

What is personality lensing?

Personality lensing is a novel hypothesis to describe the mechanism that enables moral flexibility. In plain terms, it's the way our personality mediates our moral responses. In personality lensing I propose that when given a stimuli, we perceive it first through our personality – absent any moral consideration. This allows us to downplay or amplify the stimulus before it reaches our moral foundations. Figure 1 demonstrates this concept visually utilizing the moral foundations laid out by Haidt & Joseph (2008) and the Big Five personality traits (Barrick & Mount, 1991).

In the figure, I demonstrate how a stimulus is first perceived via the related aspect of personality before its associated moral foundation. In the Big Five, conscientiousness is associated with cleanliness, and so our particular take on this aspect of personality serves to mediate our response to the room. Those with a lower conscientiousness may not be as upset, while those with a higher conscientiousness may find the room to be more objectionable.

Example Situation

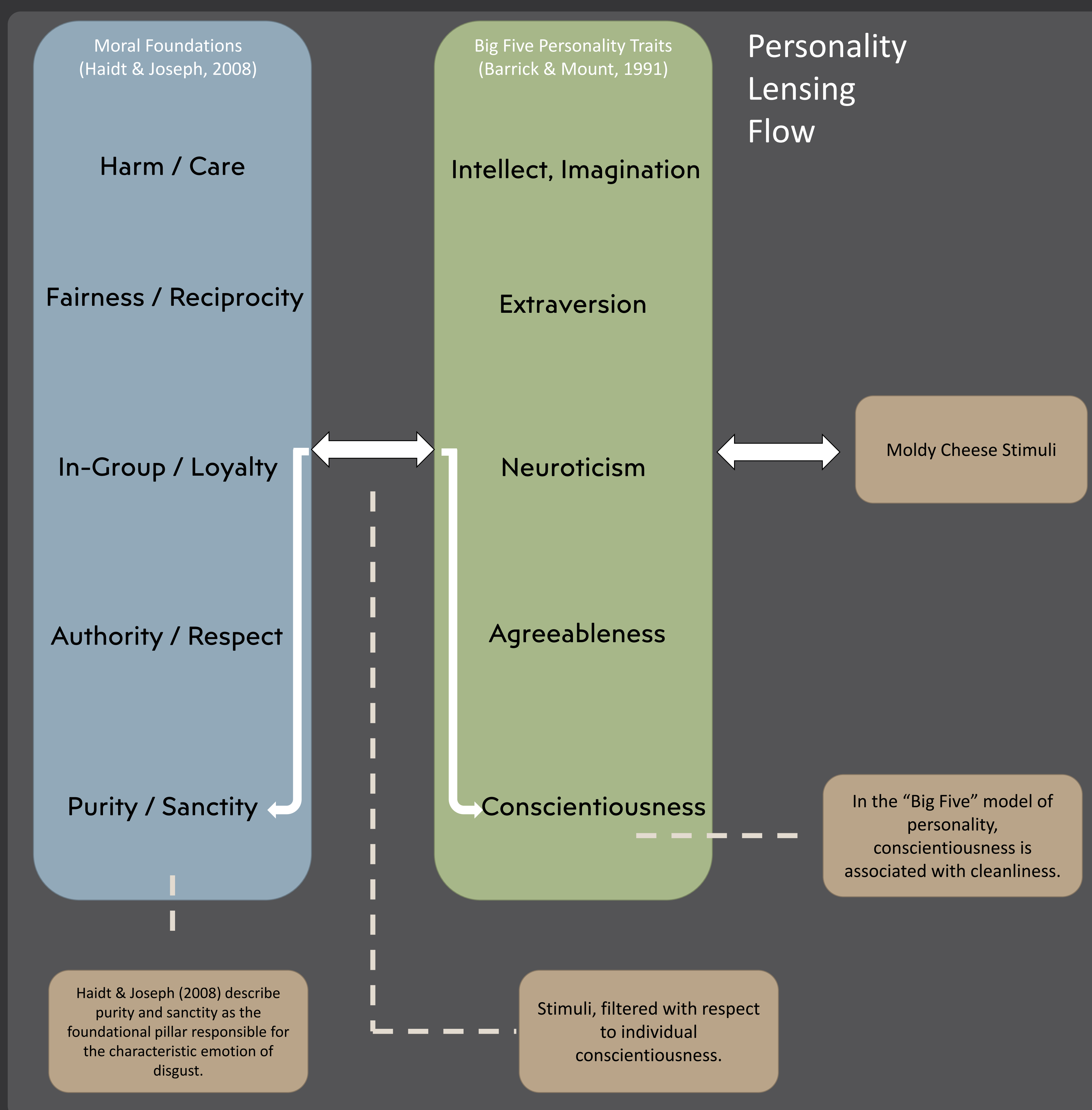
Consider the example given in the figure below: a molded block of cheese. If you're like me, and the majority of the human population, your reaction to disgusting things is probably the same: a gag reflex, and a scrunched up face! With this particular stimuli, we see how personality allows us to mediate our response. Although a number of personality attributes contribute, the largest expected contributor to mediation would be conscientiousness due to its ties to cleanliness (a trait which has been directly linked to purity)(Zhong & Liljenquist, 2006). Personality lensing would predict that those higher in conscientiousness would more consistently rate the stimuli as more disgusting than their colleagues with lower conscientiousness. In other words, where someone else might see a moldy block of cheese and be inclined to throw it in the garbage, still another may simply remove the offending piece and consider the rest good (or the more adventurous still might eat the whole thing, discovering the likes of Roquefort).

Evidence?

Research on the interaction between personality and morality specifically is difficult to locate; however, there are studies that seem to indicate the effect's presence (Jonason, Zeigler-Hill, & Okan, 2017). In their findings, Jonason et al. (2017) make an interesting note that personality is a better predictor for sinful behavior than one's morality.

Additionally, work conducted with prisoners showed that despite concrete evidence to the contrary they routinely rate themselves as more moral than their peers, imprisoned or otherwise (Constantine, Meek, Alicke, & Taylor, 2014).

Work conducted in the creation of the Three Domains of Disgust Scale (Olatunji, Adams, Ciesielski, David, Sarawgi, & Broman-Fulks 2012) demonstrated a correlation between disgust (a moral response) and personality as well, supporting the interaction between personality and morality.



References

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