

# Exploring the Universality of Personality Judgments: Evidence From the Great Transformation (1000 BCE–200 BCE)

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We examined whether personality judgments were present in texts of the diverse religious and philosophical traditions that emerged during the Great Transformation, an era spanning roughly 1000 BCE to 200 BCE. Some psychologists have suggested that the tendency of humans to judge personality has evolved; if some ancient societies failed to record personality judgments, it would be evidence against such an evolutionary position. In addition, learning about the prevalence and specifics of ancient personality judgments can help psychologists better understand the prehistory of personality psychology. Eight cultural traditions were studied: two each from China (Confucianism, Taoism), Greece (Classical and Hellenistic philosophy), India (Buddhism, Hinduism), and the Middle East (Judaism, Zoroastrianism). We found evidence that personality judgments were an important aspect of all of these traditions. Not only did people judge one another, but they also offered instructions on how to judge others.

*Keywords:* personality, history of psychology, person perception, judgmentalism

In the late 4th century BCE, the Greek philosopher Theophrastus took over the administration of Aristotle's school for philosophy, the Lyceum. Among Theophrastus' contributions to Western thought was his work, *Character Sketches*, a description of about 30 personality types (Diggle, 2004). Of the "Unsociable Man," for example, Theophrastus wrote that he:

... is one who answers, "Don't bother me!" to a question about where somebody is, or who makes no response to a polite greeting. He won't tell buyers what he is asking for an item, either; instead, he wants to know how much they would be willing to give. And when people try to pay their respects to him by sending a gift for some family celebration, he tells them that he "wouldn't touch it." (Theophrastus, trans. 1970, p. 63).

One intriguing aspect of Theophrastus' description of the unsociable man is how judgmental it is. In fact, the book's preface explains that Theophrastus had studied many people "... in minute detail," including "the good and bad among them," and suggests that the sketches could be used as a lesson book for children (Theophrastus, trans. 1970, p. 3).

Evolutionary theorists have argued that judging others' personalities is key to people's survival. Selecting a good hunting partner, for example, might be a matter of life and death (Buss, 1991). The evolutionary case is supported by the fact that personality judgments

arise early in childhood, are made quickly, and are seen as automatic processes (Haselton & Funder, 2006). Opposed to this argument is the perspective that personality is so modest a causal factor in behavior as to be relatively unimportant, that its importance is exaggerated today in Western cultures, and that greater adaptive value would likely have accrued from judging situations and groups (Jones & Nisbett, 1972; Ross, 1977; Shweder, 1975).

The study of personality judgments in antiquity can help inform this debate. Regarding the possible evolution of personality judgments, if judgments of personality were present in some ancient societies but not others, it would argue against such judgments evolving as a part of human nature. Studying personality judgments in ancient cultures serves other functions as well: such studies can enrich the intellectual history of personality psychology by increasing our understanding of whether and how personality was judged in the Western and non-Western societies of antiquity (Song & Simonton, 2007).

In this article, we ask whether judgments about personality were widespread among the cultures of the "Great Transformation" (as it is sometimes called), an era spanning roughly from 1000 to 200 BCE (Armstrong, 2006; Eisenstadt, 1986; Jaspers, 1953; Schwartz, 1975). The label "Great Transformation" was applied to the period because those times saw the emergence of many of the world's wisdom traditions, defined as schools of philosophical and religious thought that guided people in their lives (Smith, 1991). These traditions ranged from Buddhist thought to Greek Philosophy to Zoroastrianism; the regions affected included China, India, Greece, and the Middle East (Armstrong, 1993, 2006; Jaspers, 1953). Theophrastus' writing suggests that the Greeks were judging one another according to personality typologies we recognize today. But what about other traditions such as Taoism and Zoroastrianism?

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In the second section of this article, “The Ubiquity of Personality Judgments,” we examine hypotheses and evidence that personality judgments might be universal, consider the nature of personality judgments and the constraints on them, and examine how an analysis of key literatures from the Great Transformation can help shed light on the universality of judging one another. In the third section, “A Study of Personality Judgments in Eight Wisdom Traditions,” we present an empirical study regarding what key documents of that era have to say concerning personality judgment in ancient times, including the social-moral concerns that sometimes arise to restrain such personality judgments, and may be as universal as the judgments themselves (Haidt, 2001; Haidt & Joseph, 2004). Finally, in our “Discussion,” we examine the implications of our findings for the future.

## The Ubiquity of Personality Judgments

### Origins of Personality Judgments

Evolutionary theorists have proposed that human beings’ tendency to judge one another is a foundation of human character—a species-typical adaptation (e.g., Buss, 1991; Haselton & Funder, 2006). For example, Buss (1984, 2009) has suggested that the importance of human individual differences to mating, interacting, and survival, has led people to evolve difference-detecting mechanisms for spotting variations from one person to another. In our evolutionary past, choosing a skillful hunting or foraging partner may have constituted a matter of life or death (Buss, 1991). Similarly, women who chose ambitious and industrious mates were more likely to benefit from resources for themselves and their children; for this reason, such judgments were key to the survival and reproductive success of our ancestors (Buss, 1989; Gangestad & Simpson, 2000). Dunbar’s (2003) social brain hypothesis argues that a key innovation in human evolution was the ability to form larger groups. According to Dunbar’s (2003) hypothesis, the maintenance of these expanded groups was made possible by the ability to gossip—to discuss and describe one another—and the human brain enlarged in part to allow for such social conversation. Haselton and Funder (2006) further suggested that personality judgments may be an instinct universal to human nature. They drew evidence in part from how people today develop the capacity to judge.

### Developmental and Cognitive Bases of Judging Personality

Judgments of personality begin early in life (Hamlin, Wynn, & Bloom, 2007). By 3 years of age, children are able to judge others’ traits and to use such terms appropriately, distinguishing traits from individual behaviors (Eder, 1989). Many 3-year-olds already understand what traits “mean” in terms of using them to describe others’ behaviors (Yuill & Pearson, 1998). For example, young children know both that a selfish child will avoid sharing her toys, and that selfishness is irrelevant to predicting how much a child would desire to join a fun-run (a race with slides and obstacles).

Adults categorize the individuals around them with great facility. They can identify salient traits of individuals such as extraversion and intelligence, and categorize people into types based on their similarity to a parent or even to an archetype (Andersen &

Berk, 1998; Cantor & Mischel, 1979; Faber & Mayer, 2009). Judging another person’s traits is often automatic, occurring when cognitive resources are occupied by other tasks (Bargh & Pietromonaco, 1982; Gilbert, 1989), and initial impressions often are formed within 30 seconds or less (Ambady, Bernieri, & Richeson, 2000; Ambady, Hallahan & Conner, 1999; Ambady & Rosenthal, 1992; Borkenau, Mauer, Riemann, Spinath, & Angleitner, 2004; Todorov & Uleman, 2003). Some have presented clinical evidence that trait perception is carried out by localized brain mechanisms, although such evidence is tentative (e.g., Klein, Cosmides, Murray, & Tooby, 2004).

### The Advantages and Drawbacks of Judging

Considerable research indicates that the judgments we make of others’ personalities are valid at times and allow us to predict at least some of the target-individual’s behaviors (e.g., Ambady & Rosenthal, 1992; Funder, 1995). People who make judgments more accurately on average may possess an advantage over others (Haselton & Funder, 2006; Mayer, 2008, 2009). In our specialized modern society, some people—such as psychotherapists, detectives, criminal court judges and terrorist experts—are expected to bring special expertise to judging others, although they also can bring biases and misperceptions to the task (Chapman & Chapman, 1969; Turk & Salovey, 1988). The fact that society allows for professions to arise that specialize in personality judgments testifies to the importance that is placed on properly assessing the behavior of others. All told, judgments of personality are automatic, difficult to control, and pervasive—and they are an essential component of many human activities (Haselton & Funder, 2006).

For all its potential utility, judging a person also can create problems. Erroneous positive judgments can reward the undeserving; erroneous negative judgments can punish the meritorious. Negative judgments in particular can disadvantage or exclude important people from a group, thereby fostering ill will and retribution (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). In order to manage such issues, most groups socialize their members to withhold judgments at times or at least to exercise tact in expressing their opinions of others. Parents teach their children restraint and the use of white lies to cover up negative judgments (Bussey, 1999). Among adults, restraint is equally important: for example, the rate at which one spouse judges another negatively (e.g., with contempt) is a potent predictor of divorce (Carstensen, Gottman, & Levenson, 1995; Gottman & Levenson, 1999). Teachings from spiritual, religious, and folk sources are employed to restrain such judgments as well. Two examples include the Native American expression, “Don’t judge a person until you’ve walked a mile in their moccasins,” and Jesus’ admonition during the Sermon on the Mount, “Judge not, that ye be not judged” (Matthew 7:1 King James Version). Finally, societies maintain legal codes that define defamation of character as the transmission of false and reckless judgments of another person through speech or writing. When such defamation conveys false judgments of a person’s moral integrity, health, or sexual conduct, it is against the law (Kane, 1992).

### The Possible Universality of Personality Judgments

Some social scientists have argued that the attention we pay to human personality may be unrelated to how important personality

is, and is more a function of culturally transmitted beliefs about its influence (Shweder & D'Andrade, 1979, p. 1081). For example, an extensive list of human universals drawn from anthropologists' works included such features as "cooking," "joking," "law-making," and "visiting," among many others, but omitted mention of "judging personality" or any similar concept (Murdock, 1945, p. 124). Although contemporary Western conceptions argue in general for the importance of individuality, these social scientists contend that the influence of personality may be ephemeral, and its supposed influences are more in the eye of the beholder than in reality. Human behavior is controlled more by situations and groups than by an individual's traits (Jones & Nisbett, 1972; Ross, 1977; Shweder, 1975). Evidence from survey studies, they note, suggest important constraints on the strength of relationships between traits and behaviors (e.g., Ross, 1977; Shweder, 1975; Shweder & D'Andrade, 1979).

The capacity to judge personality is not trivial and would pose a challenge to ancient peoples (as it does today). Unlike judgments of rain, fire, stones, or pottery, personality cannot be directly touched, felt, or otherwise sensed. Rather, personality then (as today) would be inferred from watching people's "external manifestations," over time from which "invisible" longer-term characteristics were surmised (e.g., Roback, 1928, p. 159; see also, Hall & Lindzey, 1978, p. 8).

Lévi-Strauss (1962), among other 20th century anthropologists, argued that there were some psychological universals in human cognition. The search for universals has now become central to psychoevolutionary theory as well (e.g., Buss, 1995). Personality judgments can be distinguished from general cognition in being specifically social in focus, and *hot* in the sense of being personally relevant, and likely to elicit emotional reactions (Abelson, 1963; Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Ostrom, 1984). Haselton and Funder's (2006) suggestion that human beings evolved an instinct for judging one another led them to argue that: "The most robust universal . . . is that people everywhere should form personality judgments . . . People across the globe will . . . infer enduring traits in others . . ." (Haselton & Funder, 2006, p. 30). Ancient peoples, we suggest, verbally labeled those qualities, discussed them, and believed that their judgments of what we now call personality were of sufficient importance to be communicated as teachings in key wisdom books. Such ancient personality judgments would be recognizable because they concerned an individual's motives, feelings, thoughts, and self-control (Hall & Lindzey, 1978, p. 8).

### Defining Personality Judgments

To test whether personality judgments were universal in the time of the Great Transformation (see below), we first defined personality judgments as:

. . . an evaluation of the character of an individual that values the person as good or bad, or characterizes a person's intentions, feelings, and thoughts, such as by remarking on a person's generosity, unsociability, or wisdom. Such judgments form a diverse class including evaluations that are true, false, or in between, and that are stated sincerely or falsely, among other variants. Their key quality is that they are evaluative and are about the person's psychological attributes.

It is worth noting as well that cultural teachings concerning how and when to judge others often have developed around personality

judgments. Because these teachings impart lessons about the best ways to judge others, they can be used as additional indicators of whether such judgments are taking place in a particular time and place. The content of such teachings are of interest in their own right. As we define them:

Cultural teachings about personality judgments include formally recorded wisdom and informally communicated teachings, commentary, and sayings that constrain personality judgments. Some teachings may recommend limiting judgments to minimize any potential harm that they may cause. Other such teachings are "judgment technologies" designed to make evaluations more accurate and valid. Still another group teaches tactful expression. Also in this class are teachings about who would benefit from receiving judgments.

### Exploring Judgments Over the Great Transformation

The most powerful test of the universality of personality judgment would depart as far as possible from early 21st century settings in colleges and universities while still drawing on fairly concrete evidence (as opposed to more speculative reconstructions). We decided to examine the earliest possible era of recorded history for which teachings from diverse regions around the world were available: The Great Transformation, a period between 1000 BCE and 200 BCE. Jaspers (1953) and others have suggested that the written record before that time indicated a relative lack of self-reflection and conscious self-examination in comparison with writings during and after the era (e.g., Dennett, 1986; Jaspers, 1953; Jaynes, 1976; Ong, 1982).

In the Great Transformation, philosophies, religions, and related teachings emerged across four geographic regions of the earth (Armstrong, 2006; Eisenstadt, 1986; Jaspers, 1953; Schwartz, 1975). In India, a renewed Hinduism suddenly emphasized self-reflection and understanding in ways it had not before. In the same region, Buddhism and Jainism emerged, which were similarly self-reflective (Armstrong, 2006). China saw the creation of Confucianism, Taoism, and the "Hundred Schools" (Eisenstadt, 1986). The Middle East saw the rise of Zoroastrianism in Iran, and Judaism in Palestine, including the "second revelation" of Rabbinic Judaism which marked a shift from relatively nonreflective early writing to writing that included more humanistic teachings (Armstrong, 2006). Finally, in Greece, new philosophies emerged that highly valued knowledge of oneself and others, and were further developed in the Hellenistic schools that followed (Armstrong, 2006; Jaspers, 1953; Eisenstadt, 1986). Because a number of these traditions continue to be influential today, studies of this ancient time may also be relevant to similarities and differences among cultural views of personality judgments that have subsequently emerged.

A test is conducted of the universality of personality judgments in the era of the Great Transformation that is cross-temporal (relative to today), cross-regional, and cross-cultural. Such research will be informative concerning the prehistory of personality psychology. Moreover, if personality judgments are not prevalent across all such cultures of the time, it would undermine arguments that the tendency to judge one another has evolved.

## A Study of Personality Judgments in Eight Wisdom Traditions

### Overview of the Research Plan

In this study, our research plan was: (a) to identify major wisdom traditions (i.e., religions and philosophies) of the Great Transformation; (b) to identify key written records in each tradition which, plausibly, reflect the thinking of that time; and (c) to read through the wisdom teachings and record evidence of personality judgments and the cultural teachings about them. The research procedure is based on the assumption that these key writings survived in part because they represented cultural foundations of the civilizations that transmitted them (and often still influence people today). In addition, sampling from the writings, despite some of the limitations examined in the Discussion, is among the only empirical means available to psychologists today for understanding the development of human cognition in ancient times (e.g., Dahlsgaard, Peterson, & Seligman, 2005; Simonton, 2003; Song & Simonton, 2007).

We tested two hypotheses about the prevalence of judgments of personality in the Great Transformation. First: personality judgments could be found in the wisdom literatures of the traditions that we sampled; second: cultural teachings about such personality judgments could also be found in the literatures.

### Method

#### Identifying key traditions of the Great Transformation.

We first identified the key wisdom traditions of the Age of Transformation from which to sample, and then the key documents. To

identify agreed-upon wisdom traditions from that time, we consulted five authoritative sources that have reviewed the regions and wisdom traditions of the Great Transformation (Armstrong, 2006; Arnason, Eisenstadt & Wittrock, 2005; Eisenstadt, 1986; Jaspers, 1953; Schwartz, 1975).

The civilizations most often considered part of the Great Transformation are shown in Table 1. Table 1's first column lists four geographical regions often believed to be affected by the Great Transformation centering around: (a) China (b) Greece, (c) India, and (d) the Middle East. Each region listed in Table 1 gave rise to two to three wisdom traditions according to contemporary studies of that era. These wisdom traditions are shown in Table 1. For example, China gave rise to Confucianism, Taoism, and the "Hundred Schools"; India saw Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism, and so on. Column 3 indicates the tradition's local region, where known. Column 4 reports a tabulation of how many (and which) of the five key scholarly works included a specific wisdom tradition within the Great Transformation. This compilation stays within the 1000–200 BCE timeframe.

As with any historical topic, there were some disagreements among authorities. One source (Armstrong, 2006) included Persia (Iran) and Zoroastrianism with India rather than the Middle East; others regarded Zoroastrianism as having emerged too early to be included (Arnason et al., 2005; Jaspers, 1953). A few of the sources referred to Christianity as a "late stage" outgrowth of the Great Transformation (Armstrong, 2006; Jaspers, 1953; Arnason et al., 2005), and one included Islam within this late-stage timeframe (Arnason et al., 2005), but most sources typically treated Christianity and Islam as distinct in arising after the Great Transformation itself. These modestly different perspectives among our

Table 1  
*Wisdom Traditions of the Age of Transformation*

Region	Wisdom tradition	Local area of origin(s) where known	Tradition included in historical treatments*
China	Confucianism	State of Lu	AEW ARM, (EIS) JSP, SHW
	Taoism/Lao Tzu	Uncertain	AEW ARM, (EIS) JSP, SHW
	The "hundred schools" Mo-Di, Chuang-tse, Lieh-tsu	Warring States (Qi, Chu, Yan, Han, Zhao, Wei, and Qin); various	JSP, SHW
Greece and Greek colonies	Pre-Socratic philosophy (e.g., Parmenides, Heraclitus)	Various (e.g., Italiote and Ionian areas)	SHW, (EIS)
	Classical philosophy: Socrates, Plato, Aristotle	Athens and vicinity	AEW ARM, (EIS) JSP, SHW
	Early Hellenistic Philosophy (e.g., Theophrastus, Epicurus, Zeno of Citium)	Various (e.g., Greek, Roman, Syrian)	AEW ARM, (EIS) JSP, SHW
India and neighboring states	Upanishad Hinduism	Indus River Valley	AEW ARM, (EIS) JSP, SHW
	Buddhism Jainism	Northern India Ganges River states	AEW ARM, (EIS) JSP, SHW SHW
Middle East	Biblical Judaism	Israel, Palestine, and surrounding territories	AEW ARM, (EIS) JSP, SHW,
	Rabbinical Judaism	Various (e.g., Babylonia, Israel and Palestine)	AEW ARM, (EIS) JSP, SHW,
	Zoroastrianism	Persia	JSP, SHW, AEW- "controversial," (EIS)

\* *Note.* AEW: Arnason, et al. (2005, p. 3); ARM-AB: (Armstrong, 2006, p. xii). EIS: Eisenstadt (1986, p. 1). JSP: Jaspers, 1953, p. 3–4); SCH: Schwartz (1975, P. 1). (EIS) Eisenstadt is in parentheses because the author refers generally to areas rather than specific movements, and the endorsement of wisdom traditions was inferred from geographical locations and the general discussion. The sources often discussed Ancient Greek contributions as a group; the generally recognized division between Classical Greek and early Hellenistic Philosophies is added here.

source works suggest that the sorting indicated in Table 1 represents just one of several possible good divisions of the regions and traditions of the Great Transformation.

Table 1's form further suggested to us that for the purposes of sampling the traditions of the Great Transformation it would be possible to select two wisdom traditions from each of the four geographic areas. By doing so, we could represent the central developments of the Great Transformation by focusing on eight of the most frequently discussed traditions, as reflected in mentions across the sources.

**Bibliographic sampling approach.** The eight traditions we selected for further study are indicated in Table 2, Column 1: From China, Confucianism and Taoism; from Greece, Classical and Hellenistic philosophy; from India, Hinduism and Buddhism; and from the Middle East, Zoroastrianism and Judaism. We next identified one or two key written teachings from each tradition that

likely were contemporary to the era at least orally, and redacted either during that time or shortly thereafter.

Table 2 lists the documents we chose (Column 2). To identify the key documents of a tradition, we drew on overviews of the world's wisdom traditions (e.g., Armstrong, 2006; Smith, 1991), as well as materials specifically focused on the Great Transformation (e.g., Armstrong, 2006; Arnason et al., 2005; Eisenstadt, 1986; Jaspers, 1953; Schwartz, 1975). There often are disagreements as to the exact dates of documents from the period; we relied in particular on Armstrong's (2006) scholarship in this regard, as it is both authoritative as well as relatively recent, and draws on both the scholarship of the earlier works and more contemporary archaeological evidence.

Many traditions between 1000 BCE and 200 BCE generated multiple texts that might meet our criteria of being a "key" work. In such instances one document was often regarded as more central

Table 2  
Key Documents Employed

Region and wisdom tradition	Global document	Comments
China		
<i>Confucianism</i>	Confucius' <i>Analects</i> (trans. 1997)	The central and founding text of Confucian thought, believed to be compiled by Confucius' students from his teachings, and dated around 475 BCE.
<i>Taoism</i>	Lao Tzu's <i>Tao Teh Ching</i> (trans. 1961)	The founding text of <i>Taoism</i> , attributed to Lao Tzu, with an uncertain date sometime before or after Confucius (see above).
Greece		
<i>Classical philosophy</i>	Plato's <i>Phaedrus</i> (trans. 2005) Aristotle's <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> (trans. 1999)	Many possible texts were available for this portion of the research. Plato's <i>Phaedrus</i> , dated to approximately 417 BCE concerns human nature, and Aristotle's <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , dated to approximately 350 BCE, is concerned with proper interpersonal conduct.
<i>Hellenistic philosophy</i>	Theophrastus' <i>The Characters</i> (trans. 1970)	Many possible Hellenistic texts were available, <i>The Characters</i> , dated to about 319 BCE is frequently identified as a precursor to contemporary personality psychology
India		
<i>Hinduism</i>	<i>Bhagavad Gita</i> (trans. 1965)	A widely-known 700-verse portion of the longer Mahabharata, one of two major Sanskrit epics. Believed to have been in oral circulation during the Great Transformation; the date of first redaction is uncertain.
	Selections from the <i>Upanishads</i> (trans. 1965)	The major texts of Hinduism, transmitted orally and redacted over centuries, the oldest sometimes are dated between 800–400 BCE, overlapping with the Great Transformation. We employed edited excerpts of some of these teachings.
<i>Buddhism</i>	<i>Dhammapadam</i> (trans. 1994)	The Pali Scriptures, written in Pali, a language related to Sanskrit by followers of <i>Buddha</i> redacted perhaps 100 years BCE but with strong evidence for earlier oral transmission.
Middle East		
<i>Zoroastrianism</i>	<i>The Avesta</i> (trans. 1983)	The holy book of Zoroastrianism, including many of the sayings of the prophet Zoroaster (Zarathustra), represents an oral tradition that emerged between 1000–600 BCE with possibly two separate redactions, one in the latter half of the first millennium BCE, and the other in the 6th century CE.
	<i>The Achaemenid Inscriptions</i> (trans. 1983)	Inscriptions attributed to the Great Kings Darius and Xerxes of the Old Persian religion, perhaps influenced by Zoroastrianism, roughly 400–600 BCE
<i>Judaism</i>	<i>Hebrew Bible (Tanakh)</i> (trans. 1992)	Various portions were employed, with a reliance in particular on Psalms. Psalms is believed to be written by different authors, and redacted roughly 1000–400 BCE.
	<i>Pirke Avot</i> (trans. 1993)	The <i>Pirke Avot</i> , or "Sayings of our Fathers" is part of the broader <i>Mishna</i> : a redaction of the oral law of Rabbinical Judaism. Only sayings from the earliest pre-Tannaitic teachers, of about 200 BCE–10 BCE (falling within or at the boundary of the Great Transformation) were included here; the <i>Mishna</i> itself is believed to have been redacted around 200 CE.

to a tradition than others and was chosen on that basis (e.g., “The Analects” in Confucianism, in comparison to later works). When there were multiple equally important texts in a tradition, we selected those we believed were most likely to address issues concerning personality and its judgment. For example, from many possible texts of Judaism beyond the Hebrew Bible, we chose the *Pirke Avot*, or “Wisdom of the Fathers,” because of its focus on everyday advice concerning personal conduct; similarly, to represent Hellenistic philosophy, we chose Theophrastus’ aforementioned *Character Sketches* because it is devoted to the study of personalities. When the criteria for making such a decision was less clear, we relied on edited selections of documents (e.g., of the diverse Hindu Upanishads, trans. 1965). As with our division of the era into four regions and eight traditions, the set of documents we chose can be regarded as one possible set of several potential alternatives. The choices we employed are shown in Table 2, Column 2, along with notes describing the documents.

**Procedure for studying the texts.** Finally, we studied the texts we selected for each culture. Each of the present authors read through one or more of the selected documents making notes as to the most salient judgments of people, recording the clearest and most memorable statements concerning the manner in which judgments of others ought to be made, and, occasionally, any other material that seemed closely related (such as advice about how to react in response to being judged by others).

After studying the documents, the authors held a series of meetings over the course of a month, during which two results tables were developed: the first results table (see Table 3) recorded selected judgments of personality from the documents. The second results table (see Table 4) recorded cultural teachings about such judgments. Personality judgments had been defined (see section on definitions) as any evaluative statements about a person’s overall goodness or badness, or a more nuanced judgment of an individual. Cultural teachings about such judgments were considered to be any commentary or sayings pertaining to improving, limiting, or directing such judgments.

Throughout the meetings each member nominated candidate quotes that reflected either personality judgments or teachings about them. These were discussed and, where helpful, the group considered the broader context of the quote and whether it truly met our criterion definition (i.e., for a personality judgment or for a teaching about judgments). In cases where a quote was ambiguous or better examples were to be found, we postponed including it until a subsequent meeting and went back to further search the original document(s).

## Results

We had hypothesized that judgments of personality would be pervasive across the eight wisdom traditions we studied which spanned four geographical regions of the Great Transformation. The extent to which we could find examples of personality judgments and of cultural teachings about those judgments in the documents we studied, would provide evidence of the degree to which such personality judgments were present during Great Transformation.

### Judgments of Others’ Personalities

Table 3 includes examples of personality judgments we could locate from the various traditions. We had defined personality

judgments as (in part) . . . “an evaluation of the character of an individual that values the person as good or bad, or characterizes a person’s intentions, feelings, and thoughts . . .”. The four regions of the Great Transformation can be found in the left-hand column of Table 3, divided into the eight traditions we studied. The right-hand column contains examples of such judgments from the works we studied. All the wisdom traditions from which we sampled included many direct instances of personality evaluations, with the possible exception of Zoroastrianism, which formed a special case (this point will be discussed shortly). The specific examples illustrated in Table 3 were chosen because they were particularly clear instances of personality judgments and because they were reasonably representative of similar statements in the work from which they were drawn.

In the Chinese tradition of Confucianism, for example, Confucius distinguished between a gentleman who “. . . puts loyalty and faithfulness foremost . . .” relative to others who remain “shallow” (Confucius, trans 1997, 1.8, p. 4). Confucius goes on to distinguish among his students based on his assessment of their character (e.g., “Ran Qiu is slow, therefore I push him; Zilu has energy for two, therefore I hold him back” (Confucius, trans 1997, 11.22, p. 52). Equally clear instances of such judgments arose in Taoism. According to Lao Tzu a “Sage knows himself . . .,” and elsewhere, a virtueless leader “. . . knows only to levy duties upon the people” (Lao Tzu, trans. 1999, Ch. 79, p. 161).

Additional clear examples of judgments came from Greek writings, such as from Plato who distinguished between the weaker (“ignorant,” “cowardly,” “poor speaker”) and the stronger (“wise,” “brave,” “expert in rhetoric,” Plato, trans. 2005, p. 17), and from the later Hellenistic philosopher, the aforementioned Theophrastus, who distinguished among the “talkative,” “faultfinder,” and the “pennypincher” among many others (Theophrastus, trans. 1970).

In India, Hindu writings distinguished between students who were contemplative and required a yoga of knowledge to reach enlightenment, versus those students who were active and required a yoga of action. Buddhist thought distinguished between “One who does evil” and suffers misery on its account “in this world and after death,” and “One who does good” and who on that account “rejoices” (Dhammapada, trans. 1994, 1:17–18, p. 10). Finer distinctions arose in Buddhism as well; the readers of the Dhammapada learned to differentiate among the “sagacious” the “ascetic,” the “mendicant,” and the “noble” (Dhammapada, trans. 1994, 19:10–15, pp. 86–87).

Moving to the Middle East, Judaism distinguished among the “simple man,” the “wise man,” “the fool,” and the “man of wicked devices” among other types (Hebrew Bible, trans. 1992, Proverbs: 14:15–16). Only in Zoroastrian literature did we experience some difficulty in identifying judgments by one person of another. This may be a consequence of the tradition’s history: During the 10th century CE, portions of the Zoroastrian community’s ancient scripture, the *Avesta*, were lost. The *Avesta* is today, as one scholar put it: “. . . a battered fragment of what one can imagine to have existed in, say, the 5th century B.C.” (Malandra, 1983, p. 30). We did identify some person-to-person character judgments, for example, labels of “liar,” in inscriptions of Persian kings of the time (see Table 4). The most extensive character judgments we could find in the remaining *Avesta*, however, were judgments that Ahura Mazda, the central deity of the religion, rendered of himself: for

Table 3  
*Examples of Judgments of Personality Across Wisdom Traditions*

Region and wisdom tradition	Sample judgments of personality
China	
<i>Confucianism</i>	From Confucius' <i>Analects</i> (trans. 1997) "The Master said, 'A gentleman who lacks gravity has no authority and his learning will remain shallow. A gentleman puts loyalty and faithfulness foremost; he does not befriend his moral inferiors.'" [1.8, p. 4] "Ran Qiu is slow, therefore I push him;/Zilu has energy for two, therefore I hold him back." [11.22, p. 52] "A gentleman puts loyalty and faithfulness foremost" [1.8, p. 4]
<i>Taoism</i>	From Lao Tzu's <i>Tao Teh Ching</i> (trans. 1961) "A good soldier is never aggressive;/A good fighter is never angry." [Ch. 68, p. 139] "The Sage knows himself,/But makes no show of himself;/Loves himself,/but does not exalt himself./He prefers what is within to what is without." [Ch. 72, p. 147] "He who is brave and in daring will be killed;/He who is brave in no daring will survive." [Ch. 73, p. 149] "The virtuous attends to his duties;/The virtueless knows only to levy duties upon the people." [Ch. 79, p. 161]
Greece	
<i>Classical philosophy</i>	From Aristotle's <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> (trans. 1999) "... the base person seems to go to every length for his own sake, and all the more vicious he is ... The decent person, on the contrary, acts for what is fine, all the more better he is ..." [30: Ch. 8, p. 146] From Plato's <i>Phaedrus</i> (trans. 2005)
<i>Hellenistic philosophy</i>	From Theophrastus' <i>Characters</i> (trans. 1970) "The unsociable man is one who answers, 'Don't bother me!' to a question about where somebody is, or who makes no response to a polite greeting ..." (p. 63) "... [For the faultfinder, if] a friend sends over a serving of the main dinner course with his compliments, the faultfinder ... says to the messenger, 'You can go tell your master I said that he didn't want me to have a taste of his soup and his third-rate wine—that's why he wouldn't give me a dinner invitation'" (p. 73).
India	
<i>Hinduism</i>	From <i>Bhagavad Gita</i> (trans. 1965) "An agent free from attachment, unaffected by success or failure, is sattvika; ... /An agent unsteady, boorish, arrogant, dishonest, malicious, lazy, and despondent is tamasika." (Ch. 18, p. 66) <i>[Note: In the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna tells Arjuna there are two ways to attain enlightenment, depending upon your nature ... ]</i>
<i>Buddhism</i>	"... for the contemplative the Yoga of knowledge,/for the active the Yoga of action." (Ch. 3, p. 13) From <i>Dhammapada: The sayings of Buddha</i> (trans. 1994) "One who does evil suffers regret in this world and after death, suffering regret in both. One suffers regret knowing one has done wrong, and suffers even more when gone to a state of misery." "One who does good rejoices in this world and after death, joyful in both. One rejoices knowing one has done good, and rejoices even more when gone to a state of felicity." (1:17–18, p. 10). "... One is sagacious when one has determined both what is beneficial and what is not." (19:1, p.85) "... the wise one freed from corruption, is the one who is called fair." (19:8, p. 86) "... one who stills all evils, great and small, is called an ascetic, because of having stilled all evils." (19:10, p. 86) "One who is chaste, having transcended both good and evil, and who acts with consideration in the world, that one is called a mendicant." (19:12, p. 87) "... one who is harmless to all living beings is called noble." (19:15, p. 87)
Middle East	
<i>Zoroastrianism</i>	From <i>Avesta</i> (trans. 1983) "Then Ahura Mazda said: (They should turn to) a righteous man. O Spitamid Zarathushtra, who(se) speech is honest, (who) studies scripture, (who) is an ashawan ..." (Vendidād 9:2, p. 170) "Of these two Spirits, the deceitful (drugwant) chose the worst course of action, (while) the most beneficent Spirit ... (chose Truth, (as) also (do) those who believingly propitiate Ahura Mazda" (Yasna 30:3–6, p. 40). <i>[Note: In Zoroastrianism, the God Ahura Mazda describes himself in ways that suggest a rich vocabulary of human personality traits:]</i> "I am 'Protector' and 'Creator,' I am 'Protector' and 'Knower,' and I am 'Spirit' and 'most Beneficent' (or 'Most Beneficent Spirit') ... I am called 'Wise,' I am called 'Righteous,' I am called 'Most Righteous,' I am called 'Glorious,' I am called 'Most Glorious,' I am called 'Seer of Much,' I am called 'Best Seer of Much,' ... I am called 'Strong,' I am called 'Strongest,' I am called 'Truth,' ... I am called 'Intelligent,' I am called 'Most Intelligent,' I am called 'Far-Seeing'—and those are the names." (Ahura Mazda (Ohrmazd) Yasht 1:12–15, pp. 52–53)
<i>Judaism</i>	From <i>Hebrew Bible (Tanakh)</i> , trans. 1992) "The simple inherit folly: but the prudent are crowned with knowledge ..." (Proverbs 14:15–19) "The simple man believes everything; but the prudent man looks well to his step. A wise man fears, and departs from evil: but the fool rages, and is confident. He that is soon angry acts foolishly: but a man of wicked devices is hated ..." (Proverbs: 14:15–16)

Table 4  
*Wisdom Traditions' Commentaries on Delivering and Constraining Judgments*

Region and wisdom tradition	Instructions for judging personality types
China	
<i>Confucianism</i>	From Confucius' <i>Analects</i> (trans. 1997) "The Master said: 'One should regard the young with awe: how do you know that the next generation will not equal the present one? If, however, by the age of forty or fifty, a man has not made a name for himself, he no longer deserves to be taken seriously.'" (Analects, 9.23, p. 42) "The Master said: 'There was a time when I used to listen to what people said and trusted that they would act accordingly, but now I listen to what they say and watch what they do.'" (Analects, 5.10, p. 11)
<i>Taoism</i>	From Lao Tzu's <i>Tao Teh Ching</i> (trans. 1961) "In dealing with others, know how to be gentle and kind. In speaking, know how to keep your words . . . If you do not strive with others, You will be free from blame" (Chapter 8, p. 17) "Hence, a person must be judged as person;/A family as family." (Chapter 54, p. 111).
Greece	
<i>Classical philosophy</i>	From Aristotle's <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> (trans. 1999) "So also getting angry . . . is easy and everyone can do it; but doing it to the right person, in the right amount, at the right time, for the right end, and in the right way is no longer easy, nor can everyone do it. Hence doing these things well is rare, praiseworthy, and fine." (Aristotle, 350 BCE/1999, (15–25) Ch. 9, pp. 29–30)
<i>Hellenistic philosophy</i>	From <i>Theophrastus' Characters</i> (trans. 1970) • [Note: <i>The preface to the Characters is believed by scholars to have been added later than the book itself, perhaps by one of Theophrastus' students . . .</i> ] ". . . for a long time now I have been making a study of human nature, associating it with all sorts and conditions of men and contrasting in minute detail the good and bad among them . . . My thought is . . . that our children will be the better for it if we hand down . . . [a] treatment . . . that they can draw on for practical examples. It will help them to choose the best people to know and be with, and they will have something to aim at" (p. 3).
India	
<i>Hinduism</i>	From <i>The Upanishads</i> (trans. 1965) • [Note: this is general, but likely includes making judgments] "Who sees all beings in his own Self, and his own Self in all beings, loses all fear. When a sage sees this great Unity and Self has become all beings, what delusion and what sorrow can ever be near him?" (Isa Upanishad, pp. 49–50).
<i>Buddhism</i>	From <i>Dhammapada: The sayings of Buddha</i> (trans. 1994) "Do not look for faults of others, or what others have done or not done; observe what you yourself have done or not done." (Dhammapada, 4:7, p. 21)
Middle East	
<i>Zoroastrianism</i>	From Achaemenid Inscriptions (in Malandra, 1983) "Punish well that man who shall be a liar if you think "my country shall be secure." Achaemenid Inscriptions DBIV 2–67, p. 48
<i>Judaism</i>	From the Hebrew Bible (trans. 1992) and the <i>Pirke Avot</i> (trans. 1993) ". . . Do not reprove a scorner, lest he hate thee: rebuke a wise man and he will be yet wiser: teach a just man, and he will increase in learning." (Proverbs 8:7–9, p. 807) "Hillel said, 'Don't judge your fellow human being until you have reached that person's place.'" (PA, 2:4, p. 20)

example, ". . . I am called 'Wise,' I am called 'Righteous,' I am called 'Seer of Much,' . . . I am called "Intelligent" . . .". Similar personality judgments are found of lesser deities in the religion as well. The example of Ahura Mazda's self-judgment (shown in Table 3) is rich in personality terminology.

Overall, we found rich evidence for personality judgments of people in seven of the eight wisdom traditions, and rich personality judgments of a deity as well as more limited judgments of people in the eighth.

### Cultural Teachings About Judging Personality

The second kind of material we examined concerned cultural teachings about judging others. The presence of such teachings in a given tradition would provide further strong evidence that personality judgments were present in the society. Examples of these teachings are included in Table 4.

The quoted material represents a small sample of interesting and relevant ideas about judging others from each tradition. These excerpted materials should not be viewed as reflecting anything

about the overall philosophy of the wisdom tradition itself; most of these traditions are multifaceted, rich, and often contain statements from many different perspectives. These quotes are evidence only that personality judgments were noticed and that attempts were made to constrain or improve them.

As examples of this sort of teaching, we have quoted Confucius' remark that one can never tell what young people might do, but by the age of 40 or 50 if ". . . a man has not made a name for himself, he no longer deserves to be taken seriously" (Confucius, trans. 1997, 9.23, p. 42). Taoists were taught to be "gentle and kind," and in speaking, to ". . . know how to keep your words" (Lao Tzu, 1961, Ch. 8, p. 17). As Theophrastus' preface to his *Characters* indicated, the Greeks believed that by studying character types they could learn to ". . . choose the best people to know and be with, and . . . have something to aim at" (Theophrastus, trans. 1970, p. 3). Buddhists were taught, "Do not look for faults of others . . . observe what you yourself have done or not done" (Dhammapada, 1994, 4:7, p. 21). And, from the Middle East, Zoroastrianism speaks of punishing liars so as to ensure the broader security of the

land. The Hebrew Bible explained that reproving scorners led only to more scorn, but that if you “rebuke a wise man . . . he will be yet wiser” (Hebrew Bible; Proverbs 8:7–9, p. 807). Rabbinic Judaism included Hillel’s teaching, “Don’t judge your fellow human being until you have reached that person’s place” (Pirke Avot, 1993, 2:4, p. 20).

To briefly summarize the results from Tables 3 and 4, the written documents we examined from the Age of Transformation contained definite examples of personality judgments in all regions, and within those regions, such judgments were evident in seven of the eight wisdom traditions we studied, with the eighth providing less definite but still likely examples of personality judgments (i.e., of deities, mostly). There were also wisdom teachings about those judgments from all the regions and traditions.

## Discussion

### Synopsis of the Research Findings

Our empirical research investigated the prevalence of personality judgment within eight prominent cultures of the Great Transformation, roughly from 1000 BCE to 200 BCE. We hypothesized that we would find evidence for the universality of judging others across the cultures of that time, even though some of the cultures developed in partial independence of one another (Armstrong, 2006; Jaspers, 1953). We found that judgments of others were common in seven of the eight traditions we studied and present somewhat in the eighth. People in the ancient world observed others and from such observations abstracted psychological qualities of a person including intentions, thoughts, feelings and social preferences that overlap with the concept of personality as understood today.

Some judgments of people were highly polarized, especially in the context of religious and spiritual world-views such as Buddhism as, for example, the instruction in the Dhammapada that “One who does evil suffers regret in this world and after death . . . One who does good rejoices in this world and after death, joyful in both” (Dhammapada, trans. 1994, 1:17–18, p. 10). Other judgments and characterizations were oriented more toward classifying types of individuals. In Theophrastus’ *Characters*, for instance, the “The Unsociable Man” is described as the type of man who says to someone bringing him a gift that he “wouldn’t touch it” (Theophrastus, trans. 1970, p. 63).

The wisdom teachings we examined also provided a set of instructions on how and when to judge others. These teachings form a second, independent source of evidence that judgments of character were common in the eight cultures studied. We found examples that touched on many topics related to judging others. For instance, in Taoism, Lao Tzu emphasized compassion when he instructed pupils, “In dealing with others, know how to be gentle and kind . . .” (Lao Tzu, trans. 1961, Chapter 8, p. 17). Rabbis Joshua ben Perachyah and Nittai of Arbel did the same, when advising their students, “Get yourself a teacher, find someone to study with, and judge everyone favorably” (Pirke Avot, trans. 1993 1:6, p. 5; see also the quote from Hillel, Table 4). Another theme concerned being prudent and mindful of when to judge. Aristotle, for instance, singled out the challenge of reacting sensibly to others, which might involve, “. . . getting angry . . . at the right time, for the right end, and in the right way . . .” (Aristotle, trans. 1999, 15–25, Ch. 9, pp. 29–30). Finally, the Buddhist *Dhammapada* warns a potential speaker in advance that people

do not always react positively to negative comments: “Do not say anything harsh; what you have said will be said back to you” (Dhammapada, trans. 1994, 10:5, p. 47; see also the quote in Table 4). Although these teachings vary in the points they make, they reflect a common concern about how people judge one another, and consequently, provide further evidence of the universality and centrality of judgments of personality across those regions and cultures.

### Why Did These Cultures All Deal With Judgments of Personality?

Evolutionary theorists argue that our human ancestors developed mental mechanisms that predisposed them to function better socially (Buss, 1991; Dunbar, 2003; Funder & Haselton, 2006; Tooby & Cosmides, 1990). The readiness and ability to judge others may be one of those mechanisms. Good judges of others would be able to choose friends and coworkers who promote their well-being, select better mates, and, when attention turns to guiding the group, choose better leaders (Buss, 1991; Dunbar, 2003). One of the conditions central to proving that people evolved an instinct to judge personality was that, “people everywhere should form personality judgments” (Haselton & Funder, 2006, p. 30).

A finding that personality judgments were limited to some cultures of the Great Transformation and not others would have undermined the evolutionary hypothesis, but we failed to find such disconfirming evidence. Our research offers new cross-regional and cross-cultural evidence from the Great Transformation to support the theoretical idea that a tendency to make personality judgments applies to people everywhere. Many social scientists have argued that the tendency to focus on personality may be specific to some cultures but not others, and that this personality-centered focus, in the United States at least, exaggerates personality’s actual influence (e.g., Jones & Nisbett, 1972; Ross, 1977; Shweder, 1975; Shweder & D’Andrade, 1979). Our research shows that people’s attention to personality occurred over diverse cultures thousands of years ago. Although our findings do not speak directly to personality’s predictive value, many other works have (e.g., Roberts, Kuncel, Shiner, Caspi, & Goldberg, 2007).

In addition to personality judgments, we also found teachings designed to guide those judgments. Dahlsgaard et al. (2005), along with others, argued that morality and virtue evolved because they allowed our ancestors “to generate, recognize, and celebrate corrective virtues . . .” (see also, Haidt, 2001; Wilson, 1978). The evidence we found here indicates that not only judging others, but also constraining those judgments according to social values was already universal and geographically widespread by the time of the Great Transformation. Dahlsgaard et al. went on to conclude that, without such evolved practices, “human social groups would have died out quickly” (Dahlsgaard et al., 2005, p. 212). The teachings found here about how to judge others provided important social constraints on human social judgments—constraints that, well before the defamation laws of today, arose so as to protect individuals (and groups) from overly harsh or malicious judgments (e.g., Kane, 1992; Waelde & Lilian, 1996). There also were beginning attempts to establish rules to make judgments more accurate (see, e.g., Confucius’ quotes in Table 4)—precursors to the scientific practices of today.

## Implications for Histories of Personality Psychology

Our research on the pervasiveness of personality judgments across the cultures of the Great Transformation seem relevant to accounts of the origins of personality psychology. Early in the 20th century, A. A. Roback (1927) described the personality-related writings of antiquity. He described personality typologies worked out by ancient Hebrew writers and commentaries on personality made by Aristotle and other ancient Greeks. Roback singled out Theophrastus' *Characters* as a watershed event marking the beginning of the literary study of character (Roback, 1927, p. 8). Some contemporary histories have continued to emphasize the works of Aristotle, Theophrastus and other Greek philosophers (e.g., Dumont, 2010, p. 13). A few histories (e.g., Barenbaum & Winter, 2008) take their starting point as recently as 1900.

Teachings about personality, however, seemed pervasive by the time of the Great Transformation. Our research indicates that the *Dhammapada*, the *Pirke Avot*, the *Analects*, and other sources contained observations that people varied among themselves, that people adjusted their behavior according to the situations they encountered, and that those who studied others would be better able to interact with them. The *Dhammapada*, *Pirke Avot*, and the *Analects* also speak of judging oneself as well as others. Those who write about the origins of personality psychology in antiquity may want to consider including coverage of some of the texts discussed here.

## Present and Future Research

**Limitations.** The Great Transformation is just one period in history, and yet it marks a pivotal era psychologically. During this era, oral traditions gradually gave way to increased literacy and use of the written word (Ong, 1982). Writings from the period indicate a growing awareness of the self and of the personalities of those who made up the world (Dennett, 1986; Jaynes, 1976; Ong, 1982). As Jaspers put it:

What is new about this age, is that man becomes conscious of Being as a whole, of himself and his limitations. He experiences the terror of the world and his own powerlessness. He asks radical questions. Face to face with the void he strives for liberation and redemption. By consciously recognizing his limits he sets himself the highest goals (Jaspers, 1953, p. 2).

Before the Great Transformation, literatures that discussed human nature and human behavior in a reflective fashion were especially limited. For this reason no one knows with certainty how long these cultures' judgment traditions had existed before the Transformation.

If Haselton and Funder (2006) are correct, then the tendencies to judge, to be judged, and even to constrain such judgments with teachings may have evolved many thousands of years earlier. Our findings cannot speak to this although other research may. For example, primate researchers find that great apes today judge the intentions and behaviors of humans (and one another) and use such information to decide which humans they like best (e.g., Paukner, Suomi, Visalberghi & Ferrari, 2009; Wood, Glynn, Phillips & Hauser, 2007).

Although our findings are consistent with the idea that personality judgment has evolved, we cannot make conclusive claims

about prewritten history based on the evidence here. That acknowledged, an examination of the earliest-known spread of written wisdom teachings across four geographic regions is highly informative in itself. If our study had failed to show universality in judgment, it would have undermined claims that judging one another was universal across these places and traditions. The fact that both personality judgments and cultural teachings about them were present across such cultural traditions is consistent at a minimum with the importance of such judgments to human social life.

Many of the texts studied here had been translated from their original language into English, and therefore it is possible that the meanings of some passages have either been gradually altered or mistranslated in the process. However, the original forms of most of these texts are still available, and have been continuously examined by historians, translators, and other textual experts who share a strong interest in preserving the integrity of the original understanding of the manuscripts. In several cases, we checked across translations to ensure that what "looked like" a judgment in one still appeared to be a judgment in another and we found that this was indeed the case.

Another issue of concern might be the only partial evidence for personality judgments in Zoroastrian thought. Yet, even though portions of the Zoroastrians' *Avesta* have been lost to history, the partial representations of the original work available to us are consistent with our hypotheses that people recognized personality traits and ascribed importance to them. The importance and extensiveness of judgmental behavior and control across a time 2500 years ago is unmistakable.

**Further research.** As we conducted the research on the wisdom texts, we noticed that some of the traditions (those from the East, in particular) also dealt with how a person might cope with being the recipient of a judgment, or how a person might manage the impression(s) they make on others. An example of coping with judgments comes from Buddhism, where Buddha is quoted as saying, "I will endure abusive words like the elephant in battle endures the arrow shot from the bow; for many people are ill-behaved" (*Dhammapada*, trans. 1994, 23:1, p. 104). Another such example is Confucius' rhetorical question: "Not to be upset when one's merits are ignored: is this not the mark of a gentleman?" (*Confucius*, trans. 1997; 1.1).

An example of impression management comes from the *Bhagavad Gita* where advice offered to the warrior Arjuna raises not only profound moral concerns but also the issue of how others will view him:

"But if you persist in being a coward,  
Your dignity and your dharma are lost;  
And you expose yourself to shame.  
Your enemies will hurl insults at you.  
Arjuna, what could be more demeaning?"  
(*Bhagavad Gita*, Trans. 1965; Ch. 2, p. 8)

Further examination of these texts may provide us with insight into the ways that impression management and reactions to judgments were handled at the time. Other historical eras also might be examined for emerging themes and teachings about judgments; these would add further evidence for the universality of such concerns over time and place.

## Conclusion

People divide others into insiders versus outsiders, friends versus foes, and stereotype others, often automatically (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Brewer & Kramer, 1985). Among the most pervasive social judgments, the present research confirms, are judgments of personality (e.g., Dunbar, 2003; Gottman & Levenson, 1999; Haselton & Funder, 2006). Given the ubiquity of personality judgments both cross-temporally (compared to the present) and cross-culturally, the evidence here is supportive of those who have endorsed an evolutionary basis for this behavior. There is evidence that the peoples of the Great Transformation regarded judging personality not only as an issue they faced in their present, but also as an issue that had been faced by generations before their own. The Dhammapada notes regarding interpersonal criticisms:

It is an old saying, not a new one: "They disparage one who remains silent, they disparage one who talks a lot, and they even disparage one who speaks in moderation." There is no one in the world who is not disparaged. (Dhammapada, trans. 1994, 17:7, p. 77).

The Dhammapada provides some comfort in knowing that criticisms, including those aimed at oneself, cannot be avoided. Perhaps that is for a good reason: these judgments are likely to have been (and remain) necessary and adaptive to allow humans to develop as social beings, and to reach an understanding of themselves and others. Confucius' students attribute to him a (perhaps wry) remark that exemplifies this understanding. More than 2000 years ago, Confucius said: "I am fortunate indeed: whenever I make a mistake, there is always someone to notice it" (Confucius, trans. 1997, 7.31, p. 33). One of our points here is that judging others is potentially adaptive and functional when done accurately and with tact. That is likely one reason why such judgments—as well as social control over them—emerged in society after society.

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