Temptation, Tradition, and Taboo: A Theory of Sacralization*

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A theory of sacralization is offered in which the sacred emerges from the collision of temptation and tradition. It is proposed that when innate or acquired desires to behave in one way conflict with socially acquired and/or mediated drives to behave in another way, actors ascribe sacredness to the objects of their action as a means of reconciling the difference between their desired and actual behavior toward those objects. After establishing the sacred as a theoretical construct, the theory is sketched and then fleshed out with a more formal specification. The foundational assumptions and mechanisms of the theory are then empirically substantiated as a first step toward validating the theory, and a handful of predictions deduced from the theory are assessed.

Durkheim's conviction that the sacred is the essence of religion as well as a fundamental sociological concept is neither misplaced nor of merely historical interest. The sacred was and remains indispensable to understanding religion and is, moreover, an elemental social phenomenon with explanatory power and applications far beyond the domain of religion *per se*. This article seeks to revive the sacred as a sociological concept by articulating a robust, empirically substantiable theory of its social production, and demonstrating the resulting model's potential to illuminate a broad spectrum of social behavior and phenomena.

Any theory presupposes a clear referent. Sacredness is conceptualized herein as a perceived property of some object or class of objects.[1] The fact that "[a] rock, a tree, a spring...in a word, anything, can be sacred" (Durkheim 1995:35; Eliade 1957) tells us that it is not an inherent or even objective property of the objects perceived to possess it. It is instead a projection, superimposed upon an object by some observer(s), and as such, a property of those observers rather than of the objects themselves. While one therefore can only learn so much about the sacred by studying the objects said to possess it, there is much to be gleaned from the observation of its effects upon those who perceive it.

Foremost among these are its effects on perceivers' behavior toward the sacred object. As Callois notes, "the sacred, in ordinary life, is expressed almost exclusively through taboos" (1959:100; see also Freud ([1913] 1950)). Though Durkheim eschewed the term "taboo" for the near-synonyms "interdict" and "prohibition,"[2] he was forthright about the close affinity between it and the sacred: "The true character

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[1]Throughout, "object" is meant in the broadest possible sense, encompassing people, places, actions, and ideas as well as actual objects.

[2]Durkheim's discomfort with "taboo" was likely due to the term's exclusively abstinent connotations. For him, morality was closely aligned with obligation, which in his earliest attempts to define religion is granted the prominence later given over to the sacred (Pickering 1984). Thus, his avoidance of the

of the Roman *sacer* is very difficult to grasp, and above all to understand, if one does not see it in relation to the Polynesian taboo" ([1898] 1963:342), while in *The Elementary Forms*, his very definition of religion, as practices and beliefs "relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden" (1995:44), clearly evokes the essence of taboo.

Sacred objects are, then, treated differently than their observable properties would suggest. But by itself, a discrepancy between an object's properties and behavior toward it fails to uniquely identify the sacred, as many socially constructed entities (e.g., cash) share this quality. What distinguishes sacred taboos is their apparent lack of rational grounds. The sacred exerts its influence on behavior independently of, and often contrary to, objective reason. As Durkheim observes, the sacred "has such power that it calls forth or inhibits conduct automatically, irrespective of any utilitarian calculation of helpful or harmful results" (1995:209). It lies "outside and beyond reason" (Callois 1959:20), and is "independent of the physical laws that determine the rest of the universe" (Pickering 1984:158). Sacred duties, for example, are performed "religiously"—heedless of, and often contrary to, practical considerations (Freud 1950; Thody 1997; Weber [1922] 1993). More empirically, as Tetlock et al. (2000) demonstrate, those who hold particular objects and ideas sacred balk at subjecting them to the same kinds of calculation that they would insist upon in any other domain. The sacred is, in other words, *absolute*. It is oblivious to degrees of offense and constitutes a realm in which "the least movement can doom [one] irrevocably" (Callois 1959:19). Witness the painstaking attention to detail demanded by behavior toward the sacred, in that even the tiniest unintended violation produces the same consequences as would massive and willful defiance, *à la* Persephone's fateful pomegranate seed, and Uzza's lethal attempt to catch the falling ark of the covenant (II Samuel 6:3–8). As Wallis notes: "The holy regards not the intention, but rewards or punishes the deed as impersonally as does the [electrified] wire" (1939:4).

The sacred is further distinguished by the unique pattern of cognitive and affective attributes that accompany its behavioral effects. The first of these is its *salience*. The sacred demands attention, evokes strong feelings, and occupies a unique place in the perceiver's thought. In Berger's understated parlance, it "sticks out" from daily life (1969:26). One manifestation of this salience is the "respect," "special reverence," and "authority" typically accorded to the sacred (Callois 1959; Durkheim 1995; Eliade 1957; Shils 1982).

But what the sacred arouses is not unalloyed adoration. It is instead an admixture of "horror and ardor," to use St. Augustine's poetic phrase. As the equally poetic "mysterium tremendum et fascinans," it is for Otto ([1923] 1950) the essence of the holy. More colloquially, Callois speaks of the sacred's juxtaposition of "terror and veneration," and helpfully elaborates: "One can have only disdain for the profane, while the sacred inspires a kind of fascination. At the same time, it constitutes the supreme temptation and the greatest of dangers. Dreadful, it commands caution, and desirable, it invites rashness" (1959:21, 22). Thus, the sacred is distinct in the simultaneous and contradictory approach and avoidance impulses that it provokes in the observer, that is, in its *hedonic ambivalence*.

Another form of indeterminateness that characterizes the sacred is its *moral ambiguity*. Although the sacred possesses a distinctly moral quality, its valence is by

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term is probably less a matter of distancing the sacred from taboo than of extending the sacred into the realm of duties and obligations. Together, taboo and duty compose the realm of the sacred and thereby underscore its behavioral foundations: whether an act *must* or *must not* be done, the imperative is indubitably behavioral.

no means fixed. Contra its solely positive connotations in English, in the original
Latin, *sacré* encompasses both good and evil, holy and damned (Pickering 1984).
The sacred thus contains both the divine and the diabolical, and a given sacred
object can alternate between these categories across persons, cultures, and time, or
even occupy both at once. Just as the opposite of *tabu* in Polynesian is *noa*, which
refers to things that are accessible and unconstrained (Holden 2000; Wallis 1939),
"profane" refers not to things that are evil, but to things neutral and ordinary. The
sacred itself, meanwhile, comes in two varieties, the divine (things too holy and pure
to touch) and the diabolical (things too evil and impure to touch).[3]

Such moral ambiguity underscores the fundamentally behavioral nature of the
sacred, in that the divine and the diabolical are functionally equivalent in their be-
havioral implications. As Durkheim observes, disgust and veneration translate them-
selves into the same external signs, such that "seen from without, it is difficult to
distinguish between them" (1963:95). Thus, both "cow love" in India and "pig ha-
tred" in the Middle East (two prototypic but oppositely valenced exemplars of sacred
taboos) effectively prevent individuals and groups from engaging in the tempting but
maladaptive behavior of eating these animals (Harris 1974).

Finally, the sacred is distinguished by its contagiousness, revealing yet again its
affinity with the concept of taboo (Pickering 1984). All that touches the sacred
becomes sacred itself, and whoever violates a taboo becomes taboo, even as the
source remains undiluted by such transmission (Callois 1959; Durkheim 1995; Freud
1950).

The goal here has not been to provide an essential or exhaustive definition of the
sacred, but to derive a nominal one that allows us to recognize it. We have arrived
at this: *The sacred is a salient but directionally ambiguous moral property attributed
by some observer(s) to some object(s) that is absolute in obliging those observer(s) to
engage in or avoid certain behaviors toward it, and that evokes a mixture of attraction
and repulsion, as well as a perception of contagiousness, in those who perceive it.*

Accordingly, "sacralization" is: *a process by which an object is invested with the
property of sacredness.*

A MODEL OF SACRALIZATION[4]

Perhaps the best way to introduce the present theory is by way of analogy. Consider
an obscure but dramatic visual illusion, the "Pulfrich Effect" (Pulfrich 1922): set a
pendulum swinging in a straight line and observe it from a point perpendicular
to the plane of travel. It will appear exactly as it is—a pendulum swinging back
and forth. But if one continues to observe its motion with both eyes open while
inserting a tinted filter between the right eye and the pendulum, it appears to travel

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[3]After Hertz (1973), who recognized and emphasized the dual polarities of the sacred, the divine
and diabolical are commonly referred to as the "right" and "left" forms of the sacred. But because
he subsequently assimilates the diabolical sacred to the profane in conceptualizing the left sacred, this
terminology is misleading and therefore avoided here.

[4]Note that what is proposed is *a*—not *the*—model of the sacred. No claim is made that this is the only
means by which the sacred is created, as there clearly are other means of sacralization. Principal among
these is ritual, as argued by Durkheim (1995), and as elaborated by Marshall (2002). Where Durkheim
saw negative rites as adjuncts to the positive rites that charged the totem, the current model emphasizes
negative rites' own potential for sacralization. Thus, ritual and the present theory are best understood as
complementary alternatives, roughly corresponding to "positive" and "negative" routes to sacralization,
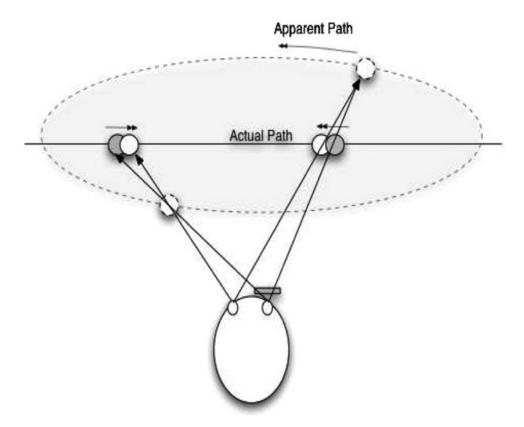respectively.

Figure 1. The Pulfrich effect: An analog of sacralization.

in a counterclockwise circle. Put the filter over one's left eye and the object's orbit reverses, use a darker filter and the circle becomes deeper.[5]

This phenomenon occurs because the tinted filter delays the arrival of the shaded eye's image in the visual cortex, which is thus presented with two discrepant images of the scene: one in (almost) real time, and a dimmer, slightly delayed version. This means that a moving target appears to be in two places at once. The brain makes sense of this discrepancy by superimposing a third dimension upon the scene and projecting the pendulum into it (see Figure 1). One perceives the pendulum as describing a circle because only if it were doing so would the discrepant images reaching the cortex make sense.

In the present model, an analogous need to make sense of one's own behavior, to reconcile discrepancies between what one does and what one is tempted to do drives an analogous process of projection into the moral dimension. Just as the brain projects physical objects into a subjectively constructed spatial dimension to make sense of discrepant visual images, it projects mental objects into a subjectively constructed moral dimension as a means of making sense of discrepancies between what one wishes to do and what one does. Objects acquire taboos when they elicit strong motivational states ("temptation"), which are suppressed by socially mediated and often unconscious forms of behavioral control ("tradition"), and the mind is

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[5]I invite readers to try this for themselves, as it is a compelling demonstration of the brain's natural affinity for world construction. In class, I use a tennis ball on a string for the pendulum and pieces of a tinted plastic report cover for filters.

left to rationalize the discrepancy by imposing moral judgments upon the objects of the behavior at hand, thereby "sacralizing" them. These in turn both justify the abstinence (or the obligation), and make it easier to maintain. In short, the sacred is produced by the collision of temptation and tradition.

The contagiousness of the sacred means that not only are the objects toward which prohibited or prescribed actions are directed sacralized, but so too are individuals who do (or who are believed to) engage in those acts. Like contact with sacred objects, such individuals occasion moral outrage and instigate moral cleansing among the faithful (Tetlock et al. 2000). By our model, sacredness is contagious in this way because, like the objects of temptation themselves, the example of others who indulge in prohibited actions exacerbates temptation, and thereby necessitates the ascription of sacredness to them as well. As Freud notes: "Anyone who has violated a taboo becomes taboo himself because he possesses the dangerous quality of tempting others to follow his example...every example encourages imitation, and for that reason he himself must be shunned" (1950:32). For example, among the teenage women Ornstein (1994) observed, those who dared to express or indulge the budding sexual feelings they were all experiencing were bestowed the diabolically sacred status of "slut" by, and thus ostracized from, the other young women.

Although it is possible for the posited mechanism to work at a strictly individual level as a product of idiosyncratic temptations and/or idiosyncratic traditions, it seems most likely to be manifest in sociologically significant ways: the shared nature of homeostatic and acquired desires and the social origins and collectively shared nature of traditional practices and normative prohibitions make it likely that much the same tensions are experienced at much the same time by potentially large aggregates of individuals within a given society or culture. Under such conditions, and in parallel with Durkheim's ([1897] 1951), treatment of anomic suicide the workings of a common individual-level mechanism within a shared sociocultural environment are likely to manifest themselves in socially patterned aggregate behaviors.

But moreso than those responsible for the patterning of suicide, the present mechanism also lends itself to collective manifestation. This occurs when the tension between temptation and tradition is not only a shared experience, but also collaboratively expressed and addressed, as in the case of spontaneous or orchestrated collective violence against the objects of, or putative indulgers in, temptation. Note, for example, how accusations of pliancy to sexual desire are a fixture of propaganda against to-be-conquered-or-oppressed groups: debuting as a staple of anti-Islamic propaganda during the crusades (Armstrong 1992), such charges also figure prominently in the Church's antiheretical rhetoric from the 14th century on (Cohn 2002), and were readily adapted for use by European witch-hunters, who commonly accused their quarry of possessing "unspeakable appetites for copulation" (Kramer and Sprenger [1486] 1971). Similar charges have been a staple of misogynist rhetoric at least since Juvenal despaired of the dangers of women, "high born or not, who would do anything to satisfy their hot wet groins" (cited in Buruma and Margalit 2004:18). Later, Europeans and Americans regularly stereotyped Africans as lascivious and oversexed, and comparable claims were made about Jews by Nazis. Today it is the Muslim Jihadists who return the crusader's insult by exaggerating the Western infidel's outsized appetites for unchaste pursuits.[6] The efficacy of such charges as

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[6]Similarly, the not-unfounded rumors of polygamy among early Mormons proved to be a particularly inflammatory antecedent to the vigilante attacks on them in Eastern and Midwestern states that eventually drove them into the Utah desert (Fraser 2002).

a releasing mechanism points to a potentially significant role for sacralization in explaining episodes of collective violence (Marshall 2008).

Let us illustrate the theory in action by applying it to the phenomenon of homophobia.[7] Adams et al.'s (1997) finding that men who score high on a homophobic attitudes scale are significantly more sexually aroused by watching gay pornography than are men who score lower on that scale lends credence to the psychoanalytic intuition that vitriolic reactions to homosexuality originate in an individual's own disposition for it. Likewise, the otherwise enigmatic insistence in homophobic rhetoric that homosexuality is a product of "selfish hedonism," a "choice" that somehow poses a threat to heterosexual relationships. Sacralization theory provides a new perspective on such phenomena by suggesting that homophobia in males is a product of the homophobe's experienced collision between his own temptation to engage in sex with other men and the behavioral inhibitions on such behavior[8] that he has internalized from his culture without compelling justifications.

By this perspective, unlike both the heterosexual majority, for whom abstinence from homosexual intercourse is a matter of biological preference, and the openly homosexual minority, who are similarly following the dictates of their biology, the homophobe's animosity is fueled by the discrepancy he experiences between the social conventions of heterosexuality, which he generally adheres to, and his temptation to depart from them. To justify this discrepancy and to maintain his effortful abstinence, the homophobe imbues the objects of his desire, and individuals who do not so abstain, with diabolical sacredness. In effect, this allows him to console and justify himself by saying, "I do not do what I want to do, and could do, because it, and those with whom I would do it, are evil."
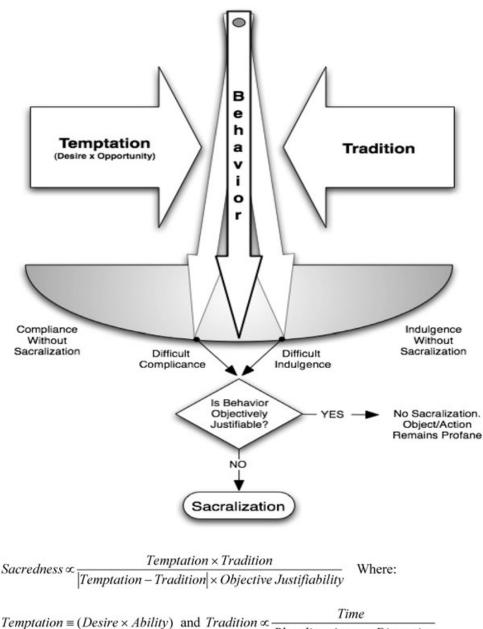
This example also demonstrates the further explanatory relevance of sacralization theory. Once those who engage in homosexual acts or elicit homosexual desire have been branded diabolically sacred as a means of bolstering and legitimating one's abstinence from them, this quality demands not only that they be shunned, but that they be persecuted. Once conjured, the moral qualities projected to justify abstinence then dictate other forms of behavior, in this case, the often bafflingly violent harassment of gay men. More generally, the sacred's absolutism gives it a singular ability to overcome countervailing sympathies, norms, and interests to justify or even compel extreme acts of sacrifice or violence. Others have noted the strong association between violence and the sacred (e.g., Girard 1972), but the present model is unique in offering an empirically substantiable account of this relationship.

Formal Specification

However heuristically and pedagogically useful, analogy and illustration lack the precision necessary for prediction, testing, and explanation, and thus do not alone constitute a theory. The following schematic, formulas, and elaboration are

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[7]In contrast to merely holding homonegative attitudes, the homophobe evinces a visceral reaction to putative homosexuals, which in its salience, absolutist a-rationality, and fear of contagion clearly partakes of elements of the sacred.

[8]To avoid any appearance of circularity, let us be clear: what we are trying to explain here is not the existence of norms against homosexuality, but rather why the violation of these norms provokes the kind of vicious response that few, if any, other similarly victimless violations ever do. Such norms could emerge implicitly from a simple scarcity of public models of such behaviors, and do not imply an extant homophobia. In short, we are not invoking norms against homosexuality in an explanation of norms against homosexuality, but rather as one part of an explanation for the virulent moralization of those norms.

Figure 2. Schematic and formular statements of the model.

intended to flesh this framework out into a viable, though still preliminary, theoretical statement (see Figure 2).

Temptation refers to motivations to behave so as to produce hedonically valued outcomes. It is both a qualitative and quantitative variable, encompassing the content (hunger, libido, etc.) as well as the strength of these states. *Temptation* is differentiated from desire by *ability*. While the unattainable provokes wanting unfettered by

behavioral implications (e.g., one can want to fly like a bird without being tempted to), the awareness of attainability creates a qualitatively distinct state of mind in that temptation, unlike desire, presents the actor with an apparent decision about what to *do*. Without at least the perception of choice, there is nothing to justify and thus no need to sacralize the objects of desire. *Ability* is in turn determined by *skills* and *opportunity,* both of which vary in socially patterned ways with resources, status, experience, and culture.

Tradition refers to a broad spectrum of socially acquired behavioral restrictions or obligations. Like temptation, *tradition* is both a qualitative and quantitative variable, encompassing both the contents and strength of a group's practices. In the quantitative dimension, the influence of a tradition "thickens and hardens" with *age* due to the objectification that comes with intergenerational transmission (Berger and Luckman 1967; Lorenz 1967), while its influence is diluted by *anomy*, *plurality,* and *social disruption* in that conflicting or uncertain standards undermine individuals' ability to behave in accordance with them (Berger 1969; Sumner 1979).

Temptation and Tradition Interact to produce the sacred when they prescribe contradictory responses to the same situation. Both the relative and absolute strengths of temptation and tradition determine the probability, direction, and degree of sacralization: sacralization is likely only when the strengths of each are relatively well matched, since large differences between the two make for straightforward decisions requiring little or no justification (i.e., a "no brainer"). Assuming they are of relatively similar strength, degree and likelihood of sacralization increase with the absolute strength of both temptation and tradition since, even if closely matched, less salient decisions require less justification, and are amenable to other, less morally laden rationalizations.

Given adequate and comparable strength, the model predicts that the act of making a difficult choice between temptation and tradition is likely to produce some form of sacralization, whichever behavior obtains: those who *almost resist* temptation are as in need of justification as those who *almost indulge*, though the kind of sacralization thus evoked will vary systematically between taboo and duty as an interactive function of the content of the tradition and the actor's actual behavior. When the tradition is inhibitory, and the actor successfully resists temptation, this yields a taboo against actions and objects, but when the actor succumbs to temptation, the result is a sacred duty to act in violation of the norm.[9] Conversely, if the tradition is compulsory, and the actor succumbs to the temptation to defy it, the result is a personal taboo on the traditional behavior, but when she acquiesces, the result is a duty.[10]

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[9]Such willful sacrilege corresponds (though imperfectly) to what Hertz (1973), Hubert and Mauss (1981), and others speak of as the "transgressive" sacred. As Riley observes, many religious traditions include notions of the religious adept who, having reached a certain stage of spiritual development, is "no longer bound by . . . moral structures and can often increase his spiritual understanding by deliberately transgressing moral rules" (2005:277). Similarly, Armstrong (2000) writes of "Holy Sin," citing Shabbetai Zevi, Jakob Frank, and Bauthumely as examples of those who violate commandments and embrace immorality as expressions of religiosity. Similarly, members of the Aghori sect practice their beliefs by assiduously breaking the taboos of mainstream Hinduism (Holden 2000), and the Church of Satan stipulates indulgence of temptation as the first of its "Nine Satanic Statements" (Lavey 1969). The present model suggests that the members of such sects are drawn from the population of those who have only narrowly succumbed to temptation.

[10]Another dimension of variation—that between divine and diabolical sacralization—is secondary in that the two are variable within cases across time and persons, and are identical in their effects upon proximate behavior. It is also largely a function of cultural factors exogenous to the model in its current

MODULAR SUBSTANTIATION

A theory lives or dies by its empirical validity. Though I anticipate conducting empirical research specifically designed to test the model, this presentation relies upon two indirect but complementary forms of substantiation. The first, treated in this section, considers the evidence bearing on four key elements of the theory. Like all truly explanatory theories, the theory of sacralization is assembled of discrete assumptions and mechanisms, the validity and plausibility of which can be individually evaluated. Admittedly, such a "modular" approach provides no guarantees about the theory as a whole. But as per Popper ([1959] 1992), the best that can be said about any theory is that it has not yet been disconfirmed: because the soundness of its assumptions and mechanisms is a historically vulnerable target for disconfirmation attempts, a theory for which these have been empirically validated lies a significant step closer to substantiation.

The Equation of the Sacred with Moral Judgment

In the Pulfrich illusion, the pendulum is projected into a real but empirically unavailable spatial dimension. Similarly, in sacralization, the moral dimension that the object is projected into is not constructed *de novo*, but preexists that particular instance. Thus the first assumption to be considered presumes an integral relationship, approaching identity, between the sacred and this moral dimension of human judgment. That morality and religion are related is hardly a novel claim, but the argument here is stronger than that: it supposes that sacredness and moral judgment are parts of a whole, partaking of common mechanisms and subject to common explanation. In short, it holds that the sacred is an essentially moral property, and that moral behavior is in large part a matter of duly respecting and observing sacred taboos and duties.

A spate of recent research on morality and its evolutionary history helps to substantiate the posited identity between moral judgment and the sacred, and in doing so helps to validate the sacred as a theoretical construct. As Joyce (2006) argues in his elegant synopsis of the evolutionary perspective on morality, moral judgment is basically a matter of deeming some actions not only desired but desirable, and others as not only deplored but deplorable, independent of the perceiver's preferences. The functional value of the capacity to pass such judgments lies in their "practical clout," or ability to compel some behaviors in ways that are immune to rationalization. To deem an action "good" creates an imperative to carry it out, just as deeming it "bad" creates an imperative to eschew it, regardless of the consequences. In this, it obviously converges with the sacred's trademark immunity to rational calculation.

Moral judgment's practical clout is a function of yet another quality it shares with the sacred, as well as with visual perception: the externalization of internally ascribed properties. In the textbook example, color itself, though corresponding to real stimuli in the world, is in fact superadded by the brain (Boghossian and Velleman 1989). Hume long ago anticipated this property, writing of the "mind's great propensity to spread itself on objects" ([1740] 1978:167). Significantly, he included morality among the qualities so projected upon the world by the perceiver—an idea that has recently been confirmed as a natural feature of human moral cognition (Greene and Haidt 2002; Joyce 2006; Nichols and Folds-Bennett 2003).

form. But it is not irrelevant: though their respective divinity and diabolicization keep both cows and pigs from being eaten, the divinity of cows conveys privilege to them, while the diabolicization of pigs leads to their banishment (Harris 1974).

Another convergence between the sacred and moral judgment concerns their contagiousness. As Rozin (1997) has demonstrated, the mental and behavioral construct of morality is in part built upon an innate and universal disgust reflex that probably originated for hygienic purposes, but then generalized to include the objects of moral opprobrium. An integral aspect of this disgust reflex is a belief that whatever touches a disgusting or immoral object thereby itself becomes disgusting or immoral.

In sum, like the sacred, moral judgment is: behaviorally compelling; antithetical to means/ends calculation; a property that originates in the observer but that appears to inhere in the object; and profoundly contagious. Such correspondence supports the present contention that the two are indeed intimately related.

One benefit of establishing this association is that by tying moral judgment to sacralization theory, it can help make sense of a vexing characteristic of moral judgment: that it is in practice seldom determined by consequences (as per the utilitarian approach), nor by a coherent system of rational principles (as per the deontic approach) (Haidt 2001). Instead, it often appears that judgments of an act's morality are largely determined by the actor's response to temptation.

Consider Christianity: a plurality of the world's inhabitants reveres it as the source (or at least repository) of their moral codes, which suggests that its themes resonate with this population's native moral intuitions. It is also a religion that enshrines one's response to temptation as the primary basis for moral judgment, as is made explicit in the Lord's Prayer, which implores "lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil" (Matthew 6:13).

The Christian scriptures begin with a parable of temptation and taboo violation (Genesis 3:12), and this breach is proffered as appropriate justification for the expulsion of humankind from paradise. In the guise of "original sin," some Protestants also see in this violation plausible justification for wholesale damnation. While Catholic Christianity has been less inclined toward such blanket condemnation, it does helpfully identify for us exactly which behaviors are likely to precipitate personal damnation. These "seven deadly sins": lust, gluttony, greed, sloth, envy, pride, and wrath, are easily mappable onto homeostatic and reproductive drives, are notably indifferent toward consequences,[11] and are conspicuously occupied with one's response to temptation.

The representation of evil in the person of Satan further attests to this identification: beyond his aforementioned debut in the Garden of Eden, it is he who tempts Jesus on the mountain (Matthew 4:1–11, Luke 4:1–13). He reappears in much the same role in early modern witchcraft trials, appearing always in the role of a seductive stranger offering whatever the witness most ardently desires (Boyer and Nissenbaum 1974; Demos 1970). As Callois observes: "The devil . . . is not only one who cruelly torments the damned in the inferno, but also one whose tempting voice offers the pleasures of earthly satisfactions to the anchorite" (1959:38). Indeed, given the input "tempter," my *MS Word for Mac* thesaurus returns but one word: "Satan."[12] Even as he plays the role of the tempter, Satan's diabolical nature is underscored by his own indulgences, witness his usual Western depiction as one possessing huge genitals and equally outsized sexual appetites (Armstrong 1993).

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[11]To be sure, consequentialist rationales have sometimes been attached to these, but they seem distinctly *post hoc,* for example, forbidding gluttony on the grounds that it deprives the needy of food appears an absurdly roundabout way to provide for them.

[12]This identification is even more overt in Islam, where "Satan" is an expletive applied to patently human sources of temptation, or even the objects of temptation (Armstrong 1992).

   This relationship obtains in the opposite direction as well, in that moral acclaim
is garnered on the basis of one's ability to resist temptation. As Simmel observes:
"Only through the sacrifice of the lower and yet so seductive goods does one reach
the height of ethical merit: and the more tempting the seductions and profound
the sacrifice, the loftier the height" ([1907] 1971:53). Thus, the seven deadly sins
are mirrored by the "seven holy virtues"—chastity, abstinence, temperance, diligence,
patience, kindness, and humility—which together effectively make defiance of temp-
tation the *sine qua non* of moral rectitude.

   Such patterns are hardly unique to Christianity. The trickster who is undone by his
appetites for food or sex (and/or undoes others through theirs) is a fixture in most
Native American religions, while Islam makes a fetish of the technology of tempta-
tion suppression in the form of the hijab. And of course, the antipathy between "the
good" and "the gratifying" in Hinduism finds its fullest expression in its Buddhist
descendant, which represents nothing less than a frontal assault on temptation. As
Eliade ([1949] 1963) notes, among the core universal myths of religion is that of
the great man who wins immortality by either defeating a great foe or resisting a
great temptation. Indeed, just as for Jesus, testing by temptation is a seminal episode
in the careers of Buddha, Mohammed, and Zoroaster. In Upanishadic Hinduism,
Prajapati acquires the very power to create the world through feats of asceticism,
and the gods feared that the rarified austerities of holy men might make them their
equals. More recently, Gandhi was able to effectively deploy the venerable Indian
tradition of fasting as a means to amplify his moral authority (Zaehner 1970).

   The relevance of the centrality of temptation to moral judgment beyond the ex-
plicitly religious domain is reflected in the inordinately negative response elicited by
vice relative to more demonstrably harmful crime, a discrepancy manifest in legal
codes that mandate harsher sentences for drug crimes than for violent assault, and
once made consensual intercourse between adults subject to prosecution. It is also
evident in the way political figures are more quickly and reliably brought low by
sex scandals than by policy decisions that actually affect constituents in catastrophic
ways.

   If, as proposed here, moral judgment is of a piece with the sacred, and the sacred
is, as proposed here, produced by the collision of temptation with tradition as a
means of justifying and maintaining one's own practices, it renders these and other
conflations of moral judgment with response to temptation explicable.

Individuals Act Without Awareness of the Actual Causes of Their Behavior

In the present model, sacralization is necessary only because individuals have acted
without awareness of the true causes of their action. Something has influenced their
behavior, but that something remains inaccessible to their consciousness, necessitating
post hoc justification. In turn, the moral projection that provides this justification
is also unconscious. The theory thus presumes a model of human behavior that is
incongruent with our culture's cherished image of human beings as a thoroughly
conscious and rational species, especially in the realm of morality.

   Despite its recurrent preoccupation with intention-based "explanations," sociol-
ogy provides plenty of precedent for the position that human behavior is greatly
influenced by such unconscious forces. Indeed, the word "tradition" was included
in the title of this article on more than strictly alliterative grounds, as it ties the
present model to sociology's rich literature on this major source of unconscious in-
fluence (Berger and Luckman 1967; Shils 1982; Sumner [1906] 1979). But the most

important sociological precedent on this point is Durkheim's criminally overlooked *homo duplex* argument (1914). Although Durkheim felt that moral behavior was mostly a product of human reasoning, he clearly did not believe that all, or even most, of human behavior was. Over the course of his career, he repeatedly made use of the idea that human nature is bifurcated into an unconscious, instinctive component and a conscious, reasoning component, and that as a result, the causes of human actions are commonly opaque to their enactors. As he writes in *Incest*: "We are of course very far from always knowing the reasons that make us act . . . one must be on guard against literally accepting the popular explanations that men devise to account for the customs they follow, when the real causes actually escape them" (1963:62, 92). This point is crucial to *The Elementary Forms*, where it is a necessary part of the means by which the subjective effects of ritual become misattributed to the totem rather than to their true social causes. As he puts it, "the ordinary observer cannot see where the influence of society comes from" (1995:211).

The idea's significance to *The Elementary Forms* becomes clearer in a later article: "The Dualism of Human Nature and its Social Conditions" ([1914] 1964), published in part to set right the misunderstandings that had beset the original work (Rawls 2004). Reviewing the long provenance of *homo duplex*, he concludes that "it is not without reason that man feels himself to be double: he actually is double. There are in him two classes of states of consciousness that differ from each other in origin and nature, and in the ends toward which they aim . . . not only are these two beings substantially different, they are in a large measure independent of each other, and are often even in conflict" (1964:337, 326, 329).

For him this duality corresponded to the discrete "individual" and "social" aspects of human nature, a premise on which much critique has focused, and the point on which the present model most decisively departs from his precedent in its rejection of this distinction. But despite the shortcomings of his characterization of its elements, in his insistence on *homo duplex* and his recognition of the implications of the resulting potential for action without awareness, Durkheim reveals himself to be a prescient social psychologist. "The old formula *homo duplex*" is indeed "verified by the facts" (1964:328) of modern empirical research. In fact, the history of social psychology can be read as one long story of influencing subjects' behavior without their awareness of that influence (Wegner and Bargh 1998). Research participants regularly deny in debriefing that demonstrably decisive causal factors had anything to do with their actions, and at the same time construct elaborate (and fictional) *post hoc* explanations for their behavior (Nisbett and Wilson 1977; Zajonc 1980).

The current consensus is that there are two basic and differentiable modes of human action (Evans 2008; Chaiken and Trope 1999), in that the conscious mode we are most aware of is built atop, and operates in parallel with, an evolutionarily older mode that operates outside of awareness, is independent of conscious control, and remains opaque to the actor's introspection after the fact. While these modes go by various names, and there is healthy debate about some details of their interaction, dual-process models currently constitute the most popular class of theories in social cognition (Deutsch and Strack 2006).

What is perhaps surprising is the extent to which unconscious, automatic control of human action is the rule rather than the exception (Palmeri 2003; Wilson 2002). Recent research leaves little doubt that much, perhaps most, behavior remains "unencumbered by the thought process," and is instead the product of mental processes taking place outside of awareness even when actors believe they are consciously choosing their actions (Bargh and Chartrand 1999; Bargh and Morsella

2008; Uleman 2005; Wegner 2002). Another surprise concerns the depth of uncon-
scious control, in that the execution of even consciously intended actions takes place
via unconscious mechanisms (Libet 1985, 1999).

Such unconscious automaticity extends as to judgment as well as behavior. Much
has been made of late about the mind's ability to correctly intuit information apart
from, and even contrary to, the individual's conscious reasoning processes (e.g.,
Gladwell 2005). For present purposes, the most pertinent application of this capacity
is to moral judgment. The work of Jonathan Haidt (2001) has shown that moral
judgment is primarily an intuitive process that takes place outside the purview of
consciousness. To be sure, people can and do engage in moral reasoning, but this
process is only loosely coupled to actual judgment and behavior. In parallel with
intuitive cognition more generally, after passing moral judgments, individuals often
find themselves "morally dumbfounded," knowing that they believe this or that act
to be wrong, but unable to identify the reasons why.

Of the two modes, the automatic and unconscious system of action and judgment
is primary in almost every sense of the term: it is older, faster, more robust, and more
closely coupled to behavior and judgment. It is not a kind of hard-wired program
blindly reeling off predetermined routines in response to environmental inputs, but
is instead deeply social, as it is shaped by socialization, responds to social inputs,
and operates via social mechanisms. Chief among these are such patently social
processes as conformity, contagion, obedience to norms, imitation, and tradition.[13]
For instance, Haidt's (2001; Haidt and Joseph 2004) "social intuitive" model of
morality rests upon the considerable evidence that the parameters and priorities of
one's moral compass are interactively fixed by social influences in childhood and
adolescence.

Individuals Are Compelled to Justify Their Behavior

As Berger and Luckman (1967) have most famously and effectively argued, humans'
unique "world openness"—our capacity for conscious cognition and action—requires
that we possess and maintain an intact and coherent model, or nomos, of our
environment, including of our own behavior in it. One manifestation of this need is
the human hunger for explanations. By Wolpert's colorful pen, "a need to explain
events...is as important as the drive for sex or food...explanation is to cognition
what orgasm is to reproduction" (2007:43, 84).

Since the genuine, social causes of our own actions are often outside of, and
invisible to, consciousness, the accounts provided to explain our behavior are as
often as not more or less fictional, designed to make sense of behavior in terms
of one's extant nomos. What we require is not an accurate explanation, but merely
a plausible one: as Durkheim nicely explains his unwillingness to accept actors'
own accounts of their behavior: "It is known how these are constructed, it is not
required that they be adequate or objective, but merely that they justify the practice"
(1963:92).

In this conviction, he is again correct: what actors commonly believe to be a
process of introspection is really one of confabulation. Nisbett and Wilson (1977)

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[13]The application of imitation to tradition is potentially significant in itself. The discovery of the neural
substrate of our imitative proclivity in "mirror neurons," which both perceive and initiate action, thereby
making cultural transmission entirely outside of awareness entirely likely (Prinz 1990), may well provide
the "missing matter" to vindicate Shils's frustrated insistence on the sociological significance of tradition
(Turner 1999).

not only found that their subjects were ignorant of why they had done what they did, but also that they readily constructed and defended plausible-sounding, but demonstrably false, justifications drawn from a culturally validated pool of plausible reasons rather than from actual insight (see also Zimbardo et al. 1993; Zajonc 1980; Kunst-Wilson and Zajonc 1980). In his work with split-brain patients, Gazzanaga (1985) found the need to construct rational accounts to be so pervasive as to suggest the existence of a dedicated "interpreter" mental module that constructs on-the-fly running commentary to reconcile action with the expectations of the nomos. But the construction of coherent, convincing justifications is itself an accomplishment, one that brings us to our last and quintessential assumption.

Individuals Project Moral Properties onto Objects in Order to Justify Behaviors

The core of the present theory, the very act of sacralization, is the projection of subjective moral qualities onto the objects of temptation. The model assumes that after individuals have acted without knowledge of the true reasons, they are motivated to justify those actions, and—here is the key—that they can and sometimes do accomplish this by engaging in moral projection, thus sacralizing the objects of their behavior.

The implicit idea that practices beget moral imperatives has a solid sociological pedigree. For Sumner, the real power of tradition lies in the way folkways (tradition) give rise to mores (moral imperatives comparable to the sacred). As he describes it: "The real process...is one of minute efforts to live well under existing conditions...The resultant folkways become coercive...then they seem true and right, and arise into mores as the norms of welfare...thence are produced faiths, ideas, doctrines, religions, and philosophies" (1979:38). Perhaps surprisingly, a similar mechanism is alluded to by Weber: "The usual process...is that something which has become customary...comes to be regarded as sacred" ([1922] 1993:38). Berger and Luckmann (1967) further elaborate the idea, positing the need to make sense of behavior after the fact as the basis for the legitimations that individuals and groups fabricate to account for practices they have inherited without any knowledge of their originating reasons.

But again, the most direct precedent for the mechanism cited here (albeit if not for its role in the creation of the sacred) is Durkheim's. The idea seems to first surface in an early book review: "Men did not begin by imagining gods...The theory only came later, in order to explain and make intelligible to these...minds the modes of behavior which had thus been formed" (1887, cited in Giddens 1972:219). It reappears in an explicitly moral context in *Incest*: "When people no longer knew why they were forbidden to eat the meat of such or such an animal, they imagined that it had become impure" (1963:93). It shows up in its most explicit form in his discussion of positive rites in *The Elementary Forms*: "Since action cannot do without the intellect, the intellect is eventually pulled along the same way, adopting without argument the theoretical postulates the act requires" (1995:372).

Here, too, sociological conjectures are well supported by social psychology's empirical evidence. The existence of such a mechanism is most directly addressed by research in the cognitive dissonance tradition (Festinger 1957). Despite five decades of study and well over a thousand experiments, the basic tenets of the theory have proven remarkably robust (Aronson 2007; Cooper 2007). While elaborated and refined over the years, it retains its status as likely the most significant in all of

social psychology (and arguably social science), as attested to by the surfeit of current articles in first-tier journals that affirm or apply it in some new way.

The gist of the theory is that individuals are motivated to maintain a degree of consistency between their actions and their beliefs.[14] Sometimes, this consistency is achieved by adjusting behavior to accord with beliefs, as per the conventional model of action. But when action has already occurred, it is the cognitive elements of the equation—beliefs and perceptions—that have to change. This is the radical lesson of Festinger's theory: the causal arrow between action and belief is double ended, actions can produce beliefs, just as beliefs can produce action. Of particular interest here are those cases where cognitive adjustments take the form of altered perceptions of the objects of action.

For example, in his classic study on the "post-decision dissonance effect," Brehm (1956) found that when subjects are allowed to choose one of two equally-well-liked items to receive as a gift, they subsequently project new subjective qualities onto both items, endowing the chosen one with new positive features and the unchosen one with new disadvantages, thus "spreading the alternatives" so as to justify their choice of one over the other. Like moral judgments and sacredness, such subjectively projected qualities then confront the perceiver as external, as objective qualities of the objects themselves. This effect has been recently replicated with amnesiacs, children, and apes, suggesting that the mechanism at work is older, and more fundamental, than previously imagined (Egan et al. 2007; Lieberman et al. 2001).

The more particular supposition of the present model is that such cognitive manipulation includes the projection of moral properties onto perceived objects. This supposition is also already established in the cognitive dissonance literature. Indeed, the original statement of the theory directly predicts that the resolution of belief with action can take the form of moral projection (Festinger 1957). In an early test of this hypothesis, Mills (1958) found that exposure to the temptation to cheat on a task in which desirable goods were at stake led those subjects who did not cheat to make harsher moral attributions about cheaters than they had before exposure to the temptation.

Another avenue of research provides an even more germane experimental demonstration of the dynamic of desire and social constraint. Aronson and Carlsmith (1963) found that when children were asked not to play with a desired toy and then left unattended with it, they consistently complied with the request, but they also subsequently derogated the toy, ranking it as less desirable than they had before the temptation period. Moreover, and more tellingly, they actually played with it significantly less than they did other originally equally-liked toys when later allowed to play with any toys they wished. Such effects obtained even when this opportunity occurred weeks after, and under completely different circumstances from, the initial episode (Freedman 1965).

In a more interpersonal example of altering subjective impressions to accord with behavior, Davis and Jones (1960) found that people who were led to believe that they had injured another person subsequently saw that person as less likeable than they had before. More pointedly, Melvin Lerner (1980; see also Hafer and Bègue 2005) has demonstrated that subjects will project subjective qualities onto other individuals in order to maintain their belief that the world is just. Faced with an individual who has suffered a tragedy that cannot be attributed to a preventable cause, subjects

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[14]Contrary to common misunderstandings, cognitive dissonance theory is primarily concerned with discrepancies between beliefs and behaviors, not among cognitions.

ascribe more negative subjective and moral qualities to that person than do subjects presented with the same individual without knowledge of their victimization.[15]

The cognitive dissonance and belief-in-a-just-world literatures are concerned with actions that have already happened, but there is also a prospective component to sacralization. That is, sacralization not only justifies past action, it is also recruited to bolster present and future behavioral control. This aspect also has empirical precedent: Trope and Fishbach's work on "counteractive control theory" demonstrates that individuals spontaneously and unconsciously bolster the value of difficult or long-term goals when confronted with competing short-term goals (2005). Johnson and Rusbult (1989) observed a similar effect in the domain of romantic relationships, in that members of committed couples actively derogated attractive available alternatives as a means of resisting the temptation these individuals evoked to leave or transgress their committed relationship, and did so more strongly the more salient the temptation was. Kanter (1968) found much the same in her field study of utopian communities, where members dealt with temptations to leave by derogating alternatives to membership as well as the moral character of outsiders and defectors.

Thus, the key idea that individuals alter their perceptions of the world in order to make sense of, justify, and influence their own behavior, and that they sometimes do so by projecting moral qualities onto objects, is not only plausible but well established.

PREDICTIVE SUBSTANTIATION AND APPLICATION

As formalized above, the model makes myriad testable predictions about the empirical world. This makes possible a second and more holistic form of substantiation, complementary to the modular approach taken in the last section. Of the many possible predictions deducible, this article will deal with but three of the most obvious, chosen on the basis of their ability to convey a sense of the theory's scope, fecundity, and explanatory power, as well as their ability to further substantiate the theory.

Sacralization Varies with the Desirability of Objects

Though the sacred is a property of observers rather than objects, the theory suggests that objects possess differential potentials for sacralization as a function of the universality and magnitude of their desirability. As temptation is the motivational engine of the model, one would expect that the objects of strong, primary (i.e., homeostatic and reproductive) drives would be the most frequently, universally, and intensely sacralized.

But not all such drives are equally likely to undergo sacralization. The theory predicts that it will occur only where these drives encounter equally strong socially mediated obstacles to their fulfillment. Thus, though oxygen is the object of a primary drive, there are no known social restraints attached to its consumption, and it is therefore unlikely to undergo sacralization. By contrast, food and sex are primary drives that *are* commonly subject to such social constraints, thus the theory predicts that where they are, the objects and actions associated with them should be among the most likely and common targets of sacralization.

As to the sacralization potential of sex, Callois has observed that: "The sentiment of the sacred is always particularly striking and in high relief with regard to

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[15]One ugly manifestation is the tendency to denigrate the moral character of rape victims.

everything that touches upon sexuality" (1959:140). Having already considered ho-
mophobia as a potential manifestation of sacralization above, let us consider another
potential example of diabolical sacralization in the sexual sphere. In their infamous
Malleus Malleficarum, Kramer and Sprenger ([1486] 1971) extend their polemics
against witches to encompass women in general, imploring, "what else is a woman
but...a necessary evil, a natural temptation, a desirable calamity and domestic
danger, a delectable detriment, an evil of nature, painted with fair colors!" ([1486]
1971:43), and charge that: "A woman is beautiful to look upon, contaminating to
the touch, and deadly to keep" ([1486] 1971:46). In such passages, the frustration
of mortal men committed to a socially ingrained and enforced norm of chastity is
palpable in the vigor of their projection of the diabolical sacred.

    Such examples[16] invite speculation that the long history of misogyny and oppres-
sion toward women might stem in part from just such an attribution of diabolical
sacredness to the objects of temptation. Monks differ from male laity only in the
totality of their presumed celibacy, in that most men are celibate toward most of the
women they meet. As with the homophobe who diabolicizes the objects of his desire
in order to justify and bolster his own socially mediated abstinence, some hetero-
sexual men might similarly diabolicize the tempting but socially restricted objects of
their desire. Consistent with such speculation, the Johnson and Rusbult (1989) study
noted above found that individuals in committed relationships coped with the temp-
tation occasioned by attractive and available alternative partners by derogating those
potential partners in the domains of humor, reliability, faithfulness, and supportive-
ness. In times, places, and minds for which such qualities are less valued in women
(and thereby less compelling bases for abstinence), derogation in the moral domain,
that is, diabolicization, might well serve the same purpose. Also, in keeping with the
bifurcated nature of the sacred, diabolicization is not the only available valence of
this kind of motivated projection, witness the "Madonna-Whore syndrome" whereby
some women are as elevated above sexual attention as others have been demoted
beneath it. Thus, the present theory uniquely suggests that gender inequality may
emerge in part as a result of the universal realities of male sexual desire and the
necessary social regulation of sexual activity.[17]

    Food's affinity for sacralization is as pronounced as is that of sex. Fasting is a
nearly universal element of religious ritual, and the avoidance of particular foods is
a staple of many religious traditions. Meanwhile, gluttony has long been subject to
moral condemnation (Brandt and Rozin 1997), and particularly pleasurable foods
(e.g., sugar, ice cream) have historically been regarded in diabolical terms (Mintz
1997). In modern society, food continues to carry a moral gloss, with desserts mar-
keted as "decadent" or "sinful," and weight loss meetings resembling religious rituals
in which members seek salvation from the "sin" of being fat (Sobal 1984).

    But the theory may explain more than such general moral overtones of food, and
be applicable to more pathological manifestations. Eating disorders, like Durkheim's
example of suicide, may appear to be a strictly individual pathology, but both their
social patterning and temporal and geographical correlation with Westernization
suggest that something sociological is afoot here, too.

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[16]And there are many such examples. These sentiments find echoes in the writings of such luminaries
as St. Jerome. Tertullian and St. Augustine, in his horror of concupiscence, laments: "whether it is in a
wife or a mother, it is still Eve the temptress we must beware of in any woman" (cited in Armstrong
1993:124).
    [17]As should be obvious, male desire is decisive here only because men's historically greater freedom,
power, and literacy have made their sacralizations more public, influential, and persistent.

Like most sociological accounts, mine begins with the link between cultural ide-alizations of thinness and increased body dissatisfaction, which leads to widespread dieting (Stice and Shaw 2002). While most diets do not lead to disorder, anorexia and bulimia usually do begin with mere dieting before progressing (Polivy and Her-man 2002; Shisslak et al. 1995; Stice 2002). Dieting is, in short, a necessary but not sufficient cause of these disorders.[18] Thus the first question that any theory must address is just what separates mere dieters from the disordered?

The primary distinguishing factor is whether or not the distal, abstract cultural ideals of thinness are reinforced by more proximal and concrete sources of social influence. Where these influences remain distal, dieting is usually moderated (or undone) by hunger. But where these messages are magnified through the more im-mediate social influence of family and friends, disorders become much more likely (Garner et al. 1982; Polivy and Herman 2002). Disorders are most likely to arise from family situations that are enmeshed and intrusive (Polivy and Herman 2002), and where parents emphasize thinness, signal their dissatisfaction with the victim's weight, and/or model contributing behaviors (Garner et al. 1982; Shisslak et al. 1998). Friendship groups also tend to become homogenous with regard to body image concerns, reinforcing any dissatisfaction conveyed at home, and encourag-ing eating restriction via example, encouragement, and normative teasing (Paxton et al. 1999; Polivy and Herman 2002). Here then is the sociological kernel of the disorder—the power of interpersonal influence. In the terms of the present model, it is here that the force of "tradition" becomes magnified.

Meanwhile food itself, as the means of satisfying a homeostatic need, provides a temptation counterpoint *par excellence*. Like any true need, it is fluid: satiation alleviates it, but abstinence amplifies it. Thus, the more successful one is at abstaining, the more tempting food becomes. Among those for whom the cultural focus on thinness is channeled through the more immediate influence of family and friends, the "tradition" of abstinence is effectively stronger, and they are able to more completely refrain from eating for longer periods of time. But in doing so, they further magnify the strength of their temptation to eat. Like any other dieter, they are squeezed between the opposing forces of temptation and tradition, but for them, these forces are of a greater magnitude. It is in this stratosphere of intense and opposing forces that sacralization becomes possible.

Though they may experience occasional reversals and violations at first, some individuals subject to these forces find their hunger relatively manageable. Indeed, because willpower, like muscular strength, grows stronger with practice (Muraven et al. 1999), they get progressively better at overcoming the temptation to eat, thereby increasing the strength of that temptation. The victim is thus caught in an escalating spiral of temptation and tradition as his hunger grows with his suc-cess at abstaining, and his ability to abstain improves with this practice at ab-staining. At some point, the suffering inflicted by their growing hunger outstrips whatever objectively available justifications may have initiated the diet, yet the vic-tim finds herself both compelled to continue her quest by the social forces she has internalized, and able to continue as a result of her ascetic virtuosity. It is at this point that sacralization takes place, when the victim recruits the moral dimension to both justify and help maintain her abstinence.

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[18]Interestingly, elevated scores on dietary restraint scales and the use of compensatory behaviors are also strongly predictive of later obesity (Stice et al. 2005). One could perhaps assimilate this element, too, with sacralization theory by hypothesizing that these individuals respond to the temptation/tradition pincer by divinely sacralizing food, and thereby chronically overeating.

Once thus elevated into a moral imperative, the external consequences and initial reasons for the practice become moot, and the means have become ends in themselves. As Garner et al. note, "most patients are aware that no weight is really low enough, for often it is the loss that becomes rewarding...The vomiting which had been a strategy for gaining control, becomes out of control" (1982:12).

In terms of our model, thinness and weight loss have become divinely sacred in and of themselves, while weight gain and food are derogated as diabolically sacred in and of themselves (Polivy and Herman 2002). Hunger has become identified with virtue (King et al. 1987; Selvini-Palazzoli 1985), and the victim's ability to overcome biological urges a basis for personal distinction and identity (Garner and Bemis 1982). As Vitousek and Gray report, eating disorders are "fiercely ego-syntonic." As one victim put it: "when I weighed 80 lbs...I was literally and metaphorically in perfect shape. I was so superior that I considered myself to be virtually beyond criticism," while another said of her emaciation "it's like winning the Nobel prize...you get a kingdom or become a goddess" (2005:179).

That this transition is indeed a manifestation of sacralization is suggested by the close correspondence between symptomology and the trademark characteristics of the sacred in terms of *taboo, absolutism and a-rationality, hedonic ambivalence*, and the *moralization* of food. Most obviously, the core symptom of the disorder and the chief characteristic of sacralization are one and the same—a behavioral *taboo* toward the object of a tempting behavior. Victims' behavior is constrained by self-imposed rules about what and when to eat, rules that are nevertheless perceived by them as externally imposed and outside their control (Herman and Polivy 1983).

These taboos are *absolute and a-rational*, in that they are exempt from rational analysis and insensitive to degrees of violation. Victims subscribe to a sympathetic magic, which makes even a miniscule breach of their diet or compensation regimen tantamount to complete failure, and a gain of one pound seems as catastrophic as would be a gain of 50 (Garner et al. 1982; Knight and Boland 1989; Vitousek and Gray 2005). Such absolutism is most dramatically manifest among purging bulimics. Episodes of binge-purge usually begin with a minor violation of the victim's eating regimen (Garner et al. 1982). But their absolutist stance makes even these deviations subjectively disastrous, obviating the need for any further restraint and instigating a binge. When accumulated hunger has been sated, the victim responds to her contact with the sacred food via the kind of cleansing and purification rituals that typically follow taboo violations: they purge (Knight and Boland 1986).

The *hedonic ambivalence* food arouses in anorexics is betrayed by their fascination with it. Almost three-quarters of victims spend more than three hours per day thinking about food, and almost half spend more than eight hours (Polivy and Herman 2002). Indeed, obsession with food and its preparation is itself a diagnostic symptom of the disorder (Herman and Polivy 1993). This ambivalence is made explicit in victims' frequent references to their own morbid fears of losing control and overindulging in their self-forbidden foods (Garner et al. 1982; Vitousek and Gray 2005).

The most decisive indication that sacralization is at work is the explicit *moralization* of food that victims engage in. Anorexics and bulimics perceive foods in moral terms, dichotomizing them into "good" and "bad" on the basis of their fattening potential, and morally evaluating themselves and others based on their consumption or abstention thereof. They see eating as a form of greedy and sinful behavior, and feel guilty about consuming "bad" foods, but virtuous when hungry (Garner et al. 1982; King et al. 1987; Marsden et al. 2007; Morgan and Marsden 2000; Stein and

Nemeroff 1995). Similarly, the moral elements of their self-image are often more salient to them than are the esthetic, as they describe their struggles in pointedly moral terms, and view their own abstinence as more a matter of moral than of physical self control (Marsden et al. 2007; Morgan and Marsden 2000). As reported by one victim, "I can't help feeling that it is somehow better to be this way" (Vitousek and Gray 2005:179).

The moral dimension of the disorder is further underscored by the oft-noted link between anorexia and religiosity (Bell 1985; Lelwica 1999; Rampling 1985). Self-starvation is a common thread in the careers of Christian saints, and modern victims of eating disorders are notable for their use of religious language in discussing their affliction (Garrett 1996).[19] In fact, their positive responses to Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory items such as "I read the Bible several times a week" and "I pray several times each day" are discriminant between anorexic and nondisordered respondents (Rampling 1985). Among victims, one's degree of religiosity is correlated with minimum body mass index (BMI), and anorexics tend to become more religious over the course of their disease (though, interestingly, bulimics tend to move in the opposite direction) (Joughlin et al. 1992). Victims' own accounts also make the theological component explicit. For example, "I had the idea that fasting was good and so I did, I literally gave up everything...I really felt that I was doing God's will, that not eating was what he wanted me to do" (reported in Marsden et al. 2007:10). Moreover, Joughlin et al. (1992) found that, exactly as the present theory predicts, the temporal and directional relationship between religion and anorexia is most consistent with the idea that religious asceticism is being recruited by individuals in order to justify and supplement their continued abstinence.

Thus far in our account, anorexia and bulimia have been considered together, in keeping with their highly overlapping natures. However, the two do differ in theoretically relevant ways. Definitionally, anorexia is primarily indicated by low BMI, while bulimia is primarily characterized by compensation behaviors, regardless of BMI (Vitousek and Gray 2005), but the two differ as well in terms of corollary indications and the social patterning of the populations affected. By applying sacralization theory, we can shed some light on at least one of these differences.

Much has been made of the profile of the typical anorexic: a middle- to upper-class, hi-achieving, perfectionist (Garner et al. 1982; Vitousek and Gray 2005). Our model can account for this pattern in three convergent ways. First, an implicit assumption of the model is that the propensity to sacralize varies with some subset of individual personality traits, such that individuals relatively high in what is probably a form of "conscientiousness/obsessiveness" are more likely to sacralize, and to do so to a greater degree. If this is so, then we would expect those who sacralize in the alimentary dimension to show similar tendencies in other dimensions. The evidence suggests that anorexia victims' absolutist ways usually do extend beyond the realm of dieting and into their educational, athletic, and employment careers (Garner et al. 1982). From this perspective, anorexia and achievement are correlated because both are manifestations of the same underlying personality traits.

Secondly, research on cognitive dissonance has found that self-esteem is directly correlated with the need for dissonance reduction in that those who think more highly of themselves have a greater need to live up to their self-image and tend

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[19]Indeed, the widespread coincidence of religiosity, alimentary abstinence, and carnal chastity is itself suggestive of a common underlying etiology and dynamic whose relevance must, alas, await further elaboration.

to both resist temptation better, and to engage in more self-justification (Aronson and Mettee 1968). From this perspective, anorexia and achievement are correlated because their history of achievement induces greater self-esteem in victims, which in turn both helps them better resist their hunger and increases their need to justify their abstinence.

Finally, one's vulnerability to sacralization may also be a function of socialization. Because the ability to delay gratification has long been linked to socioeconomic status (Freiere et al. 1980), privileged adolescents may begin their dieting with an advantage. From this perspective, anorexia and class are correlated because middle-to-upper-class adolescents have more experience with abstinence in general, which increases their ability to diet to the point where sacralization becomes necessary. Taken together, these three mechanisms suggest that from the perspective of sacralization theory, the social patterning of anorexia is perhaps overdetermined.

While it is most likely to emerge from strong innate drives, sacralization is by no means confined to these domains, and can be expected to occur as a product of almost any kind of abstention. For example, while not an innate desire, alcohol use is a behavior prone to addictive processes, by which an acquired behavior becomes subject to physiological and psychological drive states similar to those associated with innate desires. Accordingly, it should come as no surprise that when the desire to imbibe runs afoul of strong traditions of abstinence, alcohol (or other addictive substances) become diabolically sacred. Temperance movements, from the panoply of "12-step" programs to the "straight-edge" culture, produce the classic symptoms of sacralization. Most clearly indicative of this is their predilection toward absolutism. Sylvester Graham's contention that there is no safe quantity of alcohol, that its nefarious properties were "present in even a single molecule" (Whorton 1982) is alive and well in the zero-tolerance policies of Alcoholics Anonymous.

The model is also applicable apart from innate or acquired drive states, in that the sacred can be produced in the wake of any difficult decision. This can be seen in the legendary zeal of the newly converted, in the violence that typically attends sectarian schisms (e.g., the Reformation), and in the internecine warfare that plagues groups of all kinds. As Simmel notes: "People who have many common features often do one another worse or 'wronger' wrong than complete strangers do... they do it because there is only little that is different between them" ([1908] 1971:95). For example, Ammerman finds that within the fundamentalist Protestant congregation she studied "the boundaries between true belief and falsehood are most strictly patrolled then, in the neighborhood where falsehood takes the form of other Christian doctrines... for all their abstract dismissal of atheists, agnostics, Jews, and Muslims, the genuine struggle and attention is focused on other more similar groups—those who share the same gospel but interpret it differently" (1987:81).

This is predictable from sacralization theory: heresy among dissimilar others offers little temptation to follow their example, but among similar others, or worse still, former compatriots, presents a greater temptation, and thus a meaningful threat to one's nomos, necessitating the diabolical sacralization of both the differing beliefs and the deviants themselves.

In a macrosociological context, sacralization as a function of difficult decision making can be fruitfully applied to the stark dilemma between tradition and temptation posed by modernization itself, and thence to the successive waves and different forms of collective violence that have attended its advance (Marshall 2008).

Sacralization Varies with Opportunity

As a function of temptation, sacralization should also vary with opportunity, thus our second prediction is that sacralization should become more likely and intense as the opportunities to indulge a desire increase with time or circumstance. Accordingly, Laquer (2004) traces the demonization of masturbation in the 18th century to the then-new construction of truly private domestic spaces that facilitated its indulgence. In terms of the present model, it was because of the new relative abundance of opportunity that onanism came to be seen as a worse affliction than smallpox and more morally dubious than infidelity. The same dynamic, though with the opposite valence, can be seen in the divine sacralization of deaf culture in the wake of technologies that tempt some deaf individuals (and/or their families) with the opportunity to choose between remaining in it or joining the hearing culture (Aronson 2000).

Opportunity also varies across relationships. The most universal and fundamental of taboos are those on incest. The present theory would illuminate this pattern with the observation that proximate, dependent juveniles present particularly accessible targets for sexual attention, and note further that the principal correlates of attraction—similarity, familiarity, and proximity (Berscheid and Reis 1998) are characteristic of familial relations. As Durkheim observed, "the family life, because of the intimate relations taking place within it risks awakening the sexual desires at the same time as it facilitates their gratification" (1963:98). And as he further discerns, incest codes effectively function primarily so as to prevent intergenerational sexual contact among cohabitating individuals who are frequently alone together, regardless of kinship (1962; see also Freud 1950).

Therefore, the theory can account for why, among the many relationships that could be considered inappropriate by one or another culture, incest is so universally sacralized. It is a joint function of the ubiquitous nature of the desire and opportunity (temptation) attending family life, and of the traditional practices groups have evolved to ameliorate this threat to social order.

Sacralization Varies with External Justification

As suggested by the fundamental "irrationality" of sacred taboos and duties, it is only when more objective justifications are unavailable or lose their efficacy that subjective alternatives are recruited and sacralization takes place. In the forbidden-toy experiments discussed above, simply asking children to avoid the toy kept them from doing so, as did threatening severe consequences if they did not. But only in the first (no-threat) condition did they subsequently derogate, and continue to avoid, the toy. The severe threat apparently provided ample objective justification for not playing with it, and thus no subjective bolstering was required (Aronson and Carlsmith 1963). By extension, sacralization would also be undercut by the availability of objective justifications for a given behavior. Ignoring for now a number of other interesting potential applications (e.g., the effects of criminalization on norm adherence), let us consider a theoretical application that brings us back full circle to Durkheim's treatment of the sacred.

An enduring lacuna of Durkheim's work on the sacred concerns the relationship between it and the profane. He is adamant about the fact that they are mutually and profoundly opposed to one another, and must rigorously be kept apart, but says little about why. However, the association of the sacred with taboo provides an important

clue: just as *noa*, the opposite of *tabu*, is best understood to mean "ordinary and accessible," that is, available for use (Callois 1959; Pickering 1984), perhaps "profane" should be understood to mean something like "useful." As Durkheim observes: "work is the preeminent form of profane activity. It has no apparent aim other than meeting the secular needs of life" (1995:311). Similarly, Freud notes of the sacred animal that one must "avoid eating its flesh, or deriving benefit from it in other ways" (1950:2), and Malinowski's (1992) close identification of science with the profane points in the same direction.

From the perspective of the present theory this makes perfect sense. Proximal, temporal, or functional association between the sacred and the practical can potentially undermine or dilute the sacred, as such association could introduce objective justifications for behavior toward the object, which would obviate the need for moral projection and thereby desacralize it. Put simply, profane acts are objectively justifiable acts, and as such they are not only resistant, but antithetical, to sacralization. In this light, the universal contact prohibitions between the sacred and the profane (or "useful") are fully explicable. The ubiquitous proscriptions against working on holy days or trespassing on sacred ground are obvious examples, but an even better one concerns the menorah: though Hanukkah is an eight-day celebration with eight corresponding candles, the menorah also has a place for a ninth candle set apart from the others. This "shamash" candle is used to light the others because employing any of them for this or any other practical task would violate the strict dictum that menorah candles not be used for any other purpose than the sacred tasks of publicizing or meditating on Hannukah.

CONCLUSION

The sacred represents a venerable, but still significant and promising topic of sociological theory and research. This article has constructed a new model of the sacred and theory of sacralization that is original, but remains recognizably Durkheimian. While the present exposition is admittedly preliminary, it hopefully conveys the strength and promise of the model in three important dimensions—veracity, theoretical utility, and practical scope.

As to veracity, the theory's component assumptions and mechanisms have been empirically established to a degree rare among sociological theories, while the specificity of the model as a whole allows one to derive any number of nontrivial and nonobvious hypotheses that can be tested by comparison with empirical reality.

In terms of theoretical utility, it is uniquely able to account for and draw together the diverse and otherwise enigmatic aspects of the sacred. It reconciles its divine and diabolical facets, its manifestations as taboo and as duty, and its imperatives of both obedience and transgression. It also makes the various characteristics of the sacred—its hedonic ambivalence, its absolute and irrational nature, its contagiousness, etc.—into a coherent whole. In doing so, it also unifies disparate theoretical antecedents and helps to resolve venerable mysteries generated by them.

Finally, the model's foundational reliance on universal mechanisms makes it portable across time, culture, and topic. As such, the scope of its potential explanatory significance extends across many domains of traditional sociological concern. As sketched in this presentation, the model is fruitfully applicable to topics ranging from eating disorders to collective violence, from gender relations to incest taboos. More broadly, its prospective domain includes most of the classic subdisciplines of sociology—law, inequality, group and organizational behavior, culture, and most importantly, religion. If it is true that "Le Sacre c'est le père du Dieu" (Harrison

1912, cited in Pickering 1984:152), then the present model, by fleshing out the mechanisms behind Durkheim's fundamental insight that religion's force is actually that of society, may even bring us closer to a comprehensive sociological theory on the origins of religion itself.

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