Nina Pham caught the potentially-fatal illness while treating dying Liberian national Thomas Eric Duncan, who passed away last Wednesday. Officials at Texas Health Presbyterian Hospital in Dallas confirmed that the 26-year-old Ebola health worker was in frequent contact with the patient over the 11 days he was admitted.

“She’s like a hero to me,” Tom Ha said. “In the community, we think she’s a hero.”
Nina Pham caught the potentially-fatal illness while treating dying Liberian national Thomas Eric Duncan, who passed away last Wednesday.

Officials at Texas Health Presbyterian Hospital in Dallas confirmed that the 26-year-old Ebola health worker was in frequent contact with the patient over the 11 days he was admitted.

Friends and family have said that she is dedicated to her job and is said to have been ecstatic to qualify as a critical care nurse and is often called on by neighbours to babysit their children.

Colleague Jennifer Joseph said: “We have heroes that are willing to make sacrifices when no one else will.

“Because I know for a fact that she would take care of him again.”
What do you think?

Is he a hero?

What defines a hero?

Does it take a special/unique type of “character” to act heroically?

Is his act morally praiseworthy?

Is he morally praiseworthy for doing this?

Would you consider him to be a moral person? Yes/no & why?
Personality and Moral Character
Why did one person act charitably, while the other person didn’t?
Personality as a source of moral actions

Why did one person act charitably, while the other person didn’t?

Perhaps, in part, it’s due to differences in Compassion

Beliefs, Values, Motivations, Feelings

“Compassionate person”

-Character-
Personality as a source of moral actions.

Why did one person act charitably, while the other person didn’t?

Perhaps there was something about the specific situation:

Hurry, mood, impression, opportunity, Pressure, extra money.
Personality as a source of moral actions

“The disposition a person brings to the experiment is probably less important a cause of his behavior than most readers assume..... Often, it is not so much the kind of person a man is as the kind of situation in which he finds himself that determines how he will act.” (Milgram, 1974, p. 205)

“The obedience effect is due to situational variables and not personality variables. ….. These findings enable us to rule out the role of personality in obedient behavior.” (Zimbardo & Weber, 1994, p. 456-457)

“I believe that ordinary thinking in terms of character traits has disastrous effects on people’s understanding of each other, on their understandings of what social programs are reasonable to support, and of their understandings of international affairs.... We need to convince people to look at situational factors and to stop trying to explain things in terms of character traits. We need to abandon all talk of virtue and character.” (Harman, 2000)

The experimental record suggests that situational factors are often better predictors of behavior than personal factors... In very many situations, it looks as though personality is less than robustly determinative of behaviors. To put things crudely, people typically lack character. (Doris, p. 2)
Personality as a source of moral actions?

Why is this important?

Why should we care?
Morality

Questions that psychological science can’t answer:
• Are there, in fact, truly virtuous people? What exactly is right (or wrong) Which ethical code is correct?, etc.

Questions that psychological science can answer:
• How important is morality to one’s understanding of self? Do people see moral traits as relevant/important/central to who you are?
• How important is morality to one’s evaluation of other people? Do peoples’ perceptions of your morality have any/some/strong influence on their overall evaluation of you?
• Do your views of your own moral traits correspond to others’ views of your morality? If you see yourself as (relatively) moral, do other people also see you as (relatively) moral?
• What causes “moral” (or immoral) behavior? Does personality or “character” have any role?
• Many others
Morality is central to one’s identity

• Strohminger & Nichols (2014) – 5 Studies. Do changes in various physical/psychological attributes change one’s “true self”?

• E.g., S5: Participants were asked to imagine they were meeting an old friend they had known when they were 25, and whom they had not seen in 40 years.

• Subjects were presented with a list of changes the friend had undergone in terms of moral traits, other personality traits, memories, cognitive abilities, desires/preferences. Subjects were asked to assume that for each trait listed, the friend was not that way when they had known him last.

• Subjects rated the degree to which each change would impact the friend’s identity - 0% (‘This change has no impact on his true self’) to 100% (‘This change completely alters his true self’).
Morality is central to one’s identity

S5 Results: Extent to which people said the item contributed to the true self

- MORALITY Racist 74.1%, Cruel 70.6%, Rude 65.7%, Spiritual 64.0%
- PERSONALITY Adventurous 50.2%, Laid-back 50.1%, Ambitious 48.8%
- BASIC COGNITION Worse attention span 44.6%, Better at planning ahead 39.2%, Worse at picking up new skills 37.6%
- MEMORY His childhood memories have faded 48.5%, Forgetful 47.1%
- DESIRES & PREFERENCES Reduced libido 38.4%, Hates throwing things out 37.1%, Likes classical music 35.6%
Morality is central to one’s identity

Strohminger & Nichols (2014) –
All 5 Studies showed similar results

“Across five experiments, we find strong and unequivocal support for the essential moral self hypothesis. Moral traits are considered more important to personal identity than any other part of the mind.” (p 168)
Morality

Questions that psychological science can’t answer:
• Are there, in fact, truly virtuous people? What exactly is right (or wrong) Which ethical code is correct?, etc.

Questions that psychological science can answer:
• How important is morality to one’s understanding of self? Do people see moral traits as relevant/important/central to who you are?
• How important is morality to one’s evaluation of other people? Do peoples’ perceptions of your morality have any/some/strong influence on their overall evaluation of you?
• Do your views of your own moral traits correspond to others’ views of your morality? If you see yourself as (relatively) moral, do other people also see you as (relatively) moral?
• What causes “moral” (or immoral) behavior? Does personality or “character” have any role?
• Many others
How much do perceptions of morality affect on our evaluation of each other?

For 40-50 years, psychologists have identified two domains as most influential/fundamental in how we evaluate each other:

- Warmth (e.g., friendliness, helpfulness, sincerity, trustworthiness)
- Competence (e.g., intelligence, skill, creativity and efficacy)

• Warmth traits are more influential on evaluations than competence

But what about morality? Is it really part of warmth?

“The hard truth” Fairness, principled, courage, etc.

• Warmth (e.g., friendliness, helpfulness, sincerity, trustworthiness)
• Competence (e.g., intelligence, skill, creativity and efficacy)
• Warmth traits are more influential on evaluations than competence
How much do perceptions of morality affect on our evaluation of each other?

Goodwin et al. (2014) – 7 Studies. What do people most care about in others, particularly contrasting warmth vs morality?

Eg Study 5: Participants read descriptions of a target person 3 Groups: (Target person was described as....)

1. courageous, fair, principled, responsible, and honest (Moral but not particularly “warm”)
2. sociable, happy, agreeable, funny, and playful (Warm, but not necessarily moral)
3. humble, grateful, empathetic, cooperative, and kind (Moral and Warm)

Ps rated how they felt about having this person fulfill each of 12 different social roles (0: extremely negative; 50: neutral; 100: extremely positive).
Perceptions of morality have strong effects on our evaluation of each other.

Mean Ratings (and Standard Deviations) of Overall Impression of Each Target by Role and Trait Descending Order of Rated Importance of Role Effectiveness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Trait condition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Moral–warm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surgeon</td>
<td>20.56 (22.71)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long-term romantic partner</td>
<td>61.30 (24.62)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daughter’s fiancé</td>
<td>60.03 (21.78)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judge</td>
<td>48.27 (28.13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child’s primary school teacher</td>
<td>46.44 (26.16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>78.33 (19.49)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close friend</td>
<td>76.94 (16.20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boss/supervisor</td>
<td>60.99 (21.64)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coworker</td>
<td>57.13 (20.74)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family relative</td>
<td>78.05 (19.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cashier at store</td>
<td>71.53 (16.20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social acquaintance</td>
<td>72.47 (17.32)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Within rows, values with non-equivalent subscripts are significantly different at p < .05, according to Tukey’s HSD. Highest mean value(s) for each target are bolded. The simple effect of trait condition was significant for all 12 targets.
Perceptions of morality have strong effects on our evaluation of each other

Goodwin et al. (2014) – 7 Studies. Across all studies, moral traits were more strongly linked to evaluations of other people than warmth traits

“Moral character information powerfully determines the overall impression we form of another person with whom we have or expect to have an important or meaningful relationship.”
Morality

Questions that psychological science can’t answer:
• Are there, in fact, truly virtuous people? What exactly is right (or wrong) Which ethical code is correct?, etc.

Questions that psychological science can answer:
• How important is morality to one’s understanding of self? Do people see moral traits as relevant/important/central to who you are?
• How important is morality to one’s evaluation of other people? Do peoples’ perceptions of your morality have any/some/strong influence on their overall evaluation of you?
• Do your views of your own moral traits correspond to others’ views of your morality? If you see yourself as (relatively) moral, do other people also see you as (relatively) moral?
• What causes “moral” (or immoral) behavior? Does personality or “character” have any role?
• Many others
Does other people's view of our morality match our own view of ourselves? Or, if you think you’re (relatively) moral, do other people see you as (relatively) moral?

Why does this matter?

• We’ve seen that what people think of your morality probably has a strong effect on who they think you are and how much they like/respect you.

• If their “experience” of you is different for your experience of your self, then their view and evaluation of you might not be what you’d expect.

• So, do you share a social reality (of yourself) with others?

• What does lack of agreement say about the existence of moral traits, or the robustness with which they are manifested?
Does other peoples’ view of our morality match our own view of ourselves? Or, if you think you’re (relatively) moral, do other people see you as (relatively) moral?


**Answer: Yes, to a significant (but not huge) degree**

173 “Target” people – rated selves on Compassion, Honesty, Fairness, Temperance, General Moral Concern, & General Morality,

493 “Informants” – acquaintances who rated targets on same moral traits
Does other peoples’ view of our morality match our own view of ourselves? Or, if you think you’re (relatively) moral, do other people see you as (relatively) moral?

Table 3. Estimates of Trait-Level Agreement, Residual Agreement, and Agreement Controlling for Liking [95% CIs] for Self–Other and Inter-Informant Agreement in the Overall Sample (173 Targets, 493 Informants).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Global moral character</th>
<th>Facets of character</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fairness</td>
<td>Compassion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self–other</td>
<td>.36***</td>
<td>.50***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residual</td>
<td>.18**</td>
<td>.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>w/o liking</td>
<td>.36***</td>
<td>.29***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[0.25, .48]</td>
<td>[.17, .41]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inter-Informant</td>
<td>.24***</td>
<td>.20***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[.13, .36]</td>
<td>[.08, .31]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residual</td>
<td>.15**</td>
<td>.11*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>w/o liking</td>
<td>.28***</td>
<td>.19***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. CI = confidence interval.
*p < .10. *p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

Does other peoples’ view of our morality match our own view of ourselves? Or, if you think you’re (relatively) moral, do other people see you as (relatively) moral?

If you see yourself as above/below average on a given moral trait, there’s roughly a 67% chance that your acquaintance also sees you in that way

If one given acquaintance sees you as above/below average on a given moral trait, there’s roughly a 64% changes that another given acquaintance also sees you in that way.

Morality

Questions that psychological science can’t answer:
• Are there, in fact, truly virtuous people? What exactly is right (or wrong) Which ethical code is correct?, etc.

Questions that psychological science can answer:
• How important is morality to one’s understanding of self? Do people see moral traits as relevant/important/central to who you are?
• How important is morality to one’s evaluation of other people? Do peoples’ perceptions of your morality have any/some/strong influence on their overall evaluation of you?
• Do your views of your own moral traits correspond to others’ views of your morality? If you see yourself as (relatively) moral, do other people also see you as (relatively) moral?
• What causes “moral” (or immoral) behavior? Does personality or “character” have any role?
• Many others
A Fundamental Question:
What drives (ostensibly) moral action?

Transient (but powerful) external forces

OR

Personality/Character
Personality as a source of moral actions?

There is consistency in moral thinking
(Helzer, Fleeson, Meindl, Barranti, & Furr, In prep)
People who resolve a moral dilemma in a particular way are very likely to resolve another moral dilemma in a similar way

Key results:

1. Robust contextual differences (contact, action, etc.)
2. High consistency between people $r = .50$ (75%)
Personality as a source of moral actions

There is consistency in moral behavior

(Meindl, Fleeson, Jayawickreme, & Furr, In prep)
People who (say they) act in a relatively moral way in general (across a set of situations) are very likely to (say they) act in a relatively moral way in general, across a different set of situations.

Compassion $r = .67$
Fairness $r = .87$
Honesty $r = .93$
Overall Morality $r = .85$
Morality and personality: What have we learned so far?

1. Moral traits are highly important to self-concept, or at least to what people think makes someone themselves.

2. Moral traits are highly influential on our evaluation of other people. Peoples’ perceptions of your morality has a strong influence on their overall evaluation of you.

3. Your views of your own moral traits correspond to others’ views of your morality to a significant but not huge degree. If you see yourself as (relatively) moral, other people probably also you as (relatively) moral.

4. Despite claims to the contrary, personality does indeed play a role in moral behavior.
Morality and personality: (Some) unanswered questions

1. Are some people truly good judges of “character”? If so, who and why?

2. Can we differentiate moral actions from moral motivations, in driving perceptions of morality in general? Do people agree on your moral motivations separately from your moral actions?

3. What if we look at B-data from observers’ standpoint (not self-report B-data)? Do we still find consistency?

4. What aspects of personality are most relevant to driving moral behavior?

5. Can those aspects of personality be “taught”? Character development?
Revisiting Milgram and the role of personality

“The obedience effect is due to situational variables and not personality variables. ..... These findings enable us to rule out the role of personality in obedient behavior.” (Zimbardo & Weber, 1994, p. 456-457)

“The disposition a person brings to the experiment is probably less important a cause of his behavior than most readers assume..... Often, it is not so much the kind of person a man is as the kind of situation in which he finds himself that determines how he will act.” (Milgram, 1974, p. 205)

What role does personality have in driving our behavior and shaping our lives?
A General Framework for Personality Psychology

Life Events and Broad Social Contexts

Biology

Conscientiousness
Agreeableness
Assertiveness
Compassion
Authoritarianism
Etc

Authority figure’s commands
Victim’s pain

"In the Moment"

I have a duty, responsibility to follow through
It is wrong to cause pain
I am (or am not) responsible for causing pain

Obedience vs Disobedience

Someone wants me to continue
Someone is in pain

Distress
Note, no one seemed to exhibit pleasure

Conscientiousness
Agreeableness
Assertiveness
Compassion
Authoritarianism
Etc