the lower classes; whereas virtues related to autonomy, justice, and rights are more admirable and relevant for attaining status in individualistic cultures and in the upper classes.

Theoretical Contributions

First, this article presents the first integrative review of the research on morality and status attainment, and develops the moral virtue theory to address remaining questions in the literature. The integrative review reveals that extant research on the morality–status link confines its attention to a narrow scope of morality, focusing on altruism and generosity particularly relevant in collective action situations (e.g., Willer, 2009b). The moral virtue theory extends this literature by providing a more *generalized* treatment, suggesting that virtue is the general desirable trait that is costly signaled by a broad class of (outstanding) moral behavior and motivation beyond normative moral standards or character. Adopting a broader perspective of morality, this generalized treatment expands the repertoire of moral characteristics that may lead people to attain status beyond generosity and altruism to include others, such as humility (Tangney, 2000) and cleanliness (e.g., Zhong & Liljenquist, 2006), which may be particularly relevant outside the WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic) context (Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010). The moral virtue theory thus largely enhances the generality of the prior work on morality and status attainment and broadens the scope of potential applications. Moreover, the proposed three-route model of status attainment, including a generalized virtue route, complements the "big picture" of human status attainment beyond the two-route model previously of focus in the literature (Cheng et al., 2013; Levine & Moreland, 1990).

Second, the moral virtue theory of status attainment delineates the general psychological mechanism through which virtue leads to status attainment. Prior theories based on a costly signaling account (e.g., Hardy & Van Vugt, 2006; Willer, 2009b) have yet to fully answer how and why signaling virtue enhances one's status. To address this missing link, the moral virtue theory draws on the classic ideas from Mencius to suggest that virtue elicits a pleasure in witnesses' hearts, which in turn leads to status conferral, and extends Mencius' thesis by specifying the cognitive process underlying the virtue route to status. Furthermore, it identifies admiration for virtue as the virtue-elicited pleasure that Mencius referred to and that plays a crucial role in guiding people to confer status to a virtuous actor, probably, in an intuitive manner. By distinguishing admiration for virtue from respect for skills underlying the competence route, the moral virtue theory explicitly disentangles the virtue route from the competence route. Instead of being a component or modifier of the competence route as previously theorized (Cheng & Tracy, 2014; Ridgeway, 1982), the moral virtue theory emphasizes that virtue serves as a distinct and independent path for aspiring individuals to attain status. It hence clarifies a major source of confusion in the literature regarding the interrelationship between the competence and the virtue routes to status.

Third and finally, the moral virtue theory advances the literature by elucidating how cultural variances in moral values critically moderate the process by which virtue is perceived and conferred with status. Extant research tends to conceptualize virtue as universally valued (Dahlsgaard et al., 2005) and overlook the impact of the cultural context on the morality–status relationship (see Torelli et al., 2014, for an exception). The moral virtue theory, instead, adopts a relativistic view of virtue, suggesting that virtues are not necessarily universal but culturally bound. In other words, the cultural context (e.g., individualism–collectivism and social class) determines whether and to what extent a certain moral trait or act is deemed virtuous by a moral community. A moral act (e.g., honor killing; Rai & Fiske, 2011) may be seen a virtue, leading to status in some cultures, but a vice, or even a crime, resulting in sanctions in others. In addition, Torelli et al. (2014) recently suggests that morality or warmth is valued to a greater degree and more important to attain status in collectivistic cultures than in individualistic cultures. While acknowledging certain moral characteristics (e.g., humility and cleanliness), pertaining to the moralities of community and divinity, may indeed be associated with status to a greater degree in collectivistic cultures, the moral virtue theory also points out that other moral characteristics (e.g., advocating for human rights), pertaining to the morality of autonomy, may be associated with status to a greater degree in individualistic cultures. It therefore contributes to the literature by stressing the importance of matching moral characteristics with the cultural context for the virtue route to be effective in status attainment.

Research Agenda

The moral virtue theory laid out above represents one of the first theoretical attempts to integrate research and theories from various disciplines to understand the "big picture" of human status attainment. Admittedly, given its theoretical breadth and novelty, direct empirical evidence for the moral virtue theory is scarce. Although studies from different research areas have provided some evidence—each supporting a portion of the overall conceptual model (see Figure 1)—there has been little research that rigorously and

systematically tests the conceptual model as a whole. A key goal of the present article hence is to set forth a research agenda to generate future studies that validate the aforementioned hypotheses.

First and foremost, the generalizability of the moral virtue theory needs to be thoroughly examined. As aforementioned, the moral virtue theory makes a crucial theoretical contribution by providing a more generalized treatment of the existing morality-status research, suggesting that a broad class of moral characteristics can enhance status insofar as they are endorsed by a moral community. My own empirical work, indeed, has found preliminary evidence that demonstrating humility (Tangney, 2000), cleanliness (Zhong & Liljenquist, 2006), and (advocating for human) rights (Haidt & Joseph, 2004)—corresponding to the moralities of community, divinity, and autonomy, respectively (Shweder et al., 1997)—led to status attainment in a task-oriented context. Future empirical investigations are warranted whether these positive effects on status attainment can be generalized to other virtues, particularly those that are highly appreciated in some cultures but not necessarily in others (e.g., chastity and advocating for homosexual rights).

Second, the culturally relativistic perspective of virtue adopted in the moral virtue theory calls for future research that explicitly examines the role of the cultural context in status attainment. The first step is to replicate findings from previous studies in different cultural contexts. One limitation of the moral virtue theory is that most of the theories and studies drawn on are rooted in the WEIRD context. More empirical attention is needed in collectivistic cultures, as well as in the lower classes, to validate the positive effects of generosity and altruism on status attainment found in the WEIRD context (e.g., Flynn, 2003; Hardy & Van Vugt, 2006; Willer, 2009a). The second step is to conduct cross-cultural studies to directly investigate the impact of culture on the relationship between virtues and status attainment. Across two experiments, I found that the positive effects of expressing humility on status conferral were affected by culture—*collectivistic* individuals admired humility to a greater degree, than their *individualistic* counterparts, which in turn led them to confer higher status and behavioral influence to a humble actor. More research attention is needed to investigate whether other virtues, particularly those emphasized in individualistic cultures (e.g., rights), also interact with culture and social class to affect status attainment.

Third, it is crucial to empirically examine the interaction of virtue and competence on status attainment. Researchers (Cheng & Tracy, 2014; Ridgeway, 1982) previously theorized that virtue is a component or modifier of the competence route to status, affecting only the extent to which a group is willing to accept one's task contribution. In other words, virtue does not independently lead to status attainment, particularly when a virtuous actor lacks competence. The moral virtue theory instead emphasizes that virtue is a distinct and independent route to attaining status. Experimental research that manipulates both levels of competence and virtue of an actor hence is warranted to examine whether virtue interacts with competence to affect status attainment as predicted by these two competing theories. A significant positive effect of virtue on status attainment when one's competence is low will provide strong support for the moral virtue theory. In addition, an investigation is also warranted whether there is a certain threshold of moral standard to be fulfilled for competence to enhance status.

Fourth, the social psychological mechanisms underlying the virtue, competence, and dominance routes to status remain to be empirically tested. Note that the conceptual model depicted in Figure 1 is *tentative*, and, as aforementioned, only some separate portions of the overall model have been tested. For example, research in moral psychology has shown that witnessing virtue elicits admiration for virtue in the audience (Algoe & Haidt, 2009), and research in emotions has shown that admiration, in general, can lead people to confer status to an admired target (Sweetman et al., 2013). Yet, no direct test of the mediating role of admiration for virtue in the relationship between virtue and status conferral exists in the literature. In the aforementioned studies, I also found preliminary evidence that admiration for virtue mediated the positive impacts of virtues (i.e., humility, cleanliness, and rights) on status conferral toward a virtuous actor, even after controlling for perceptions of competence and dominance. A crucial remaining issue, however, is that admiration for virtue and respect for skills are difficult to discern empirically. Instruments that accurately and reliably measure these distinct emotions, including their associated cognitions and motivations, need to be first developed. Future studies should then rigorously examine these mechanisms using advanced mediation analyses (e.g., Model 4 in Hayes, 2013). As scholars have been debating the relative impacts of the different routes in status attainment (Cheng et al., 2013; Levine & Moreland, 1990), more evidence from the field is needed to examine the relative prominences of these mechanisms in actual groups and organizations.

Finally, the moral virtue theory does not discuss how witnesses' individual differences affect the virtue route; instead, it assumes that people are, in general, moral beings who genuinely care about others (e.g., Batson, 1990), and who desire to maintain a positive moral identity (e.g., Aquino & Reed, 2002; Strohminger & Nichols, 2015). Yet personality research (T. R. Cohen, Panter, & Turan, 2012; T. R. Cohen et al., 2014) has shown substantial individual differences in a variety of moral character traits—empathy, moral identity, agreeableness, and honesty–humility, to name a few—that affect to what extent people admire virtue (Aquino, McFerran, & Laven, 2011; Diessner et al., 2013). For example, Aquino et al. (2011) found that highly moral individuals experienced more intense feelings of admiration in response to witnessing acts of virtues (e.g., forgiveness and sympathy) and were more likely to make a donation afterwards than their less moral counterparts. On the contrary, immoral people or

"takers" may instead exploit or persecute a virtuous actor for their personal interests (Grant, 2013). As Grant suggests, perhaps the key for a virtuous actor to attain status is to be able to identify "takers" and avoid being surrounded by them. Future studies should explore how and when individual differences in witnesses' moral character can affect the virtue route to attaining status. Finally, witnesses' moral characters may also interact with the cultural context—perhaps, the "good" persons in one culture may indeed admire the "evils" condemned in another (Nietzsche, 1887/2007).

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Notes

1. Wojciszke, Abele, and Baryla (2009) also manipulated information on the target's morality or communion (e.g., "helpful" and "unfair"), and, surprisingly, found that morality-based information also positively predicted respect, even after controlling for interpersonal liking. Nevertheless, they argued that these positive effects were superfluous due to the confounding effect of liking, overlooking the evidence that the effects of moral traits on respect remained significantly positive after controlling for liking.
2. Kraus, Piff, Mendoza-Denton, Rheinschmidt, and Keltner (2012) argue that upper class individuals prioritize respect and authority in moral judgment, driven by their desire to maintain their superior social ranks. They, however, did not provide much empirical support for this account. Moreover, this argument goes against previous theories and findings (e.g., Haidt, Koller, & Dias, 1993; Merton, 1957) that lower class individuals are more likely to justify the social inequality by internalizing and moralizing the values related to respect and authority.

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