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## 12 The moral intuitions of the child

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Young children are intuitive moralists. Although four- to six-year-olds have little reflective understanding of their moral knowledge, they nevertheless have an intuitive moral competence that displays itself in the way they answer questions about moral rules and in the way they excuse their transgressions and react to the transgressions of others. Recent research by Much and Shweder (1978), Nucci and Turiel (1978), Pool, Shweder, and Much (in press), and Turiel (in press), indicates that they have moral understandings that are distinguished from nonmoral forms of appraisal. In fact, at this relatively early age, four to six, children not only seem to distinguish and identify moral versus conventional versus prudential rules using the same formal principles (e.g., obligatoriness, importance, generalizability) employed by adults; they also seem to agree with the adults of their society about the moral versus conventional versus prudential status of particular substantive events (e.g., throwing paint in another child's face versus wearing the same clothes to school every day).

These recent findings are in sharp contrast with many accounts of the development of social thought in which it is asserted that young children lack moral understanding per se and that they confuse moral and nonmoral forms of appraisal. In analyses of both the evolution of social systems (Gellner, 1973; Horton, 1968; Hobhouse, 1906) and the ontogenesis of children's moral judgments (Kohlberg, 1963, 1969, 1971; Piaget, 1932) it has been proposed that development entails the differentiation of domains of appraisal. In this view, children's judgments are dominated by nonmoral appraisals and true moral understanding only comes about after a gradual process of separating nonmoral judgments from moral ones. For example, Piaget (1932) and Kohlberg (1963, 1969, 1971) view social cognitive development as a process of differentiation and replacement in which moral understandings come to be distinguished from prudential and conventional understandings and then supersede them. This process of differentiation and replacement takes place at what

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are considered to be the most advanced developmental levels; indeed, by Kohlberg's account all young children and most adults in all cultures never display pure moral understandings.

Studies showing that young children have moral understandings do not imply that substantive moral development ceases at an early age. Rather, those findings suggest that it is necessary to distinguish intuitive abilities from reflective abilities. It appears that some (e.g., Piaget and Kohlberg) have traced the ontogenesis of reflective understanding and the ability to *articulate* the formal principles that define morality. In contrast, Much and Shweder (1978), Nucci and Turiel (1978), Pool, Shweder, and Much (in press), and Turiel (in press) have examined these same formal principles, but from the point of view of intuitive understanding.

In the first part of this chapter we argue that the young child is an "intuitive moralist"; the intuitive moralist knows a good deal more about morality, convention, and utility than he or she can deliberately formulate (see Nisbett & Wilson, 1977, on "knowing more than one can tell"; also Searle, 1969, p. 41). On the assumption that young children do possess intuitive moral knowledge, we then turn to the developmental question, "where do the moral intuitions of the young come from and how are those intuitions of childhood related to the moral order of the adult?" One of the best-suited methods for answering this question is cross-cultural developmental research. Accordingly, the second part of the chapter analyzes the development of intuitive moral knowledge as related to philosophical assumptions regarding moral universalism and relativism.

#### **What is a moral issue?**

Before one can speak of the moral intuitions of children one must define morality and identify moral issues. The meaning of "morality" is something discovered, not stipulated. Adults normally employ a vocabulary of moral appraisal exemplified by such terms as "immoral," "unfair," "unethical," a vocabulary that can be distinguished from nonmoral vocabularies of appraisal exemplified by such terms as "rude," "discourteous," "inappropriate," "inefficient," "impractical," "short-sighted," "illogical," and "unauthorized." A vocabulary of appraisal, whether moral or nonmoral, is applied when certain implicit or explicit prescriptions for conduct ("one should not steal"; "one should return a greeting") are violated. One way to discover the meaning of morality is to identify the formal criteria or principles that characterize and distinguish moral from nonmoral prescriptions.

The formal criteria or principles that define "morality" are relatively few in number. Gewirth (1978, p. 1) describes the core meaning as follows:

A morality is a set of categorically obligatory requirements for action that are addressed at least in part to every actual or prospective agent, and that are concerned with furthering the interests, especially the most important interests, of persons or recipients other than or in addition to the agent or the speaker. The requirements are categorically obligatory in that compliance with them is mandatory for the conduct of every person to whom they are addressed regardless of whether he wants to accept them or their results, and regardless also of the requirements of any other institutions such as law or etiquette, whose obligatoriness may itself be doubtful or variable. Thus, although one moral requirement may be overridden by another, it may not be overridden by any non-moral requirement, nor can its normative bindingness be escaped by shifting one's inclinations, opinions, or ideals.

According to this definition a transgression (e.g., a promise is broken) should elicit moral terms of appraisal (e.g., "wrong," "unfair," "immoral") if its governing prescription is perceived to satisfy certain formal criteria. Prescriptions will be classified as moral if they are (1) *obligatory*, that is, duties are invoked that do not depend on what anyone happens to want to do, (2) *generalizable or just*, that is, what is right or wrong for one is right or wrong for any similar person in similar circumstances, and (3) *important*, that is, the moral has precedence. If we subdivide "obligation" into some of its components, moral prescriptions are also perceived as (4) *impersonal or external*, that is, what is right or wrong is right or wrong regardless of whether people recognize it as such, (5) *unalterable*, that is, what is right or wrong cannot be changed by consensus or legislation, and (6) *ahistorical*, that is, although its recognition may be historical, there is no point in time at which the validity of what is right or wrong changes. (See Whiting & Whiting (1960), Hart (1961), Black (1962), Kohlberg (1971), Much & Shweder (1978), Nucci & Turiel (1978), and Turiel (1979), and Pool, Shweder, and Much (in press) for overlapping formal definitions of morality.)

Moral prescriptions are perceived as obligatory (impersonal, unalterable, ahistorical), generalizable, and important, at least by adults. The question arises, do children identify and distinguish moral prescriptions by means of the same formal criteria? Two independent lines of research suggest that they do.

#### The child as an intuitive moralist

Much and Shweder (1978) conducted a sociolinguistic analysis of naturally occurring excuses and justifications elicited by accusations of wrong-

doing in a kindergarten setting. Three hundred twelve transgressions committed by five- and six-year-old children were classified as either breaches of morality, convention, law (school rules), belief, or "know-how" (pragmatic instructions) using adult formal criteria derived from Black (1962). The formal criteria included alterability and historicity as previously discussed. The 312 transgressions were reliably classified by two adults. What follows is an example of a transgression classified as a moral breach:

Sally: That was my chair, Diane, get out of it.

Diane: You can get another one, see?

Sally: I don't have enough room. You stole my chair.

Diane: Nobody was in it and I sat in it.

Sally: I'm sitting here first. I was sitting here first!

Much and Shweder discovered that for kindergarten children the things talked about and some of the ways of talking in transgression situations varied by type of breach (moral, conventional, prudential, etc.), as classified by adults using formal criteria (alterability, historicity, etc.). An analysis of the excuses and justifications of kindergarten children suggested that five- and six-year-olds distinguish among breach types in much the same way adults do, and adjust their speech behavior accordingly.

As Much and Shweder point out, breaches of conventions (e.g., "Thou shalt not stare at someone while they undress") and school rules (e.g., "Children are expected to be in school every day") elicit a legalistic orientation rich in explicit references to rules. Breaches of these kinds are explained with reference to myriad circumstantial or contextual conditions. Much and Shweder also found that breaches of pragmatic instructions (e.g., "Don't take freshly painted articles home in the rain") elicit "knowledge talk" and references to what one is trying to accomplish, his or her goals, wants, preferences. Moral breaches, in contrast, elicit negotiations over what it is that was done and who did it. Reference to the nature of the untoward act occurs most typically in connection with breaches of this type. Children either deny the act of which they have been accused, or that the accused did it, or they redefine the act to make it appear innocent instead of blameworthy. In the previous example, Diane, accused of "stealing" Sandra's chair, notes that because the chair was empty, she didn't steal it, she "sat in it." This verbal strategy ("redefine in order to avoid blame") is consistent with the view that children (like adults) perceive moral prescriptions as unalterable, obligatory, and general. Special circumstances do not excuse them. When, on occasion, a child does proffer what he or she believes to be a justification for a moral breach, it is justification of a special type: The child explains his act as

punishment or retribution for someone else's wrongdoing ("Why did you pinch Tammy?" "She wouldn't let Alice play.") The research suggests that young children distinguish the moral versus conventional versus prudential status of a prescription and modulate their speech accordingly.

Research by Nucci and Turiel (1978) and Turiel (1979) and Weston and Turiel (1979) provides us with even more direct evidence that young children possess intuitive knowledge of the formal criteria that define "morality" and distinguish it from other types of prescriptions. In the Nucci and Turiel study, preschool children and adults were asked to classify seventy-two observed transgressions of moral and conventional prescriptions in terms of obligatoriness, alterability, and generalizability as measured by responses to the question: "What if there weren't a rule in the school about [the observed act], would it be right to do it then?" "The preschoolers and adults agreed 83 percent of the time. In addition, preschoolers were observed to display different reaction patterns to actual rule violations, which paralleled their formal classification of the violation as either moral or conventional.

In the Turiel study subjects ranging from six to seventeen years of age were questioned about a series of rules selected to represent the distinction between moral and conventional prescriptions. The prescriptions pertained to such matters as stealing, dress codes, use of titles in school, games, and so on. Queries were posed concerning the importance of the various moral and conventional prescriptions, their perceived alterability ("Can the rule be changed?") and perceived generalizability ("Suppose there is another country in which no families have that rule. Is that all right?"). At *all* ages, subjects were discriminating in their responses and tended to agree with each other about which prescriptions were important, which could or could not be altered, and which did or did not generalize. Similar results have been obtained by Nucci (1977).

In the study by Weston and Turiel (1979) subjects from five to eleven years of age were questioned about hypothetical stories describing (1) a school in which children are allowed to hit each other (i.e., no rule exists regarding a moral prescription), and (2) a school in which children are allowed to be without any clothes (i.e., no rule exists regarding a convention). In each story the children evaluated the school policy (that permitted the act) and a child who had engaged in the permitted act. At all ages the majority of children stated a school should not permit hitting, but that a school could allow children to be undressed (even though the children, in the absence of information about school policy, had stated that one should not go around undressed). The following example of a five-year-old boy's responses is typical:

David (five years old): (This is a story about Park School. In Park School the children are allowed to hit and push others if they want. It's okay to hit and push others. Do you think it is alright for Park School to say children can hit and push others if they want to?)

No, it is not okay. (Why not?) Because that is like making other people unhappy. You can hurt them that way. It hurts other people. hurting is not good. (Mark goes to Park School. Today in school he wants to swing but he finds that all the swings are being used by other children. So he decides to hit one of the children and take the swing. Is it okay for Mark to do that?) No. Because he is hurting someone else. . . .

[Prior to specifying the school rule David was told about a boy who took his clothes off because he was warm from running around and asked if that was alright.] No, because it's a school and other people don't like to see you without your clothes on. It looks silly. (I know about another school in a different city. It's called Grove School. . . . At Grove School the children are allowed to take their clothes off if they want to. Is it okay or not okay for Grove School to say children can take their clothes off if they want to?) Yes. Because that is the rule. (Why can they have that rule?) If that's what the boss wants to do, he can do that. (How come?) Because he's the boss, he is in charge of the school. (Bob goes to Grove School. This is a warm day at Grove School. He has been running in the play area outside and he is hot so he decides to take off his clothes. Is it okay for Bob to do that?) Yes, if he wants to he can because it is the rule.

As noted earlier, the results of all these studies serve to question the commonly held view that young children do not differentiate moral and nonmoral forms of understanding. Moreover, the evidence of pure moral understandings in such young children serves to highlight the importance of distinguishing between *intuitive* and *reflective* understanding. It may be the failure to make such a distinction that has led to the belief that children confuse morality, convention, and prudence. Consider a concrete example. It is frequently thought that children confuse morality with prudence, believing that right and wrong is defined by reward and punishment; as in a child who responds to the question "Why is it wrong to steal?" with "because you will be punished for it." However, the results of the studies just reviewed suggest that such responses are a consequence of the child's difficulty in articulating justifications for their moral prescriptions. When initially asked for a justification children do indeed sometimes express themselves in the idiom of reward and punishment. However, the child does not seem to define rightness or wrongness by punishment. Rather, the resulting punishment for transgression is seen as a demonstration of its wrongness. In other words, the child is not stating that because you will be punished it is wrong, but instead is stating you will be punished because it is wrong. In fact, when the issue is pressed a little further and children are asked a question like "what if there were no punishment" for the transgression, they maintain that the act would still be wrong.

This point can be clarified through an analogy with grammatical intuitions. The young intuitive grammarian can distinguish a grammatical utterance from an ungrammatical utterance. Whatever its origin, this early competence emerges independently of either the ability to describe grammatical principles or the inclination to speak grammatically. Grammatical competence, grammatical theorizing, and speech performance undergo separate courses of development that must be explained in somewhat different terms. Similarly, it is necessary to distinguish moral intuition from moral reflection. Young children possess knowledge of the formal criteria that define "morality," but their knowledge does not involve deliberate reflection and cannot necessarily be articulated.

There are two versions of the analogy with grammar that have somewhat different implications for moral development. In the "strong" version, it would be asserted that evidence of an early intuitive ability of children to distinguish moral versus nonmoral forms of appraisal means that reflective moral *articulation* is analogous to writing the grammar of one's language. For both the intuitive grammarian and the intuitive moralist, reflective understanding is an intellectual pastime that has little bearing on either the development of grammatical or moral competence, or on the inclination to engage in appropriate behavior, either linguistic or moral. According to the "strong" version of the analogy most young children have moral intuitions. None are moral philosophers, and only a few are paragons of virtue. In the "weak" version of the analogy, however, it would be maintained that moral reflection is different from grammatical reflection in certain crucial respects. Whereas reflection upon grammatical principles does not necessarily alter one's grammatical intuitions or speech performance, reflection upon the moral reasoning of the self or others may very well result in substantive transformations in moral judgments and/or moral conduct. That is, reflection upon morality may be an intellectual activity that has a significant bearing on the development of moral competence and the regulation of behavior.

There are, then, three issues regarding the child's orientation to rules that need to be kept separate. Rules, to the extent they are *legitimately*, not whimsically or arbitrarily, enjoined, are designed to influence conduct by appealing to what is reasonable. Thus, one issue deals with the existence (or nonexistence) of an intuitive *grasp* of the requirements set by reason and an appreciation of the difference between moral and nonmoral forms of appraisal. That is the issue that concerns us in this chapter. The second issue deals with the development of skills of moral reflection, *articulation*, and reasoned argumentation. The third issue is about the fit (or lack of fit) of moral conduct and moral reason. This last issue might

be viewed affectively as a problem in the development of a *respect* for the requirements set by reason (i.e., superego formation), or cognitively as a problem in the *coordination* of two subsystems, judgment and behavior. Each of these problems is compelling in its own right. When accused of wrongdoing, young intuitive moralists often fail to articulate adequate reasons for their apparent transgression, and they are not always inclined to convince themselves or others that the appearance that they have behaved in an arbitrary and unjustifiable way is merely an appearance. Both the concern with justifying oneself to oneself (and others), and the intellectual tools for doing so may or may not yet be or ever get acquired. Finally, it must be asked whether or not either intuitive or reflective understanding has a bearing on moral conduct. Nevertheless, to distinguish moral intuitions from moral articulation is an important first step in the examination of a five-year-old's orientation to rules. The second step is to penetrate more deeply into the nature of intuitive understanding.

#### **Intuitive knowledge: perceptible, elementary, innate or merely – tacit?**

As we have said, intuitive knowledge is knowledge possessed without deliberate reflection. There are several different ways that the early appearance of intuitive knowledge can be interpreted.

1. Knowledge may be intuitive in that it is "there for all to see." Such intuitions are immediate, perceptible, simple, given (so to speak) directly from the world to the senses. For example, ". . . if you cut your finger deeply with a knife, it bleeds."

2. Knowledge may be intuitive in that it involves "elementary logical deductions" that are difficult to intelligibly doubt. Although it may be said that knowledge appearing by four or five years of age appears early, it is also the case that children at that age have had four or five years of interaction with the environment for their logical schemata to develop. By age five the mind of the child is sufficiently developed so as to make elementary deductions routinely. For example, "a whole is greater than any of its parts."

3. Knowledge may be intuitive in that "nature wired us that way." Such intuitions have been given in the evolutionary past of one's species, genetically transmitted, "prepared" to emerge with minimal assistance from the environment. For example, "nothing can be perceived as red and green all over."

4. Knowledge may be intuitive in that it has been "tacitly conveyed." Such intuitions are given by one's symbolic community; they are the unconscious, acquired, unstated messages, implicit in the ongoing prac-

tices of a group. For example, "the uses of the prefix *un-* to reverse the meaning of an English verb coincides with the centripetal enclosing, covering and surface attaching meaning of the verb. We say, uncover, uncoil, undress, unfasten, unfold, unlock, unroll, untangle, untie, unwind, 'but not' unbreak, undry, unhang, unheat, unlift, unmelt . . ." (Whorf, 1956, p. 71, paraphrased). Whorf referred to such intuitions as "cryptotypes."

Which of the four interpretations (if any) of the early appearance of intuitive knowledge best explains the development of the moral understandings of the young? The currently available data come from studies of American children. The American five-year-old does have an intuitive grasp of both the form and substance (content) of adult moral codes. By a "formal" grasp we mean that the young intuitive moralist understands the principles of obligatoriness, generalizability, importance, and so forth, that distinguish moral prescriptions from nonmoral prescriptions. By a "substantive" grasp we mean that the five-year-old understands which of his prescriptions are moral (e.g., promises should be kept), which are conventional (e.g., greetings should be returned), and which are prudential (e.g., sharp objects should be handled carefully). It could be argued that the evidence of the early appearance of unarticulated moral knowledge is compatible with all four of the interpretations. Knowledge that is "there for all of us to see," easily deduced, already available in the genes, or tacitly (if repetitively) conveyed need not take long to appear. Therefore, all four approaches to intuitive knowledge might conceivably predict that five-year-old children know much about morality and know more than they can tell. The different interpretations also have implications for later moral development. For instance, if moral intuitions are genetically transmitted, it would not be surprising if all moral competence had emerged by the age of five. However, if moral intuitions are deduced, it is likely that further age-related changes will occur.

To choose among the different interpretations of intuitive knowledge other types of evidence are required, especially evidence on the degree and nature of cross-cultural variability in the moral codes of children and adults. For example, if moral knowledge is "there for all to see" or is easily deduced then it should not be acquired by children in only some cultures but not others, unless there are peculiar mitigating circumstances (e.g., differential "blindness" or "feeble-mindedness"). That is, such explanations are most compatible with *universality*. Cross-cultural variability in childhood moral codes is more easily explained by the notion of "tacit communication." If moral knowledge is "tacitly conveyed," then

children should not endorse moral rules at variance with adult practices recognized as legitimate and consistent in their own symbolic community (unless they have not been exposed to these practices). Parallel evidence of a universal childhood moral code and a cross-culturally variable adult moral code would be inconsistent with the proposition that moral knowledge stems from tacit communications received by children. The idea that morality is tacitly conveyed is most compatible with *relativism*.

The required evidence on variability in moral codes is presently unavailable. There are many historical and ethnographic accounts of other people's customs and manners, but very few of these studies, if any, examine the rule understandings of children. And it is the rare study, indeed, that provides the type of interview protocol necessary to answer the question "do such and such people perceive such and such rule as moral, or do they perceive it as conventional, or prudential, and why?" Because relevant evidence on the cross-cultural variability of childhood moral codes is not yet available we cannot review it. Instead we shall discuss the implications of certain hypothetical patterns of cross-cultural evidence for the two major philosophical approaches to the development of moral codes, namely, universalism and relativism. How does each approach interpret the moral intuitions of the child? What does each approach have to say about the relationship of the child's moral intuitions to the moral order of adults?

#### **Intuitive knowledge: moral universalism and moral relativism**

Moral universalists differ from moral relativists in their answer to the question: Is the relationship between the formal criteria of a moral code (the various criteria discussed earlier) and the content of a moral code (e.g., promises should not be broken) ultimately arbitrary? The relationship between the form and content of a moral code is *not* arbitrary to the extent that some law of nature enables you to induce, or some canon of logic enables you to deduce the content of a moral code from formal principles such as obligatoriness, generalizability, and importance. Moral universalists are typically involved in a search for some canon of logic or universal generalization that will help specify a content for a moral code that all peoples should endorse. For relativists, in contrast, the individual's moral codes are derived from premises concerning matters of fact, importance, and value (e.g. all persons are created equal) that may vary from culture to culture. Therefore, for a relativist, the content of a moral code has no determinate relation to the formal criteria that define morality.

### Universalism

In the universalist view there are a number of ways to link the formal criteria and content of a moral code in a determinate relationship. Deductive universalists (e.g., Kohlberg, 1971; Gewirth, 1978) argue that formal principles such as generalizability (justice) enable you to logically deduce the content that ought to be part of any moral code (e.g., respect for another's physical and psychological well being). Notably, universalists of this type do not make clear-cut predictions about the cross-cultural or developmental *content* of extant moral codes. What they do maintain is that proper deductive reasoning from undeniable premises, combined with a willingness to accept the requirements set by reason would lead to unanimity about how one is obligated to behave, although because people often commit logical errors or hold false or contradictory beliefs, the deductive universalist would not be surprised by evidence that what is thought to be moral on one side of the Red Sea is not thought to be moral on the other side. However, they would expect cross-cultural commonalities in the developmental sequences of reasoning about what are considered moral contents.

Inductive universalists, in contrast, do expect extant moral rules (i.e., rules that are perceived as obligatory, impersonal, unalterable, ahistorical, generalizable, and important) to in fact concentrate on a predictable and universal content, such as the value of life, physical and psychological harm to others, truthfulness, and so on. First, certain species-wide goals (e.g., survival) are attributed to the child. Furthermore, inductive universalists maintain that interpersonal actions are the basis for the formation of prescriptive judgments in childhood. Morality entails judgments (initially intuitive) and judgments are generated out of experiences. Although moral judgments stem from experiences, they are not directly given in the experiences: Inferences about events and about relations between events result in moral prescriptions. In conjunction with the goal of survival the perceived consequences of, for example, attacks on persons, property, and promises constitute the experiences that stimulate the development of a moral orientation. Therefore, moral development stems from the child's interpretations of events experienced, rather than from the social transmission of rules, values or instructions as to how to behave. Certain social events (e.g., those entailing the infliction of harm by one person upon another) are likely to be perceived as nonarbitrary, whereas other events (e.g., a uniformity in mode of dress) will be perceived as arbitrary. It is events perceived as nonarbitrary that lead to the construction of moral prescriptions, whereas it is events perceived as

arbitrary, insofar as they are subject to social regulation, that lead to conventional appraisals.

Given the proposition that inferences about the consequences of social interactions are the source of a moral orientation, inductive universalists claim that in all cultures a limited number of content areas (e.g., violence to persons, properties, or promises) will be viewed in moral terms. However, inductive universalists may differ as to whether or not those are the only content areas treated as moral. Those who may be referred to as *maximal* inductive universalists would claim that moral rules will focus *exclusively* on a limited number of content areas. In contrast, those who may be referred to as *minimal* inductive universalists would claim that all people view the same *few* content areas in moral terms, but they may differ about other content areas. This is a more restricted claim because it leaves many other content areas (sexuality, dress code, dietary customs, marriage rules, etc.) free to vary in their moral versus nonmoral status from society to society. *Maximal* inductive universalists would, thus, look skeptically upon reports that, for example, female dress codes are a moral issue for Iranian Moslems and dietary codes a moral issue for Brahmanic Hindus. In contrast, *minimal* inductive universalists do not deny the moral status of a veiled face in the Middle East or a beef-free diet in South Asia. They will insist, however, that such issues as the protection of persons, property, and promises have a moral status across cultures.

The position taken by inductive universalists has implications for cross-cultural developmental research. From this viewpoint, cross-cultural research must do more than catalogue cultural uniformities or practices. In cross-cultural research it is necessary to do in-depth study of individuals' reasoning about specific rules and thereby assess the formal criteria used by them. Moreover, it is necessary to compare the formal criteria used for different rules. The inductive universalist would expect to find that in certain equivalent content areas rules will be viewed and treated as important, obligatory, impersonal, unalterable, ahistorical, and generalizable for all peoples. However, rules in other content areas will be viewed and treated as (1) important and obligatory for members of the group, and (2) alterable, historical, and not necessarily obligatory for members outside the group (nongeneralizable across groups).

The prediction is that moral forms of appraisal are nonarbitrarily linked to certain content areas that are, across cultures, distinguished from conventional forms of appraisal that are recognized as specific to their own culture. Moreover, it is claimed that the evidence is not in yet, in spite of frequent social scientific assertions to the contrary. This is because what may actually be conventional forms of appraisal by peoples in other lands

may be misinterpreted by social scientists as moral forms of appraisal. Only cross-cultural research that makes in-depth study of individuals' orientations to a variety of specific rules can begin to answer these questions.

Such cross-cultural research must also be developmental, focusing on the experiences that stimulate moral development and the types of moral judgments made by young children. In that way it would be possible to determine how the moral judgments of children in various cultures compare with each other and how children's moral judgments within a culture compare with those of adults. The prediction most consistent with the interpretation of inductive universalism is that children around the world will agree with each other about what is and what is not a moral issue regardless of the content of adult moral codes in the child's own society. The prediction that children around the world subscribe to similar moral codes, an intuitive code derived directly from experience and reason, must be reconciled with the apparent correspondence between *American* children and *adults* of their culture in what is and what is not regarded as a moral issue.

Two interpretive possibilities can explain transgenerational consensus. Maximal inductive universalists would maintain that the moral codes of adults in all cultures is an amplification of universal childhood intuitions. That is, the child's moral intuitions form the basis for subsequent transformations into reflective moral judgments evident among adults in all cultures. Minimal inductive universalists might maintain that (1) in all cultures there would be substantial correspondence between childhood and adult moral codes for a limited number of content areas, and (2) within some cultures other content areas are treated by adults as moral but not by children.

### *Relativism*

According to universalists moral judgments arise out of intuitive responses to the consequences of certain types of human social interactions in relationship to certain universal human goals. Therefore, the basis of morality does not stem from cultural consensus. In contrast, according to relativists, moral codes do arise from direct and indirect cultural transmission: The moral intuitions of the child are tacit, culturally conveyed understandings and the content of moral intuitions will vary from culture to culture. Relativists grant that for any person or people moral codes may be supported by reasons, considerations, and so on, but they insist that, for any person or people, reasons and considerations ultimately give out. Ultimately, a relativist will argue, moral codes rest upon declarations of

what is of importance, value, and significance, declarations that cannot themselves be justified and are matters of preference that have neither an inductive nor a deductive warrant (see Perelman, 1963).

Relativism is associated with the view that the formal principles that define morality do not contribute any content to a moral code. As examples consider, first, the formal principle of importance and then the principle of generalizability (or justice). Briefly, relativists argue that judgments about what is morally important are cross-culturally variable, potentially charged with symbolic value, and typically disproportionate to the substance of the valued conduct. From not worshipping idols to not coveting thy neighbor's wife to not spending money on luxuries to not remarrying if one's husband dies to veiling one's face, what are matters of importance on one side of the globe are not matters of importance on the other. The collection of practices thought to be morally important by one people or other at one time or other is a diverse and unpredictable set, or so the relativist would argue.

The same relativist argument (the formal criteria and content of a moral code are unrelated) can be applied to the principle of generalizability or justice. The principle of justice states, "What is right (or wrong) for one is right (or wrong) for any similar person in similar circumstances" (Singer, 1963, p. 19), "persons who belong to the same essential category ought to be treated in the same way" (Perelman, 1963, p. 29), "treat like cases alike and different cases differently" (Hart, 1961, p. 155). Relativists will point out, along with Hart, that justice

cannot afford any determinate guide to conduct. . . "Treat like cases alike and different cases differently" is the central element in the idea of justice [but] it is by itself incomplete. . . This is so because any set of human beings will resemble each other in some respects and differ from each other in others and, until it is established what resemblances and differences are relevant, "treat like cases alike" must remain an empty form (Hart, 1961, p. 155).

Thus, for example, given our culture's belief that there are relevant differences between an adolescent and an adult in the capacity for responsible judgment, there is nothing unjust or unfair about denying a thirteen-year-old the right to vote or enter into a contract. To be just, fair, equitable, or impartial is not necessarily to treat all sentient beings in identical fashion. Quite the contrary. It is out of respect for the principle of justice that relevant differences between people must make a difference for how they are treated. As relativists see it, the principle of justice is compatible with all sorts of nonidentical treatment and diverse (but only "apparently" inequitable) social classifications. Many peoples, the relativist will argue, perceive the difference between a woman and a man,

a slave and a master, a "black" and a "white," an animal and a person to be as significant as the difference between a thirteen-year-old and an adult appears to us.

As the relativist sees it, the principle of justice (treat like cases alike and different cases differently) not only fails to specify who it is that is to be treated in like or different fashion: it also fails to specify in what particular way those treated in like fashion are to be treated. Thus, in our culture, it might be unjust, as Hart notes (1961, p. 155), if a father "arbitrarily selected one of his children for severer punishment than that given to others guilty of the same fault." However, if all children guilty of the same fault are treated in like fashion, it is no less just to spank each of them than to reason with each of them, or psychologically torment them by withdrawing love. Again, the formal principle of justice contributes little to the content of a moral code; the content derives instead from historically specific and culturally relative premises about the nature of the person, society, and social relationships.

Relativists radically separate the formal criteria of a moral code from its content. This radical separation makes it possible for relativists to admit the possibility that the formal principles (obligatoriness, generalizability, importance) underlying moral (versus nonmoral) appraisal are universal while arguing at the same time that the content of moral codes is cross-culturally variable. Thus, relativists are amenable to the idea that any single content area (e.g., sexuality, possession of property) can be covered by rules of more than one type (e.g., moral prescriptions against certain "animal-like" postures, prudential rules for maximizing pleasure, conventions governing who does what when); a relativist will argue that for any person or people matters such as how to do it, what to do, when not to do it, and who not to do it with may or may not be viewed as moral, conventional, or prudential issues. It all depends upon the importance, value, and significance assigned to the practice. A rule prescribing vegetarianism (or proscribing the eating of beef) might be viewed by one people as a moral injunction against the killing of animals (or the murder of "sacred cows"), whereas for another people it might be viewed as a prudential rule for achieving good health.

Although within any given culture certain content areas may be treated as moral in a formal sense, relativists maintain that individuals come by their morality via conversational routines and the incidental learning of ongoing practices. Therefore, the moral intuitions of the American five-year-old are regarded as tacit-covert understandings, achieved primarily from having lived for a half a decade in a distinctive cultural environment packed with implicit messages about what is of importance, what is of

value, which differences between people should be overlooked, which should be emphasized, and so on. Because, from a relativistic viewpoint, the form of a moral code does not determine its content, the young intuitive moralist has no other way to achieve a substantive moral understanding except by making sense of, and with, the values and beliefs that are part of his peculiar cultural inheritance. If moral codes are historically and cross-culturally variable, then they are not "there for all to see," (unless some people are blind), nor are they likely to be innate (unless biological evolution occurs in historical timeframes and unless there are "racial" differences in moral sensibilities) or self-evident (unless some peoples are feebleminded). Relativists do not deny that the intuitive moral understandings of the child may *seem* directly apprehended to the child, but, a relativist will argue that some of the obviousness is the product of overlearning a tacit code that one has never had the opportunity to question or doubt.

Relativists make two strong predictions about what cross-cultural developmental evidence on moral codes will reveal: (1) the formal principles of obligatoriness (impersonality, unalterability, ahistoricity), generalizability, and importance will not enable you to determine the content of adult moral codes; that is, what is perceived as obligatory, impersonal, unalterable, ahistorical, just, and important in one land will not correspond to what is perceived in that way in other lands; (2) to the extent that children are exposed to adult practices, the substantive moral intuitions of children in different lands will correspond more closely to the moral codes of adults in their own culture than to the moral intuitions of children in different cultures. In other words, the content of moral codes will vary for both children and adults across time and culture. Furthermore, relativists emphasize the symbolic character of social interactions, and predict that children everywhere learn to interpret the meaning of a social event by applying, misapplying and reapplying extant adult moral codes.

### Summary

In the foregoing pages our aim has been to identify some questions worth asking in the investigation of moral development. As an essay in conceptual clarification we have (1) distinguished between intuitive moral understanding and reflective moral understanding; (2) outlined four possible interpretations for the existence of an intuitive moral competence in American five-year-olds; and (3) examined the problem of "arbitrariness" in moral codes.

The interpretive options currently available to moral development re-

searchers are rich, spanning the full philosophical spectrum from universalism to relativism. A major conclusion of our chapter is that a reduction in the degrees of theoretical freedom is desirable and can be best achieved by means of relevant cross-cultural developmental research.

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