

What's There to Negotiate? Some Questions For Youniss

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Youniss (*Merrill-Palmer Quarterly*, 1982, 27, 385-403) identifies morality with humanism and pluralism. He views both humanism and pluralism as universal developmental endpoints, socially-constructed rational ideals. This essay discusses the limitations of Youniss's view of morality. "Constructivism" is described as an heir to "behaviorism." An alternative approach is introduced. Moral codes are neither constructed nor passively discovered; they are socially "constituted." Important aspects of moral thinking are neither rational nor irrational, but nonrational; and many moral ideas are less the product of a process of negotiation among peers and more the product of an inevitable process of tacit cultural domination.

Youniss (1981) advances a "social construction theory" of moral development. His theory has something to say about each of three major issues in the developmental and comparative study of ethics. These issues are: (a) What are the ideas and concepts associated with moral thinking in normal (non-sociopathic) Western adults? (b) What are the processes resulting in a judgment that something is a vice or a virtue? (c) Are those ideas, concepts, and processes available in different cultures and at different ages? I shall restrict my comments to the first two of these issues, since Youniss discusses the ontogenetic distribution of moral thinking only in passing and in respect to the concept of a "peer." (Youniss suggests that moral thinking is absent before the age of 8 and probably does not develop until adolescence.)

What are the ideas and concepts associated with moral thinking in normal Western adults? Youniss answers that first question by identifying morality with the idea of mutuality, equality, and community. He holds out the "friendship" or "peer" relationship as the prototype of a moral order. According to Youniss, the moral person retains his own liberty and individuality while working for the com-

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mon good and while working for the common good the moral person respects the liberty and individuality of others.

What Youniss seems to have done is equate Western morality with two of its substantive ideals, viz., "humanism" and "pluralism." According to the ideals of "humanism," all people are worthy of respect and interest, and entitled to have their "thoughts, problems, feelings, and needs talked out and worked through" merely by virtue of being alive (or is it by virtue of having a soul?). In Youniss's version of humanism all people are supposed to be co-equal or mutually substitutable, especially when it comes to deciding who to consult, who to debate, who to negotiate with. Youniss, however, is sensitive to the danger of sacrificing our individuality, our distinctiveness, to our "common" humanity. Thus, "pluralism," with its slogan of "different but equal," is the second Western ideal that Youniss identifies with moral thinking.

Now it seems to me it is hazardous to equate morality with humanism and pluralism. The least of the difficulties is that the equation directs our attention away from the formal or abstract ideas (duty, harm, justice) associated with moral thinking. The more serious difficulty is that Youniss, despite his humanism, and his honorable intentions, is far down the path to ethnocentrism.

Like many Western observers, Youniss believes that humanism and pluralism are the most advanced and adequate forms of moral understanding. He views humanism and pluralism as universal developmental endpoints, i.e., socially-constructed rational ideals. Now, to cite one case with which I am familiar, Indian civilization is one among many civilizations (and cultures) to deny *prima facie* the moral superiority of humanism and pluralism. Adopting Youniss's developmental perspective, what are we to make of this divergence of opinion? There are four possible answers to that question, and each one of them seems dubious (see Shweder & Bourne, 1981). Answer 1: The Indian moral code, if properly understood, is really an expression of humanism and pluralism, i.e., it is not fundamentally different. Answer 2: Over time, and without foreign imposition, the Indian moral code has displayed a tendency to become more and more humanistic and pluralistic; i.e., as it develops, the Indian moral code is moving in our direction. Answer 3: Indians are deficient in their capacity for rational thought. Answer 4: Indians are deficient in their processes of social construction.

A fifth answer seems more likely: That Youniss has described the Western moral code at precisely that *substantive* level where it does not qualify as a rational (and thus universal) endpoint of development. There may well be universal developmental trends in the ontogeny of moral thought; for example, the progressive renunciation

of egoism and harm and the increasing concern for treating like cases alike and different cases differently. That remains to be seen. However, it seems to me that the abstract principles of duty, harm, and justice are compatible with diverse substantive moralities, and humanism and pluralism are just one of many ways to honor those abstract ideals. Mature and moral Hindus believe there are other ways. They certainly do not lack a concept of duty ("dharma") or justice ("karma").

What are the processes resulting in a judgment that something is a vice or a virtue? With regard to that second question, Youniss argues that a fully developed moral code is the product of socially-constructed rational processes, viz., "procedures of communication [such as "argumentation," "discussion," "debate," "compromise" and especially "negotiation"] which serve the function of reasoning." He rejects Kohlberg's view (a view advocated by Hobbes, Voltaire, and many others) that a moral code is the individual invention of an autonomous self-reflective reasoner.

Youniss's social construction theory of moral development rests upon his idea that the child "confronts reality only to discover that there are multiple interpretations, including his own." Youniss describes three possible reactions to the discovery of discrepant judgments. One reaction is to subordinate your own judgment to the judgment of authoritative others. A second possible reaction is to subordinate your judgment to objective, external standards of rationality. A third possible reaction is to "turn to communication" with the aim of evolving a "common view with others."

Now it seems to me that this is neither an exhaustive nor mutually exclusive list of alternatives. First of all, it is not an exhaustive list. Perhaps the most typical reaction to diversity in the area of opinion, value, and belief is to view as inferior, backward, or uncivilized those who (e.g.) worship idols, engage in political assassinations, enforce rules of *purdah*, or cut off the hands of a thief. A common reaction to diversity and disagreement is to view others as different but unequal; thus (so-called) "ethnocentrism" is a fourth possibility. There is also a fifth possibility. Not infrequently there is a premium on perpetuating disagreements, especially for the sake of differentiating oneself from significant others. In another context (Shweder & Bourne, 1981) I have discussed how various untouchable castes in India seize upon minor differences in their practices and customs to put "distance" (in this case, status distance) between themselves and other untouchable groups. I suspect that a similar process of "identity formation through contrast" goes on at all levels within a social system—between ethnic groups, between families, between siblings within families. Quite often, who or what you support or believe, is

less important than that it be different from what some significant other (the "Russians," "your older sister") supports. The calculated perpetuation of differences in custom, opinion, and belief is a fundamental social process.

Youniss's three alternatives are also not mutually exclusive. Youniss argues that moral codes are rational and that disputants "turn to communication" with the aim of evolving a "common view with others." Most scientific discourse, of course, fits that description. Yet, scientific discourse can also be described as a process whereby disputants subordinate their claims to objective, external standards (e.g., principles of statistical inference, rules for experimental reasoning, deductive logic, etc.). It even happens in scientific discourse that some people are more expert or knowledgeable than others. Given the distribution of knowledge and expertise it may even be rational to subordinate one's judgment to the judgment of others. Contrary to Youniss's formulations, deference to authorities, appeals to objective standards, and dialogue are not contrastive alternatives.

There is a deeper problem with the scheme. Youniss underscores the importance of "communicative relations" in the development of moral understandings, and I applaud that emphasis. Under the rubric "communicative relations," Youniss classifies together "debate," "argumentation," "compromise," and "negotiation." Yet, as soon as Youniss tries to argue that moral codes are rational, a two-sided problem emerges for the theory. On the one hand, the rational is not a proper subject for "negotiation." Whether or not it hurts to have your hair pulled is not a matter for "compromise." Scientists do not negotiate the truth. On the other hand, the non-rational (not to be confused with the irrational) is not a proper subject for "debate" or "argument." Whether or not a fetus is a person is a matter of social agreement, a "social fact" (à la Durkheim) whose reality is entirely a matter of agreement and consensus. Youniss must choose between two positions. If moral codes are rational they are not "negotiated." If moral codes are negotiated they are non-rational. Unfortunately, neither alternative favors Youniss's pluralism!

Pluralism (different but equal) is an inherently unstable process. Typically, equality is purchased at the price of diversity, while diversity is purchased at the price of equality. Uniformity (equal because alike) and hierarchy (different and hence unequal) are the fundamental processes of social and intellectual life. In the domain of rational discourse (e.g., Is copulation connected to pregnancy or isn't it?), convergence or uniformity of belief is expected to emerge over

time. And, since the "truth is one not many," the existence of divergent theories can only suggest error, ignorance, confusion, invalidity, or stupidity. The concept of rationality is incompatible with pluralism. In the nonrational domains (e.g., Is polygamy a sin?) there are no logical or evidential means of reconciliation. Discrepant opinions about (e.g.) polytheism, polygamy, abortion, school prayer are usually greeted with contempt (e.g., disparaging evaluations of those who disagree with you) or with a "fist" (power-assertion or domination). In a nonrational world full of heroes and villains there is little room for "different but equal."

Youniss not only underestimates the importance of hierarchy in social and intellectual life; he exaggerates the importance of the "peer" relationship. From a comparative viewpoint, contemporary American society is one of the more age-graded societies—just look at our schools. In age-graded societies the peer relationship does assume importance, although even in age-graded societies the peer relationship is a secondary formation; it is part of what is left over after you have defined your in-group, those of your kind. In many societies, however, it is the patron-client relationship or the relationship of caretaker to caregiver that is the prototype for the social order, and even in American society, hierarchy and deferential respect are not entirely absent, especially in that micro-society called the "family," that powerful arena for moral socialization and opinion formation.

Many aspects of moral codes are socially constructed. Seven-year-old American children do not create for themselves a taboo on brother-sister marriage or devise for themselves the idea that "personal success" and "progress" are major goals in life or the idea that what they decide to be when they grow up (a butcher, a baker, a candlestick maker) is their own business. However, in my view, social construction looks far less like a reciprocal egalitarian process of debate, compromise, and negotiation among peers than Youniss supposes. It looks far more like the diffusion of "collective representations" from one generation to the next, far more like tacit cultural domination. Again, hierarchy cannot be ignored.

Piagetians like Kohlberg and Youniss have no place in their conceptual schemes for processes of cultural domination. This is because the idea of cultural domination presupposes that the mind of man is, in certain crucial respects, nonrational. Where Kohlberg views morality as self-constructed, Youniss views morality as socially constructed, but both view morality as rational. The Piagetian stamp is obvious.

Piaget views the mind of man as intendedly rational. Since the

"objective" world insists that we think straight and induce correctly, rational adaptation to reality requires, according to Piaget, some knowledge of the proper dictates of reason and the regularities of nature. Thus, Piaget directs our attention to the child's emerging knowledge of canons of deductive and inductive inference, laws of motion, concepts of number, speed, mass, etc. Undoubtedly, Piaget is correct. There are canons of reason worthy of universal respect (e.g., all A's are B's; A, therefore B), and there are regularities of nature there for any rational person to see (e.g., a finger, cut deeply with a knife, bleeds). Piaget is undoubtedly correct but terribly incomplete. There is a lot more to the mind of man than reason and evidence or logic and science.

Now it seems to me that Piaget's so-called "constructivism," with its emphasis on thought as rational adaptation, is quite continuous with behaviorism. Not only is there formal equivalence between the notions of assimilation and accommodation and the notions of stimulus generalization and response differentiation, but more crucially, for Piaget, ultimately the external world insists that we all adapt our intelligence to the demands of a common and objective reality. We all end up in the same place. True, the child generates hypotheses and ideas and tests them against experience and other ideas, but, most of these ideas (or schemata) get weeded out, leaving us with an adaptation that is controlled more by external events than anything else. Even Skinner's pigeons display spontaneous behaviors and make maladaptive moves en route to being shaped by the environment.

What Piagetian "constructivists" overlook is the nonrational, or the "constitutive." Different children grow up in different social "realities." The reason for placing quotations around that term is that those "realities" are collective mental creations constructed in large part out of shared premises, ideals, values, and definitions beyond logical or scientific evaluation. The mind does more than simply generate ideas; it has the power, in the nonrational domains, actually to "constitute" a reality. Those who decide to equate "cousins" and "siblings" are obviously different from those who distinguish "brother" from "father's sister's son." Those for whom dreams give access to the numinous realm of the soul and its wanderings are obviously different from those for whom dreams are unreal. Those who have three gods and one wife are obviously different from those who have one god and three wives. Those for whom a fetus is a person are obviously different from those for whom a fetus is a fetus. But is there really any criterion worthy of universal respect that ranks any of these beliefs the more rational or advanced?

Scratch deeply on any social order and what one discovers is not logic or science but what D'Andrade (1981) has described as a "social agreement that something count as" (e.g.) "sin" or "justice," etc. No individual actually negotiates this agreement, but all members of a culture are party to the agreement. The way they become party to the agreement is through "enculturation," through tacit (and sometimes explicit) indoctrination into the ways of seeing of their culture.

What makes an American 5 year old so American is what he or she already knows about (e.g.) privacy, autonomy, territories of the self, relevant likeness and differences, etc., and what American 5 year olds know about such things is neither natural nor logical—and it is certainly not self-constructed. American 5 year olds have been "let in" on the received wisdom of their symbolic community, and the received "wisdom" they have been let in on is less wisdom and more constitutive code. When a full-grown adult walks up to a young child and asks "What do you want to eat for dinner tonight," a series of messages about autonomy in decision making are conveyed and the child is tacitly made party to a pre-existing social agreement about what it is to be a voluntary agent in middle-class American culture.

How does the child get "let in" to the pre-existing social agreement? How does the received wisdom of one's culture get passed on from generation to generation? Much more needs to be done on the cognitive processes associated with enculturation. Indeed, it is time for child development research to return to this fundamental issue.

I would hazard a suggestion about where to look in the enculturation process. As noted above, there are a lot of messages implicit in social discourse, messages about what to presuppose, what to value, what to feel, how to classify, messages about what it is to be a person, how to relate to a group, messages about what is self-evident, what can be taken for granted, etc. The "language-games" of American parent-child discourse redundantly transmit the thematic content of American culture. A short list of such "language-games" might include "What if everybody did that?" "If you don't stand up for yourself, who will?" "I'd rather do it myself," "Let's make a deal," "Play by the rules," "That's mine—that's yours," "You're old enough now to . . ." and, by the way, "What do you want to eat for dinner?" While social learning theorists have focused on rewards and punishments, and Piagetians have drawn our attention to the supposed deep structural or formal features of logical-scientific reasoning, parents and children have been talking to each other about the substantive nonrational issues of social life. It is time

to find out what is being said. The move from the rational to the nonrational, from the "constructed" to the "constituted" should be paralleled by a move from structure to content. It may even be time to take "talk" seriously. Whatever the difficulties with Youniss's formulation, he is to be congratulated for looking beyond self-constructed knowledge.

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Adolescent Understanding of Compromise in Political and Social Arenas*

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Understanding of opposing views and realistic compromise solutions for 12 political and legal situations was explored in 72 adolescents, age 14 to 19. Their explanations were rated on a 3-point scale in terms of mention of opposing views and of likely societal-legal procedures. In three increasing age groups 1-rated responses dropped (42%, 31%, 4%), and 3-rated responses increased (20%, 31%, 66%). Four aspects of political understanding were proposed: (a) recognition of individual rights, (b) articulation of other (different from personal) viewpoints, (c) need for reasonable compromise, and (d) separation of legal from conventional-moral regulations.

There is general agreement among investigators of political thinking that the period of adolescence marks the transition from the "childish" conceptions of pre-teenagers to the relative maturity of socialized adults. This dramatic change within a relatively short time has been documented in qualitative descriptions (Adelson, 1971; Connell, 1971) and in a few studies that provide precise scoring criteria and frequency data (Gallatin, 1980; Gallatin & Adelson, 1971).

The distinction of political knowledge in terms of specific information and of political thinking in terms of understanding is by no means clear-cut and one without the other would not make sense. Nonetheless, it seems worthwhile to focus on the understanding component in order to relate growth in political thinking to more general theories of adolescent development, whether they concern interpersonal relations (Blos, 1979) or logical thinking (Inhelder & Piaget, 1958) in adolescence. To this end an appropriate method seems to be the exploration of the adolescent's grasp of political

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