

# When the Spirit Is Willing, but the Flesh Is Weak: Developmental Differences in Judgments About Inner Moral Conflict



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## Abstract

Sometimes it is easy to do the right thing. But often, people act morally only after overcoming competing immoral desires. How does learning about someone's inner moral conflict influence children's and adults' moral judgments about that person? Across four studies, we discovered a striking developmental difference: When the outcome is held constant, 3- to 8-year-old children judge someone who does the right thing without experiencing immoral desires to be morally superior to someone who does the right thing through overcoming conflicting desires—but adults have the opposite intuition. This developmental difference also occurs for judgments of immoral actors: Three- to 5-year-olds again prefer the person who is not conflicted, whereas older children and adults judge that someone who struggles with the decision is morally superior. Our findings suggest that children may begin with the view that inner moral conflict is inherently negative, but, with development, come to value the exercise of willpower and self-control.

## Keywords

morality, social cognition, childhood development, open data, open materials

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People are sometimes tempted to do the wrong thing—to lie on a résumé or betray a friend—and yet they often override these temptations and act morally. In other cases, they do the right thing without conflict, because they just are not tempted by the morally wrong option. Who is the better person: the one who acts morally while tempted or the one whose heart is pure? One might agree with Aristotle (trans. 1985), who argued that an action should be considered moral only if it is easy for the actor to do. Or one might side with Kant (1785/1998), who argued that an action is truly moral only if it is difficult—actions done simply out of desire should not count as particularly moral.

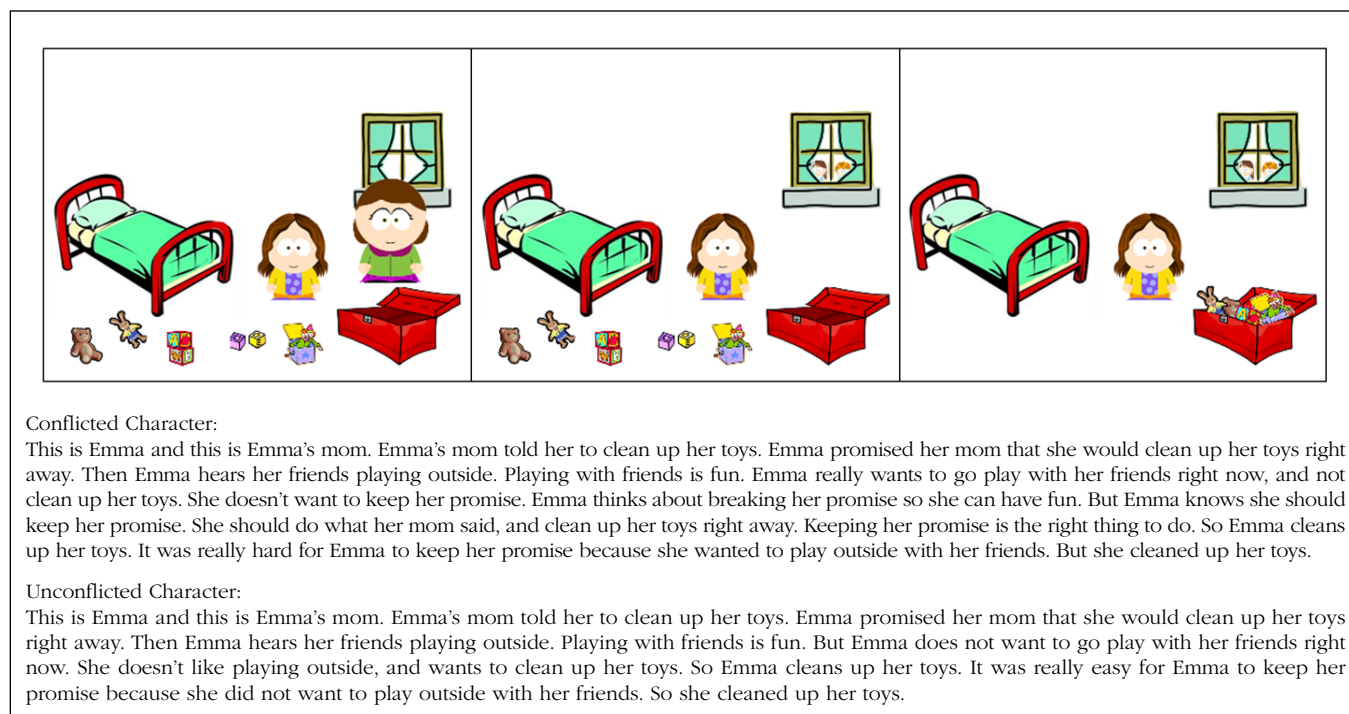
Which of these philosophies—if either—captures everyday moral psychology? Some findings with adults are broadly consistent with an Aristotelian view. People are judged more positively if they perform helpful actions cheerfully rather than grudgingly, and are blamed less for doing a bad deed if they seem unhappy, rather than happy, about it (Ames & Johar, 2009; Krull, Seger, & Silvera, 2008). Likewise, doing a small good deed, such as returning a wallet, is perceived more positively if the

decision to do it is made quickly, rather than slowly (Critcher, Inbar, & Pizarro, 2013; Pizarro, Uhlmann, & Salovey, 2003). However, other findings suggest that adults' moral judgment may sometimes be more Kantian. For example, people who resist an immoral temptation are seen as more trustworthy than those who do not face temptation, and the larger the temptation on offer, the greater the credit for resisting it (Kee, 1969). Furthermore, people sometimes prefer moral actors who exhibit conflicting mental states, such as reluctance to perform a distasteful act, while nonetheless doing it for the greater good (Pizarro & Tannenbaum, 2012).

Less is known about the ways in which inner conflict affects children's moral judgments. Research examining children's understanding of conflicting mental states has produced mixed results. Although some researchers have found that children younger than 7 or 8 years old fail to

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**Fig. 1.** Example of the images and scripts presented in Experiment 1. Each participant read or was told a story about a character who promised to clean up toys (examples shown here) and a similar story about a character who promised to clean up dishes. Participants who received the conflicted-character version of one story received the unconflicted-character version of the other story.

understand that one person might have conflicting or mixed desires (Choe, Keil, & Bloom, 2005; Harris, 1989; Harter & Buddin, 1987; Lagattuta, 2005), others have found that with simpler tasks and more explicit forced choices, even 4-year-olds can identify mixed emotions (Kestenbaum & Gelman, 1995) and 6-year-olds affirm that people can act against their stated desires (Kushnir, Gopnik, Chernyak, Seiver, & Wellman, 2015). Indeed, recent research has suggested that in a simple behavioral task, 3-year-olds demonstrate understanding that someone may have multiple desires that conflict with one another and can determine which of these conflicting desires are most relevant to the task at hand (Martin & Olson, 2013). Finally, children begin to understand their own conflicting desires and develop strategies for self-control by around age 4 (H. N. Mischel & Mischel, 1987; W. Mischel & Ebbesen, 1970).

The question remains, then: Precisely how does the presence of conflicting moral and immoral desires play into children's and adults' moral judgments? This is the focus of the present studies.

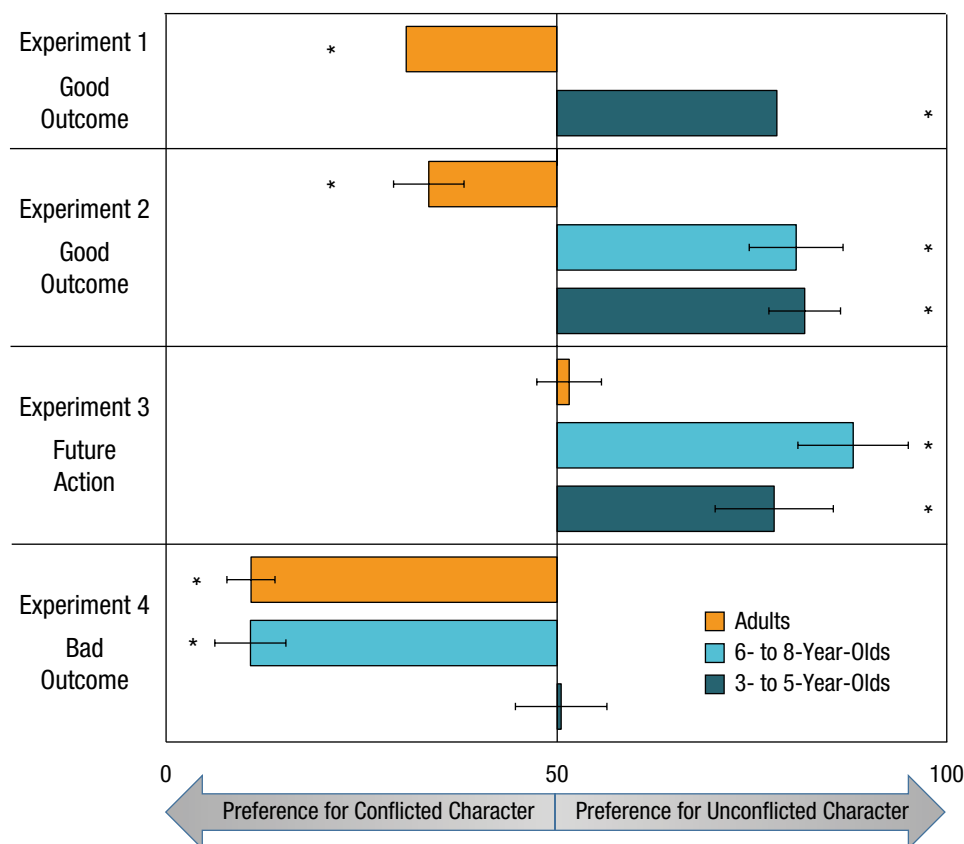
## Experiment 1

### Method

**Participants.** Sixty-nine 3-, 4-, and 5-year-olds were recruited through lab databases and local preschools. This

age range includes the youngest age at which children have shown success at representing conflicting desires (e.g., Martin & Olson, 2013) and extends to an age at which children are old enough to reliably use mental-state information in a variety of tasks. A minimum sample size of 20 children per age group was set (as suggested by Simmons, Nelson, & Simonsohn, 2011), and data collection was stopped at the conclusion of the first testing day on which this threshold was met (so that all children who had already signed up to participate were included). Sixty-one American adults were also recruited, to match the sample size of the group of children. The adults were tested online (Amazon Mechanical Turk) using Qualtrics. Four children (but no adults) were excluded for incorrectly answering a memory question. This left 126 participants in the main analyses (3-year-olds:  $n = 22$ , 59% female, mean age = 41 months; 4-year-olds:  $n = 23$ , 52% female, mean age = 55 months; 5-year-olds:  $n = 20$ , 50% female, mean age = 65 months; adults:  $n = 61$ , 46% female; mean age = 36.4 years).

**Procedure.** The children were each read two brief stories and shown accompanying cartoons (see Fig. 1). Both stories described a child who had made a promise to perform a good action (tidying up toys or dishes). One story was about a *conflicted* character, who wanted to break the promise, but also wanted to keep the promise. The other story was about an *unconflicted* character,



**Fig. 2.** Children's and adults' moral evaluations of the conflicted and unconflicted actors in Experiments 1 through 4. The horizontal axis indicates the percentage of choices of the unconflicted actor as the character who should receive the award "for doing something good" (Experiment 1), who was "more good" (Experiment 2), who was more likely to behave morally in the future (Experiment 3), and who was "more bad" (Experiment 4; reverse-scored). Error bars represent  $\pm 1$  SEM. Asterisks indicate percentages that differed from chance ( $p < .05$ ).

who found it easy to keep the promise because he or she was not tempted to do otherwise. Which story was about a conflicted character and which was about an unconflicted character was counterbalanced across participants. Both stories depicted a good outcome—that is, the character ultimately kept his or her promise.

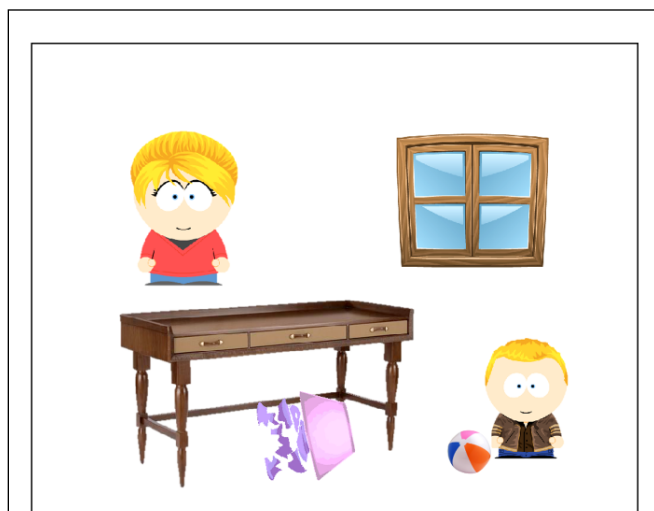
Both characters were the same gender as the participant, and the order of presentation of the dishes and toys stories and of the conflicted character and unconflicted character was counterbalanced across participants. After hearing both stories, the children were asked two memory questions (in counterbalanced order): "Who found it easy to do something good?" and "Who found it hard to do something good?" If the children answered either question incorrectly, the experimenter corrected them and then asked again. If they answered incorrectly a second time, their data were excluded from analyses ( $n = 4$ ). Neither including the excluded participants nor excluding those who initially answered the memory questions incorrectly changed the pattern or significance of results

reported here. After answering the memory questions, the children were asked to award a prize "for doing something good" to one of the characters.

The adults received identical stimuli and questions, but read through these materials themselves online, and the characters were not matched to adult participants' gender. All adult participants answered the memory questions correctly; none were excluded from analyses.

## Results

The adults' moral judgments of the characters in these scenarios were the opposite of the children's moral judgments (see Fig. 2). Binomial sign tests showed that the children preferentially awarded the prize to the unconflicted character (78%;  $p < .001$ ), whereas the adults preferentially awarded the prize to the conflicted character (31% chose the unconflicted character;  $p = .004$ ). The adults preferred the character who overcame immoral desires significantly more than did the children (Fisher's exact test,  $p < .001$ ).

**Conflicted Character:**

This is Adam and this is Adam's mom. Adam accidentally broke his mom's lamp when he was playing with his ball. When Adam's mom came home from work, she asked Adam what happened. Telling the truth is the right thing to do. And Adam wants to tell his mom the truth. But if Adam tells his mom that he broke the lamp, his mom might take his ball away. Adam really likes his ball, and he'll be sad if his mom takes it away. Adam also wants to lie to his mom so that she won't take his ball away. Part of Adam wants to tell the truth, but part of him wants to lie. So Adam told his mom that he broke the lamp. It was really hard for Adam to tell the truth because he also wanted to lie to his mom. But Adam told his mom the truth anyway.

**Unconflicted Character:**

This is Adam and this is Adam's mom. Adam accidentally broke his mom's lamp when he was playing with his ball. When Adam's mom came home from work, she asked Adam what happened. Telling the truth is the right thing to do. And Adam wants to tell his mom the truth. If Adam tells his mom that he broke the lamp, his mom might take his ball away. But Adam doesn't want to lie to his mom at all. He doesn't really like his ball, so he won't be sad if his mom takes it away. Adam wants to tell his mom the truth. So Adam told his mom that he broke the lamp. It was really easy for Adam to tell the truth because he didn't want to lie at all. So he told his mom the truth.

**Fig. 3.** Examples of the images and scripts presented in Experiment 2. Each participant received a pair of stories about characters who told the truth about having broken an object (example shown here) and a pair of stories about characters who helped a sibling.

There were no age differences among the children; 3-, 4-, and 5-year-olds preferred the unconflicted character at similar rates,  $\chi^2(2, N = 65) = 3.76, p = .152$ .

## Discussion

In Experiment 1, adults took a Kantian position, considering a person who had done something difficult to be more moral than a person who had performed the same action easily. Children had a more Aristotelian view, considering someone who wholeheartedly wanted to do the right thing to be morally superior. The children's strong preference for the unconflicted character could not have

been based on the outcomes of the stories, as the two stories had the same outcome. Thus, the results indicate that even the youngest children used mental-state information to arrive at their judgment.

## Experiment 2

Experiment 2 extended this investigation in three ways. First, we expanded the types of moral actions presented to participants, to ensure that our results in Experiment 1 were not specific to promise keeping. Second, we included a wider age range of children (3–8 years) to explore developmental changes. Finally, we asked participants to give a moral judgment of the characters, rather than award one a prize.

## Method

**Participants.** Thirty-nine 3- to 5-year-olds and thirty-six 6- to 8-year-olds were tested in the lab or at local pre-schools. A minimum sample size of 36 children per age group (12 per age in years) was set, and data collection was again stopped at the conclusion of the first testing day on which the threshold was met. One hundred five American adults were recruited online through Amazon Mechanical Turk. A sample size of 100 adults was initially set in the online software, but 5 extra adults completed the study, so we included their data. Three children and 14 adults<sup>1</sup> were excluded for incorrectly answering memory questions, which left 163 participants in the main analyses (3- to 5-year-olds:  $n = 37$ , 54% female, mean age = 53.4 months; 6- to 8-year-olds:  $n = 35$ , 43% female, mean age = 89.7 months; adults:  $n = 91$ , 43% female, mean age = 33.4 years).

**Procedure.** Each participant saw two pairs of stories. One pair described decisions about whether to help a sibling, and the other pair described decisions about whether to lie to a parent (see Fig. 3 for an example). Within each story pair, the main character in one story was conflicted about the decision, and the main character in the other story was unconflicted. Both characters ultimately performed the moral action. Both characters were the same gender as the participant, and the order of presentation of the helping and honesty stories and of the conflicted and unconflicted characters was counterbalanced across participants. After each pair of stories, participants answered the same two memory questions as in Experiment 1 and were asked which of the characters was "more good."

## Results

Because each participant contributed a dichotomous response on each of two consecutive trials, we used a

binary logistic generalized estimating equation (GEE) to examine which character participants chose as “more good” (unconflicted = 1, conflicted = 0). In this analysis, age group (3- to 5-year-olds, 6- to 8-year-olds, adults) was a between-subjects factor, and story line (helping, honesty) was a within-subjects factor.

As in Experiment 1, we found a main effect of age group,  $\chi^2(2, N = 163) = 47.5, p < .001$  (see Fig. 2). The adults were more likely to choose the conflicted character as “more good” than were either the 6- to 8-year-olds,  $\chi^2(1, N = 126) = 24.8, p < .001$ , or the 3- to 5-year-olds,  $\chi^2(1, N = 128) = 36.9, p < .001$ . Thus, the developmental difference found in Experiment 1 was replicated. The two age groups of children did not differ in their judgments,  $\chi^2(1, N = 72) = 0.02, p = .881$ , which suggests that the shift to an adult pattern does not begin until some point beyond age 8.

There was also a main effect of story line,  $\chi^2(1, N = 163) = 7.62, p = .006$ . Participants of all ages had a slightly greater tendency to prefer the unconflicted character in the lying scenario than in the helping scenario, but this difference did not reach significance for any age group (all  $ps > .06$ ). Furthermore, both story lines elicited the same pattern of results with respect to chance, and there was no interaction between story line and age group,  $\chi^2(2, N = 163) = 1.44, p = .486$ , so we report results of analyses collapsed across story line.

As in Experiment 1, not only were adults more approving than children of a character who overcame inner conflict and acted morally, but adults' and children's judgments significantly differed from chance in opposite directions. The 3- to 5-year-olds judged that the character who did not struggle with the decision was morally superior ( $M = 1.62$  out of 2 trials),  $t(36) = 6.94, p < .001, d = 1.14$ . The 6- to 8-year-olds also preferred the character who was not conflicted ( $M = 1.60$ ),  $t(34) = 5.11, p < .001, d = 0.86$ . This suggests that the responses of the younger children are unlikely to have been due to a lack of theory-of-mind abilities or difficulty understanding the stories. However, the adults judged that the character who was conflicted about whether to act immorally, but ultimately acted morally, was morally superior (choice of the unconflicted character:  $M = 0.68$ ),  $t(90) = -3.61, p < .001, d = -0.38$ . Thus, in Experiments 1 and 2, adults rewarded and morally praised a character who overcame inner conflict, whereas children rewarded and morally praised a character who did not experience conflict to begin with.

### Experiment 3

In Experiments 1 and 2, children's moral judgments of current actions focused on the presence of immoral desires, whereas adults' focused on the presence of will-power. Do these differing emphases also engender

different predictions about future moral behavior? If so, children should predict that an unconflicted character will be more likely than a conflicted character to act morally in the future, even when both have acted morally in the present. However, adults should predict that a conflicted character who has acted morally will be more likely than an unconflicted character to act morally in the future. Alternatively, future predictions may rest on different assumptions than do judgments of current behavior. In Experiment 3, we examined these possibilities by asking participants about the likely future behavior of conflicted and unconflicted characters.

### Method

**Participants.** Twenty-six 3- to 5-year-olds and twenty 6- to 8-year-olds were tested in the lab or at a local museum. A minimum sample size of 20 children per age group was set, and data collection was again stopped at the conclusion of the first testing day on which the threshold was met. One hundred American adults were recruited online through Amazon Mechanical Turk. Six children were excluded from analyses, 5 for failing to provide any response and 1 because of sibling interference. Ten adults (and no children) were excluded for incorrectly answering memory questions. This left 130 participants in the main analyses (3- to 5-year-olds:  $n = 20$ , 55% female, mean age = 54.3 months; 6- to 8-year-olds:  $n = 20$ , 45% female, mean age = 88.1 months; adults:  $n = 90$ , 58% female, mean age = 34.4 years).

**Procedure.** Participants saw the same two pairs of stories as in Experiment 2 and answered the same two memory questions after each pair. After these questions, participants saw a new story page depicting “what happened next.” The conflicted and unconflicted characters were placed together in this new scene, which depicted a new situation similar to the previous one. Character names and pronouns were varied to match the gender of the child participants, and the adults saw one pair of stories about boys and one pair about girls. For example, after the helping stories with male characters, participants were told:

Steven and Matt are at recess with their friend Paul, who lost his Frisbee. Paul has been looking really hard, but he still hasn't found it. So Paul asked Steven and Matt to help him look for it. Who do you think will help their friend?

After the honesty stories with male characters, participants were told,

Billy and Adam played Frisbee together during recess. They accidentally broke a window when



they were playing Frisbee. When their teacher saw the window, she asked Billy and Adam what happened. Who do you think will tell the truth?

## Results

We used a binary logistic GEE to examine which character participants selected as most likely to help or to tell the truth in the future (unconflicted = 1, conflicted = 0). As in Experiments 1 and 2, we found a main effect of age group,  $\chi^2(2, N = 130) = 12.90, p = .002$  (see Fig. 2). The adults were more likely to predict that the conflicted character would act morally in the future than were either the 6- to 8-year-olds,  $\chi^2(1, N = 110) = 8.10, p = .004$ , or the 3- to 5-year-olds,  $\chi^2(1, N = 110) = 6.37, p = .012$ . The two age groups of children did not differ in their judgments,  $\chi^2(1, N = 40) = 0.85, p = .355$ , which suggests that the shift to an adult pattern begins at some point beyond age 8. There was no main effect of story line,  $\chi^2(1, N = 130) = 0.86, p = .355$ , and no interaction between story line and age group,  $\chi^2(1, N = 130) = 1.63, p = .442$ .

We also tested each age group's predictions of the characters' future behavior against chance. The 3- to 5-year-old children judged that the character who did not struggle with the decision was more likely to act morally in the future ( $M = 1.55$  out of 2 trials),  $t(19) = 3.58, p = .002, d = 1.64$ . The 6- to 8-year-olds were even more likely to choose the character who was not conflicted ( $M = 1.75$ ),  $t(19) = 5.25, p < .001, d = 2.41$ . Although the adults were significantly more likely to predict that the conflicted character would act morally in the future than was either age group of children, the adults were split in their predictions, with about half predicting that the conflicted character would act morally in the future and half predicting that the unconflicted character would act morally in the future ( $M = 1.03$ ),  $t(89) = 0.38, p = .708, d = 0.15$ .

## Discussion

These findings suggest that, as when judging present moral behavior, adults and children focus on different characteristics when predicting future moral behavior. Children judge that someone who is not tempted to act immorally is more likely to act morally in the future than is someone who acts morally despite immoral temptations. This suggests that children see the presence of immoral desires as more predictive of future behavior than the presence of willpower. Conversely, adults are more likely than children to judge that someone who acts morally despite immoral desires will act morally in the future, which suggests that adults see the presence of willpower as more predictive of future behavior than do children.

However, although the developmental difference remained robust, the adults were more divided in their

predictions of future behavior than they were in their moral assessment of current behavior in Experiments 1 and 2. And indeed, these two types of judgments are in principle quite separable. To take an extreme example, a person with a brain abnormality that causes her to be incapable of lying is more likely to be honest in future situations than is an ordinary person who at times is tempted to lie but overcomes this temptation and tells the truth anyway. Yet most people would likely agree that the ordinary person deserves more moral credit for her truth telling. Thus, adults' predictions of future behavior might be influenced both by considerations of moral character and by considerations of nonmoral factors, such as the mere ability to act immorally.

## Experiment 4

Why do 3- to 8-year-olds take such a strong stance against inner conflict, even if it ultimately results in a moral action? One possibility is that they evaluate moral desires positively and evaluate immoral desires negatively, so that their net evaluation of a conflicted character is lower than their net evaluation of an unconflicted character. Alternatively, children might judge internal conflict to be negative in and of itself. If so, they may evaluate an unconflicted character more positively than a conflicted character even if the unconflicted character is wholly committed to acting immorally. In Experiment 4, we tested these accounts by contrasting conflicted and unconflicted characters who both acted immorally. If children penalize characters for immoral desires, then they should evaluate characters who have both moral and immoral desires as morally superior to characters who have only immoral desires. Conversely, if children value internal harmony, then they may prefer characters who wholeheartedly want to act immorally.

## Method

**Participants.** Thirty-nine 3- to 5-year-olds and thirty-seven 6- to 8-year-olds were tested in the lab or at local preschools. A minimum sample size of 36 children per age group (12 per age in years) was set, and data collection was again stopped at the conclusion of the first testing day on which the threshold was met. Ninety-five American adults were recruited online through Amazon Mechanical Turk. A sample size of 100 adults was initially set in the online software, but 5 adults did not provide complete responses. Five children and 19 adults were excluded from analyses for answering memory questions incorrectly, which left 147 participants in the main analyses (3- to 5-year-olds:  $n = 35$ , 40% female, mean age = 54.9 months; 6- to 8-year-olds:  $n = 36$ , 64% female, mean age = 88.2 months; adults:  $n = 76$ , 40% female, mean age = 32.7 years).

**Procedure.** Each participant saw two pairs of stories in which one character struggled with a moral decision and the other did not. These were the same stories as in Experiment 2 except that both characters ultimately performed the immoral action (lying or not helping a sibling). The conflicted character had the same struggle between the moral and immoral action as in Experiment 2, but the unconflicted character wholeheartedly wanted to act immorally. After each story pair, participants answered the same two memory questions as in Experiments 1 through 3 and were then asked which of the characters was “more bad.”

## Results

Responses were reverse-coded to align with the judgments in Experiments 1 through 3, so that the means reported here again reflect judgments of the unconflicted character as morally superior. A GEE again revealed a main effect of age group,  $\chi^2(2, N = 147) = 37.02, p < .001$  (see Fig. 2). The adults were more likely than the 3- to 5-year-olds to evaluate the character who struggled between the moral and immoral actions as morally superior to the character who wholeheartedly wanted to commit the immoral action,  $\chi^2(1, N = 111) = 29.56, p < .001$ . However, unlike in Experiments 2 and 3, the 6- to 8-year-old children responded similarly to the adults,  $\chi^2(1, N = 112) = 0.000, p = .989$ . Both the adults ( $M = 0.22$  out of 2 trials),  $t(75) = -12.73, p < .001, d = -1.46$ , and the 6- to 8-year-olds ( $M = 0.22$ ),  $t(35) = -8.64, p < .001, d = -1.44$ , chose the conflicted character at rates greater than chance, whereas the responses of the 3- to 5-year-olds did not differ from chance ( $M = 1.00$ ),  $t(38) = 0.00, p = 1.000, d = 0.00$ . We did not observe any age differences when we compared the responses of 3-year-olds ( $M = 0.90$ ), 4-year-olds ( $M = 1.08$ ), and 5-year-olds ( $M = 1.00$ ). There was no main effect of story line,  $\chi^2(1, N = 111) = 0.11, p = .736$ , and no interaction between story line and age group,  $\chi^2(2, N = 111) = 0.74, p = .689$ .

## Discussion

Three- to 5-year-olds are more likely than older children and adults to positively evaluate actors who are unconflicted not only before acting morally, but also before acting immorally. Given that the unconflicted character had only immoral desires, whereas the conflicted character had both immoral and moral desires, our results suggest that the young children did not add up moral “points” for good and bad desires, but found internal moral conflict inherently negative. One concern in interpreting these results might be that the younger children avoided choosing the conflicted character because they did not understand the inner conflict. However, this is unlikely because this experiment required the children to choose which character was “more bad,” and thus the elevated

scores of the 3- to 5-year-olds (after reverse scoring) are a result of them choosing the conflicted character *more* often than older participants.

Comparing these data to the results of Experiments 1 through 3 reveals that 3- to 5-year-olds are more opposed to inner conflict when evaluating morally good actions than when evaluating morally bad actions. This suggests that two separate factors may influence young children’s judgments: a negative evaluation of inner conflict and a positive evaluation of the desire to act morally. When young children are evaluating moral actors, these two factors do not conflict, and so an unconflicted character is strongly preferred over a conflicted character. But when children are evaluating immoral actors, their negative evaluation of the character experiencing inner conflict competes with their positive evaluation of that same character’s desire to act morally, and this leads to chance judgments of whether the conflicted or the unconflicted character is more moral.

## General Discussion

Across four experiments, adults were consistently more likely than preschoolers to judge that a person who experienced inner conflict was more moral than a person who was not conflicted. This developmental difference remained consistent across questions about who should be rewarded (Experiment 1), who was morally superior (Experiments 2 and 4), and who would act morally in the future (Experiment 3). These opposing judgments were evident whether the characters ultimately acted morally (Experiments 1–3) or immorally (Experiment 4).

When considering conflicted characters who acted morally, the responses of the 6- to 8-year-olds were similar to those of the younger children, rather than the adults. This suggests that the developmental difference observed in Experiments 1 through 3 did not arise because the stories were too complex for the younger children, or because they had difficulty using mental-state information, but instead was due to a shift in moral judgments that occurs later in childhood or adolescence. Conversely, when judging immoral actors, the 6- to 8-year-olds’ responses were similar to those of the adults. This suggests that the developmental shift from condemning internal conflict to rewarding willpower occurs earlier for negative outcomes than for positive outcomes.

These findings suggest that children may start out with an Aristotelian moral psychology, judging individuals who do not struggle with moral decisions as more moral than those who struggle, but that at some time after the age of 8 years they transition to a more Kantian framework, judging the worth of moral actions according to how difficult the actions were for the actors. This is particularly interesting in light of the large body of research

finding that adults generally condemn not only immoral actions, but also immoral desires and intentions (e.g., Cushman, 2008; Pizarro et al., 2003; Zelazo, Helwig, & Lau, 1996). Yet our findings suggest that there are some situations in which adults award more moral credit to individuals who have *immoral* desires—that is, that the presence of immoral desires may allow for moral actions to be seen as even more moral.

There are at least three possible explanations for this developmental pattern. First, it is possible that children reason differently than adults because they less often experience conflicting desires to do both the right and the wrong thing and hence see the mere existence of immoral desires as a sign of a deviant character. Adults, in contrast, realize that struggling with (at least certain types of) immoral desires is a normal experience, and thus judge it less harshly than they did as children. This view raises the interesting possibility that there may be some temptations for which adults show a more childlike pattern of judgments, condemning individuals whom they see as having particularly deviant, extreme, or abhorrent temptations.

A second possibility is that children and adults judge immoral desires equally harshly, but that adults award more moral credit to people who exercise willpower. Many children may be unfamiliar with exercising willpower—and particularly with exercising it successfully (e.g., W. Mischel & Metzner, 1962); adults might better appreciate that only a person who has conflicting desires has the opportunity to exercise willpower.

Finally, a third possibility is suggested by the developmental difference in judgments about immoral actors. Young children were more likely than adults to judge that someone who wholeheartedly wanted to act immorally was morally superior to someone who was conflicted before acting immorally. Coupled with young children's preference for unconflicted moral actors, this finding suggests that they have a preference for inner harmony *per se*, regardless of whether it is directed toward good or bad actions.

These three possibilities are not mutually exclusive. It might be that children's developing understanding of temptation, willpower, and internal conflict work together to guide the transition from an Aristotelian, character-based view of morality to a more Kantian philosophy that values the exercise of willpower and self-control.

### Action Editor

Bill von Hippel served as action editor for this article.

### Author Contributions

C. Starmans developed the study concept. Both authors contributed to the study design. Testing and data analysis were performed by C. Starmans. C. Starmans drafted the manuscript, and

P. Bloom provided critical revisions. Both authors approved the final version of the manuscript for submission.

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### Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared that they had no conflicts of interest with respect to their authorship or the publication of this article.

### Open Practices



All data and materials have been made publicly available via the Open Science Framework and can be accessed at <https://osf.io/fq7mb/>. The complete Open Practices Disclosure for this article can be found at <http://pss.sagepub.com/content/by/supplemental-data>. This article has received badges for Open Data and Open Materials. More information about the Open Practices badges can be found at <https://osf.io/tyxyz/wiki/1.%20View%20the%20Badges/> and <http://pss.sagepub.com/content/25/1/3.full>.

### Note

1. Although these questions should have been easy for adults, we included them in order to screen out those who did not attend to the vignettes in an attempt to speed through the online task.

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