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Egocentrism shapes moral judgements

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Abstract

We review past and recent literature on how egocentrism shapes moral judgements. We focus on mechanisms by which egocentric evaluations appear to people as objective, impartial and morally right. We also show that people seem to be unaware of these biases and suggest that understanding how egocentrism impacts moral judgements demands studying morality embedded in a specific social context rather than the social void created in a laboratory. Finally, we argue that egocentric biases in moral judgements are not easily overcome and persist even if people deliberately try to omit attitudes in their judgements or if morally relevant information is present. We conclude that egocentric evaluations triggered by such factors as personal and group interests or attitudes may lay at the core of moral judgements of others because they help maintain a strategic social and personal relationships.

1 | INTRODUCTION

We don't see things as they are, we see them as we are (Anaïs Nin, 1961).

People experience the world through their preferences, values, background and expectations. For all the richness of our experience, however, the perspective of others cannot be felt: to infer what others might think, we need effort and careful deliberation. While our unique point of view is easily and automatically accessible, the perspective of others is attainable only in favourable conditions in terms of motivation and cognitive resources. Consistent with this account, research has shown that the egocentric perspective contributes to many errors in social (Epley, Keysar, Van Boven, & Gilovich, 2004a; Gilovich, Medvec, & Savitsky, 2000; Gilovich & Savitsky, 1999;

Keysar & Barr, 2002) and justice judgements (Babcock, Loewenstein, Issacharoff, & Camerer, 1995; Messick & Sentis, 1979; Thompson & Loewenstein, 1992). Although egocentrism has also been postulated as a source of bias in moral cognition too (Epley & Caruso, 2004; Moore & Loewenstein, 2004), for many years, it was neglected in empirical moral psychology. In this paper, we review past and recent findings providing theoretical and empirical evidence for egocentrism as a strong source of bias in moral judgements of others. We first outline mechanisms upon which egocentric evaluations are automatic and seem objective. We then explain why the egocentric perspective fulfils the adaptive function of strategic moral decision-making to show further how egocentrism shapes moral judgements of others' behaviour and character.

2 | EGOCENTRIC EVALUATIONS ARE AUTOMATIC

Contrary to the popular belief that only young children make egocentric errors in their judgements (Piaget, 1954), psychological research has accrued ample evidence indicating that adults' judgements are egocentrically biased as well (Alicke, 1993; Epley, Savitsky, & Gilovich, 2001; Keysar, 1994; Krueger & Clement, 1994; Savitsky, Epley, & Gilovich, 2001). For example, people overestimate their skills and underestimate the skills of others, but only when the threshold for successful performance is low (e.g., using a computer mouse). The error is produced by the fact that when skills are not difficult to learn, people fail to recognize that others might be as experienced as they are (Kruger, 1999). Furthermore, people tend to overestimate how visible their internal states are to others (e.g., feelings of disgust or intentions to lie—Gilovich, Savitsky, & Medvec, 1998). They also exaggerate the extent to which others would share their valuations of a commodity (Van Boven, Dunning, & Loewenstein, 2000).

Research has found that adults interpret the world as egocentrically as children, but in contrast to children, they have more cognitive ability to correct their initial egocentric interpretations. Specifically, comparisons between young children and adults have shown that both groups interpret spoken instructions egocentrically. However, adults are faster and more effective in correcting these biased interpretations when they yield errors in decision making (Epley, Morewedge, & Keysar, 2004b). This evidence aligns with dual-process models that distinguish two different modes of information processing: automatic and controlled. While the first process is fast, effortless and unconscious, the second process is slow, analytical and might be recruited when needed (Moore & Loewenstein, 2004).

Based on these dual-process models, psychologists have assumed that egocentrism is an automatic (and thereby the default) perspective in social judgement. This is because people experience the world directly, in a fast and effortless manner, whereas taking the perspective of others requires effort, cognitive resources and time (Epley & Caruso, 2004; Moore & Loewenstein, 2004). Corroborating this hypothesis, research has shown that people make more egocentric errors in social evaluations when their attentional resources are limited by cognitive load (Kruger, 1999) or when they do not have sufficient time to correct the default egocentric perspective (Epley et al., 2004a). Moreover, as mentioned earlier, adults are better than children in correcting their egocentric perspective because they can adjust their judgements to the perspectives of others using controlled processing (Epley et al., 2004b). Research confirms that an enhancement of motivation, for instance, by offering participants financial incentives for accuracy, reduces egocentric biases in their social evaluations (Epley et al., 2004a).

Overall, adults, similar to children, anchor social judgements to their own perspective, which is an automatic, effortless and continuously available process. Nevertheless, when people are motivated to be accurate, they might try to correct their egocentric perspective with deliberate processing. Based on these premises and dual-process models, psychologists have assumed that moral judgements might result from both automatic evaluations and conscious reasoning. Therefore, people should make the same egocentric errors regarding what is right and wrong (Epley & Caruso, 2004; Moore & Loewenstein, 2004; see also Cushman, Young, & Greene, 2010 for dual-process models in moral psychology).

3 | EGOCENTRIC EVALUATIONS ARE PERCEIVED AS OBJECTIVE

People may strongly believe in the objectivity of their egocentric evaluations because the process underlying these evaluations is automatic and unconscious (Epley & Caruso, 2004). For example, people judge their own moral beliefs as more objective than social conventions and almost as objective as scientific statements (Goodwin & Darley, 2008). Moreover, because people are automatically inclined to evaluate the social world from the egocentric perspective, their judgements may heavily depend on the potential outcomes of an event. Thus, people may base their evaluation on automatic answers to such questions as follows: (1) Is it good or bad for me? (Ferguson & Bargh, 2004)?, (2) Is it positive or negative to me? (Chen & Bargh, 1999)? and (3) Does it pose any threat to me? (Epley & Caruso, 2004; Wilensky, Schafe, & LeDoux, 2000)?

Support for these assumptions is found in the field of moral psychology. Research has indicated that people need approximately 250 milliseconds to decide whether something is right or wrong (Van Berkum, Holleman, Nieuwland, Otten, & Murre, 2009) and make moral evaluations even when they cannot explain them (Haidt, 2001) or are unable to disclose the logic behind their decisions because of poor verbal skills (Hamlin, 2013). This evidence confirms that moral judgements like any other judgements can be generated automatically (Bargh, 1994) and therefore suggests that the automatic side of social and moral judgements makes them prone to egocentric biases.

An excellent example of how egocentric evaluations impact moral judgement is the classic experiment that showed that people overpaid themselves and underpaid others for the same work but still believed that their decisions were fair (Messick & Sentis, 1979). In court, people differ in their perceptions of a fair settlement depending on whether they play the role of the plaintiff or the defendant (Loewenstein, Issacharoff, Camerer, & Babcock, 1993). Furthermore, overpayment to oneself is perceived as fair, but overpayment to a similar other seems unfair (Greenberg, 1983). Moreover, even when the procedures of the payment distribution are unfair people, judge the outcome as just if it yields medium or high monetary benefits for themselves (Greenberg, 1987).

The evidence reviewed above indicates that beneficial outcomes seem fair and moral because people's evaluations are based on egocentric interpretation of the outcome value. Positive outcomes seem objectively moral, while negative outcomes are experienced as objectively immoral because egocentric evaluations appear rapidly and effortlessly, leaving the impression of impartial judgement reflecting reality. In this way, the egocentric perspective seems to fulfil the adaptive function, which may result in strategic moral decision-making.

4 | EGOCENTRIC EVALUATIONS ARE STRATEGIC

People might strategically use morals to benefit the self or one's group, and several major theories of moral psychology account for this strategic perspective recognizing the centrality of the ego in their conceptualizations of morality. For example, the social cognitive theory of moral agency (Bandura, 1986, 1991) explains that individuals adopt standards of right and wrong in the exercise of a moral self, which serve as deterrents for immoral conduct. Therefore, people engage in a self-regulatory process using several cognitive functions that allow monitoring their behaviour with their moral standards. However, self-regulatory mechanisms operate when they are activated; hence, an individual might use a variety of psychosocial mechanisms to selectively disengage moral self-sanctions from immoral actions (Bandura, 2002). Research has shown that moral disengagement mechanisms such as a reduction in prosocial behaviour or low levels of guilt explain the aggressive and delinquent behaviour of teenagers (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 1996), while moral justification and dehumanization enable prison execution teams to carry out the death penalty (Osofsky, Bandura, & Zimbardo, 2005).

More recent theories, for example, the social intuitionist model (Haidt, 2007, 2012), suggest that moral judgements typically derive from intuitive and automatic process (the moral intuition). Hence, when people engage in moral reasoning, first process has already been run. In this way, post hoc conclusions about what is right and

wrong serve as evidence supporting and justifying people's initial intuitive reactions (but see also McHugh, McGann, Igou, & Kinsella, 2017).

Other theories, such as relationship regulation theory (Rai & Fiske, 2011), argue that moral judgements are embedded in our social-relational cognition. Therefore, whether an action would be judged as right or wrong entirely depends on the social-relation context in which it occurs. Research supporting the relationship regulation theory found that variability in relational context might account for over 50% of the variation in moral judgements (Simpson, Laham, & Fiske, 2016). Moreover, it was shown that people protect close others who committed such acts as theft or sexual harassment by justifying their actions and planning to discipline close others on their own (Weidman, Sowden, Berg, & Kross, 2020). In the same vein, a different study found that people judge harmful behaviour committed by their siblings as less unethical than the same behaviour committed by a stranger (Lee & Holyoak, 2020; Study 1). Additionally, recent research has shown that when young children collaborate with partners who help them to acquire resources but also harm third parties, their obligation to sustain the beneficial relationship is stronger than the aversion to antisocial others. In the result, children express a positive attitude towards the partner, even though they recognize the partner's actions as immoral (Myslinska Szarek, Bocian, Baryla, & Wojciszke, 2020).

Finally, the dynamic coordination theory (DeScioli & Kurzban, 2013) explains that people use moral condemnation to strategically decide which side of the conflict they should choose. In this way, people can dynamically change whom they support based on public signals regarding the actors' actions rather than actors' identities and therefore reduce potential personal conflicts. For example, side-taking is an essential part of being a good friend, and research has shown that people react negatively towards a friend who remains neutral as much as towards a friend who is against them (Shaw, DeScioli, Barakzai, & Kurzban, 2017). Additionally, agents who helped strangers instead of kin are judged as less morally good and trustworthy (McManus, Kleiman-Weiner, & Young, 2020).

The egocentric perspective has a deep account in several theories of moral psychology that describe egocentrism as a source of strategic, moral decision-making. In other words, egocentric evaluations serve an adaptive function, helping social relations to thrive and reducing potential personal conflicts while conferring benefits for the agent and the agent's group. In this way, the theories mentioned above describe moral judgements as almost always serving the current goals of the agent or the goals of the agent's group.

5 | EGOCENTRISM BIASES MORAL EVALUATIONS OF OTHERS' ACTIONS

Despite a strong theoretical and empirical rationale for egocentric biases in moral psychology, past research has focused mainly either on justice and fairness judgements (e.g., Babcock et al., 1995; Greenberg, 1983; Loewenstein et al., 1993) or on how people adjust their perceptions of their immoral behaviour to protect their self-concept (Batson, Thompson, Seuferling, Whitney, & Strongman, 1999; Mazar, Amir, & Ariely, 2008; for review see; Shalvi, Gino, Barkan, & Ayal, 2015).

Only recently was the idea that automatic evaluations might bias people's judgements of others' actions directly tested. Specifically, studies have investigated how positive outcomes (e.g., personal benefits, group interests) and attitudes (e.g., liking) influence moral judgements of others' behaviour (Bocian, Baryla, & Wojciszke, 2016; Bocian, Cichocka, & Wojciszke, 2020b; Bocian & Wojciszke, 2014a, 2014b; Wojciszke & Bocian, 2018), and moral character judgements (Bocian, Baryla, Kulesza, Schnall, & Wojciszke, 2018; Bocian & Myslinska Szarek, 2020; Grizzard et al., 2020; Melnikoff & Bailey, 2018).

In one of the first studies, Bocian and Wojciszke (2014a) conducted a field experiment in a university library in which they recruited students who did or did not have to pay a fine for overdue books. For half of the students, the librarian arbitrarily waived the fine, but for another half, she did not. Moral evaluations collected from participants two minutes after they had left the library showed that students judged the librarian's decision as more moral when

she broke the university rules and helped them save money by waiving the fine than when she enforced the fine. This initial evidence for egocentric bias in moral judgements of others' actions was additionally supported in two laboratory experiments. For example, participants judged their partner's cheating as less immoral if the participants could win an iPod than if they could not after catching their partner cheating.

Bocian and Wojciszke (2014a) assumed that at least two plausible mechanisms might explain how egocentrism biases moral evaluations. The first hypothesis, based on the mood congruency hypothesis, presumes that when people benefit from a person's wrongdoing, they experience a rise in positive affect, which leads to more positive perceptions of the person. Past research has shown that happy participants make more positive judgements about others (Forgas & Bower, 1987). Additionally, another study found that individuals who cheat, experience more positive affect than those who restrained themselves from unethical behaviour (Ruedy, Moore, Gino, & Schweitzer, 2013). The second mechanism presumes that people develop a positive attitude towards a person who benefits them because the latter helps them attain their current goal (i.e., gain maximization). For example, when people are engaged in goal pursuit, they automatically evaluate objects instrumental to goal achievement as more positive than objects irrelevant to the current goal pursuit (Ferguson & Bargh, 2004; see also; Melnikoff & Bailey, 2018). This suggests that people may automatically evaluate others who help them obtain resources as more likeable than others who do not support them.

In their last laboratory experiment, Bocian and Wojciszke (2014a) tested the attitude formation hypothesis by manipulating whether participants initially disliked or liked a wrongdoing partner and found that when positive attitude formation had been blocked (as well as automatic evaluation), the participants' moral judgements were freed from egocentrically biased interpretations. Moreover, no evidence for the mood congruency hypothesis was found—participants who had observed an act of cheating experienced a decrease in mood independent of whether they benefited from the act or not.

Overall, the reviewed evidence indicates that people automatically evaluate others' actions as morally right when anticipated outcomes are positive (i.e., personally beneficial) and negative actions (i.e., personally detrimental) as morally wrong. These results confirm the adaptive function of egocentrism because people might use moral judgements to confer benefits from the unethical actions of others and still perceive themselves as moral (e.g., displacement of responsibility, see Bandura, 2002), build future social relations with the agent (Rai & Fiske, 2011) or reduce potential conflicts (DeScioli & Kurzban, 2013). Undoubtedly, egocentrism is a difficult to control, usually oblivious, automatic perspective in which people observe the world paying more attention to themselves than others. Therefore, it seems reasonable to assume that people remain unaware that their moral evaluations are biased.

6 | UNAWARENESS OF EGOCENTRIC BIASES

Egocentric evaluations are automatic, and like affective changes can emerge and operate without conscious awareness (Strack & Deutsch, 2004). Therefore, people do not have reasons to suspect that egocentric evaluations are not an accurate reflection of the event or person they are judging. Accordingly, it is highly plausible that people are not aware that they generate moral judgements of others that are biased by automatic and egocentric interpretations. Bocian and Wojciszke (2014b; Study 2) tested this idea by first asking participants to imagine that the librarian waived (or not) the fine for them and then evaluated her actions in terms of morality. Afterwards, the results from the sample, which only involved imagining judging the librarian, were compared with the results from the actual experiment from Bocian and Wojciszke (2014a; Study 1). This comparison showed no trace of egocentric interpretations of the librarian's actions as morally right when people imagined themselves in the situation from the field experiment (see Figure 1). Their moral judgements were harsher than the moral judgements of participants who benefited from the librarian actions in the field experiment (Bocian & Wojciszke, 2014b).
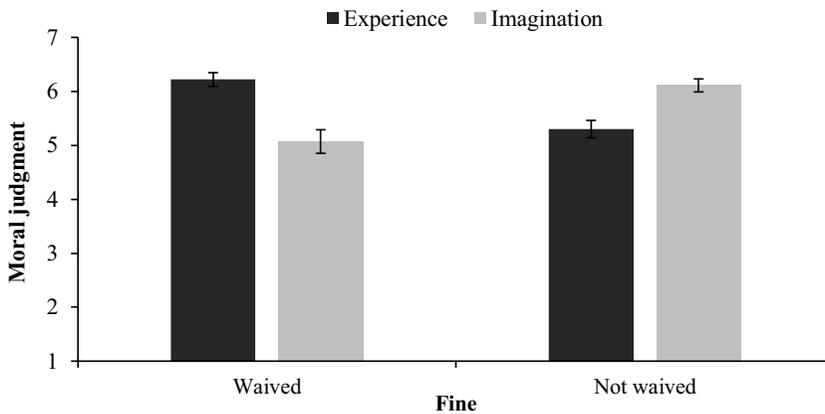
FIGURE 1 Mean moral judgement of the librarian action as a function of personal benefit and perspective manipulation (Bocian & Wojciszke, 2014b, Study 2). The error bars represent standard error

In a different study, Wojciszke and Bocian (2018) asked participants to imagine that another student cheated for money in a group task and did (or did not) share the final payment with them (different participants experienced this situation in the study by Bocian et al., 2016). Then, participants had to evaluate how moral or immoral was the behaviour of their partner, and the results were compared with the moral judgements of participants who experienced the described actions in the actual laboratory experiment. Corroborating previous findings, Wojciszke and Bocian (2018) found that when participants only imagined (vs. experienced) the beneficial yet unethical event, their judgements were not biased by egocentric evaluations suggesting that imaginary studies recruit controlled processes to a higher degree than real-life situations.

In imaginary studies, people might be concerned about their moral appearance and base their judgements solely on social norms (e.g., favouritism is unethical and do not act selfishly). Support for this hypothesis was found in a study in which participants read descriptions of different situations that involved moral norm violations (vs. maintaining the norm) and involvement (or not) of their interests (e.g., allotting an attractive internship to a candidate that was less qualified than other candidates) and tried to predict their moral responses. Analysis of the participants' moral judgements revealed a strong influence of norms and only a weak, secondary role of personal gain, suggesting that people's automatic evaluations were corrected to align with current norms (Bocian & Wojciszke, 2014b; Study 1). In real-life situations, a person's attention might be distracted by many factors. Therefore, any adjustments of automatic evaluations might be scarce. Research indicates that when people are motivated to adjust or correct their egocentric interpretations, such corrective attempts are insufficient because they require effort (Gilbert & Gill, 2000) and conscious attention (Epley & Gilovich, 2004).

If people are not aware that egocentrism biases their moral judgements, that they experience them as objective, and that they correct them only sporadically, there are reasons to expect that they would follow these judgements. For instance, because moral judgements should inform behaviour, people considered to be moral should be trusted, even if the moral judgement in question concerns cheaters who worked in the observers' interest. In one behavioural experiment, Bocian et al. (2016) found that a cheating confederate, in contrast to an honest one, was judged as less moral and trustworthy but only when participants did not benefit from the wrongdoing. When they did profit from the confederate's actions, they judged the confederate as moral. Even more importantly, in a one-shot trust game (which measures behavioural trust; see Berg, Dickhaut, & McCabe, 1995), the participants sent the same amount of their own money to the confederate regardless of whether the confederate cheated or not. These results demonstrate that people might believe in their egocentrically biased judgements and act upon them even by trusting a cheater. However, these findings are preliminary and require additional empirical support and as such should be treated with caution (Bocian et al., 2016).

The evidence reviewed so far suggests that egocentric biases, because of their automatic and unconscious nature, may be shared in different domains of moral evaluations. Therefore, it seems essential to investigate how common is egocentric bias is in moral judgements because moral experiences and judgements are surprisingly frequent. Out of 13,000 events assessed every day, 29% appeared to be interpreted in moral terms, with participants engaged in the acts either as agents or targets, witnessing them in person or learning about them from others (Hofmann, Wisneski, Brandt, & Skitka, 2014). In everyday situations, moral judgements profoundly influence interpersonal attitudes, thereby determining whom people approach and whom they avoid (Abele & Wojciszke, 2014). In extreme cases, they influence perceptions of others' identity (Strohminger & Nichols, 2015) as well as life or death decisions (Wilson & Rule, 2015).

7 | EGOCENTRIC BIASES IN JUDGEMENTS OF MORAL CHARACTER

If egocentric evaluations can bias judgements of others' (im)moral actions, one can expect that perception of others' moral character could be influenced by them as well. In contrast to moral actions, the moral character of an individual is perceived as his or her disposition to produce morally wrong or right acts (Everett, Pizarro, & Crockett, 2016). Therefore, whereas most actions are fleeting and their construal is insufficient for making predictions of the future, judgements of moral character are more stable and allow for such predictions.

Because people automatically evaluate objects as positive or negative and these evaluations produce approach or avoidance tendencies (Chen & Bargh, 1999), attitude valence might be a source of strong egocentric bias in the perception of others' moral character. For example, Bocian and Wojciszke (2014a) found that people's favourable moral judgements about cheating confederates were explained by the surge in a positive attitude (liking) towards them. A different study showed that preference for moral versus immoral traits in others depends on the context and our current goals. Specifically, it was found that moral traits increase liking when morality is advantageous toward our goals, but when immorality is goal conducive, the preference for moral traits is eliminated or reduced (Melnikoff & Bailey, 2018).

According to affective disposition theory (Zillmann & Bryant, 1975; Zillmann & Cantor, 1977), moral judgements of character actions influence whether we like or dislike the character. More recent theories have tried to expand affective disposition theory, suggesting that people not only like characters because their behaviours are perceived as good and moral but also judge them as moral because they like them (Raney, 2004). Building on this line of reasoning, Bocian et al. (2018) found that positive attitudes, evoked by sources irrelevant to the judgement, biased perceptions of others' moral character.

In one study, Bocian et al. (2018) relied on the classic chameleon effect (see Chartrand & Bargh, 1999), which assumes that mimicry (e.g., postures and facial expressions) increases liking between interaction partners. Participants' facial expressions were or were not mimicked by a confederate. The confederate was liked and considered to be more moral after mimicking the participant than when the same confederate did not mimicking the participant. In a different study, participants who believed that another person had the same (vs. different) political beliefs liked this person more and judged the moral character of this person more favourably.

Overall, in four experiments, the same pattern of interpersonal attitudes (i.e., liking) strongly influencing judgements of moral character was found, suggesting that subjective and inevitable egocentric preferences strongly influenced perceptions of moral character (Bocian et al., 2018) in addition to previously discussed perceptions of immoral acts. Corroborating this account, a study found that character morality and liking are so profoundly tied that even orthogonal manipulation of both factors was unable to suppress the relationship between them (Grizzard et al., 2020). Also, a recent developmental study found that 4-year-olds liked the agent more and judge the agent's actions as less bad when the agent inflicted harm against the antisocial recipient

than on the prosocial and neutral recipient (Bocian & Myslinska Szarek, 2020). These results are important because perceptions of moral character can have serious social consequences: they shape first impressions and perceived suitability for different social roles, as well as influence trust in social interactions (Everett et al., 2016; Everett, Faber, Savulescu, & Crockett, 2018).

8 | EGOCENTRIC BIASES IN MORAL JUDGEMENTS OF GROUP MEMBERS

The research we discussed so far focused on investigating how egocentric evaluations bias moral judgements at the individual level. However, it is highly probable that we could observe a similar process involving egocentric interpretations at the intergroup level, which should be especially strong when people are motivated to protect the interests of their group.

Recent research conducted in 60 different societies demonstrates that cooperative behaviours (e.g., helping your group) are uniformly seen as positive (Curry, Mullins, & Whitehouse, 2019). People are also more likely to perceive politicians as more moral if their political programmes serve their interests than if those programmes undermine their interests (Cislak & Wojciszke, 2006). Similarly, research indicates that perceptions of policy fairness are based on how well these policies serve ingroup interests (Bialobrzeska, Bocian, Parzuchowski, Frankowska, & Wojciszke, 2015). For example, citizens are likely to support policies that benefit their nation, even if they could harm others (Baron, Ritov, & Greene, 2013).

Bocian et al. (2020b) investigated whether people perceive actions as morally right when they serve the interests of their group but as morally wrong when they serve outgroup interests. Moreover, they argued that egocentric bias regarding moral judgements about ingroup members should be especially strong among participants who are defensive about their group identity (collective narcissism). In one of the experiments, they asked English and Polish participants to judge the morality of decisions made by ingroup and outgroup members and found that group identity influenced participants' moral judgements but only those high in collective narcissism. In a different experiment, they asked American participants (Democrats and Republicans) how moral was the decision of the US Senate to nominate Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court (Kavanaugh was accused of sexual harassment before the nomination). For Republican voters, the decision of the US Senate was moral, although Democrats condemned it to the bone. This strong effect of group identity on moral judgements was additionally moderated by partisan narcissism, which suggests that egocentric evaluations regarding the protection of group interests might be present among individuals who are defensive (but not secure) about their group identities.

9 | DEBIASING STRATEGIES FOR EGOCENTRIC EVALUATIONS IN MORAL JUDGEMENTS

Identifying strategies that could eliminate egocentric biases in moral judgements might help modern societies change the disruptive nature of moral disagreements. However, to date, research on effective strategies for reducing egocentric biases has been limited to studies on conflict or fairness but has returned inconclusive results and are thus unable to advise which specific strategies are successful (see Epley & Caruso, 2004). For example, one line of studies found that a commonly advised strategy of considering the perspective of others (perspective taking) did reduce egocentric judgements (people claimed that it was fair for them to take less) but also strengthened egoistic (selfish) behaviour, as participants in the end allocated more resources to themselves (Epley, Caruso, & Bazerman, 2006). Therefore, egocentric evaluations might be challenging to overcome because of their automatic and affective nature and because attempts to mitigate them might lead to a discrepancy between moral judgements (what people judge as fair distribution of resources) and moral behaviour (how people distribute the resources; Epley et al., 2006). This discrepancy was also found in research that showed that people's imaginary moral

judgements differed significantly from their behavioural moral judgements (Bocian & Wojciszke, 2014b; Wojciszke & Bocian, 2018).

Recently, Bocian, Baryla, and Wojciszke (2020a) tested which strategies might be successful in eliminating the biasing impact of interpersonal attitudes on attributions of moral character. The results of three experiments revealed that only accountability (i.e., the prospect of giving justification for one's moral judgements) was strong enough to block the bias. However, neither a deliberate attempt to ignore personal attitudes nor the presence of morally relevant information about past unethical behaviour of a judged (and well-liked) person could de-bias moral judgement. Overall, these results suggest that the influence of attitude-driven egocentric interpretations on moral character perception can be either eliminated or limited through specific cognitive factors. Future research should focus on testing which deliberate (e.g., moral image) and automatic (e.g., time pressure) factors weaken or reinforce egocentric evaluations in judgements of moral character.

10 | CONCLUSION

Egocentric evaluations are fast, automatic, affective and strategically motivated. Because they do not require effort and resources to operate, they can serve as a default basis for moral judgements. Therefore, egocentric evaluations subjectively seem objective and accurate perceptions of the social world, thereby making people unaware of their biasing power in moral evaluations. However, even though strategies such as attitude evading or increased motivation could help people correct their biased egocentric perspective, the evidence presented in this study suggests that these strategies are frequently insufficient since they require effort and conscious attention.

Knowledge that egocentric evaluations are predominantly automatic helps understand why people judge outcomes as fair or moral when they are positive for them and unfair or immoral when they are negative. Moreover, it also clarifies why the same people perceive others as self-interested or egoistic. People overestimate the impact of self-interest on others' attitudes and behaviours (Miller & Ratner, 1998) and probably assume that others judge positive outcomes as fair and negative outcomes as unfair because of their selfish and egoistic nature. That might be plausible because people are not aware that the egocentric perspective automatically influences their evaluations. Hence, instead of accusing people of being selfish or self-interested, we should understand how egocentrism shapes the way people talk about morality.

This can be done by bringing egocentric biases into moral judgement paradigms to make them more ecologically valid and, thus, more socially relevant. However, to understand how egocentrism biases moral judgements, we should recognize that while recent theories of moral psychology explain morals through the self, most of the empirical work regarding morality does not take the self into account. Therefore, moral judgements are typically studied in a sort of social vacuum by placing people in decontextualized and often imagined situations when they are asked to act as omniscient moral judges. These methods raise concerns about the value of moral judgements in moral behaviour predictions. For example, recent evidence confirms that responses to hypothetical moral dilemmas cannot predict responses to real-life dilemmas (Bostyn, Sevenhant, & Roets, 2018), moral decisions (Patil, Cogoni, Zangrando, Chittaro, & Silani, 2014) or moral actions (Francis et al., 2016).

The mismatch between studied and experienced morality may be resolved by embedding moral judgements in a specific context. Specifically, scholars may contextualize actors (e.g., manipulating personal relationships; Waytz, Dungan, & Young, 2013), actions (e.g., studying the unique context of war; Watkins & Goodwin, 2020), judges (e.g., participant's subjective experience; Royzman, Kim, & Leeman, 2015) and values (e.g., how do people prioritize them; Dungan, Young, & Waytz, 2019; for the review see Schein, 2020). Based on the reviewed theories and empirical evidence, we argue that scholars should contextualize attitudes and personal or group interests as well. In this way,

future research would narrow the gap between the egocentrism centrality in theory and its underrepresentation in empirical work, bringing moral judgements closer to moral behaviour.

We might need to accept that egocentric biases in moral judgements are inevitable. Social, justice and moral psychology offer ample evidence against our naïve confidence in humans as impartial judges, despite the strong confidence in the objective nature of our moral judgements and collective denial they could be influenced by such egocentric factors as personal benefits, attitudes or group interests.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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