Research Statement | Jason D'Cruz

My research concerns two overlapping projects in moral psychology: character, promising, and trust; and deliberation, rationalization, and self-deception. Broadly speaking, the first project concerns the moral significance of consistency. The second project concerns the human impulse to cultivate the appearance of consistency in contexts where it is conspicuously absent. I describe each project in more detail below.

Character, Promising, and Trust
My work in this area is guided by the following questions: To promise responsibly, how confident must I be in my ability to carry out what I promise? To trust another person, how confident must I be in that person's competence and commitment to act in a way that is trustworthy? What is the relationship between belief in character and the warrant for interpersonal and self-trust? How must I conceive of my own moral character if I am to make responsible promises and invite the trust of others?

These questions are brought into communication with the work philosophers working under the banner of "situationism" (e.g. Doris, Harman, and Merrit). Situationists maintain that a mature research program in social psychology indicates that most or all human being lack moral character. Minor situational variables, often morally irrelevant and at times inaccessible to conscious deliberation, systematically disrupt dispositions to act in the way we would expect from beings with robust traits of character such as honesty, compassion, or courage.

Rather than staking a position in the battle between situationists and virtue theorists, this work shifts the grounds of the discussion by drawing attention to the moral significance of skepticism about character. In a co-authored article with my colleague Rachel Cohon - "Promises and Consistency" - we argue that in order to promise sincerely, a promisor must believe that she will do whatever it is she promises to do, and that a situationist who accepts the implications of situationism does not have any such belief. The conclusion is that someone who adopts situationism and understands its implication cannot make a promise in good faith.

In a related paper - "Trust, Character, and the Moral Consequence of Consistency" - I argue that in order to realize the moral value of trust one must believe in one's trustee's capacity to act consistently across diverse contexts. In the absence of such a belief, it is rational to withdraw from the reactive attitudes constitutive of trust. This paper, too, aims to illustrate the radically morally revisionary implications of adopting a moral psychology that disavows belief in the human capacity for consistent dispositions.

This work forms part of an overarching investigation into what the virtues of conscientiousness and fidelity require in contexts of promising and other invitations to trust. In "Promising to Try", co-authored with Justin Kalef (Rutgers), we argue that if a person thinks that there is a significant chance that she will fail to keep a promise, then she is not morally entitled to make a promise; rather, she is only entitled to *promise to try*. We argue that *promising to try* is not as evasive or morally insignificant as it may initially seem.

My work in progress continues to take up these themes, asking whether we are obliged to take up the position of an impartial spectator on our own reliability when deciding whether

we have a right to promise ("Responsible Promises and the Third Person") and whether we are still bound by our promises when we learn that others are not relying on us ("The Infelicitous Promise"). My (provisional) answer to both these questions is yes. In future work I plan to investigate the moral consequence of *distrust* and the characteristic injustice and harm of being distrusted without warrant. I have sketched some of possible implications for applied ethics in a recent presentation to the Center for the Elimination of Minority Health Disparities at UAlbany.

Deliberation, Rationalization, and Self-Deception.
At the opposing end of the spectrum from conscientiousness and consistency, my work on deliberation, rationalization and self-deception concerns the self-serving logic of self-justification. *It's not cheating because everyone else is doing it too. I didn't report the abuse because it wasn't my place. I understated my income this year because I paid too much in tax last year. I'm only a social smoker, so I need not worry about lung cancer.*

The concept of *rationalization*, in the sense of self-serving self-justification, has come to play a crucial theoretical role in recent empirically-minded moral psychologists (e.g. - Jonathan Haidt, Dan Ariely, and Joshua Greene). Considering the central theoretical role that rationalization plays in much of this work, there has been surprisingly little sustained philosophical attention to characterizing it precisely and exploring its normative implications. How should we draw the distinction between reasoning and rationalizing? Is rationalization a defective form of deliberation, or is it something different from deliberation altogether? What is the moral significance of rationalization? Is rationalization morally blameworthy?

In two recent papers, I elaborate and defend a novel model of rationalization. In "Rationalization as Performative Pretense" I present a cognitive model of rationalization that draws on philosophical accounts of the regulative role of truth in doxastic deliberation (deliberation about what to believe). I argue that rationalizers should be understood as pretenders rather than as biased inquirers. I argue further that genuine inquiry and rationalization are often woven very fine, and that even careful doxastic deliberation should not be viewed a serum against rationalization. In "Unconstrained by the Evidence" I assess the degree of latitude thinkers have in forming, revising, and extinguishing their rationalizing representations.

My on-going work in this field aims to distinguish the kind of imaginative pretense found in acting and role-playing (which I dub "witting pretense") from the kind of pretense implicated in rationalization and self-deception (which I dub "unwitting pretense"). The hallmark of unwitting pretense is that the introspective representation that one is pretending is not easily accessible. This explains why the value of the pretense and its proper limits are not the object of rational scrutiny.