Teleology & Personal Identity

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The Story of Phineas Gage

A typical, mild-mannered individual, Phineas Gage was a blasting foreman for a railroad construction company. Having set and ignited a blast, he was distracted by workers, as a layer of blasting powder ignited, rocketing a tamping iron clean through his skull. But he survived. A neuropsychological marvel turned moral miscreant.

The Question:

What accounts for the intuition that he is "no longer Gage"?

Competing Hypotheses

Moral Valence

(De Frietas, Tobia, Newman, & Knobe; Strohminger & Nichols; Tobia)

Teleology (Taylor, Kalbach, & Rose)

While De Frietas et al. showed that Moral Valence plays a role in persistance judgments about both persons and material objects, recent work has suggested that it is actually Teleology that drives judgments of material object persistance (Rose & Nichols). As such, there is good reason to suspect that Teleology and not Moral Valence could be driving personal identity judgments as well. Indeed, this is our contention

Does the loss of purpose better explain the intuition that he is 'no longer Gage'?



Phineas Gage

Pre-Accident Gage

Special Skill: Blasting Moral Character: Good

Injured in Accident

Telos Lost:

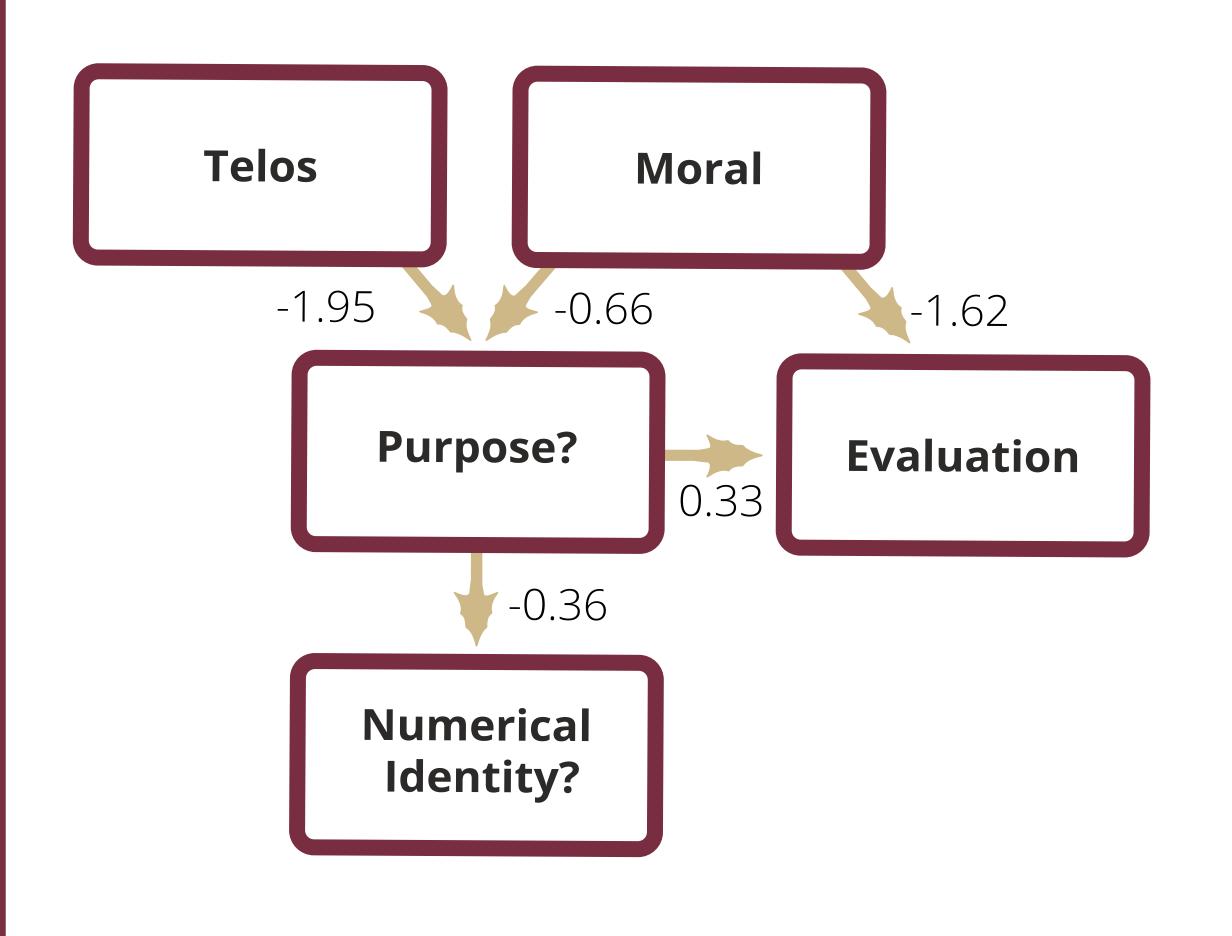
2 Conditions

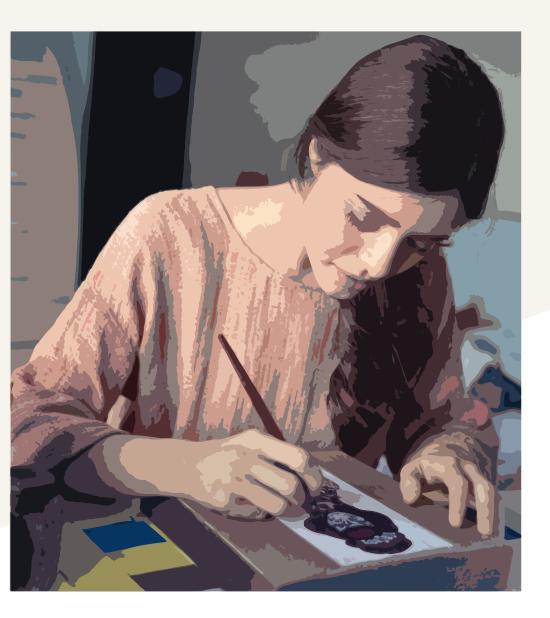
Moral Character: Preserved/Lost

Telos Preserved:

2 Conditions

Moral Character: Preserved/Lost





Sally the Artist

Pre-Accident Sally

Special Skill: Painting Moral Character: Good

Injured in Accident

Telos Lost

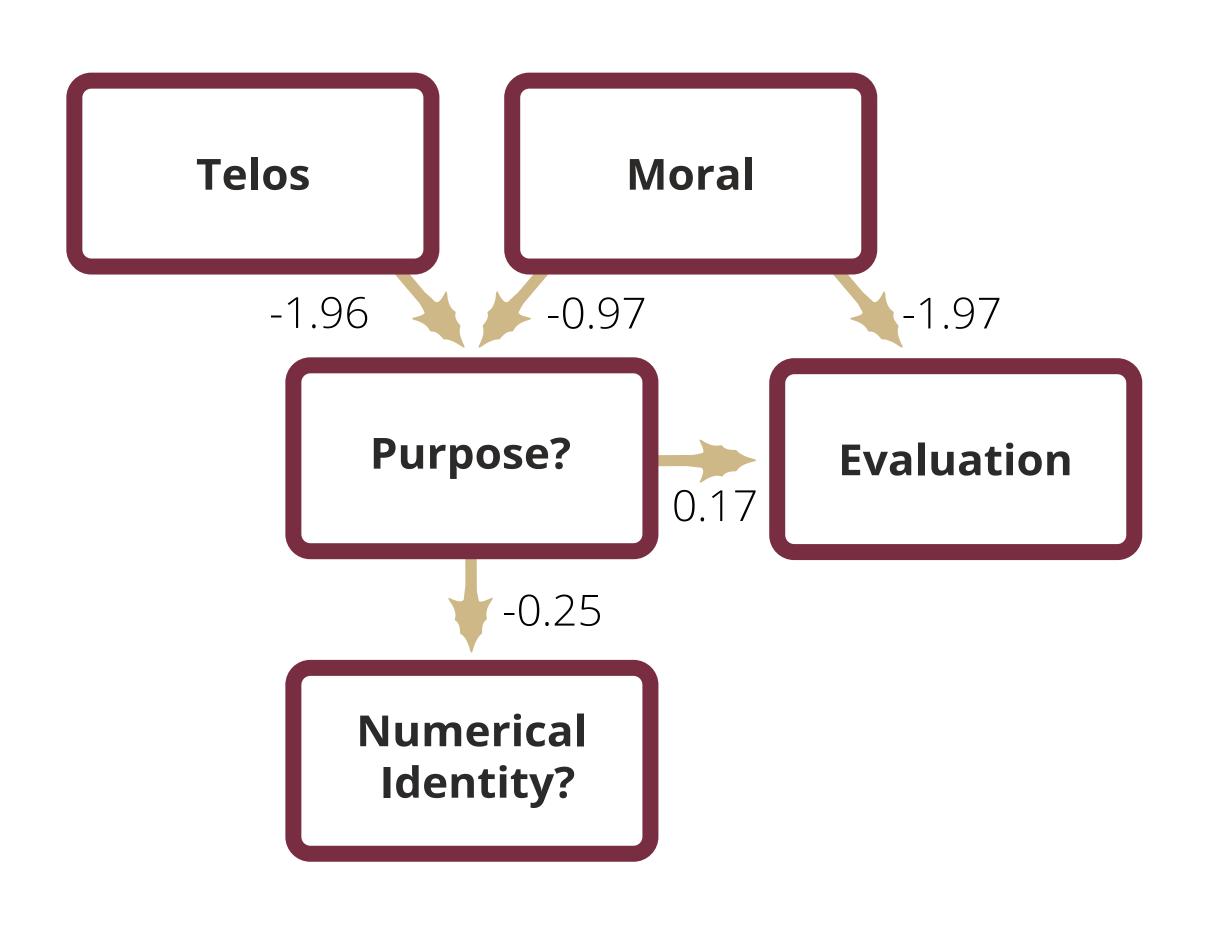
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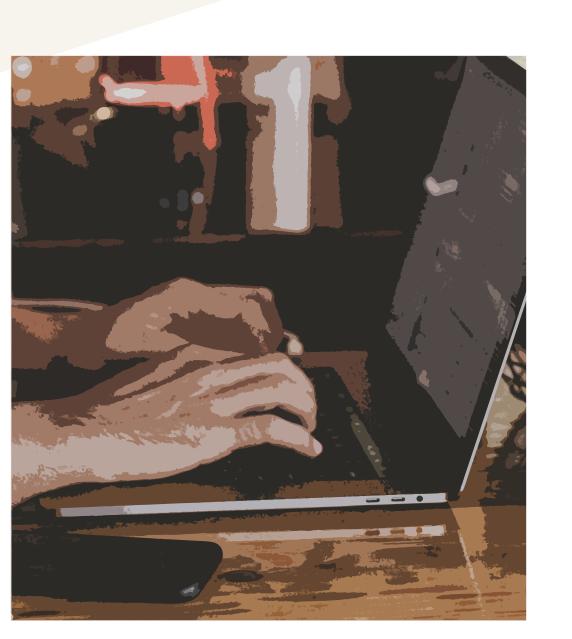
Moral Character: Preserved/Lost

Telos Preserved

2 Conditions

Moral Character: Preserved/Lost





Stanley the Hacker

Pre-Accident Stanley

Special Skill: Hacking Moral Character: Bad

Injured in Accident

Telos Lost

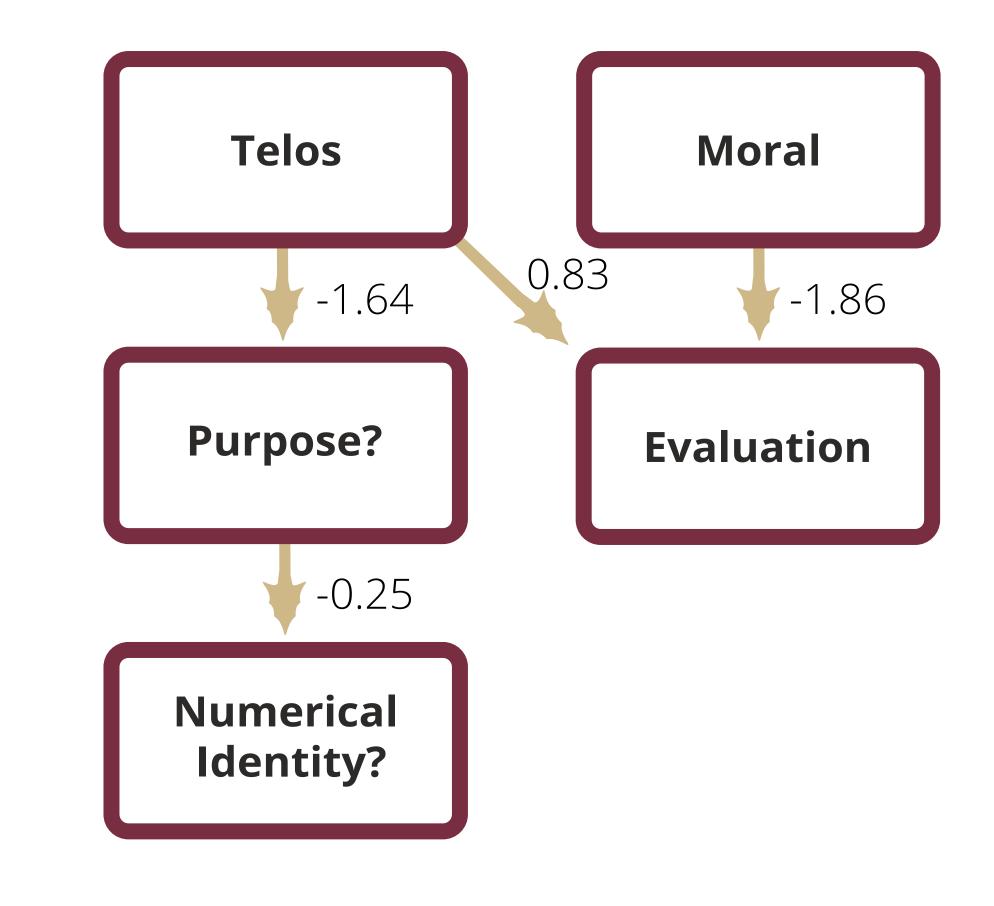
2 Conditions

Moral Character: Preserved/Lost

Telos Preserved

2 Conditions

Moral Character: Preserved/Lost



Implications:

- (1) We have added Teleology to the discussion pf personal identity.
- (2) Across three studies, we found that teleological and not moral considerations play a direct role in generating judgments of personal identity.
- (3) Teleology, then, should serve as a constraint of discussions of personal identity.

