

## Moral Identity

In many primates, individuals evaluate others for their suitability as social partners. Several hundred thousand years ago, as humans began moving toward a more cooperative and interdependent lifestyle, the evaluation process intensified (see Chapter 2). To survive and thrive, human individuals had to choose good collaborative partners and, crucially, to be chosen by others as good collaborative partners themselves.

But the process did not just intensify; it changed. Early humans, but not other apes, came to understand how the process of partner evaluation and choice worked, in the sense that they now knew that others were also evaluating and choosing them. At that point it became important for individuals to actively manage the impression they were making on others, to project to others in the group an identity as someone who was cooperatively competent and trustworthy. And because individuals played the role of both judge and judged—with “our” shared standards in the group applying in both cases—they came to evaluate themselves in the same way that they evaluated others, thus creating an internalized moral identity. And so was born a species that executively self-regulated its own beliefs and actions normatively—that is, morally.

From an early age, even before their first birthday, infants engage in processes of social evaluation. By three years of age children are making moral judgments: judgments that do not just express their personal preferences but assess how others meet the objective normative standards that “we” all share. By four or five years of age children discover that others are judging them in this same way, using the same normative standards, so they engage in active attempts at self-presentation to influence those judgments. But one cannot escape one’s own watchful eye, so children of this age also reverse roles and begin to evaluate themselves in the same