

.....

The Construction of Moral Rationality

David Moshman

University of Nebraska, Lincoln, Nebr., USA

Key Words

Constructivism · Culture · Morality · Peer interaction · Rationality · Reflection · Relativism

Abstract

Rational moral agents have justifiable moral perspectives and genuine moral reasons. A rational constructivist approach to morality highlights the rational basis for morality and posits that moral rationality is actively constructed via reflective processes that cannot be reduced to the causal influence of genetic and/or environmental forces. Cultural transmission and peer interaction are critical, and qualitatively distinct, contexts of moral reflection. A pluralist conception of the construction of moral rationality retains the rational constructivist conception of progress through levels of moral rationality but rejects commitment to a universal sequence of developmental stages. The result is a developmental moral epistemology that accommodates moral pluralism to a greater degree than does standard cognitive developmental theory without lapsing into the moral relativism of social learning theories.

My purpose is to sketch a theoretical account of the construction of moral rationality. In the course of doing so, I attempt to justify three assumptions implicit in the title of the article. First, I assume there is such a thing as morality, in a sense that transcends particular cultures. Second, I assume that morality is rational to a sufficient extent that moral rationality may be deemed a genuine phenomenon and one worthy of explanation. I do not assume, however, that morally relevant behavior can be fully explained in terms of rationality. Finally, I assume that moral rationality is actively constructed rather than (a) revealed in the course of a genetically directed process of maturation, (b) internalized from one's culture, or (c) caused by some interaction of hereditary and environmental factors. I do not deny, however, that a variety of genetic and environmental factors are highly influential in moral learning and development.

The rationalist and constructivist orientation of the present theory places it within the broader genetic (or developmental) epistemology of Baldwin and Piaget. Genetic epistemologists maintain that the cognitive development of individuals involves epistemological judgments by those individuals about the justifiability of various beliefs and

forms of reasoning. Philosophical epistemology inevitably incorporates tacit psychological assumptions about the origins and development of knowledge and reasoning. Without collapsing the distinction between normative examinations of how people ought to think and empirical accounts of how they do think, genetic epistemology coordinates philosophical and psychological considerations to produce a transdisciplinary theory of how cognition develops toward higher levels of rationality. In the domain of morality, the present theory attempts to coordinate moral psychology and moral philosophy within a developmental moral epistemology.

In the first half of the article, I present a metatheoretical framework for addressing the construction of moral rationality. I first consider the nature and relationship of rationality and reasoning. Then I define moral rationality as a specific sort of rationality involving an appeal to moral reasons. Third, I propose that moral rationality is actively constructed by means of a family of processes that may be collectively labeled *reflection*. Fourth, I propose the label *rational constructivist* for the present metatheoretical approach and contrast this approach with a *causal determinist* metatheory. Finally, I consider the role of social interaction within a rational constructivist paradigm and highlight a fundamental conceptual distinction between asymmetric and symmetric forms of social interaction.

In the second half of the article I present a theory of the construction of moral rationality. I suggest that constructive reflection generates progressive change through developmental levels of moral rationality. The proposed conception of such levels acknowledges a greater degree of moral pluralism than does standard cognitive developmental theory without lapsing into the moral relativism of social learning or social constructionist theories.

Rationality and Reasoning

I define rationality as metasubjective objectivity, involving a justifiable perspective and genuine reasons. Rationality includes the competence and inclination to engage in good reasoning. Reasoning can be defined as epistemically self-constrained thinking, involving the deliberate construction and application of reasons in generating and justifying beliefs and behavior. Several aspects of these definitions merit elaboration [Frankena, 1983; Habermas, 1990a,b; Moshman, 1994, 1995; Rescher, 1988; Siegel, 1988].

To be rational is to have good reasons for what one believes and does. Reasoning is a conscious and intentional effort to provide such reasons. Good reasoning, then, involves the successful imposition of epistemically justifiable constraints on one's own thinking. To the extent that one attempts to impose justifiable constraints on one's thinking but fails to do so, one is engaged in bad reasoning. To the extent that one makes no deliberate effort to constrain one's inferences and judgments, one is not reasoning at all. Automatic inferences and judgments do not constitute reasoning even if they are demonstrably adaptive, appropriate, and/or in accord with logical, moral, and/or other norms.

To be a rational agent is to be a subject with a perspective and purposes of one's own. To be rational is to progressively reflect on and reconstruct one's subjective perspective in such a way as to increase one's objectivity. Thus, rationality is something more than simply acting on the basis of whatever seems reasonable from one's idiosyncratic perspective, but something less than the achievement of perfect objectivity. It is in this sense that rationality is defined as a metasubjective – rather than an absolute – form of objectivity.

Rational agents generate, and act on the basis of, their own reasons. Genetic and/or environmental forces do not simply cause beliefs or behaviors. The present theory is thus rooted in a rational constructivist – rather than a causal determinist – world view. Nevertheless, no claim is made that people are perfectly or consistently rational or even that human behavior typically approximates some standard of rationality. The concept of a rational agent is an idealization that is helpful in accounting for the behavior of at least some people in at least some circumstances.

Moral Rationality and Moral Reasoning

Extending the general definitions of rationality and reasoning, I define moral rationality as metasubjective moral objectivity, involving a justifiable moral perspective and genuine moral reasons. Moral rationality includes the competence and inclination to engage in good moral reasoning. Moral reasoning can be defined as epistemically self-constrained thinking with regard to matters one justifiably construes as falling within the domain of morality.

Many of the preceding claims regarding the general nature of rationality and reasoning apply with respect to moral rationality and moral reasoning. Moral reasoning involves a conscious and intentional effort to have good reasons for one's moral beliefs and actions. To the extent that one is morally rational, this effort will be successful. Moral rationality involves reflection on and reconstruction of one's moral perspective. Such reflection and reconstruction may enable one to transcend the egocentrism of any particular perspective and thus make progress toward moral objectivity, but it does not provide for the attainment of any sort of final or perfect objectivity. Finally, the present approach posits an autonomous moral agent as a useful theoretical construct but no claim is made that real people ever attain some idealized state of moral rationality.

Consideration of moral rationality and moral reasoning raises particularly difficult issues concerning moral objectivity, moral perspectives, moral reasons, and the scope of the moral domain. An objectivist approach defines, on philosophical grounds, just what constitutes the moral domain and then determines on that basis what reasons, perspectives, and forms of objectivity are moral in nature. But this approach might lead us to seriously underestimate the moral rationality of an individual who does not delineate a domain of morality identical to that of the theorist.

A subjectivist approach proceeds from each individual's differentiation of various domains of rationality and his or her identification of a domain of morality. But cross-cultural research and research with young children may involve participants who do not use the term 'morality' or anything directly equivalent to it. Even people who use the term 'morality' may be talking about quite different things. How, then, can we determine which of the individual's subjective domains, if any, constitute one or more domains of morality? At the very least, it seems, we need some conception of what we, as theorists, mean by morality.

A middle-ground approach is suggested by what appears to be a consensus among moral theorists and among individuals in a variety of cultures that morality, at least in part, involves at least some behavior deemed obligatory, desirable, undesirable, or forbidden on the basis of consideration of others' rights or welfare [Audi, 1993; Brandt, 1979; Gert, 1988; Gewirth, 1978, 1991; Habermas, 1990a,b; Helwig et al., 1990; Hoffman, 1991; Kahn, 1991, 1992; Kant, 1785/1959; Killen, 1991; Kohlberg, 1981, 1984; Mill,

1861/1979; Rawls, 1971; Reiman, 1990; Smetana, 1989; Smetana and Braeges, 1990; Smetana et al., 1991; Turiel et al., 1987; Winfield, 1988]. This definition should be regarded, however, as a rough pointer toward at least some of the phenomena generally seen as relevant to morality, rather than as a definitive delimitation of the moral domain. It leaves open the possibility that some individuals in some cultures may justifiably construe morality more narrowly as encompassing, for example, only strict obligations or prohibitions dictated by universalizable principles of justice [Kant, 1785/1959; Kohlberg, 1981, 1984; Rawls, 1971]. It also leaves open the possibility that some individuals in some cultures may justifiably construe the moral domain as extending, with no sharp demarcation, into broad considerations of virtue, honor, duty, courage, obedience, care, compassion, benevolence, character, responsibility, integrity, fidelity, solidarity, sanctity, and so forth [Aristotle, 1985; Blasi, 1990; Boyes and Walker, 1988; Campbell and Christopher, in press; Gilligan, 1982; Hoffman, 1991; Huebner and Garrod, 1991; Kahn, 1991; Rasmussen and Den Uyl, 1991; Shweder, 1990; Shweder et al., 1987; Snarey, 1985; Snarey and Keljo, 1991]. This approach thus permits a pluralist conception of moral rationality without suggesting that morality is whatever anyone says it is or that all moral reasoning is equally good.

Moral Reflection

Moral philosophers not only engage in reflection themselves but routinely assume the centrality of reflection in their theories of how moral judgments are, and/or ought to be, justified. In many cases this assumption is explicit. Rawls [1971], for example, posits an ongoing quest for reflective equilibrium as central to moral reasoning. Even where the concept of reflection is not highlighted, however, reflection is arguably indispensable for any theory that posits a rational basis for morality. Audi [1993] argues that, notwithstanding the existence of a wide variety of defensible theories of morality, 'the method of reflection is and deserves to be our basic method for justifying ethical judgments' [p. 308].

Reflection also figures prominently in a variety of psychological theories. Piaget, for example, posited a process of reflective abstraction as central to stage transition [Campbell and Bickhard, 1986]. Reflective abstraction is distinguished from learning in that it does not involve the internalization of information from one's environment or the shaping of behavior by external forces. Rather it involves reflection on current knowledge such that new understanding is abstracted from that knowledge. Similarly, Karmiloff-Smith [1992] proposes *representational redescription* as a constructive developmental process in which new knowledge comes not from the environment but through the reconstruction of previous knowledge. What these conceptions have in common is a process of *explicitation* whereby knowledge implicit in earlier structures or representations becomes an explicitly understood object of consciousness.

Although reflection may thus be construed as a developmental process, it is important to distinguish it from a deterministic process of maturation. Reflection is guided not by the genes but by an active mind that cannot be reduced to genes or environment, or even to an interaction of both. An emphasis on the role of reflection in morality, then, leads to a conception of morality as – at least in part – constructed and rational, rather than determined by external and/or internal causal forces.

The Rational Constructivist Approach to Morality

A focus on reflection as a process qualitatively distinct from traditional conceptions of learning and maturation suggests a fundamental distinction between two meta-theoretical paradigms that I label *rational constructivist* and *causal determinist*. Both are well represented in the psychological study of morality.

Causal determinism accounts for behavior by identifying the biological and/or environmental variables responsible for that behavior and examining patterns of causal influence. With respect to morality, causal determinist theories include (a) nativist theories in which behavior deemed moral or immoral emerges by means of a genetically programmed course of maturation, (b) social learning theories in which moral ideas and behaviors are inculcated and shaped by one's cultural and/or interpersonal environment, and (c) interactionist theories in which (moral or immoral) behavior is attributable to complex interactions of hereditary and environmental forces. Most current psychological theories of moral development recognize (a) the role of both heredity and environment, (b) the role of the individual as a factor in his or her own development, and (c) some degree of unpredictability due to unique and ongoing interactions of these various forces. A theory may nevertheless be construed as reflecting a causal determinist metatheory to the extent that it emphasizes causal forces as determinants of learning and/or development.

The rational constructivist approach, by contrast, construes individuals as rational agents acting on the basis of their own interpretations, values, and goals. Development is deemed to involve active reflection on and reconstruction of one's own knowledge and behavior. People are assumed to have reasons for what they do. Their behavior and development are thought to be best explained on the basis of these reasons, rather than as a direct result of genetic and/or environmental forces. Rational constructivism, in other words, highlights the subject's point of view.

Within the realm of moral development, the rational constructivist paradigm includes theories such as those of Piaget [1932/1965] and Kohlberg [1981, 1984] that focus on deliberate moral reasoning rather than causal influences. Here again, however, we must guard against oversimplification. It is accepted that genetic and environmental factors facilitate and constrain development in multiple ways. A theory may be construed as reflecting a rational constructivist metatheory to the extent that it highlights the developmental role of active construction by rational agents. Thus, although few current theorists deny the role of reflection in moral development, within the rational constructivist paradigm reflection plays a central role.

Social Contexts of Moral Reflection

To highlight the role of reflection in the rational constructivist paradigm is not to suggest that social considerations are unimportant. From a rational constructivist perspective, the emphasis is not on the causal role of social forces but on social interactions as contexts for moral reflection. A conceptual distinction must be made, moreover, between asymmetric and symmetric social interactions as distinct contexts for reflection.

Asymmetric social interactions are ones in which the participating individuals differ, and/or perceive themselves to differ, in relevant knowledge and/or power. Asymmetric social interactions include most instances of parent-child and teacher-student

interaction. Such interactions are particularly emphasized in social learning theories on the assumption that children learn morality through social experience with adults who inculcate and shape what the adult, the culture, and/or the theorist deem to be moral ideas, values, and behaviors [Gewirtz and Pelaez-Nogueras, 1991; Liebert, 1984].

A rational constructivist perspective distinguishes the inculcation of fixed ideas, values, and behaviors from the suggestion of useful starting points for moral reflection. To the extent that parents, teachers, and cultures instill ideas, values, and behaviors that remain permanently beyond the reach of critical analysis, asymmetric social interactions are a hindrance to the construction of moral rationality, even if the inculcated ideas, values, and/or behaviors are, from some external point of view, morally correct [Piaget, 1932/1965]. To the extent that external input functions as a spur to reflection, however, it may serve in the long run to facilitate the construction of moral rationality. The specific nature of such input, moreover, may constrain the structure of the resulting rationality and thus influence not only the rate but the direction of developmental change.

Symmetric social interactions are ones in which the interacting individuals are, and perceive themselves to be, equal in relevant expertise and power [Habermas, 1990b; Kant, 1785/1959; Rawls, 1971]. Symmetric social interaction corresponds roughly to what psychologists refer to as peer interaction, although it is important to distinguish the idealized theoretical concept of interchange among autonomous moral equals from the looser psychological notion of interchange among individuals of about the same age.

From a causal determinist standpoint, peer interactions are often deemed irrelevant at best. A social learning theorist, in fact, may see them as a basis for learning ideas contrary to what adults and society at large wish to teach. From a rational constructivist standpoint, peer interaction, to the extent that it approximates a condition of social symmetry, is a basis for free coordination and reflection in which no one's ideas have *a priori* authority simply on the basis of their source. Thus, one might expect peer interaction to be critical to the construction of moral rationality [Habermas, 1990b; Piaget, 1932/1965; Rawls, 1971; Youniss and Damon, 1992].

Levels of Moral Rationality

Thus far I have presented a metatheoretical framework for addressing the construction of moral rationality. Within this framework, a variety of quite different theories are possible. For present purposes, it is useful to distinguish two families of potential rational constructivist theories that differ with respect to the fundamental question of universality.

Theories in the Piagetian tradition, including Kohlberg's [1981, 1984] theory, propose that development proceeds through a universal sequence of cognitive structures. Not everyone reaches the highest stage in the postulated sequence, but anyone who develops beyond a given stage does so by constructing the particular structure that constitutes the next stage. In Kohlberg's theory, for example, moral development beyond stage 2 invariably involves the construction of the particular moral structure that constitutes stage 3. Development proceeds along a single path that tends toward, in Piaget's words, 'the permanent laws of rational cooperation' [1932/1965, p. 72].

In the remainder of this article, I present a theoretical account of the construction of moral rationality that does not assume a universal sequence of stages or a particular endpoint of moral development. Rather, two or more qualitatively distinct moral struc-

tures may be regarded as equivalent in their level of rationality. Which one an individual constructs depends on a variety of specific circumstances, including the specific ideas and values inculcated by his or her culture. Thus, an individual may progress from one level to another by reflecting on assumptions implicit in the lower-level thinking and proceeding to construct a new structure of moral understanding that justifies those assumptions. There may, however, be more than one potential moral structure that provides such justification and thus variation among individuals in the higher-level structures they construct. Variability may also occur across cultures in the relative likelihood that particular structures will be constructed.

Without lapsing into the moral relativism of social learning or social constructionist theories, then, the rational constructivist approach proposed here permits a greater degree of moral pluralism than can be accommodated within universalist theories such as Kohlberg's. That is, it allows that some structures of moral reasoning are of a higher level than others. It is not claimed, however, that all possible moral structures fall into a single hierarchy. Within this rational constructivist paradigm, we can now consider a pluralist account of progress through levels of moral rationality.

Level 1: Implicit Morality

Infants are born with a variety of behavioral tendencies that orient them toward social stimuli, including others' emotional states [Emde et al., 1991]. In any normal human environment, these tendencies lead to social interactions even in early infancy and rapid development of a variety of morally relevant attributes. Turn-taking, for example – an elementary form of reciprocity – can be seen in young infants' interactions with their parents [Emde et al., 1991]. The tendency to share another's distress – an elementary form of empathy – is also seen in the first year of life [Hoffman, 1991]. Within the next year or two, toddlers come to understand that some behaviors usually make others happy and some behaviors usually make others sad [Hay et al., 1991; Smetana, 1989; Smetana and Braeges, 1990; Zahn-Waxler et al., 1992]. They learn to act in accord with tacit rules of behavior that increase the likelihood of altruistic behaviors and decrease the likelihood of antisocial ones [Emde et al., 1991; Hay et al., 1991; Lamb 1991].

In virtually all societies, adults directly teach young children a variety of moral rules – 'share' and 'don't hit', for example – and reward or punish them on the basis of behavioral conformity to cultural and individual expectations [Gewirtz and Pelaez-Nogueras, 1991]. Specific rules and expectations vary considerably both within and between cultures. A pluralist approach posits that social variations in rules and expectations influence (contrary to universalist theories) but do not cause or determine (contrary to causal determinist theories) the subsequent direction of the individual's moral development.

Level 1 morality is tacit, unsystematic, and unstable. There may be a concern for justice or human welfare implicit in societal rules and/or in a young child's natural empathic responses but infants and toddlers appear to be largely unaware of such moral considerations. Morality – if we call it 'morality' at all – is initially implicit in a variety of uncoordinated rules and behaviors [Emde et al., 1991; Hay et al., 1991].

Although children at level 1 are capable of learning, stating, and following rules, they do not think about the moral nature or justification of such rules. Thus, they have little ability or inclination to coordinate rules or to bring inconsistent behaviors into line with rules. Intercoordinations of rules and behaviors with those of other children are literally unthinkable. Inconsistencies in rules, behavior, and the relation between them, and conflicts in one's relations with peers, can only be resolved by constructing a higher level of reflective awareness (see table 1).

Level 2: Explicit Morality

The transition to level 2 begins, around age 3, with reflection on one's social interactions and on the various rules one has formulated or learned [Emde et al., 1991]. Over the course of the preschool years, children construct increasingly sophisticated conceptions of the nature of mind, including reflective understanding about such morally relevant phenomena as beliefs, desires, intentions, and dif-

Table 1. Proposed Levels of Moral Rationality

Level	Object of reasoning	Basis of behavior and reasoning
(1) Implicit morality	behavior and consequences	rules
(2) Explicit morality	rules; moral domain	principles
(3) Explicit ethics	principles; ethical systems	metaethical criteria
(4) Explicit metaethics	metaethical criteria and perspectives	general theories of rationality

ferences in perspective [Flavell, 1992; Flavell et al., 1992a; Lillard and Flavell, 1992; Perner, 1992]. They increasingly grasp the distinction between underlying moral character and present appearance [Flavell et al., 1992b]. Such understandings of self, others, and relationships may enable children to reflect on the nature and justification of their empathic reactions and of the rules they have formulated or learned.

Reflection on rules, feelings, and social relations may enable the abstraction of implicit principles that not only guide behavior but guide and justify the formulation and application of rules. For example, reflection on the rules 'don't hit', 'don't kick', and 'don't bite' may enable abstraction of a more general ethical (i.e., meta-moral) principle such as 'don't hurt others'. Because such a principle is more abstract, it does not provide as clear a guide to behavior as do specific concrete rules. It does have the advantage, however, of providing a basis for the application and justification of such rules and assisting in the formulation and evaluation of potential new rules, such as 'don't scratch'.

More broadly, the construction of tacit ethical principles may enable increasingly explicit identification and coordination of moral rules and behaviors and thereby yield an increasing sense of morality as a distinct psychological domain. There is substantial evidence that American children explicitly distinguish matters relating to fair and compassionate relations with others from matters of social convention or personal discretion, perhaps beginning as early as age 3 [Killen, 1991; Smetana and Braeges, 1990; Smetana et al., 1993; Turiel et al., 1987]. Without endorsing any particular demarcation of the moral domain, we may postulate that children in all cultures construct a moral domain in early childhood and then proceed to construct subsequent refinements, varying to some degree from person to person and culture to culture in the nature of the distinction between moral and other concerns [Bersoff and Miller, 1993].

Most moral reflection, especially on the part of young children, probably occurs in the context of peer interactions and conflicts [Killen, 1991; Kruger, 1992]. Explicit understanding of rules as a basis for behavior may permit a better understanding of the behavior of others, involving an ability to think about the rules that they are or should be following [Flavell et al., 1992a]. Such understanding of others may enable more sophisticated social interactions, including ability to work with peers in the formulation of rules or procedures that, by virtue of their co-construction, may be deemed to have a special moral force [Habermas, 1990a,b; Piaget, 1932/1965; Power, 1991; Youniss and Damon, 1992]. We may thus posit a mutually facilitative relationship between reflection and peer interaction. Greater reflective awareness of rules, persons, and relationships enables increasingly coordinated peer interactions, which in turn constitute new objects of reflection.

It does not follow, however, that adults and social institutions are irrelevant. Moral development may be substantially facilitated if, as is generally the case, the society in which development takes place actively inculcates ethical principles. Such principles may initially be learned as rules. The developing individual may be encouraged to apply them as principles, however, or, with attainment of level 2, may spontaneously do so. Thus, 'don't hurt others' may be taught as a guide to behavior but the child may also be told, or encouraged to infer, that we have rules against hitting and kicking *because* we shouldn't hurt others, thus facilitating the transformation of 'don't hurt others' into a principle applicable to the evaluation of rules [Smetana, 1989; Smetana and Braeges, 1990].

The constructive and inculcative forces involved in stage transition are thus to a large degree mutually facilitative [Gibbs, 1991]. Reflection on moral rules and on social interactions facilitates the construction of ethical principles, while the teaching of ethical principles encourages and facilitates reflection on moral rules and social interactions. The relation of social learning to development is thus complex. The nature of level 2 moral rationality and the direction of subsequent development are substantially influenced, but not caused or determined, by the rules and principles a society inculcates.

Progress through level 2 involves the construction of a moral equilibrium. The level 2 thinker does not simply apply discrete rules to discrete behaviors. She or he has an increasingly coordinated conception of moral rules constituting a moral domain and justified on the basis of general ethical principles. As one's moral rules get better articulated, integrated, and justified, conformity of one's behavior to moral rules is more likely. Because the moral domain is *constructed*, however, in part on the basis of cultural rules and principles, its precise definition and scope, although not arbitrary, may vary substantially across individuals and cultures, as well as developmental levels [Shweder, 1990]. From about age 3, children increasingly fit the level 2 portrayal of a moral agent able to distinguish moral issues from social conventions and personal preferences, able to formulate and evaluate moral rules alone and with peers, able to coordinate moral with other interpersonal and societal considerations, and sensitive to the ethical basis of moral imperatives [Killen, 1991; Rest, 1983; Smetana, 1989; Smetana and Braeges, 1990; Smetana et al., 1991, 1993; Turiel et al., 1987; Youniss and Damon, 1992].

A variety of factors, however, work against, and may eventually undermine, this equilibrium. First, there may be inconsistencies within the child's system of moral rules and behaviors that cannot be resolved by application of the child's ethical principles. Second, there may be inconsistencies among the child's ethical principles or between the child's old ethical principles and new principles that she or he formulates or encounters. Finally, and perhaps most important, social interactions with others may yield conflicts that cannot be resolved at level 2 because the various parties disagree at the level of ethical principles. Conflicting ethical perspectives are, from any level 2 standpoint, incommensurable.

Level 3: Explicit Ethics

The transition to level 3 typically begins in adolescence, with reflection on the previously tacit or isolated ethical principles one has formulated, learned, or encountered. Articulation, coordination, and reformulation of one's ethical principles may yield an increasingly integrated sense of one's ethical system, including (a) the relations among one's various principles, and (b) their applications to rules and behavior. Moreover, explicit understanding of ethical principles as a basis for moral rules and behavior yields a better understanding of one's moral disagreements with others, involving consideration of the conflicting principles that may underlie such disagreements. Reflection on, and social intercoordination of, conflicting principles and ethical systems may ultimately lead to metaethical insights (intuitive at first) about the justification of ethical principles and systems.

Social interaction is critical to the development of moral rationality at all levels. For peer interaction to facilitate development at level 3, however, it must proceed beyond consideration of the basis for differences in moral rules to contemplation of the basis for more fundamental differences in ethical principles and systems. Brief encounters among individuals may thus play a lesser role than at level 2. Extended, critical discourse, involving mutual articulation and critique of tacit metaethical assumptions, may become correspondingly more important [Habermas, 1990b; Kurtines et al., 1991].

Opportunities for such discourse may arise in a variety of contexts, ranging from formal education to ongoing personal relationships. It may even become possible to engage in virtual interactions and co-constructions with hypothetical, idealized others holding views systematically different from one's own. Purposeful formulation of such others may play an increasingly important role in the construction of moral rationality. Such exercises cannot replace real interchange, however, in that real others may propose critiques and alternatives, or embody social perspectives, that one could not have anticipated.

Development at level 3 may be facilitated by direct inculcation of metaethical criteria. Such criteria may initially be learned as rules or principles. Thus, the Golden Rule – 'Do unto others as you would have others do unto you' – may initially be learned and applied as a principle regulating rules and behavior. It is, however, more abstract than most principles and can function as a metaethical criterion. It can be used, for example, to conclude that 'Don't hurt others' is a plausible ethical principle

whereas 'Don't help others' is not. Direct teaching of metaethical criteria most likely takes place largely in specialized contexts, for example in moral philosophy courses, where one learns about such metaethical criteria as universalizability [Kant, 1785/1959], nonsubjugation [Reiman, 1990], self-realization [Aristotle, 1985], consistency with the categorical imperative to treat others as ends rather than solely as means [Kant, 1785/1959], conformity to some sort of ideal social contract [Rawls, 1971], respect for rights to freedom and well-being [Gewirth, 1978, 1991], maximization of individual freedom compatible with equivalent freedom for others [Rawls, 1971], consistency with the pragmatic presuppositions of practical discourse [Habermas, 1990a,b], maximization of utility [Mill, 1861/1979], and continuance of human life under humane conditions [Campbell, 1991].

It is noteworthy, in this respect, that Kohlberg [1981, 1984] defined his highest stages in terms of particular metaethical criteria – such as reversibility, universalizability, respect for persons, application of 'moral musical chairs', and consistency with a 'prior-to-society perspective' – derived primarily from Kantian philosophy [especially Rawls, 1971]. The present approach, in contrast, leaves open the possibility that there may be other, equally defensible metaethical criteria. These may, for example, involve concepts such as virtue, honor, duty, nonviolence, responsibility, integrity, solidarity, development, self-realization, communal equilibrium, collective happiness, human flourishing, alleviation of suffering, universal care, respect for life, the underlying oneness of all living things, or conformity with some sort of natural, divine, or cosmic order [Boyes and Walker, 1988; Campbell and Christopher, in press; Huebner and Garrod, 1991; Rasmussen and Den Uyl, 1991; Shweder, 1990; Shweder et al., 1987; Snarey, 1985; Snarey and Keljo, 1991]. Without suggesting that all metaethical criteria are equal, we may leave open the possibility that a variety of metaethical criteria are rationally defensible.

Once again, the constructive and inculcative forces involved in stage transition can be mutually facilitative. Reflection on and social intercoordination of ethical systems encourages the construction of metaethical criteria, while the teaching of metaethical criteria encourages and facilitates reflection on and intercoordination of ethical principles and systems. Cultures may differ with respect to the specific metaethical criteria they teach. Such differences may influence the course of reflection such that the typical structure of level 3 moral rationality shows corresponding variation across cultures. Cultures may also differ in the extent to which defensible metaethical criteria are meaningfully presented and in the extent to which reflection and metaethical discourse are encouraged or discouraged. Such variation may yield differences across cultures in the proportion of individuals attaining level 3. Because the structure of level 3 moral rationality may differ radically from culture to culture, however, claims of variability across cultures in the proportion of individuals who reach level 3 must be subject to serious scrutiny for the possibility of ethnocentric bias in the definition and assessment of explicit ethics.

Level 3 reflection can, over a period of years, generate a higher level of moral equilibrium than was previously possible. Whereas the equilibrated level 2 thinker has a coordinated conception of moral rules justifiable on the basis of general ethical principles, the level 3 thinker can construct a much more encompassing and integrated ethical system that incorporates explicit ethical principles and can be justified on the basis of metaethical criteria. Whereas the level 2 thinker may base his or her morality on a very stable set of ethical principles, the stability derives largely from the dogmatic commitment of one who *uses* principles but does not think *about* them. Level 2 thinkers do not consider alternative principles as serious possibilities, nor do they see a need for a deeper level of justification of the principles they use [Moshman, in preparation]. Level 3 thinkers, by contrast, are more aware of the multiple possibilities for principled ethical systems and can address the justifiability of their own principles. Ethics, at level 3, is not merely the underlying basis for an explicit morality but is itself an object of explicit reflection based on newly understood metaethical criteria.

Such reflection may tie directly to broader issues of self and commitment. Level 3 reflection in multiple domains may transform one's various self-conceptions into an integrated and purposely chosen identity. To the extent that being a moral person becomes fundamental to one's sense of who one is, one's moral conceptions and behavior are likely to be coordinated with each other and with other aspects of one's personality [Blasi, 1984; Campbell and Christopher, in press; Colby and Damon, 1992; Flanagan and Rorty, 1990; Higgins, 1991; Nisan, 1991].

Research indicates progress toward explicit ethics in at least some adolescents and adults in at least some cultures [Kohlberg, 1984]. At this key point, pluralist theories potentially differ from each other. How many forms of explicit ethics (that is, level 3 ethical systems) can be observed among hu-

man beings? What are they? How are they distributed across cultures? An empirical basis for addressing such issues is beginning to emerge [Boyes and Walker, 1988; Huebner and Garrod, 1991; Shweder, 1990; Shweder et al., 1987; Snarey, 1985; Snarey and Keljo, 1991].

Level 3 ethical systems generally exceed level 2 moral systems in scope, flexibility, and stability. Moreover, most people in most cultures associate almost exclusively with people who share, if not their specific moralities, at least their core metaethical commitments. Disequilibrium at this level is likely to come less from daily social life than from extended engagement with others in situations of personal crisis, cultural conflict, or rigorous intellectual exchange.

Level 4: Explicit Metaethics

Reflection on metaethical criteria may lead to a more explicit awareness of one's own metaethical perspective and increasing ability to engage with others in systematic metaethical discourse (e.g., in philosophical, theoretical, jurisprudential, theological, or intercultural contexts). Such discussion takes one beyond the ethical realm to the postulation and use of general rational standards. Thus, for example, one might seek to justify the Golden Rule on the basis of a still more abstract imperative, arguably central to all rationality, to treat relevantly like cases alike and relevantly different cases differently. Most moral philosophy may be construed as operating at this level in that metaethical criteria are specified, elaborated into complex systems, and justified on the basis of some general theory of rationality [Audi, 1993; Brandt, 1979; Frankena, 1983; Gert, 1988; Gewirth, 1978, 1991; Habermas, 1990b; Kant, 1785/1959; Mill, 1861/1979; Rasmussen and Den Uyl, 1991; Rawls, 1971; Reiman, 1990; Winfield, 1988].

Again, however, we must be careful to see any particular approach as only an example of level 4 moral rationality and not to regard particular philosophical positions or traditions as the defining essence of such a level. Without suggesting [as does Shweder, 1986] that divergent rationalities are ultimately incommensurable, we may acknowledge our inability to identify one true rationality, if indeed there is such a thing [MacIntyre, 1988]. Level 4 does not yield a definitive set of objective moral truths or correct forms of moral reasoning. It is not a moral template – an ideal structure against which moral systems can be evaluated. It provides neither a definitive endpoint for moral development nor a firm foundation for an absolute morality.

What various level 4 structures of moral justification have in common is their degree of reflective depth. A particular level 4 system of moral rationality constitutes a perspective that articulates, coordinates, and justifies a set of metaethical criteria that in turn can be used to reflect on ethical systems. Such systems in turn allow reflection on moral rules, which can be used to justify behavior. These justifications are not absolute and final, although they may appear so from the epistemic subject's perspective. A wide variety of level 4 moral perspectives may exist. But it does not follow that every moral perspective is a level 4 perspective, that every moral prescription is justifiable from some level 4 perspective, or that all level 4 perspectives are, ultimately, equally defensible. Moral pluralism, even at higher levels of development, need not entail moral relativism. The ongoing processes of social coordination and reflection may provide sufficient constraints on metaethical criteria, ethical systems, moral rules, and behavior to justify postulating developmental progress in moral rationality.

Level 4 roots moral rationality – the justification of morality – in more general rationality – in theories of justification. There is no reason in principle why level 4 must be the highest level. In fact, if level 4 were inescapable, divergent rationalities would indeed be incommensurable. But beyond level 4 lie questions that go beyond morality to the fundamental nature and justification of rationality itself.

Toward a Pluralist Moral Epistemology

I have offered a rational constructivist perspective on morality that highlights the construction of moral rationality. I have contrasted this account with a causal determinist perspective that highlights processes of maturation and internalization in which genetic and/or environmental forces generate and shape a variety of ideas, values, and/or behaviors, some of which are deemed moral in nature by parents, cultures, and/or theorists.

Although a variety of rational constructivist theories of morality are possible, all theories of morality within the rational constructivist paradigm share certain orientations toward research and theorizing. First, given the rationalist conception of morality, the focus is on moral reasoning and the underlying structure of moral justification. Emphasized are understanding and explaining the moral perspective of the epistemic subject, rather than identifying patterns of causal influence. Second, given the constructivist conception of moral rationality, rational constructivist theories focus on processes of reflection and on progress through developmental levels generated by such reflection. Thus, moral cognition and development are understood and explained, at least in part, from the subject's point of view. Finally, with respect to social context, there is a focus on symmetric or peer interactions in which the subject functions as an autonomous moral agent in relation to other agents. Such interactions are seen as fundamental to the construction of moral rationality [Habermas, 1990b; Piaget, 1932/1965; Rawls, 1971; Youniss and Damon, 1992].

Within the rational constructivist paradigm, a distinction can be made between universalist and pluralist conceptions of moral rationality. Universalist theories posit a single sequence of moral structures and thus propose that the only way to transcend any given structure of moral rationality is to construct the next higher structure. Pluralist theories, by contrast, posit that for any given structure of moral rationality, two or more higher structures may exist, each constituting a deeper level of reflection. Progress to the next level of rationality may thus involve two or more distinct pathways of development.

The difference between these two versions of rational constructivism is perhaps most apparent with respect to the functions of cross-cultural research. For the universalist, differences among cultures are superficial compared to underlying commonalities in the direction and steps of moral development. The central point of cross-cultural research, then, is to show that individuals in all cultures proceed through the same stages in the same order. Some individuals may proceed further than others and differences across cultures may occur in this respect, but the primary focus of research is to show that individuals do not skip stages, that there are no reversals in the order of stages, and that there exist no forms of moral reasoning that do not fit one of the stages.

For the pluralist, in contrast, cross-cultural research offers an opportunity to discover new structures of moral reasoning and understanding. The pluralist is wary of universalist efforts to force divergent moralities into the Procrustean bed of a specific theoretical sequence of stages. At the same time, the pluralist rejects the causal determinist view that people simply learn whatever their cultures teach. The pluralist also rejects the corresponding relativist view that comparisons across cultures can have no rational basis. The challenge is to distinguish levels of moral rationality without limiting the moral domain in advance to some small number of hierarchically ordered moral structures.

Consider, as an example, the practice of female circumcision, an active tradition in more than 40 countries, mostly in Africa and the Middle East. One form, known as excision or clitoridectomy, involves removal of part or all of the clitoris and often some surrounding tissue. Another version is infibulation, in which

virtually all of the external female genitalia are removed. With this type of circumcision, a dramatic excision is performed – removing the entire clitoris and labia minora – and in addition, much or most of the labia majora is cut or scraped away. The remaining raw edges of the labia majora are then sewn together with acacia tree thorns, and held in place with catgut or sewing thread. The entire area is closed up by this process leaving only a tiny opening, roughly the size of a match stick to allow for the passing of urine and menstrual fluid. The girl's legs then are tied together – ankles, knees, and

thighs – and she is immobilized for an extended period, varying from fifteen to forty days, while the wound heals [Slack, 1988, pp. 441–442].

This procedure is usually performed without anesthetic, using instruments such as ‘kitchen knives, old razor blades, broken glass, and sharp stones’ [p. 442], on girls between ages 3 and 8. In addition to the intense pain and extreme psychological trauma, severe and lifelong medical complications are routine among the millions of women who survive the operation. For many, the process is fatal.

Within a causal determinist perspective, a cultural determinist would focus psychological investigation on the cultural forces that generate and sustain these practices. Such investigation might include cognitive research on how cultural differences yield different moral evaluations of female circumcision among individuals in different cultures. Wary of both ethnocentrism and philosophy, contemporary cultural determinists rarely suggest that moral evaluations dictated by certain cultures are superior to alternative conclusions instilled by others [Robinson, 1992]. On the contrary, with respect to the present issue, they would likely argue that any inquiry into the morality of female circumcision can only be conducted within a particular cultural context and that any conclusion will necessarily be specific to that context. Thus, cultural determinism tacitly assumes or explicitly adopts a philosophical position of moral relativism [Gewirtz and Pelaez-Nogueras, 1991; Liebert, 1984; Nunner-Winkler, 1990].

A rational constructivist, in contrast, would be concerned with how individuals in various cultures justify their views about female circumcision. A universalist would direct inquiry into such justification in such a way as to determine which of several postulated structures of moral rationality, sequentially ordered, best corresponds to the reasoning of each individual studied. A pluralist, in contrast, would focus on characterizing the potentially diverse structures of moral reasoning that might be elicited in research of this sort and understanding how those structures are similar to or differ from each other with respect to the level of reflection involved.

Suppose, for example, that some individuals, most likely within cultures that practice female circumcision, indicate that female circumcision is appropriate because it discourages promiscuity and helps assure that women maintain their virginity until marriage. Suppose we then inquire as to why female promiscuity should be discouraged and why female virginity is important. Some individuals might be perplexed by such questions; they might never have considered the basis for, or the need to justify, their views about female promiscuity or virginity. They might simply restate in various ways the rules that promiscuity is bad and virginity good, especially for women. Others might welcome the questions and respond with a set of principles that dictate the proper and distinct social roles of men and women and justify, on the basis of those roles, a special and critical concern with the sexual purity of women. For a universalist, these latter individuals would be regarded as functioning at a higher level of moral rationality only if their responses reflected a structure corresponding to that of a postulated higher stage of moral development. For a pluralist, in contrast, the criteria for level 2 explicit morality are not so stringent. It would suffice that the responses reflect principles that, if accepted, would arguably justify the rules regarding promiscuity and virginity.

Other individuals, perhaps mostly within Western cultures, might denounce female circumcision as a grotesque conjunction of sexism and child abuse. Some of these individuals might respond to further inquiry by reiterating that sexism and abuse are wrong, whereas others might attempt to justify these claims by postulating and applying general

principles of human equality or bodily integrity that transcend the particular issue. In identifying the latter individuals as exhibiting level 2 explicit morality, the pluralist would have to consider whether an individual has really shown evidence of applying genuine principles in a manner that arguably justifies rules of behavior.

With respect to those individuals who provide principled justifications for their views, further questioning could determine the extent to which they can reflect on, rather than simply apply, those principles, and can justify them on the basis of metaethical criteria. It might turn out that a variety of principles are thus justifiable. It, however, might become apparent that some sets of principles cannot be justified, perhaps because they turn out, upon reflection, to be internally inconsistent. It might even be proposed that particular views about female circumcision, although justifiable within the context of certain principles, cannot be justified on the basis of any set of principles that can themselves be justified at a metaethical level.

Pluralist rational constructivism thus occupies a middle ground between universalism and relativism. It does not assume a single path of development, but neither does it assume that all moral views are equally justifiable. It encourages theorists to question their philosophical presumptions about the scope of the moral domain and the basic forms of moral reasoning. It does not suggest, however, that they can avoid theoretical judgments about moral justification. Pluralists refuse to accept any fixed philosophical conception of what moral structures exist. Yet they acknowledge that (a) development in the moral domain involves epistemological judgments about the justifiability of various moral beliefs, and (b) the study of moral development correspondingly requires epistemological judgments by the theorist.

Inevitably, pluralists will differ from each other in their judgments about what issues can reasonably be construed as moral in nature and about the level of rationality manifested in different instances of moral reasoning. Pluralist rational constructivism is thus best seen not as a single theory but as a family of theories positing that morality can develop in multiple directions but that there is nonetheless such a thing as moral progress. Judgments about the reflective level of the moral reasoning of diverse individuals in diverse cultures and about what constitutes moral progress will be influenced by the various personal and cultural biases of the theorists making those judgments. To some extent, theorists may be able to overcome particular biases by being aware of, and possibly compensating for, their own moral commitments. Nevertheless, progress in our understanding of moral rationality will surely depend on active interchange among theorists, researchers, and research participants representing a variety of moral perspectives and cultural backgrounds.

Rational constructivists agree that no moral psychology can avoid issues of moral epistemology. Efforts to understand the nature of moral development are normative or philosophical in their focus on justifiability. Yet they are simultaneously empirical or psychological in their focus on how people actually think about morality. Thus we need a developmental moral epistemology that construes moral development as a successful quest for moral reasons and explains moral rationality as a product of such development.

Acknowledgment

An earlier version of this article was presented at the 1991 annual meeting of the Jean Piaget Society, Philadelphia. I am grateful to Augusto Blasi, Robert Campbell, Gus Carlo, Karl Hostettler, Peter Kahn, Melanie Killen, Jennifer Parkhurst, Nelson Potter, Rick Shweder, and several anonymous reviewers for helpful comments and discussion.

References

- Aristotle (1985). *Nicomachean ethics*. Indianapolis: Hackett.
- Audi R (1993). Ethical reflectionism. *The Monist*, 76, 295–315.
- Bersoff DM & Miller JG (1993). Culture, context, and the development of moral accountability judgments. *Developmental Psychology*, 29, 664–676.
- Blasi A (1984). Moral identity: Its role in moral functioning. In Kurtines WM & Gewirtz JL (Eds.), *Morality, moral behavior, and moral development* (pp. 128–139). New York: Wiley.
- Blasi A (1990). How should psychologists define morality? or, The negative side effects of philosophy's influence on psychology. In Wren TE (Ed.), *The moral domain* (pp. 38–70). Cambridge MA: MIT Press.
- Boyes MC & Walker LJ (1988). Implications of cultural diversity for the universality claims of Kohlberg's theory of moral reasoning. *Human Development*, 31, 44–59.
- Brandt RB (1979). *A theory of the good and the right*. Oxford: Clarendon.
- Campbell DT (1991). A naturalistic theory of archaic moral orders. *Zygon*, 26, 91–114.
- Campbell RL & Bickhard MH (1986). *Knowing levels and developmental stages (Contributions to human development, Vol. 16)*. Basel: Karger.
- Campbell RL & Christopher JC (in press). Moral development theory: A critique of its Kantian presuppositions. *Developmental Review*.
- Colby A & Damon W (1992). *Some do care: Contemporary lives of moral commitment*. New York: Free Press.
- Emde RN, Biringen Z, Clyman RB & Oppenheim D (1991). The moral self of infancy: Affective core and procedural knowledge. *Developmental Review*, 11, 251–270.
- Flanagan O & Rorty AO (1990) (Eds.). *Identity, character, and morality*. Cambridge MA: MIT Press.
- Flavell JH (1992). Perspectives on perspective taking. In Beilin H & Pufall PB (Eds.), *Piaget's theory: Prospects and possibilities* (pp. 107–139). Hillsdale NJ: Erlbaum.
- Flavell JH, Mumme DL, Green FL & Flavell ER (1992a). Young children's understanding of different types of beliefs. *Child Development*, 63, 960–977.
- Flavell JH, Lindberg NA, Green FL & Flavell ER (1992b). The development of children's understanding of the appearance-reality distinction between how people look and what they are really like. *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly*, 38, 513–524.
- Frankena WK (1983). Concepts of rational action in the history of ethics. *Social theory and practice*, 9, 165–197.
- Gert B (1988). *Morality: A new justification of the moral rules*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Gewirtz A (1978). *Reason and morality*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Gewirtz A (1991). Can any final ends be rational? *Ethics*, 102, 66–95.
- Gewirtz JL & Pelaez-Nogueras M (1991). Proximal mechanisms underlying the acquisition of moral behavior patterns. In Kurtines WM & Gewirtz JL (Eds.), *Handbook of moral behavior and development* (Vol. 1, pp. 153–182). Hillsdale NJ: Erlbaum.
- Gibbs JC (1991). Toward an integration of Kohlberg's and Hoffman's moral development theories. *Human Development*, 34, 88–104.
- Gilligan C (1982). *In a different voice: Psychological theory and women's development*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.
- Habermas J (1990a). Justice and solidarity: On the discussion concerning stage 6. In Wren TE (Ed.), *The moral domain* (pp. 224–251). Cambridge MA: MIT Press.
- Habermas J (1990b). *Moral consciousness and communicative action*. Cambridge MA: MIT Press.
- Hay DF, Caplan M, Castle J & Stimson CA (1991). Does sharing become increasingly 'rational' in the second year of life? *Developmental Psychology*, 27, 987–993.
- Helwig CC, Tisak MS & Turiel E (1990). Children's social reasoning in context: Reply to Gabennesch. *Child Development*, 61, 2068–2078.
- Higgins A (1991). The just community approach to moral education: Evolution of the idea and recent findings. In Kurtines WM & Gewirtz JL (Eds.), *Handbook of moral behavior and development* (Vol. 3, pp. 111–141). Hillsdale NJ: Erlbaum.
- Hoffman ML (1991). Empathy, social cognition, and moral action. In Kurtines WM & Gewirtz JL (Eds.), *Handbook of moral behavior and development* (Vol. 1, pp. 275–301). Hillsdale NJ: Erlbaum.
- Huebner A & Garrod A (1991). Moral reasoning in a karmic world. *Human Development*, 34, 341–352.
- Kahn PH Jr (1991). Bounding the controversies: Foundational issues in the study of moral development. *Human Development*, 34, 325–340.

- Kahn PH Jr (1992). Children's obligatory and discretionary moral judgments. *Child Development*, 63, 416-430.
- Kant I (1959). *Foundations of the metaphysics of morals*. New York: McMillan. (Originally published in 1785).
- Karmiloff-Smith A (1992). *Beyond modularity: A developmental perspective on cognitive science*. Cambridge MA: MIT Press.
- Killen M (1991). Social and moral development in early childhood. In Kurtines WM & Gewirtz JL (Eds.), *Handbook of moral behavior and development* (Vol. 2, pp. 115-138). Hillsdale NJ: Erlbaum.
- Kohlberg L (1981). *The philosophy of moral development*. San Francisco: Harper & Row.
- Kohlberg L (1984). *The psychology of moral development*. San Francisco: Harper & Row.
- Kruger AC (1992). The effect of peer and adult-child transactive discussions on moral reasoning. *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly*, 38, 191-211.
- Kurtines WM, Mayock E, Pollard SR, Lanza T & Carlo G (1991). Social and moral development from the perspective of psychosocial theory. In Kurtines WM & Gewirtz JL (Eds.), *Handbook of moral behavior and development* (Vol. 1, pp. 303-333). Hillsdale NJ: Erlbaum.
- Lamb S (1991). First moral sense: Aspects of and contributors to a beginning morality in the second year of life. In Kurtines WM & Gewirtz JL (Eds.) *Handbook of moral behavior and development* (Vol. 2, pp. 171-189). Hillsdale NJ: Erlbaum.
- Liebert RM (1984). What develops in moral development? In Kurtines WM & Gewirtz JL (Eds.), *Morality, moral behavior, and moral development* (pp. 177-192). New York: Wiley.
- Lillard AS & Flavell JH (1992). Young children's understanding of different mental states. *Developmental Psychology*, 28, 626-623.
- MacIntyre AC (1988). *Whose justice? Which rationality?* Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Mill JS (1979). *Utilitarianism*. Indianapolis: Hackett. (Originally published in 1861.)
- Moshman D (1994). Reason, reasons, and reasoning: A constructivist account of human rationality. *Theory & Psychology*, 4, 245-260.
- Moshman D (1995). Reasoning as self-constrained thinking. *Human Development*, 38, 53-64.
- Moshman D (in preparation). Cognitive development beyond childhood. In Kuhn D & Siegler R (Eds.), Damon W (Series ed.), *Handbook of child psychology: Vol. 2. Cognition, perception, and language* (5th ed.) New York: Wiley.
- Nisan M (1991). The moral balance model: Theory and research extending our understanding of moral choice and deviation. In Kurtines WM & Gewirtz JL (Eds.), *Handbook of moral behavior and development* (Vol. 3, pp. 213-249). Hillsdale NJ: Erlbaum.
- Nunner-Winkler G (1990). Moral relativism and strict universalism. In Wren TE (Ed.), *The moral domain* (pp. 109-126). Cambridge MA: MIT Press.
- Perner J (1992). Grasping the concept of representation: Its impact on 4-year-olds' theory of mind and beyond. *Human Development*, 35, 146-155.
- Piaget J (1965). *The moral judgment of the child*. New York: Free Press. (Originally published in 1932).
- Power C (1991). Democratic schools and the problem of moral authority. In Kurtines WM & Gewirtz JL (Eds.), *Handbook of moral behavior and development* (Vol. 3, pp. 317-333). Hillsdale NJ: Erlbaum.
- Rasmussen DB & Den Uyl DJ (1991). *Liberty and nature: An Aristotelian defense of liberal order*. La Salle IL: Open Court.
- Rawls J (1971). *A theory of justice*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.
- Reiman J (1990). *Justice and modern moral philosophy*. New Haven CT: Yale University Press.
- Rescher N (1988). *Rationality*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Rest JR (1983). Morality. In Flavell JH & Markman EM (Eds.), Mussen PH (Series ed.), *Handbook of child psychology: Vol. 3. Cognitive development* (pp. 556-629) (4th ed.). New York: Wiley.
- Robinson DN (Ed.) (1992). *Social discourse and moral judgment*. San Diego: Academic Press.
- Shweder RA (1986). Divergent rationalities. In Fiske DW & Shweder RA (Eds.), *Metatheory in social science: Pluralisms and subjectivities* (pp. 163-196). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Shweder RA (1990). In defense of moral realism: Reply to Gabennesch. *Child Development*, 61, 2060-2067.
- Shweder RA, Mahapatra M & Miller JG (1987). Culture and moral development. In Kagan J & Lamb S (Eds.), *The emergence of morality in young children* (pp. 1-82). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Siegel H (1988). *Educating reason: Rationality, critical thinking, and education*. London: Routledge.
- Slack AT (1988). Female circumcision: A critical appraisal. *Human Rights Quarterly*, 10, 437-486.
- Smetana JG (1989). Toddlers' social interactions in the context of moral and conventional transgressions in the home. *Developmental Psychology*, 25, 499-508.
- Smetana JG & Braeges JL (1990). The development of toddlers' moral and conventional judgments. *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly*, 36, 329-345.
- Smetana JG, Killen M & Turiel E (1991). Children's reasoning about interpersonal and moral conflicts. *Child Development*, 62, 629-644.
- Smetana JG, Schlagman N & Adams PW (1993). Preschool children's judgments about hypothetical and actual transgressions. *Child Development*, 64, 202-214.
- Snarey J (1985). Cross-cultural universality of social-moral development: A critical review of Kohlbergian research. *Psychological Bulletin*, 97, 202-232.

- Snarey J & Keljo K (1991). In a gemeinschaft voice: The cross-cultural expansion of moral development theory. In Kurtines WM & Gewirtz JL (Eds.), *Handbook of moral behavior and development* (Vol. 1, pp. 395–424). Hillsdale NJ: Erlbaum.
- Turiel E, Killen M & Helwig CC (1987). Morality: Its structure, functions, and vagaries. In Kagan J & Lamb S (Eds.), *The emergence of morality in young children* (pp. 155–243). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Winfield RD (1988). *Reason and justice*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Youniss J & Damon W (1992). Social construction in Piaget's theory. In Beilin H & Pufall PB (Eds.), *Piaget's theory: Prospects and possibilities* (pp. 267–286). Hillsdale NJ: Erlbaum.
- Zahn-Waxler C, Radke-Yarrow M, Wagner E & Chapman M (1992). Development of concern for others. *Developmental Psychology*, 28, 126–136.

David Moshman, Department of Educational Psychology, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, NE 68588–0345 (USA)

.....

Commentary

Peter H. Kahn, Jr.

Colby College, Waterville, Me., USA

Moshman offers much to think with, argue about, and learn from as he appropriately refocuses our attention on the importance of moral rationality and its development. In the study of moral development, a persistent tension exists. An increasing number of theorists are calling into question research programs that seek to articulate universal aspects of moral development. Their claim often is that morality is largely ethnocentrically determined and that attempts to find moral universals lead to 'thin' descriptions of the moral life and often invalid judgments about the moral worth of other people and cultures. Yet, certain moral orientations that turn on considerations of rights, justice, and human welfare do appear in most, if not all, cultures. Moreover, when they are absent, it is difficult for many people to withhold moral judgment.

[Chinese] guards in Gutsa Prison [in Tibet] raped nuns who were political prisoners and sexually violated them with electric cattle prods. In another prison, the chief administrator said to me, 'I will give you Tibetan independence.' Then he rammed the cattle prod into my mouth. When I regained consciousness, I found myself in a pool of blood and excrement and I had lost most of my teeth [Rosenthal, 1995, A25].

In response to such occurrences, many people would be hesitant to say 'live and let live', especially since that very idea is being violated by others.

Moshman is sensitive to this tension, and he seeks middle ground by offering an account that allows for moral pluralism but rejects the view that morality is 'whatever anyone says it is' or that 'all moral reasoning is equally good'. Moshman stakes out this ground by a bold move that shifts the level of analysis away from morality and toward rationality. Does he succeed? In certain ways.

Certainly there is much to appreciate as Moshman offers an account of rationality that is unabashedly constructivist. Reflective abstraction, heteronomy, autonomy, peer interaction, equilibration, hierarchical integration, genetic epistemology – Moshman sketches a familiar and still vibrant theoretical orientation. Throughout it runs

the web of rationality: 'metasubjective objectivity, involving a justifiable perspective and genuine reasons'. Constructivist rationality carries forth Moshman's account of moral development.

Perhaps the most efficient way to examine this account is to consider Moshman's example of female circumcision. Moshman quotes Slack's description that during the infibulation of girls „the entire clitoris and labia minora ... [and] most of the labia majora is cut or scraped away.“ Moshman writes: „In addition to the intense pain and extreme psychological trauma, severe and lifelong medical complications are routine among millions who survive the operation. For many, the process is fatal.“ One might hope that a theory of morality could legitimately speak against such acts. But Moshman says no. To ask that potentially imposes our ethnocentric moral views on another culture. Should we then condone such action? Not so fast, Moshman responds. Let us first consider the reasoning of the individuals who justify their views about female circumcision, in the light of constructivist rationality. Moshman then imagines that individuals might reason that 'female circumcision is appropriate because it discourages promiscuity and helps assure that women maintain their virginity until marriage'. Moshman keeps probing; and each of his imagined answers follows his account of at best what he terms level 2 rationality: a set of limited principles that can sufficiently justify assumptions that themselves cannot yet be justified on a meta-ethical level. Moshman then asserts that ultimately female circumcision may not be rationally justified beyond a level 2 rationality. And there we have it. Given moral pluralism, morality itself cannot get leverage on female circumcision, but rationality can. In other words, if I am understanding Moshman correctly, in the moral life all views are not equally justifiable, not because one view is more or less moral than another but because one view may be more or less rational than another.

Moshman is no doubt correct that rationality has an important place in understanding the adequacy of moral judgments. Earlier research, for example, has shown ways in which the development of logical knowledge is necessary but not sufficient for the development of moral reasoning as assessed by Kohlberg's measures [Kuhn et al., 1977]. Yet for several reasons I am hesitant to follow Moshman entirely. First, there is the issue of internal consistency. Moshman says that without suggesting 'that divergent rationalities are ultimately incommensurable, we may acknowledge our inability to identify one true rationality, if indeed there is such a thing'. But if there is no definitive way to characterize rationality, and if different rationalities can offer competing accounts, I am unclear how exactly constructivist rationality provides a check on moral relativism. After all, different cultures could have different level 4 rationalities, which, in turn, could support seemingly immoral behavior from the other culture's perspective. For example, Moshman in effect leaves open the possibility that female circumcision could be justified by level 4 rationality. I am sympathetic with Moshman's caution in not wanting to overstep his formulations; perhaps, too, he is wary of a postmodern assault if he says more. But, in turn, I think he hedges too much. To be internally consistent (am I here asking for a level 3 or level 4 rational defense?), Moshman needs either to give more ground to moral relativism or to work out a stronger account of level 4 rationality, one that can with some confidence transcend culture.

The second option appears more in keeping with Moshman's general enterprise. It also finds support in recent debate on logic and gender. In feminist theorizing, Ginzberg [1989a] has written that women in her logic classes generally have more dif-

ficulty than men in recognizing the validity of the inferential logic of modus ponens (if p, then q; p; therefore q). Ginzberg suggests that therefore we should consider broadening our notion of logic to include the thinking of these women. In a heated response, Nussbaum [1994, 1995] has sought to deflate this conception. She argues that what Ginzberg calls a broader notion of the rational is simply the irrational, and that Ginzberg's view (framed itself by means of a modus ponens argument) supports the mistaken stereotype of women as empty-headed and illogical. Moreover, Nussbaum [1994] argues that women have good reasons, 'both theoretical and urgently practical, to hold fast to standards of reason and objectivity' (p. 59) – theoretical because without reason little could be thought or spoken, and practical because reason and objectivity provide the basis on which charges of inequality, bias, and injustice incurred by women can be made and, when adequately supported, corrected.

Similarly, I think people across cultures have good reason, theoretical and practical, to hold fast to standards of rationality. I press this issue, for we are not talking about cross-cultural differences in forms of dress, or whether people in various cultures eat for breakfast chicken eggs or ant eggs. We are talking about one of the deepest processes of human nature; and I think that the anthropological research would have to be much stronger than that which Moshman cites to speak compellingly against a conception of rationality that crosses cultural boundaries.

I recognize that I may be asking Moshman to require more of rationality than he may think possible. But also I would like to ask him to require less. Moshman claims that either there are universal theories of moral development, like Kohlberg's, that posit a single developmental sequence of moral structures, or there is moral pluralism. He then gives significant credence to many of the cross-cultural critiques of Kohlberg's theory, therefore concluding that there is moral pluralism. But I think the initial premise moves too fast over moral issues. Moshman may thereby overestimate the extent to which he needs to account for moral pluralism and in this way may be asking rationality to account for more than is necessary. To help convey the argument, it is useful to consider three fruitful points of departure for moral inquiry that have been gaining currency in the literature.

First, metaphysical assumptions should be separated from moral reasoning. For example, Huebner and Garrod [1991] claim that Tibetan Buddhism 'presents profound challenges to those who argue for general applicability of moral reasoning theories originating in Western culture' [p. 341]. They illustrate their point by providing a passage from one of their interviews with a Tibetan monk, which I quote in its entirety:

He [the bug] went under my feet, but he did not die. Now he was suffering, wasn't he? Suffering. I figured that if I left him like that, he would suffer forever, because there was no medicine for him as there is for a human being. So I prayed ... And then I killed him with my hand, the suffering one. Why did I kill him? He was suffering. If I left him, he would suffer. So it was better for him not to suffer any longer. That's why I killed him. And I prayed ... that one day in the next life, he would become a man like me, who can understand Buddhism and who will be a great philosopher in Tibet [p. 345].

Huebner and Garrod [1991] say that 'such sensitivity to the nonhuman world leads to moral dilemmas not likely considered in Western culture' [p. 345]. As support for what can be called moral pluralism, I find this claim surprising. Have not many of us experienced moral qualms very similar to this Buddhist monk – stepping by mistake on ants or caterpillars, and feeling remorse? The Tin Man in the Wizard of Oz

does; and his heartfelt extension of sympathy to the small animals beneath his feet speaks clearly to Western audiences. More formally, the suffering of animals receives attention, for example, from Western political activists (the 'animal rights' movement) and philosophers [Regan, 1983; Spiegel, 1988; Stone, 1986]. Granted, the Buddhist monk interviewed by Huebner and Garrod advances metaphysical assumptions about karma and an afterlife in a way that most Westerners would not. (I say only 'in a way' because indeed many Westerners – for example, of Christian faith – believe in some form of an afterlife and that one's actions on earth affect one's place there.) The point is that moral pluralism sometimes gives way by separating metaphysical assumptions from moral reasoning based on those assumptions [Turiel et al., 1987, 1991; Wainryb, 1991, 1995].

A second point is that when moral differences do seem to appear cross-culturally, it is important, just as Moshman says, to assess the responses of all the participants. People being tortured rarely give their consent and seldom say that they enjoy the activity. Or consider, for example, incidents reported by Hatch [1983] concerning the Yanomamo tribe in Brazil. Women were 'occasionally beaten [by men], shot with barbed arrows, chopped with machetes or axes, and burned with firebrands' [p. 91]. Hatch also reports that the Yanomamo women did not appear to enjoy such physically abusive treatment and were seen running in apparent fear. I wonder, is this situation so different from ones occurring in many Western countries? Some Western women live in physically abusive relationships; they, too, can be seen to flee in terror when their partners approach them with the intent to harm; and, like Yanomamo women, they often return to these partners at a later time. The point is that some acts may be rational – based on Moshman's account of level 1 and 2, if not 3 and 4, constructivist rationality – but immoral. Instead of asking rationality to do all the work to check moral relativism, let morality do some.

A third point is the need to separate and then integrate analyses of differing moral conceptions. Moshman is keenly aware that what counts as morality is highly contested in the literature. He offers what he calls a 'middle-ground approach'. He believes there is consensus that 'morality, at least in part, involves at least some behavior deemed obligatory, desirable, undesirable, or forbidden on the basis of consideration of others' rights or welfare'. He suggests that we use these criteria and yet leave open that some theorists (and cultures) may construe morality more broadly. Moshman offers a reasonable approach. I merely wish to highlight that it is not the only one.

While theorists may debate the scope of the moral domain, the possibilities of what counts as moral usually fall within one of two broad orientations [Kahn, 1991]. One moral orientation focuses on what constitutes right action. In the philosophical literature, this orientation includes deontological and consequentialist theories and their various extensions and permutations. This orientation is also central to Kohlberg's theory, as well as to theorists adopting a domain approach to social development [Killen, 1990; Laupa, 1991; Nucci, 1981; Smetana, 1995; Tisak, 1986; Turiel, 1983]. A second moral orientation focuses on what it means to be a 'good' person or on a conception of the 'good' or the 'good life'. Moshman excludes this orientation from his working definition of morality, yet leaves open that it offers potentially viable moral constructs, such as 'virtue, honor, duty, nonviolence, responsibility, integrity, solidarity' and so forth.

These two moral orientations need not always offer competing accounts of the moral life. In an agile response to Campbell and Christopher's [in press] critique of their work, Helwig et al. [in press] show how Aristotle, the prototypic virtue theorist, also focused on conceptions of justice, including notions of proportion, equality, and merit. Indeed, Aristotle proposed that justice is the greatest of virtues. In turn, Helwig et al. [in press] show how Rawls, the prototypic modern-day deontologist, includes substantive considerations based on human excellences, conditions for human flourishing, and the good life. Thus, while eminent moral philosophers can emphasize certain moral orientations, they rarely can be reduced to the caricatures that follow them. Where does this leave us as developmental psychologists? I think it suggests that these two moral orientations are related ontogenetically and that research programs could be patterned accordingly.

In some of my own research, I move in this direction by distinguishing between children's obligatory and discretionary moral judgments [Kahn, 1992]. Akin to Moshman's working definition of morality, obligatory judgments are generalizable requirements that are not contingent on societal rules or laws and are justified by considerations of rights, justice, or welfare. Discretionary moral judgments are those for which moral action, while not required of an agent, is nevertheless conceived of as morally worthy and admirable based on considerations of welfare and virtue. My research suggests that children as young as 8 years of age distinguish obligatory and discretionary moral actions. The distinction also helps account for an asymmetry between negative moral actions (do not steal) and positive moral actions (practice charity). Children of all ages more often conceived negative moral actions as obligatory.

The obligatory-discretionary distinction is also proving helpful in investigating children's environmental views and values [Howe et al., in preparation; Kahn and Friedman, in press, in preparation]. For example, in studies that include populations in North American city and urban and rural parts of the Brazilian Amazon, it appears that children conceive of polluting local waterways as a violation of a moral obligation. At the same time, some of their justifications include considerations that turn on teleological, Aristotelian-like, moral conceptions. One child, for example, said that it is wrong to pollute the water because animals could die, and 'without animals the world is like incomplete; it's like a paper that's not finished.' This child embeds a concern for the welfare of animals in a conception of the proper endpoint or functioning of the world. Thus, instead of asking which moral construct defines or is the most important to the moral life (e.g., rights, justice, welfare, virtue, or human flourishing), the distinction between obligatory and discretionary moral judgments helps to cultivate analyses of different, conceptually grounded moral constructs and their relations.

By moving in this direction, the problem of moral pluralism that Moshman deftly articulates can be further pursued. For example, it may be that moral pluralism more often appears in considerations of the good life than in considerations of rights, justice, and welfare. Where similar conceptions of the good are found cross-culturally, it may be because the good is grounded itself by rights, justice, and welfare. These are difficult issues, to be sure; all the more reason that we should avail ourselves of as much conceptual moral clarity as is possible.

Moshman is engaged in a vitally important enterprise. As many countries become increasingly multicultural, and as our world 'shrinks' by virtue of technological

advancements, we increasingly need to be tolerant if not appreciative of human differences, yet intolerant of human injustice and cruelty. Here Moshman is surely correct about the need for rational discourse, and also that a robust account of rationality – like the one he offers – can help stake out a middle ground. I have suggested, however, that constructivist rationality may be more pervasive across cultures than Moshman commits to. I have also suggested that rationality by itself cannot do all the work Moshman asks of it, and that there is need for essentially moral labor: to separate, for example, the moral from the nonmoral, and to analyze differing moral constructs (such as justice and virtue), and their potential coexistence, coordination, and structural integration. Thus in this brief commentary I have but sought to shift the ground slightly. Female circumcision or the torture of Tibetan monks and nuns – such acts, multiplied daily in innumerable forms, larger and smaller, may not always call for moral rationality, but moral responses, rationally informed.

References

- Campbell RL & Christopher JC (in press). Moral development theory: A critique of its Kantian presuppositions. *Developmental Review*.
- Ginzberg R (1989a). Feminism, rationality, and logic. *American Philosophical Association Newsletter on Feminism and Philosophy*, 88(2), 34–39.
- Ginzberg R (1989b). Teaching feminist logic. *American Philosophical Association Newsletter on Feminism and Philosophy*, 88(2), 58–62.
- Hatch E (1983). *Culture and morality*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Helwig CC, Turiel E & Nucci LP (in press). The virtues and vices of moral development theorists. *Developmental Review*.
- Howe D, Kahn PH Jr & Friedman B (in preparation). *Along the Rio Negro: Brazilian Children's Environmental Views and Values*.
- Huebner A & Garrod A (1991). Moral reasoning in a karmic world. *Human Development*, 34, 341–352.
- Kahn PH Jr (1991). Bounding the controversies: Foundational issues in the study of moral development. *Human Development*, 34, 325–340.
- Kahn PH Jr (1992). Children's obligatory and discretionary moral judgments. *Child Development*, 63, 416–430.
- Kahn PH Jr & Friedman B (in press). Environmental views and values of children in an inner-city Black community. *Child Development*.
- Kahn PH Jr & Friedman B (in preparation). *Children's moral and ecological reasoning about the Prince William Sound oil spill*.
- Killen M (1990). Children's evaluations of morality in the context of peer, teacher-child, and familial relations. *Journal of Genetic Psychology*, 151, 395–410.
- Kuhn D, Langer J, Kohlberg L & Haan NS (1977). The development of formal operations in logical and moral judgment. *Genetic Psychology Monographs*, 95, 97–188.
- Laupa M (1991). Children's reasoning about three authority attributes: Adult status, knowledge, and social position. *Developmental Psychology*, 27, 321–329.
- Nucci LP (1981). The development of personal concepts: A domain distinct from moral and societal concepts. *Child Development*, 52, 114–121.
- Nussbaum M (1994, October 20). Feminists and philosophy. *The New York Review of Books*, pp. 59–63.
- Nussbaum M (1995, April 6). Feminism and philosophy: An exchange [A reply to letters to the editor]. *The New York Review of Books*, pp. 48–49.
- Rosenthal AM (1995, April 11). You are Palden Gyatso. *The New York Times*, p. A25.
- Regan T (1983). *The case for animal rights*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Smetana JG (1995). Parenting styles and conceptions of parental authority during adolescence. *Child Development*, 66, 299–316.
- Spiegel M (1988). *The dreaded comparison. Human and animal slavery*. New York: Mirror Books.
- Stone C (1972). *Should trees have standing?* Los Altos: William Kaufman.
- Tisak MS (1986). Children's conceptions of parental authority. *Child Development*, 57, 166–176.
- Turiel E (1983). *The development of social knowledge*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Turiel E, Hildebrandt C & Wainryb C (1991). Judging social issues. Difficulties, inconsistencies, and consistencies. *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development*, 56(2, Serial no. 224).

- Turiel E, Killen M & Helwig CC (1987). Morality: Its structure, functions and vagaries. In Kagan J & Lamb S (Eds.), *The emergence of morality in young children* (pp. 155–244). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Wainryb C (1991). Understanding differences in moral judgments: The role of informational assumptions. *Child Development*, 62, 840–851.
- Wainryb C (1995). Reasoning about social conflicts in different cultures: Druze and Jewish children in Israel. *Child Development*, 66, 390–401.

Peter H. Kahn, Jr., Department of Education and Human Development, Colby College, Waterville, ME 04901 (USA)