

## **Special Topic: Mapping the Moral Domain**

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### **Bounding the Controversies: Foundational Issues in the Study of Moral Development<sup>1</sup>**

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**Abstract.** By drawing on four foundational issues in the study of moral development – moral definition, ontogeny, variation, and epistemology – this article offers a means for bounding moral development controversies, in the sense of defining their parameters and clarifying the conflicts. Numerous controversies are examined, to provide a sense of the robustness of the analyses. These controversies include debates between character-education and social-cognitive theorists concerning moral education, claims of gender differences and charges of sex bias in moral development research, differing interpretations of cross-cultural data, tensions embedded in anthropological theories of cultural relativism, and attempts to move from empirical findings to statements of value. In addition, attention is paid to how the four foundational issues can and often should be brought together in moral theory and research.

Presumably uncontroversial is the proposition that the moral development literature abounds in controversy. From some anthropological accounts, for instance, we learn that devout Hindus believe that it is immoral for a widow to eat fish, or for a men-

struating women to sleep in the same bed with her husband [Shweder et al., 1987]. Other accounts document that members of the Yanomamo tribe of Brazil at times practice infanticide, and that the women are 'occasionally beaten, shot with barbed arrows, chopped with machetes or axes, and burned with firebrands' [Hatch, 1983, p. 91]. Some theorists use such illustrative accounts of moral diversity to argue against the proposition, supported by others, that on important dimensions the moral life is similar across cultures. Some theorists also use such accounts to argue against the proposition,

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again supported by others, that one culture can morally judge another culture.

Many such controversies in the literature (spanning the fields of psychology, anthropology, sociology, philosophy, and education) reflect persistent and pervasive differences in theoretical perspective. These differences can neither be easily dismissed nor reconciled. However, some of these controversies become more complicated, if not muddled, than they need be because they confuse what I will refer to as foundational issues in the study of moral development. In the first section of this article, I briefly characterize four such issues. The first entails the definition of morality, the second moral ontogeny, the third individual and cultural moral variation, and the fourth moral epistemology. In the second section, I suggest that while the content of moral development controversies can vary widely, their sources are often bounded by one or more of these issues, and that moral theorists and researchers have sometimes confused or confounded evidence that pertains to two or more of these issues. In addition, I pay attention to how these issues can and often should be brought together in moral theory and research.

#### Four Foundational Issues

##### *Moral Definition*

One fundamental issue in the study of moral development is how to define the term 'moral'. In philosophy, three broad approaches traditionally have been taken: consequentialist, deontological, and virtue-based. Briefly stated, consequentialist theories maintain that a moral agent must always act so as to produce the best available outcomes overall [Scheffler, 1982]. Utilitarianism, dating from John Stuart Mills and more

recently defended by Smart and Williams [1973], is the most common form of consequentialism. In its simplest form, utilitarianism proposes that a moral agent should act so as to bring about the greatest amount of utility (for example, happiness) for the greatest number of people. In contrast, deontological theories maintain that there are some actions that a moral agent is forbidden to do, or, in turn, must do, regardless of general consequences or utility. Moral theories ranging from Kant's [1785/1984] work in ethics to current work by Rawls [1971], Gewirth [1978], and Dworkin [1978] are largely of this type. For example, Kant's maxim that a moral agent should never treat another human being merely as a means but always as an end develops the idea of a rationally derived respect for person. Both consequentialist and deontological theories are centrally concerned with answering the fundamental question, 'What ought I to do?' In contrast, virtue-based theories are centrally concerned with answering the fundamental question, 'What sort of person ought I to be?', where the focus is on long-term character traits and personality [Louden, 1984]. This tradition dates back to Aristotle's delineation in *Nichomachean Ethics* of the ethical virtues (for example, courage, temperance, wisdom, and justice), and is developed in current work by, for instance, MacIntyre [1984] and Foot [1978].

##### *Moral Ontogeny*

A second issue in the study of moral development is how to explain moral ontogeny, or the developmental process. Drawing on characterizations by Turiel [1983], Piaget [1966], and Langer [1969], four general types of explanations can be provided for moral development. The first is an en-

dogénous explanation – that moral development occurs largely through internal mechanisms. Included are innatist and maturational theories [Rousseau, 1762/1979; Neill, 1960/1977], and sociobiological theories [Dawkins, 1976; Trivers, 1971; Wilson, 1975]. The second is an exogenous explanation – that moral development occurs largely through external mechanisms. Included here are behaviorist theories that focus on stimulus-response mechanisms and operant conditioning [Watson, 1924/1970; Skinner, 1974] and social-learning theories that focus on modeling and imitation [Bandura, 1977; Rushton, 1982]. The third type of explanation is interactionist, involving both endogenous and exogenous forces. For example Freud [1923/1960] proposed that the conditions for moral development arise when the child's instinctual desires come into conflict with environmental constraints. Finally, the fourth type of explanation reflects a structural interaction theory. As proposed by Piaget [1932/1969, 1983] and elaborated by Kohlberg [1971], Turiel [1983], Langer [1969], and others, moral development is theorized to occur through the equilibration of mental structures, driven by the interaction of individual and environment. For each of these types of explanations for moral development, differing views can be taken with respect to the extent, rate, sequence, and invariance of development. Extent refers to how far development proceeds, rate refers to how fast development proceeds, sequence refers to the order of the developmental progression, and invariance refers to whether that order is necessarily sequential.

#### *Moral Variation*

A third issue in the study of moral development is how to interpret moral variation

i.e., empirically-assessed differences in moral practices and beliefs across individuals, groups, or cultures. Documenting moral variation is part of the stock and trade of anthropologists. A few examples were noted at the outset of this article, involving Hindu beliefs and Yanomamo practices that differ from Western ones. Research of this sort directly addresses the question of how the moral life is similar or different across cultures or among individuals within a culture.

#### *Moral Epistemology*

A fourth issue in the study of moral development is how to conceptualize moral epistemology, i.e., the limits and validity of moral knowledge. Often at stake is whether it is possible for a moral statement to be objectively true or false, or for a moral value to be objectively right or wrong, or good or bad. A wide variety of positions have been taken. For instance, some believe that moral knowledge corresponds with or approaches a correspondence with a moral reality that exists independent of human means of knowing [R.N. Boyd, 1988; Sturgeon, 1988]. Others believe that moral knowledge can be objectively grounded by constructing rational principles that strive for coherence and consistency while building on the common ground and specific circumstances of a society [Dworkin, 1978]. Still others believe that the only thing that can be said of moral knowledge is that it can be true subjectively for an individual or culture depending on that individual's or group's desires, preferences, and goals [Rorty, 1982; Dewey, 1929/1960; Ayer, 1952; Mackie, 1977]. Finally, some believe that any moral knowledge is unattainable, even in a weak sense. This is the full skeptic's position (see Nagel, 1986, for a characterization).

## Bounding the Controversies

These four foundational issues – moral definition, ontogeny, variation, and epistemology – can be combined in six distinct paired combinations. Controversies concerning moral development often involve four of these combinations. In this section, I show how this is the case by examining a variety of controversies and highlighting how the controversies can be clarified and at times resolved by distinguishing between foundational issues.

### *Controversies Involving Moral Definition and Moral Ontogeny*

In the opening to Plato's [1956] *Meno*, Menon asks Socrates:

Can you tell me, Socrates – can virtue be taught? Or if not, does it come by practice? Or does it come neither by practice nor by teaching, but do people get it by nature, or in some other way? [p. 28].

In effect, Menon offers Socrates a choice of developmental mechanisms. Menon asks if virtue develops by exogenous forces (by practice or teaching), by endogenous forces (by nature), or in some other way. In response, Socrates says that he is in no position to answer, as he does not know what virtue is. Thus Socrates, as he is wont to do, embarks on a dialogue that is centrally concerned with the essence of a thing. In other words, Socrates analytically distinguishes the ontogenetic question from the definitional one and argues that the latter needs as much attention as possible before addressing the former.

This distinction, let alone ranking of priorities, is not always made in the current literature. For instance, the recent US Secretary of Education, Bennett [Bennett and Delatree, 1978], has argued vigorously against the cog-

nitive-developmental approach to moral education, as embodied in the work of Kohlberg [1971]. Though it is not made explicit in his writing, Bennett's position differs from Kohlberg's in two distinct ways. First, Bennett and Delatree [1978] provide a different definition of morality than does Kohlberg:

In fact, it must be doubted whether what Kohlberg describes is really morality at all. Morality takes place among human beings and not among disembodied bearers of 'rights', who are incessantly engaged in squabbling about them. Morality is concerned with doing good, with sacrifice, altruism, love, courage, honor, and compassion, and with fidelity and large-mindedness regarding one's station, commitments, family, friends, colleagues, and society in general [p. 97].

Without worrying about Bennett and Delatree's misunderstanding of what Kohlberg means by rights [D. Boyd, 1979, 1986, 1989], it is clear that while Kohlberg provides largely a deontological definition of morality that emphasizes rights and justice, Bennett and Delatree provide largely a virtue-based definition, including such virtues as sacrifice, altruism, love, courage, honor, compassion, and fidelity. Granted, to this list Bennett and Delatree might add the virtue of justice. But from their perspective, the justice construct is conceived largely in terms of habits and dispositions, rather than rational judgments and decision-making processes. It is partly for this reason that Bennett and Delatree disagree with Kohlberg's educational efforts in creating a just community.

Second, Bennett and Delatree build on a different explanation of developmental process than does Kohlberg, one that is largely exogenous. Moral development occurs through the transmission of those who know (adults) to those who do not (children). Bennett and Delatree [1978], for instance, end their essay as follows:

Finally, according to ... Kohlberg, there is no place for stories and lessons, no place for the passing on of knowledge and experience. Children are invited to a world where it is a travesty and an imposition for anyone to tell them the truth [p. 98].

This exogenous view emphasizes the transmission ('passing on') of moral knowledge and is compatible with character-education views. For example, Wynne [1986, p. 4] argues that the 'transmission of moral values has been [and should be] the dominant educational concern of most cultures'. According to this view, transmission occurs best through good role models [Wynne, 1989a], and by demanding from children obedience to authority, while moral reasons and justifications 'merely serve as a form of intellectual courtesy' [Wynne, 1989b, p. 2]. In contrast, Kohlberg's structural-interaction view has led him and others to propose pedagogy that involves students in critical thinking about and active participation in moral issues and problems.

This is not the place to discuss the strengths or limitations of the views proposed by these theorists. However, in such discussions clarity can be achieved by independently addressing issues and assessing arguments that pertain to the two foundational issues, moral definition and moral ontogeny. Indeed, this is the tact partly taken in a recent response to Wynne [Kahn, 1990] in which I argue that one can accept the importance of role models in shaping a child's life without accepting an exogenous developmental theory.

A distinction between these two foundational issues can also help to clarify a complexity that has been part of extensive debate regarding gender and moral development initiated by Gilligan [1982]. Here I wish simply to point out that Gilligan has inter-

twined two fundamentally distinct claims. The first claim is that Kohlberg has too narrowly defined the moral domain in terms largely of deontology, excluding an alternative definition based on an ethic of care. Based on this dispute over moral definitions, Gilligan's second claim is that males and females undergo different developmental progressions. These two issues of definition and ontogeny are independent since one does not imply or contradict the other. One could accept a different moral definition than Kohlberg's (or Gilligan's), and find or not find developmental differences between males and females. Likewise, one could accept Kohlberg's (or Gilligan's) definition and find or not find developmental differences.

If we accept that the same individual can draw on different moral perspectives and that such perspectives may develop by different means, a research approach is needed that takes seriously the relations between definitional and ontogenetic issues. One such approach has been proposed by Shweder [1990; Shweder et al., 1987], who distinguishes three different codes of moral discourse. Roughly characterized, code 1 focuses on justice, code 2 on duty, and code 3 on virtue. A strength of this approach is that by distinguishing different moral definitions, it allows for analyses of different moral development processes. While these processes, in turn, have not yet been adequately characterized by Shweder [see the critique by Turiel et al., 1987, pp. 220-233], they do reflect important considerations, for example in the ways that constructed knowledge may depend on socially transmitted beliefs, customs, and taboos.

I have taken another approach to this problem in a recent study of children's obligatory and discretionary moral judgments

[Kahn, in press]. Obligatory judgments were defined as generalizable requirements not contingent on societal rules or laws and largely justified on the basis of justice and welfare. In turn, discretionary moral judgments referred to those for which moral action, while not required of an agent, is nevertheless conceived of as morally worthy based on concerns of welfare and virtue (for example, benevolence, sacrifice, and supererogation). The point here is that by drawing a distinction based on two different moral definitions, deontological and virtue, it was possible to analyze developmentally the intrapersonal coexistence and relations between different moral orientations. This same approach is being used in a current study [Kahn, in preparation] on children's moral reasoning about environmental issues. It is hypothesized that judgments about why one should protect the natural environment (for example, why one should protect Prince William Sound from oil spills) can tap both obligatory moral judgments (that an oil spill harms individuals who are dependent on the local fishing economy) and discretionary moral judgments (that the consequences reflect a wrong, inharmonious relation between individuals and the land).

### *Controversies Involving Moral Definition and Moral Variation*

Anthropological accounts of the practices and beliefs of various cultures provide important data that directly bear on the question of whether the moral life is similar or different across cultures. At first blush, it may seem self-evident that cultures differ morally. For instance, among the practices van der Post [1958/1986] documents of the Bushmen of the Kalahari Desert is that they abandon their elderly, either to be attacked

by animals or to sure starvation. Such a practice differs sharply from the treatment accorded the elderly in Western cultures. Likewise, in the case of the examples described earlier, Westerners, unlike devout Hindus, do not generally believe that it is immoral for a widow to eat fish, or for a menstruating woman to sleep in the same bed with her husband. Nor do Western men engage in the practice of shooting women with barbed arrows, chopping them with machetes or axes, or burning them with firebrands, practices documented among the Yanomamo tribes.

Yet what is crucial in analyzing such anthropological data is to pay close attention to varying moral definitions. A simple analogy may prove helpful. Modifying an example used by S. Langer [1937/1953], consider four men's suits. One is made of cotton, the second wool, the third polyester, and the fourth silk. Each is also cut to a different size. Now we ask, are these four objects the same? If by object we mean the material, then the answer is no. If by object we mean their size, then the answer is no. But if by object we mean their function as a suit, then the answer is yes. Thus the answer to whether there is variation or similarity between objects depends on how we define what we mean by an object.

So, too, with morality. Depending on how morality is defined, and anthropological data are collected, one is led to varying conclusions about moral diversity. For instance, the example of the Bushmen practice of leaving their elderly to die appears fundamentally different from Western practices. But as van der Post [1958/1986] further describes the Bushmen's intentions, motivations, social context, and environmental constraints, their practice seems less foreign. The Bushmen are a nomadic people that depend on physical

the time one has identified a common moral feature that cuts across cultures, one has so disembodied the idea into an abstract form that it loses virtually all meaning and utility. For instance, consider once again the example of devout Hindus who believe that by eating fish a widow hurts her dead husband's spirit. Is the interesting moral phenomenon that Hindus, like ourselves, are concerned with not causing others harm? Or, as Shweder might argue, is the interesting moral phenomenon that Hindus believe in spirits that can be harmed by earthly activity?

I believe that both questions have merit, and that a middle ground offers a more sensible and powerful approach, one that allows for an analysis of universal moral constructs (such as justice, rights, welfare, and virtue) as well as allowing for the ways in which these constructs are expressed in a particular culture at a particular point in time. Granted, a particular construct may reflect a high level of abstraction and yet not be universal. For example, the virtue of chastity presumably does not apply to all cultures. Yet it is precisely in the examination of such phenomena that this approach is productive. [For a further discussion of these issues, see Dunker, 1939; Asch, 1952; Hatch, 1983; and Spiro, 1986; for additional studies based on this approach, see Friedman, 1989; Helwig, 1989; and Turiel et al., 1990.]

Consider as an illustration a study by Hollos et al. [1986] examining social reasoning of Ijo children and adolescents in Nigerian communities. The study reports on various Ijo beliefs that differ from Western ones, such as the belief that the spirit of ancestors can be harmed by adultery, or by a menstruating woman touching the food she serves to her husband – not unlike the beliefs of the devout Hindu reported by Shweder et

al. Such beliefs, in addition to those proscribing such acts as murder and stealing, are termed in the Ijo language 'ologho' and either have supernatural sanctions or are considered to be of universal applicability. In contrast, the term 'miyen miyen ya' refers to 'customary behaviors that are considered normal by members of the community, such as not eating with the left hand or greeting older people first' [p. 357]. Interviews with Ijo children and adolescents established that they, like children and adolescents in Western countries [Davidson et al., 1983; Nucci and Nucci, 1982a, b; Smetana, 1981, 1989], distinguish between moral and conventional concepts, where the former refer to prescriptions of a noncontingent nature pertaining to obligations in social relations and the latter to regulations contingent on the constituted system of social arrangements.

This research approach – one that is sensitive to both universal and cultural influences – is applicable not only to cross-cultural work, but to research within our own culture as well. For example, in a study by Friedman [1988], adolescents' conceptions of property rights pertaining to electronic information were found to entail universal abstract components alongside of specific variation in the application of those rights. The variation was, in part, found to depend on assumptions about the social context. For example, some students said that copying computer software to give away did not violate the author's property rights because they assumed that by publishing the program the author implicitly gave consent to have the program copied. Other students said that such copying violated the author's property rights because they assumed explicit consent from the author was required. Friedman proposed that such varied assumptions were related in

movement for their survival. Elderly people are left behind only when they can no longer keep up the nomadic pace and thereby jeopardize the survival of the entire tribe. When the tribe is thus forced to leave an elderly person behind, they conduct parting ceremonies and ritual dances that convey honor and respect. The tribe also builds the elderly a temporary shelter and provides a few token days of food. All these additional practices convey an attitude of care and concern for the elderly, and felt loss at their impending death – a death that is unavoidable should the tribe as a whole be able to survive.

Such an analysis does not negate differences between Bushmen and Western cultures. On a behavioral level, both cultures do engage in different practices regarding the care of their elderly. But the analysis also points to similarities. Both societies show care and concern for their elderly. Both societies also balance that care with the well-being of society as a whole. (Note, for instance, that as some of our medical practices become more extensive and extraordinarily expensive, we face the problem of how to weigh the benefits to elderly patients with the corresponding costs to society.) Thus, if morality is defined and analyzed in terms of a deontic idea of respect for persons, or a consequentialist idea of promoting the good for the greatest number, then in some respects Bushmen morality may well resemble the morality reflected in Western culture.

It is this type of analysis that Turiel et al. [1987] provide of the anthropological data of Hindu culture collected by Shweder et al. [1987]. For instance, Shweder et al. found that devout Hindus believed that harmful consequences would follow from a widow who ate fish. (The act would offend her husband's spirit and cause the widow to suffer

greatly.) Similarly, harmful consequences were believed to follow from a menstruating woman who slept in the same bed with her husband. (The menstrual blood is believed poisonous and capable of hurting the husband.) While such beliefs themselves differ from those in Western culture, the underlying concern for the welfare of others is similar.

If it is accepted that an analysis of moral variation depends on but is analytically separate from moral definition, the following generalization can be proposed. Definitions of morality that entail abstract characterizations of justice and welfare tend to highlight moral universals, while definitions that entail specific behaviors or rigid moral rules tend to highlight moral cross-cultural variation. Typically, theorists who strive to uncover moral universals believe they are wrestling with the essence of morality, with its deepest and most meaningful attributes. Thus, for instance, in the *Meno*, when Menon defines virtue in terms of many different virtues depending on a person's activities, occupation, and age, Socrates asks:

If I asked you what a bee really is, and you answered that there are many different kinds of bees, what would you answer me if I asked you then: 'Do you say there are many different kinds of bees, differing from each other in being bees more or less? Or do they differ in some other respect, for example in size, or beauty, and so forth?' Tell me, how would you answer that question? [p. 30].

Menon replies: 'I should say that they are not different at all one from another in bee-hood' [p. 30]. This is exactly what Socrates wants to say about virtue, and what we could say about the essence of 'suits' in the case of the earlier analogy.

In contrast, theorists – and I take Shweder to be of this position – who strive to characterize moral variation argue that by



part to cultural conventions that were not well established for new technologically related property such as computer software.

*Controversies Involving Moral Variation and Moral Epistemology*

In various critiques, Kohlberg's theory has been charged with sex bias. For instance, Baumrind [1986] has argued that had Kohlberg's research shown that higher stages of moral reasoning are equally distributed among sexes then 'there could be no charge of sexual ... bias against the Kohlberg system' [p. 520]. However, on Baumrind's interpretation the findings do show that men score higher than women on Kohlberg's moral reasoning dilemmas, and thus she concludes sex bias exists in the theory.

An empirical finding for or against sex differences cannot, however, by itself, establish sex bias. This fact can be illustrated by considering six examples. In the first example, identical to one used by Walker [1984], it is assumed that sex differences are empirically shown to exist for body height (generally men are taller than women). In the second, albeit trivial, example, it is assumed that no sex differences are empirically shown to exist for number of eyes (virtually all men and women have two eyes). In both cases we can say that no sex bias exists in our system of measurement and counting. But this is not a conclusion that can be empirically derived from negative findings regarding sex differences; in the first example sex differences are present, not absent. This same reasoning applies to Kohlberg's work. If Kohlberg's research showed no sex differences, it could follow that the theory was either sex-biased, should it be that men (or women) were more morally developed, or not sex-biased, should it be that men and women were morally

equal. Similarly, if Kohlberg's research showed sex differences, it could follow that the theory was either sex-biased, should it be that men and women were morally equal, or not sex-biased, should it be that men (or women) were more morally developed. Thus the fallacy should be clear. Baumrind assumes there are no sex differences, and charges bias if research finds them, and yet, by her approach, prejudges an answer to precisely the research question. In other words, empirical findings that pertain to moral variation are directly used to judge the validity of Kohlberg's theory (with respect to sex bias), when instead judgments of validity should be established by drawing on epistemological criteria, such as predicability, disconfirmation, and coherence, in consort with evidence.

A more distinct and pervasive confusion between moral variation and epistemology occurs in the often heated and confusing controversy regarding cultural relativism. This confusion can be highlighted by considering Herskovits' theory. According to Herskovits [1972]:

... cultural relativism is a philosophy that recognizes the values set up by every society to guide its own life and that understands their worth to those who live by them, though they may differ from one's own. Instead of underscoring differences from absolute norms that, however objectively arrived at, are nonetheless the product of a given time or place, the relativistic point of view brings into relief the validity of every set of norms for the people who have them, and the values these represent [p. 31].

In addition, Herskovits writes:

The very core of cultural relativism is the social discipline that comes of respect for differences – of mutual respect. Emphasis on the worth of many ways of life, not one, is an affirmation of the values in each culture [p. 33].

Thus Herskovits puts forth the philosophical position that cross-cultural practices and beliefs differing from one's own deserve respect and validation. Most notable, for purposes here, is the explicit justification that Herskovits provides for this view:

For it is difficult to conceive of a systematic theory of cultural relativism – as against a generalized idea of live-and-let-live – without the pre-existence of the massive ethnographic documentation gathered by anthropologists concerning the similarities and differences between cultures the world over. *Out of these data came the philosophical position*, and with the philosophical position came speculation as to its implications for conduct [p. 33, emphasis added].

Note that it is the established empirical claim of cultural variation that leads Herskovits to the epistemic claim that every culture's practices and beliefs are equally valid.

At this time, at least two broad interpretations of Herskovits' theory have been advanced. The more traditional interpretation [Williams, 1972; Spiro, 1986; Turiel, 1989] is that Herskovits asserts contradictory propositions. By asserting that the values and beliefs of different cultures are equally valid and cannot be judged from the perspective of any single culture, Herskovits commits himself to what he says cannot be done, namely establishing a judgment that transcends purported cultural biases. Said differently, the proposition that morality is subjective because different people hold different moral beliefs inappropriately draws on a statement of moral variation to support an epistemic claim.

Another interpretation of Herskovits' cultural relativism has recently been advanced by Fernandez [1990], although a good part of his interpretation appears inadvertently con-

sonant with the more traditional one. According to Fernandez, Herskovits distinguished between cultural relativism and ethical relativism. Cultural relativism refers to 'the way things are – facts learned by many years of ethnographic fieldwork in a great diversity of cultures' [p. 144]. Ethical relativism refers to how things ought to be. According to Fernandez, Herskovits did not confuse the two: 'In short, it is a "logical distortion" of the anthropological position to reword into an implicit moral premise explicit propositions based on extensive ethnographic knowledge of how cultures work' [p. 144]. If Fernandez stopped here, the interpretation would be clear: Herskovits was only concerned with documenting moral variation, and his theory said nothing about how to judge that variation, let alone about the epistemic standing of such a judgment. Yet such a position is quite unsettling to many (is their no objective basis by which to judge Nazi Germany?), and was apparently unsettling to Herskovits. Thus, according to Fernandez, Herskovits' theory of cultural relativism was not, after all, a theory of ethical indifference, but a 'tough-minded' theory [p. 148] that did not condone 'man's inhumanity to man' [p. 148]. At this point, of course, a problem arises in that this added proposition leads directly to the very contradiction noted by Herskovits' critics. After all, who decides and on what basis, what counts as inhumanity in a different culture?

At the conclusion of his essay, Fernandez offers a response to this problem. He suggests that what has to date been characterized by critics such as Williams [1972] as a naive contradiction should be reconceived as, and thus transformed into, a meaningful paradox:

[I]n a discipline such as ours in which complex, overdetermined creatures propose to study other complex and overdetermined creatures by means of an apparently absurd and surely paradoxical method, participant-observation, perhaps the best we can do, in the case of such overarching, virtually existential issues as this one of how to treat 'otherness,' is transform dilemmas into paradoxes. And perhaps in that transformation – the coming to a thoroughgoing apprehension of the paradoxical in human affairs to which it leads – lies the only true and lasting relief from intolerance and the best remedy we can devise for dealing with 'man's inhumanity to man' [1990, p. 160].

As far as I can understand, this provocative passage means that the paradox that arises (given that a theory of cultural relativism is itself a non-relativistic theory) reflects the human condition, and is part of that with which people must struggle for there to exist human consideration of divergent cultures.

Naive contradiction or meaningful paradox? The point here is not to argue for or against a theory of cultural relativism, but to recognize that any stance partly hinges on how one understands the relation between the foundational issues of moral variation and epistemology. Directly drawing on variation to establish a subjective epistemic claim creates clear problems. Thus the challenge for those who seek to generate a convincing theory of cultural relativism is to provide a rich and compelling account that can ease the tension that occurs when fusing both foundational issues.

#### *Controversies Involving Moral Ontogeny and Moral Epistemology*

In the *Emile*, Rousseau [1762/1979] presents paradigmatic examples of an epistemological fallacy. Consider the following propositions:

Do you wish always to be well guided? Then always follow nature's indications [p. 363].

Everything that hinders and constrains nature is in bad taste [p. 367].

I am persuaded that all the natural inclinations are good and right in themselves [p. 370].

What is, is good ... [p. 371].

The fallacy inherent in these propositions, whose explication is sometimes credited to Hume [1751/1983] though more often to Moore [1903/1978], is that facts do not logically imply value. Counterexamples make this clear. A baby can be born with an infection, a fact that describes the baby's condition; but that fact does not logically imply that the infection is good, or that a doctor's efforts to hinder the infection is, in Rousseau's terms, in 'bad taste'. Similarly, a person can naturally acquire AIDS, but it does not logically follow that the disease is good. The fallacy is part of an epistemological enterprise because it draws on empirical evidence in an attempt to establish the validity of moral knowledge of the good and the right.

Now and again, this fallacy pervades current arguments. For example, Sperry [1988] claims that inherent in the human cognitive structure is an elaborate system of innate value preferences, and that these preferences are directly embodied in future preferences and provide the basis for knowing the rightness of particular moral decisions. Thus Sperry claims that current concepts of cognitive processing make it possible not only to explain mentalistic phenomena (such as moral and religious beliefs), 'but to go from fact to value and from perception of what "is" to what "should" be' [p. 610]. However, as noted by Pirolli and Goel [1990], Sperry's claim still falls prey to the naturalistic fallacy. For example, it is often believed that our

inherent nature includes not only, as Hume proposed, a general sympathy for all human kind, but some level of aggression as well, as reflected in Freud's [1930/1961] theory of an original and self-subsisting aggressive instinct. Assuming that all natural preferences are not moral, it then becomes even clearer that morally right preferences cannot logically be derived from the natural.

At times, Kohlberg comes close to committing the naturalistic fallacy as defined here. In one essay, Kohlberg and Mayer [1972] say that the moral principles underlying stage 6 of his theory

represent developmentally advanced or mature stages of reasoning, judgment, and action. Because there are culturally universal stages or sequences of moral development (Kohlberg and Turiel, 1971), stimulation of the child's development to the next stage in a natural direction is equivalent to a long-range goal of teaching ethical principles [p. 475].

To the extent Kohlberg and Mayer mean to say that because there are universal stages of moral development it therefore follows that the latter stages are more moral than the earlier stages (thus providing long-range pedagogical goals), they commit the fallacy. After all, it could be claimed that as people get older they, by and large, get more politically conservative; but it does not follow from this proposed developmental progression that political conservatism is a more adequate political theory than political liberalism. Hence, the claim for the more advanced status of the 'higher' stages is not supported by establishing a developmental progression.

Rather, such a claim is supported by other philosophical considerations. For instance, Kohlberg follows a view proposed long ago by Baldwin [1899/1973] that a more

adequate moral theory will take into account a larger group of people. Based on this philosophical criterion, Kohlberg's stages do increase in moral adequacy. In stage 1 there is moral consideration only for the self (punishment avoidance). In stage 2, there is consideration for another person, but only instrumentally (instrumental hedonism). In stage 3, there is consideration for family members and other personal relations (good boy or good girl orientation). In stage 4, there is consideration for society at large (law and order orientation). And, finally, by stages 5 and 6, there is consideration for humanity from a universal perspective. This stage progression also highlights another criterion, that of hierarchical integration. Kohlberg proposes that the higher stages subsume the earlier stages. For instance, the legal codification emphasis of stage 4 includes considerations for self, other, and family, but it attempts to correct for the unfairness that can arise from basing moral judgments largely on interpersonal considerations (e.g., the unfairness of a judge who gives his family member or friend preferential treatment). It is in this sense – in which the central organizing principle of an earlier stage becomes an element in a more inclusive organizational framework – that stages represent transformations of moral knowledge, rather than simple replacements of one moral view with another.

While these philosophical criteria are arguably plausible criteria in helping to evaluate the relative adequacy of various moral theories, their plausibility does not follow logically from the claim that they are observed ontogenetically. In fact, Kohlberg himself elsewhere says as much. In his 1971 article provocatively titled, 'From is to ought: How to commit the naturalistic fal-

lacy and get away with it in the study of moral development', Kohlberg says that there are forms of the naturalistic fallacy that he does not commit. One of these is 'assuming that morality or moral maturity is part of man's biological nature', and another is that the 'biologically older is necessarily the better' [p. 222]. The first is the fallacy that Sperry commits. The second is the fallacy I characterized earlier using the analogy of the progression from political liberalism to conservatism. Instead, Kohlberg says that the 'form of the "naturalistic fallacy" which we are committing is that of asserting that any conception of what moral judgment ought to be must rest on an adequate conception of what it is' [p. 222].

At this point Kohlberg moves beyond what most theorists take to be the naturalistic fallacy, and what I have in mind when arguing for the distinction between moral ontogeny and moral epistemology. Instead, Kohlberg draws on Piaget's [1971a, b, c] theory of genetic epistemology. In this theory, Piaget argues against the view that philosophy can stand apart from psychology in identifying valid knowledge, for such knowledge is tied to its psychological genesis and requires scientific methods of verification. Thus for Piaget [1971b] the 'first rule of genetic epistemology is therefore one of collaboration [between philosophy and science]' [p. 8]. Now, as Piaget develops this theory, I think he runs into problems. For though he seeks collaboration, Piaget [1971a] in fact sets psychology above philosophy. While both are modes of knowledge, the former 'is higher than the other, because it attains the essential, while the other is "lower", as it is either merely verbal or incomplete knowledge ...' [p. 79]. But I do not take Kohlberg to go this far. Rather Kohl-

berg seems to place psychology and philosophy on an equal footing. To the extent that Kohlberg is successful in bridging the two disciplines, so does he successfully bridge moral ontogeny and epistemology.

## Conclusion

By drawing on four foundational issues – moral definition, ontogeny, variation, and epistemology – I have portrayed a means for bounding moral development controversies, in the sense of defining their parameters and clarifying conflicts. Numerous controversies have been examined to provide a sense of the robustness of the analyses. I do not wish, however, to overstate my case. While it is true that some of the controversies arise from straightforward conceptual mistakes (and need not be perpetuated), others have for many decades if not centuries resisted simple means of dismissal, and I have offered no simple means here. Rather, in these latter cases, the foundational issues provide a means for understanding better the nature of the controversies and what is at stake in varying approaches that strive to resolve them.

Indeed, in this regard it is worth noting that the conceptual distinctions themselves share common ground. For example, the problems that arise from confusing moral ontogeny and epistemology are often similar to those that arise from confusing moral variation and epistemology. In both cases, a descriptive claim about how the world is empirically can lead to an epistemic claim about what ought to be and about the validity of such judgments. More generally, if we accept that the issues of definition and epistemology entail a philosophical stance, and variation and ontogeny a psychological

stance (broadly conceived to include cross-cultural psychology), then many of the controversies in the moral development literature arise from differences in how to conceive of the relation between philosophy and psychology.

Toward conceptualizing this relationship, we can draw on current philosophical theory [Williams, 1981, 1985; Nagel, 1986; Scheffler, 1982], which holds that since morality derives from social relations, an adequate moral theory must take into account the nature (including possible limitations) of human agents ('ought implies can'). For instance, Scheffler [1986] seeks a moral philosophical theory in which 'the content of morality is constrained by considerations of the agent's psychology and well-being, and of the ways in which it is appropriate for morality to enter into an agent's life, and to impinge on his or her thought, deliberations, feeling, and action' [p. 537]. Taking this position more broadly, moral psychology and philosophy – while distinct from one another in the ways described in this article – are foundationally interdependent. Moral psychology cannot succeed unless it is situated within a valid moral philosophical theory. Moral philosophy cannot succeed unless it takes seriously and accurately accounts for the actual social and moral lives of human beings. It is hoped that the conceptual analyses presented here contribute to clear thinking in the difficult task of integrating both disciplines substantively.

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