Determinations of Meaning:
Discourse and Moral Socialization

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This essay explores social communication and its power to represent and transmit moral beliefs. Moral beliefs have their ontogenetic origins in the messages and meanings implicitly conveyed through talk, conversation, discourse, and customary practice. Children are continually assisted by local guardians of the moral order in constructing their notions of right and wrong, and the inferences they draw about both the moral (its deem) and what is moral (its content) are personal reconstructions recreated within a framework of tradition-based modes of apperception and evaluation represented in everyday discourse.

A scheme of concepts (communicative array, indexicality, instantiation, background knowledge) accounts for the construction of meaning in discourse. We focus on the way a picture of the moral order is indexed and tacitly conveyed through speech, and we outline a method of discourse analysis based on the expansion or unpacking of what is said to reveal propositions about the moral order that remain unsaid yet are nonetheless effectively communicated through everyday speech. This method of expansion implements our theory of how meaning is constructed in discourse: since speakers always mean and convey more than they say, meaning is revealed by making explicit the relationship between the said and the unsaid.

We apply our theory of meaning and method of expansion to one part of the text of a moral dilemma interview (Kohlberg's Heinz dilemma; see appendix to this chapter, page 229) conducted with an orthodox Hindu informant in India. Lawrence Kohlberg himself classifies the unexpanded text as an instance of stage 3/4 conventional reasoning. Not until the text is expanded or unpacked to explicate implicit meanings is it possible to recognize the postconventional reasoning of the informant, who, unlike Kohlberg, represents the Heinz dilemma as a problem in the irrationality of committing a sin rather than as a problem of rights, justice, or life versus property. From this analysis it seems clear that codings of unexpanded moral development interview protocols, based exclusively on propositions explicitly stated in an interview, are likely to misrepresent the moral beliefs of informants.

In trying to make sense of the widespread academic phobia for studying everyday talk and its power to represent and transmit moral beliefs, we are led to rethink the terms of the destructive debate over whether moral judgments ("that's wrong," "that's bad") are cognitive or noncognitive (emotive). Both cognitivists and emotivists have unfortunate conceptions about the relation between moral judgments and natural or objective entities. Emotivists tend to view moral judgments as entirely subjective, and to dismiss moral discourse or argumentation as pretense, or as a mock or illusory rhetoric disguising an underlying pragmatic function (for example, to preserve privilege or power). Cognitivists tend to search for the objective foundations of moral judgments in an abstract-formal-logical realm far removed from everyday thoughtful talk. Our neorationalist approach shares with cognitive approaches the assumption that natural or objective moral entities exist and that moral understandings are a form of knowledge about some objective moral world. Our neorationalist approach is defined by three distinctive assumptions: that genuine objectivity can be, in some measure, subject dependent; that the existence of moral facts and moral knowledge is compatible with the existence of multiple objective moral worlds and alternative forms of postconventional moral reasoning; and that each of those several objective moral worlds is found in, and maintained through, the ordinary conversations of everyday life.

Discourse and the Framing of a Moral Universe

During the last several years we have been conducting research on moral development in India and the United States (Shweder 1982a,
father to take the pot of ghee and offer it to the sadhu guests. He also told his father to cut off his head and take it away so the sadhu of the monastery would not be able to recognize him. The father did this and threw away his son’s head.

The father did such things only because he wanted to help the sadhus. After he offered ghee to his guests the sadhus were satisfied. The next morning the father bode them farewell, and they asked, “Where is your son? He is not seen.” The father started to cry. The sadhus asked him why he was crying. So he told all the details and facts, and said it was nobody’s fault.

The sadhus said, “You have made a mistake. Okay. If you have done it only to satisfy us, if you had no evil intention under it, if you had no temptation for the wealth, and if your son died only for this, then we will pray to God for his life.” They asked, “Where is your son’s head?” They wanted to show God the decapitated head. The father took the head of the son to the sadhus. They sprinkled some Tulsi water on the head. [Tulsi is a basil plant. The leaf of the plant in water produces a substance believed to have various potent causal powers. Among orthodox Hindus there is a well-known story about how Tulsi became a basil plant. In brief, Tulsi was the loyal, chaste, and devoted wife of a demon. Her husband was very successful at terrorizing the gods. He could not be killed unless he was weakened, and the only way to weaken him was to violate the chastity of his wife; her chastity made him strong. So the Hindu god Vishnu disguised himself as Tulsi’s husband and slept with her. The demon was killed. When Tulsi discovered the treachery she cursed Vishnu and told him he would turn into a log or piece of wood. In fact Vishnu is today represented as a log in the Temple of Jagannath in Orissa. Vishnu, however, blessed Tulsi and made compensation to her by turning her into a holy plant, which he always keeps with him, and which is today worshiped by wives and widows all over India. In the courtyard of every Brahman household is a Tulsi plant.] So the son returned to life.

This story was narrated in the Oriya language to Shweder during an interview concerning whether a man should steal a drug to save the life of his wife. The interview, based on Kohlberg’s Forms A (the Heinz dilemma), was modified in trivial ways to eliminate obvious culture-specific or ethnocentric features (for example, Heinz was renamed Ashok). (See the appendix to this chapter for the full text of the interview.) It is only one of many stories the informant told to support his position that Ashok should not steal.

The text above incorporates in brackets a minimal explication or
expansion of elements of Hindu life that are obviously opaque to a Western reader (for example, what a sadhu is, why it is important for sadhus to have ghee for dinner, and what Tulsi is). There are, however, many other things in the text that are opaque without being obviously so, and there are many unstated propositions that must be made explicit if an uninformed reader is to appreciate the compelling nature of the case that is being advanced by the informants against committing the sin of stealing. At this point we merely note the characteristic Oriya form of moral argumentation: telling stories related to precedents recorded in scriptures that reveal truths about the causal structure of reality as a natural-physical-moral order.

One of the more striking findings of our moral development research in India and America (Shweder, Mahapatra, and Miller 1987) is that by age five Oriya children are very Oriya and American children are very American. When it comes to judgments about what is right and what is wrong there is virtually no correlation between the judgments of the five-year-olds in the two cultures. That is also true of the moral judgments of older children and adults in the two cultures. Thus while there are some areas of agreement between the five-year-olds in the two cultures (for example, that it is wrong to break a promise, destroy a picture drawn by another child, kick a harmless animal), there are just as many areas of disagreement. Oriya (but not American) five-year-olds believe it is wrong to eat beef, or address one’s father by his first name. American (but not Oriya) five-year-olds believe it is wrong to cane an errant child or to open a letter addressed to one’s fourteen-year-old son. Moreover, while the obligations (whatever they are thought to be) associated with each of those issues are conceived by five-year-olds in both cultures to be natural or objective obligations (that is, unalterable and, in most cases, universally binding), the Americans, but not the Oriyas, represent those obligations in terms of natural rights and in terms of values associated with liberty, equality, and secular happiness. On the other hand, the Oriya concept of dharma and sin and the concept of the moral authority of custom or tradition are alien to the moral sensibilities of secularized American informants.

Finally, the evidence of Shweder and colleagues (1987) suggests that, within each culture, those moral judgments that are common to both cultures (for example, that it is wrong to engage in arbitrary assault, break promises, destroy property, commit incest) are learned at about the same rate as those that are distinctive of each culture (for example, in America, that it is wrong for a husband to beat his wife if she repeatedly leaves the house without permission; or, in India, that it is wrong for a widow to remarry or eat fish or meat or wear jewelry). This evidence of a roughly equal rate of acquisition for culture-specific and universal moral content indicates that both the universal and the culture-specific aspects of a moral code may be learned by means of the same process.

Children five years of age and older in orthodox Hindu India and secularized America have orthogonal judgments about what is right and wrong, conceive of obligations in somewhat divergent terms (for example, it’s my right; it’s a sin), and achieve an understanding of the culture-specific aspects of their moral code at the same rate as they achieve an understanding of those aspects of their moral code that are shared with other cultures. Our social communication approach to moral development is an attempt to identify that unitary process of moral socialization.

Our basic (and perhaps commonsensical) notion is that children develop the moral ideas they have because local guardians of the moral order (parents, teachers, peers) represent and convey to children powerful morally relevant interpretations of events. Those interpretations are conveyed, we believe, in the context of routine, yet personally involving, family, school, and social life practices (practices having to do with eating, sleeping, grooming, possessing objects, distributing resources, and so on). They are conveyed through the verbal exchanges—commands, threats, sanction statements, accusations, explanations, justifications, and excuses—necessary to maintain routine practices. We assume that morally relevant interpretations of events are given across and made salient, as well, by the emotional reactions of others; for example, anger or disappointment or “hurt feelings” over a transgression. Finally, we assume that moral interpretations of events are expressed through and are discernible in the very organization of routine practices (a separate bed for each child, a communal meal, lining up—first come, first serve—to get tickets). In sum, it is our view that children’s emerging moral understandings are the product of continuous participation in social practices (the mundane rituals of everyday life), and those socially produced and reproduced understandings are the grounding for later attempts reflectively or self-consciously to reconstruct their own moral code.

It is an axiom of our social communication approach to moral socialization that local guardians of the moral order persistently and powerfully trace for children the boundaries of a normative reality and assist the children in stepping into the frame.
Because language is perhaps the most powerful means of social communication, we focus on the analysis of discourse. The data corpus available to us consists of conversations between children (ages four and five) and adults in situations of accountability in an American preschool (Misch and Shweder 1978; Misch 1983). Our route to understanding those symbolic forms is by way of what Clifford Geertz (1973) has called "thick description." While what is said in everyday discourse in preschool settings may seem "thin" and obvious, what is implied, suggested, got across, or accomplished by what is said is "thick" and often surprising. Implicit in or presupposed by what is said is a conception of an objective moral universe.

**INCIDENT 1: ALL THE CHILDREN ARE FRIENDS IN SCHOOL**

It is "rump time." Children are seated around Mrs. Swift on the rug. Emily sits just to the left of Mrs. Swift and Andrea sits next to Emily. Vicki leaves her seat and approaches them.

1. Vicki: I want to sit next to Emily.
2. Mrs. Swift: There's no room and you stay where you are. [Vicki would have to place herself between Mrs. Swift and Emily or between Emily and Andrea in order to sit next to Emily.]
4. Mrs. Swift: All the children are friends in school.
5. Vicki: Yeah, but some children say they're not my friend.
6. Mrs. Swift: Well, then you try to make them your friend.

**INCIDENT 2: THE VALUE OF FRIENDLINESS**

Mr. Price and some children are sitting in the back playroom. A teacher from another classroom appears at the door with a child from her unit. Alice (a four-year-old) addresses them.

1. Alice: What are you doing in our class?
2. Teacher: Well, we came up the stairs and we didn't know where we were going and here we are.
3. Alice: Get out of our class.
4. Teacher: That's unkind of you.
5. Mr. Price: That's not very friendly.
6. Mr. Price: You should be friendly to visitors.
7. Mr. Price: Sometimes you go up and visit their classroom.

In both incidents local guardians of the moral order trace for these four-year-olds the boundaries of a moral universe and help the children step into the frame. In incident 1 Vicki presses for the privilege of affiliating with Emily on the grounds that Emily falls into a certain category of person, "my friend" (utterance 3). Mrs. Swift, however, will not allow Vicki to treat this category as an exclusive class; she introduces a norm including all classroom members in the category "friend" (4). Mrs. Swift's proposition (4) may appear to be a factual proposition, but it is used to deliver a moral message: it describes the way things ought to be, not the way they are. Whether in this instance Vicki understood the normative force of Mrs. Swift's utterance is ambiguous; Vicki's next utterance (5) introduces a contrary fact, which calls into question Mrs. Swift's implication. This suggests that Vicki either interpreted Mrs. Swift's utterance (4) as a factual proposition or understood its normative implication yet tried to evade its normative force by conveniently "misreading" it as a statement of fact.

But notice how carefully Mrs. Swift monitors the uptake of her own messages. Vicki's factual objection is met not by further factual reasoning, but by another statement of a normative proposition (6), which is a prescription for appropriate action. Vicki has objected to Mrs. Swift's reasoning on the grounds that Mrs. Swift's words do not describe the classroom as Vicki knows it. Mrs. Swift, however, proffers a norm, making it unambiguous to the children that they expect them, through their actions, to get the world of the classroom to line up with her words. The conversation portrays for these young children a moral world based on free or at least nonexclusive affiliation.

In incident 2 ("get out of our class") the child, Alice, tries to understand the event in terms of rights (what is ours and not yours) (1, 3) and the attendant privilege of imposing one's own intentions (3). However, adults in the episode are interested in instructing Alice in the expectations of free and nonexclusive affiliation. They represent for Alice and call her attention to a moral universe in which three evaluative criteria compete with Alice's one-dimensional evaluation of the event in terms of who holds rights. The norm of "friendliness" is introduced and prescribed (4, 5, 6) along with a category, "visitor" (6), which is supposed to classify the outside teacher as a person with whom one is expected to affiliate. A rationale for affiliation is expanded in utterance 7 by reference to the actions of the outside teacher relative to the actions of members of Alice's class; that is, a norm of reciprocity is represented and applied. The message is that rights are not the only or most important consideration bearing upon the event, and that in the moral universe in which we are going to live together rights must be weighed or balanced against other values.

Everyday conversation and social interaction between adults and
This conversation reveals not only Clifford's emerging competence (and sophistication) in representing events in terms of who holds rights, but also several features of the way rights are conceived in the moral universe undergoing reconstruction in the mind of the four-year-old American child.

First, when Sean wishes to claim an article in Clifford's possession he objectively his claim by oblique reference to some purpose or constraint. Sean's utterance "I need this" (1) implies an intention to use the implement for some purpose. Whether such a purpose is actually present "in Sean's mind" is a separate question that, in this context, is of little importance. Nursery school children have learned the advantage of using "I need" where "I want" could also be used; it lends an air of legitimacy to a demand or request. While the usage certainly does not guarantee the success of the claim, it does tell us something about the norms for making a legitimate claim on communal resources. Purposiveness has become a reasonable basis for personal removal of resources from the common pool.

It is noteworthy that Sean extends a justification by reference to purpose to account for a claim to an implement already in the possession of another child. Sean's reasoning represents the standard justification among preschool children for demanding or requesting rights to material resources in another's possession or use. Here Clifford meets the demand-request with an assertion of his own rights to the implement on the basis of a widely recognized principle for establishing temporary personal claim to communal property, namely, priority (2). But Clifford rechecks Sean's meaning (3); Clifford wants to know whether Sean's claim was also supported by established rights. Sean indicates that it was.

A sequence follows (5–8) in which Clifford tries to determine the basis of Sean's rights. Clifford begins by testing the hypothesis that the implement is Sean's private property, that Sean has brought it from home. This would constitute the strongest kind of claim to rights that Sean could have. But, as Sean indicates (6), this is not the case. The next principle Clifford checks is priority (7)—was Sean using the implement even before Clifford was? Sean asssents to this condition as the basis of his claim, and Mrs. Swift (9) swiftly, and with considerable weight, enters to support his contention.

The argument thus far has been concerned with determining who has established rights over the implement, a not uncommon type of argument in the nursery school. Once the basis of Sean's rights has
been established, apparently to Clifford's satisfaction, Clifford not only submits to Sean's claim but also accounts for his own actions with a constituting denial (10).

A constituting denial disclaims the blameworthiness of an action by defining it in such a way that the action as described does not breach the norm in question; typically a contrast is implied between the action as defined and another possible definition of the action that would make it appear as a breach. That move may be accomplished with the use of "only" or "just" ("I was just using it"); "I was just seeing it") or by substitution with the alternative definition ("You stole my chair!"). "No, nobody was in it and I sat in it").

What is noteworthy about Clifford's constituting denial (10) is that he recognizes his potential liability to some blame, although it is unclear whether that recognition is the result of his reasoning or the result of the teacher's intervention, or both. In his constituting denial (10) he defines his action in such a way as to disclaim intent to infringe upon Sean's rights. Clifford seems to be saying that what he did was not really bad because he did not know the marker was already claimed.

In the closing utterance (11) Mrs. Swift, a guardian of the moral order acting on her didactic agenda, seized an opportunity to teach Clifford a principle: you should ask before using something. This is a fascinating admonition. Does Mrs. Swift really intend that Clifford conduct a systematic inquiry for establishing prior rights every time he wants to use an article of communal property? She certainly does not. What she probably does intend is to make salient for Clifford a general responsibility to anticipate possible rights of others over resources even when prior claims are not immediately evident. How incisively yet delicately we trace for each other the boundaries of our moral universe, and our responsibilities to it and within it.

Socialization and the Construction of Meaning in Discourse

Our theory about the acquisition of moral beliefs is a theory about how meaning is constructed in discourse. Recent work on the analysis of discourse and conversation has made it axiomatic that ordinary talk means far more than it says and carries information about cultural beliefs and knowledge systems that transcend the grammatical and referential aspects of language (Labov and Fanshel 1977; Longacre 1983).

For example, in the utterance "Oh dear, I wish I were taller" at least three things are happening (Ervin-Tripp 1976). The speaker is explicitly stating a proposition regarding an intentional state (wishing to be taller). The speaker is implicitly requesting a service ("Please get the dishes down for me"). The speaker is implicitly communicating something about her relationship to the interlocutor (that he is familiar, that he may be expected to have a solicitous attitude toward the speaker, that he is taller than the speaker). In ordinary conversation what is said is never a complete representation of what is implied or suggested or got across by what is said.

One way to state the axiom is that what is said carries indexical meaning—it points beyond itself to implications and suggestions whose connection to what was said is inferential. The meaning and coherence of any stretch of conversation are dependent upon processes of inference that tie the utterance to features of the context in which it is embedded, and to various unstated background propositions. A corollary of the indexicality axiom: in drawing inferences from what was said to what was unsaid, participants need to be informed, and in fact become informed, about things that were never mentioned.

A second axiom is that an inference to occur in the construction of meaning the recipient or observer of a communication must have sufficient prior knowledge to infer the implication or suggestion that is the meaning of what was said. The basic idea is that prior knowledge (knowledge of categories, propositions, maxims, contexts, intentional states, logical relations, and so on) is the most powerful factor in generating further knowledge (the meaning of what was said).

A corollary of the prior knowledge axiom is a principle of intersubjectivity that states: (1) participants in conversation address utterances to listeners who are assumed to have sufficient prior knowledge to understand them; (2) participants monitor the uptake or comprehension of their utterances and watch for indications that they may be wrong in their assumption that the listener has sufficient prior knowledge; and (3) conversation is a self-corrective process in which an equilibrium is sought between what is said and the prior knowledge needed to comprehend it.

That self-corrective process can be thought of as a progressively constrained dialectic that proceeds iteratively in two directions. From one direction prior knowledge consisting of unstated propositions is brought to bear in interpreting what was said; so to the extent the interpretation "works" it gives a sense of reality or objectivity to the un-
stated propositions. This is sometimes referred to as the instantiation of beliefs—the utterance is seen as an instance of an unstated general proposition that is already known.

In the other direction what is taken as known is used to draw inferences beyond itself, as part of an effort to make sense of what was said and to search for a propositional content that is not yet known but is implicit in what was said. Again, in forcing participants to draw inferences from what was said to what was unsaid, discourse has the power indirectly to inform participants (for example, children or observers) about things that were never explicitly mentioned.

A third axiom of discourse analysis is that the relevant unit of analysis is the entire communicative array linking by means of knowledgable inference what was said to what was meant. A communicative array is a set of coexisting elements—speech (what is said), context, and background knowledge—in which the three elements bear a mutually constraining relationship. Thus to construct the meaning of discourse in a communicative array, as either a participant or an observer, involves referring the explicit content of speech (what was said) to two indexed levels, the context and all the relevant prior background knowledge needed to make sense of what was said. Indeed, everyday discourse is abbreviated, condensed, and implicit (indexical) precisely because participants count on each other to count on (and can count on each other to take account of the other's counting on) context and a (presumed) shared body of prior knowledge to contribute the knowledge needed to draw a reasonable inference from what was said to what was meant.

A corollary of the communicative array axiom is that objective determinations of meaning are possible. That is not the same as saying that there are formal, logical, deductive, or structural principles that can be mechanically, automatically, or routinely applied to an utterance to arrive at a determination of what it means; if the meaning of an utterance is indexical there is no formal or structural feature of the utterance per se that determines what it means, yet the utterance may still have a meaning that can be determined objectively.

Thus given sufficient prior knowledge of context, background assumptions, usage, and so on, it is possible to distinguish between valid and invalid inferences about what an utterance means; to recognize improper or implausible deductions about what was left unstated, presupposed, or assumed in the communication; and so on. The process of determining the meaning of an utterance in a communicative array is somewhat like solving a hermeneutic jigsaw puzzle, but if you have enough pieces in place it becomes easy to see how the rest should be filled in. The following analysis shows how the process works.

**Incident 4: “That is not a paper cup”**

Alice (age four years) is seated at a table. She has a glass full of water. Mrs. Swift (the teacher) approaches and addresses Alice.

1. Mrs. Swift: That is not a paper cup.

The episode contains two more utterances, but for the moment consider only the initial one. It is noteworthy that while there is no formal, abstract, or logical feature of the utterance that marks it as an “accusation,” the context, the discourse, and certain background knowledge make the teacher’s utterance readily identifiable as such.

It is also noteworthy that at the time of recording the episode the observer (Micha) had not yet learned of the classroom rule that children are supposed to use paper cups and not glasses (except at snack time with the teacher’s supervision). However, from Mrs. Swift’s utterance (1) the rule could be immediately inferred or constructed, at least as far as “children are supposed to use paper cups and not glasses.” Indeed, it is only because of that rule that the utterance “That is not a paper cup” is the kind of speech act it is at all—an accusation.

In other words, the rule, a context-specific and mentioned entity, is crucial for the very constitution of the speech act. Yet a listener who did not previously know about the existence of the rule is able not only to understand the speech act (as an accusation) but also to infer the rule and become informed of its existence from the very fact of its functional presupposition. A hermeneutic dialectic is at work, and it operates rapidly, unconsciously, and effectively.

This episode illustrates the principle that if we have enough pieces of the puzzle we can fill in the missing ones. We recognize expressions of belief and desire through voice and action cues in context, and those tell us how to interpret or go beyond the surface content of what was said. We are assisted by our general knowledge of cultural belief propositions concerning the relevant differences between glasses and paper cups (the former break and the latter do not) and the anticipated competences of children three to five years old (who, we believe, might knock things over and get hurt). Even though lacking a formal procedure or generalized coding instruction for identi-
flying accusations as accusations, knowledgeable observers of the communicative array have little difficulty reliably classifying utterance 1 as an accusation. The utterance has a meaning that can be objectively determined.

The episode continues:

2. Alice: I want to put it down [broken, whimpering voice].
3. Mrs. Swift (taking the glass away from Alice): No, that’s just for snack time when the teacher is at the table.

It is ambiguous from utterance 2 whether Alice had prior knowledge of the rule that constitutes the accusation. The fact that Mrs. Swift initially engaged in an indirect indication of the rule (1) suggests that she thought it was something the child already knew; in other words, Mrs. Swift expected Alice to recognize the rule even though it was only implicit in what was said. Alice’s utterance (2), however, is not a definitive confirmation of Mrs. Swift’s expectation. Alice seems to appeal to some intuition that she believes mitigates the breach (if I put it down rather than hold it in my hand I won’t be breaking any rule).

What is clear is that Alice recognizes Mrs. Swift’s speech act and the intention behind it. Alice knows that she is being told that she is doing something wrong. This is confirmed by her plaintive tone and her effort to “repair” the situation. Mrs. Swift, in utterance 3, seems to express doubt that Alice has fully comprehended utterance 1 or correctly inferred the rule implicit in it. This can be inferred from the fact that Mrs. Swift responds to Alice by giving the rule further explicit formulation in utterance 3, telling Alice that the glass is just for snack time when the teacher is assisting.

It is clear from this illustration that determining the meaning of a stretch of discourse (as either a participant or an observer) is no formal or mechanical matter, yet it is objectively constrained. It calls for a good deal of prior cultural knowledge, and it is through the process of determining the meaning of a symbolic form that more cultural knowledge is acquired by both the child and the outside observer. Of course in interpreting the meaning of discourse one is always trying to make sense of what was explicitly said, and that is a major constraint on attributions of meaning. But there are other kinds of constraints as well.

One constraint is the way language gets used indexically. Mrs. Swift’s utterances, though quite condensed, powerfully summarize the cognitive-normative core of the event and point the child in the direction of understanding it. Though abbreviated, the utterances crystallize and transmit the moral meaning of the event. The utterance “That is not a paper cup” is basically a category contrast, meaning “That is not a paper cup, it is a glass.” It refers the meaning of the event to what is assumed to be known about the relevant differences between paper cups and glasses (a potential for harm through breakage), focusing the meaning of the event on the issue of potential harm. Although the teacher’s utterances never explicitly mention the issue of harm, the child seems to understand it, as she shows by her offer to “put it down” (so that she will be less likely to break it?).

The teacher’s final utterance gives additional normative content to the event and corrects the child’s partial misunderstanding. Glasses in the classroom are used only for snack time and only when a teacher is supervising. The teacher’s utterances (1, 3) leave a lot unsaid. No one has actually stated that paper cups are different from glasses because glasses break, that glasses are dangerous when broken, or that young children (you, Alice) are insufficiently competent or conscientious to be trusted with the unsupervised use of fragile and potentially harmful materials.

Nor has anyone mentioned the “obvious” moral proposition behind this: that teachers should take responsibility for protecting young children from classroom activities in which they are likely accidentally to injure themselves. All of that propositional content remains unsaid, and all of it is necessary for a true and objective understanding of the episode.

However, what is spoken points to or implicates that material so powerfully that anyone to whom those belief propositions are familiar will connect them with the event—the event will instantiate the beliefs. And an observer or participant who did not have prior knowledge of those propositions would, at the very least, be alerted to search or query for them; to anyone trying to comprehend what was going on it would be obvious that something of importance was missing—that is, one would wonder why the teacher wanted Alice to use a paper cup instead of a glass except at snack time.

A second constraint on the interpretation of the meanings implicit in a communicative array has to do with the monitoring of the participants’ expressed state of mind. Expressed intentions are important as evidence of the uptake of an utterance. In incident 4, Alice’s rather plaintive reply (2) and her offer to put the glass down instead of giving it up suggest a rather partial recognition of the teacher’s meaning. Senders of messages about cultural propositions (for example, Mrs.
Unpacking the Babaji Interview: Heinz in Orissa

The discourse in moral development interviews is often processed and coded as though what was explicitly said were a complete representation of what was meant or being argued. By expanding or unpacking one part (about 30 percent) of the text from a single interview and identifying its implicit argument structure, we raise some doubts about the ability of current coding and classification procedures accurately to represent the moral reasoning of an interviewee. If discourse is to be the measure of moral understanding and reasoning, then we must be concerned not only with what was said but also with what was presupposed, implied, suggested, or conveyed by what was said, and we need a theory of how meaning is constructed in discourse to help us go from what was said to what was meant.

An interview conducted by Shweder at his residence in Orissa, India, with the Babaji, a male in his thirties, gives expression to a central concept in the Hindu worldview, the concept of dharma (religion, duty, obligation, natural law, truth).

The Babaji, as a young child, was betrothed to a goddess to protect him from various misfortunes predicted by an astrologer, and he was raised in a village monastery. As a young adult he was returned to the everyday world, where he got married and became a father. Though not a Brahman, he is a member of a high-status “clean” caste. His formal education is limited to approximately five years of primary school. He is literate. His knowledge of automobiles, how to drive them and how to fix them, helps him earn a living. Shweder, who has known the Babaji for many years, views him as an articulate and highly intelligent participant in the devotional, meditative, and mystical aspects of Hinduism as they apply to the management of one’s personal life.

Our analysis of the expanded text of the interview raises several issues, in need of further discussion among moral development researchers, concerning (1) the proper meaning of preconventional moral reasoning, (2) the comprehensiveness of Kohlberg’s stage scheme, and (3) the hazards of interview scoring procedures that operate exclusively on unexpanded texts and code only explicit utterances that come in propositional form. In our text expansion we assume that the interview text per se (the totality of recorded and transcribed utterances) is only a fragmentary representation of its own meaning, that the text points beyond itself to a network of ideas about social and cognitive events, which co-constitute what the interviewee is trying to get across through the utterances inscribed in the interview text.

That assumption was exemplified in incident 4: the meaning of the utterance “That is not a paper cup” could be determined only with reference to its context, plus certain background knowledge instantiated in the episode. The context included, among other things, a teacher approaching a child holding a glass of water, and a classroom rule. The background knowledge included, among other things, beliefs about the relevant properties of glass objects, the competences of young children, the probabilities of harmful consequences, and the responsibilities of teachers. It was not the surface text alone, but all of those things, and more, that constituted the meanings that were conveyed by what was explicitly said (“That is not a paper cup”).

If we are to use ordinary language to investigate moral reasoning or moral understanding, we must have some way of taking account of the implicit meanings of utterances. One way of doing that involves giving explicit propositional form to the implicit material that co-constitutes the meaning of an utterance. The procedure is illustrated by Lieb and Fanshel (1977), who give it the name expansion.

The relevant implicit meanings, to be drawn out and stated in propositional form, might have various kinds of referents. Propositions might refer to observations (“It is raining”), rules (Thou shalt not steal), beliefs or assumptions (If a man sins, he will suffer), roles, statuses, or other social identities (wife, holy man, untouchable), and so
insufficient, and unnecessary. If he were not desperate he would recognize that there is a natural limit to (a given) human life; that providing his wife with the drug will not necessarily prolong her life; that it may be this woman's destiny to die at this time; and that if that is the case the drug will not prolong her life. It is God's intention and not human intervention that ultimately determines matters of human life and death. It follows that providing the drug is neither a sufficient nor a necessary condition for saving the woman's life. From the human point of view the result of providing the drug is unpredictable.

Moreover, other means are available to raise needed money. Ashok could sell his property or, if need be, sell himself into indentured servitude in order to raise the money. Since those alternative means exist and have not been exhausted, stealing is not a necessary condition for obtaining the drug.

Since the drug itself cannot be assumed to be effective in determining the course of events, and since one can assume the existence of alternative means to obtain the drug, there is no justification for stealing it.

Second-order expansion: The argument attributes the intention to steal to confusion deriving from desperation, in contrast to a well-considered and informed motive. The argument locates the ultimate efficient cause (including necessary and sufficient conditions) for human life and death with divine agency rather than with human intervention in events. The understanding is that human destiny is an expression of divine intention, and that human destiny is an actual plan given to an individual by God. The implication that follows from that proposition is that any specific human intervention is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition in the determination of life and death.

Having set forth that implication in the first part of this piece of reasoning, the Babaji then changes the focus of logical evaluation to a different locus in the causal structure of events. Having first dealt with the question of necessary and sufficient conditions and the ultimate causal course determining matters of life and death, in the latter part of his response he considers causality from the viewpoint of possible human interventions.

The argument takes administering the drug as the proposed intervention, which presupposes that the drug must be obtained. That goal then becomes the focus of evaluative reasoning. The argument asserts, in essence, that, even if one were to assume that administering
the drug is the best intervention, stealing the drug is not a justifiable means of obtaining it; there are other ways to raise the money to buy it at the asked price. Assuming, for the sake of argument, that the goal is to obtain the drug, the argument contrasts stealing to obtain the drug with an alternative causal or instrumental sequence (sell one's property or oneself), with the additional meaning that the alternatives are to be preferred.

In essence the Babaji's response states that if Ashok steals it is because he has become confused in his desperation and lost sight of reality, and not because stealing the drug is a defensible solution. There are no informed grounds for concluding that one ought to steal the drug, and this is why:

Interviewer: He has no other way out. He has neither money nor anything.
Babaji: Stealing is bad. He has made a mistake.
Interviewer: But his wife is going to die!
Babaji: There is no way within Hindu dharma to steal even if a man is going to die.
Interviewer: But doesn't Hindu dharma prescribe that you try to save a person's life?
Babaji: Yes. And for that you can sacrifice your blood or sell yourself, but you cannot steal.
Interviewer: Why doesn't Hindu dharma permit stealing?
Babaji: If he steals it is a sin, so what virtue is there in saving a life? Hindu dharma keeps man from sinning.
Interviewer: Why would it be a sin? Isn't there a saying, “One must jump into fire for others”?
Babaji: That is there in our dharma—sacrifice, but not stealing.

First-order expansion: The act of stealing is wrongful and not virtuous. It is prohibited by Hindu dharma (religion, duty, obligation, natural law, truth). If a man commits such an act he makes a serious moral and spiritual error, which, because of the nature of cause and effect, will divert him further from virtue and wisdom and in the direction of ignorance and suffering.

Dharma prohibits such acts even at the cost of human life. The purpose of dharma is to instruct humans in how to live a virtuous life that will spiritually benefit themselves and others; its purpose is to keep individuals from committing grave errors that will lead to spiritual degradation and suffering. If a man steals he commits a grave sin; even if he saves a life in doing so the outcome is not virtuous. According to Hindu dharma, it is virtuous to save a person's life. Dharma instructs that one may endure extreme hardship or even sacrifice oneself in order to help others. But even though the dharma condones extremes of personal self-sacrifice in order to help others, it does not condone actions such as stealing. As a means to help others, stealing is an unvirtuous action that goes contrary to the natural order.

Second-order expansion: The Babaji classifies stealing as a sinful and unvirtuous action and asserts that such actions are always wrong. He does not tell us, at this point, why it is always wrong to commit a sin, yet two considerations seem to be involved. First, the Babaji seems to hold that those actions classified as sins by dharmaic law are wrong independently of circumstance, good intention, or apparent outcome; sins are by nature wrongful actions.

Second, a further expansion of the concept of sin could be proposed, based on general Hindu belief as it is explicitly expressed by the Babaji later in the interview: Actions classified as sins have certain natural consequences as part of their inherent causality. The Hindu concept of sin, in fact, entails causal implications. In general, actions that are sinful tend to lead persons to situations or conditions that are still more desperate than the one they were trying to get free of in the first place. In those desperate situations a person is likely to become confused and commit even more errors. Sinful actions lead an individual away from virtue and wisdom and into ignorance and suffering.

In essence the Babaji argues that the purpose or end of instruction in dharma is to enable human beings to distinguish virtuous actions from sinful ones, so that they will be able to avoid the latter. The reason for avoiding sinful actions is that they have destructive consequences, for they lead people into degraded forms of existence in which both suffering and ignorance are greater and in which it becomes still more difficult to distinguish truth from falsity and illusion. In addition, specific instruction with regard to the act of stealing is attributed to dharma. From that the Babaji derives an obligation: a man should not steal, for if a man steals he commits a great sin.

But there is more to it than that, for the nature of sin entails something further. What is apparently the ultimate conclusion of the argument is expressed in the Babaji's interpretation of dharma concerning the relationship of moral polarities at the means-ends loci of a causal structure. That is, if a sin is committed (for example, stealing)
The argument implies that the moral value of the ends locus does not exert important, or at least decisive, influence on the evaluation of the means locus. Rather, the important moral influence operates in the reverse direction. To save a life is virtuous only if it is accomplished by virtuous means. If it is accomplished by sinful means, it becomes a sinful act; seemingly, it becomes a different act altogether.

It seems possible, given what we know about the Hindu world view as expressed by the Babaji in this and numerous other interviews, that the Babaji's reasoning is based on distinctions concerning God-given constraints on human action that have the force of natural law. As long as a man exerts his efforts in accordance with dharma, he can feel that he served God and dignified human existence. However, if he commits sinful actions such as stealing, even in the interest of a virtuous purpose, he has overstepped the constraints on human action according to natural law and God's design. His action, therefore, offends God and nature and risks obstructing divine intention or divine order. Nothing truly good can result from such an act, because (1) acts congruent with the will of God (helping others) cannot be achieved with acts that are forbidden by him (stealing); and (2) sinful actions always have evil as their consequence, if not immediately then in the long run. No lasting good can be achieved through sinful actions. A maxim would seem to follow: Do one's dharma; that above all else.

In the final part of his reply the Babaji comments on the moral implications of the means adopted for attaining an apparently virtuous end. Again the moral values are attributed directly to the laws and teachings of dharma. As he has argued previously, to commit sinful actions in the service of a virtuous purpose is to act in a way that is sinful and not virtuous. The true moral course of action in any situation is quite otherwise. It is to exert maximal and even heroic effort toward virtuous ends, but only through such courses of action as are defined as virtuous, or at least permissible, by divine law. The moral course of action is to be followed regardless of how any fallible individual (mis-) perceives the apparent contingencies or projected outcomes of sinful versus virtuous action.

In understanding the Babaji's reasoning it is important to recognize that he is arguing that a virtuous means of conduct is the only conceivable efficacious route to an end. One cannot cheat divine or natural law, for it simply will not work. The functioning of natural moral law is not dependent on one's goodwill, intentions, or knowledge. If one jumps off a roof, one is going to fall to the ground. If one seeks to attain an end by means of unvirtuous actions, the result, in the long run if not in the short run, will simply not be satisfactory. The Babaji ends with a contrast between the virtuous means given by dharma through which one may aid others, and sinful acts such as stealing that are forbidden even though done in the service of a virtuous purpose. The purpose under consideration (saving a life) is assumed to be virtuous as long as it is achieved within the rightful limits of human action.

Interviewer: But if he doesn't provide the medicine for his wife, she will die. Wouldn't it be a sin to let her die?
Babaji: That's why, according to the capabilities and powers which God has given him, he should try to give her shamanistic instructions and advice. Then she can be cured.
Interviewer: But that particular medicine is the only way out.
Babaji: There's no reason to necessarily think that that particular drug will save her life.

First-order expansion: Yes, it would be wrong for a man not to do what he could to save the life of his wife. But he must act in recognition of the limitations of man's rightful place in the natural order, and he must act within the constraints on virtuous conduct set forth in the dharma. For example, according to the capabilities and powers which God has given him, he should try to give his wife shamanistic instructions and advice. It is conceivable that she could be cured that way. But it is our moral duty to pursue right ends by right means, as set by dharma, and it is not human action that truly decides the fate of other persons or the outcome of events. The actual outcome does not rest solely in our hands. Nor can such things be attributed to any one particular material causal factor; there is no reason to think that the drug in question would be necessary or sufficient to save the woman's life. Consequently, there is no reason to neglect other courses of action and pursue only that one.

Second-order expansion: Here the Babaji separates two aspects of the causal structure of the original dilemma, two aspects that Kohlberg presupposed to be fused in the context of the dilemma as presented.
According to the Babaji, given his understanding of the causal structure of nature, saving the woman’s life is not to be equated with providing her with the drug. Providing the drug is neither a necessary nor a sufficient course of action for saving the woman’s life, even if it should turn out that in this case human intervention can influence the outcome. By separating aspects of the causal structure that we might fuse, the Babaji creates an additional issue around which a proposed solution is argued.

Indeed for the first time in the interview it becomes clear that the Babaji believes that there is a moral obligation to make an attempt to save the woman’s life. The fact that a person’s God-given or natural destiny is decisive in matters of human life and death does not relieve an individual from personal responsibility to act on behalf of another. It would be a sin simply to let her die if there is anything one can do to save her life. The Babaji’s arguments, in fact, suggest that somewhat heroic measures might be expected. What the Babaji says one can do, however, is in some ways expanded and in other ways restricted relative to the predominant Western world view. On the one hand, the range of efficacious actions (including ritual and prayer) through which the woman might be cured is greater than what is allowed for in the original dilemma. On the other hand, the domain of possibility is held to be constrained by the limits of the opportunities and capabilities that exist for action in accordance with dharma. Action that is sinful should be regarded as simply impossible.

The Babaji here and elsewhere perceives no conflict between what is effective and what is moral; indeed, the efficacy of action is viewed as proportionate to its moral value, and thus what Kohlberg views as a moral dilemma (preserving life versus upholding the law) is not a dilemma, given the Babaji’s view of the world. Within that view of the world it is as if the contingencies of action were functions of interrelationships in a consistent system of natural order in which physical and social contingencies are but one further manifestation of moral law.

Interviewer: Let’s suppose she can be saved only by that drug, or else she will die. Won’t he face lots of difficulties if his wife dies?
Babaji: No.
Interviewer: But his family will break up.
Babaji: He can marry other women.
Interviewer: But he has no money. How can he remarry?

Babaji: Do you think he should steal? If he steals he will be sent to jail. Then what’s the use of saving her life to keep the family together?

First-order expansion: It is false to believe that Ashok’s family will suffer great hardships if his wife dies, for he can marry another woman to take her place in the family. Even if he were unable to remarry, it would be foolish to steal in order to preserve his family, because if he steals he will end up in jail, which would be as disruptive to his family as the death of his wife. In that case the good of his family would not have been served by saving her life.

Second-order expansion: In this argument the Babaji once again demonstrates the uselessness of an act such as stealing. Here the interviewer introduces the question of the possible social and domestic consequences to Ashok and his family if Ashok’s wife were to die.

In reply the Babaji offers a causal argument concerning the uselessness of stealing as a means to avoid such consequences. If Ashok steals, his family will suffer hardship on account of that, and no one will be any better off. It would be better simply to remarry or to suffer the loss of the spouse. The argument becomes a warning against stealing, in the form of a comparison of the uselessness of stealing with the preferable implications of other possible courses of conduct, including simply bearing the loss of his wife.

To this point in the interview the overall sense of the argument is that unvirtuous courses of action do not bring about satisfactory results. There is nothing to recommend unvirtuous action, even from a mundane instrumental point of view. Because of the evil consequences it bears at every level, unvirtuous conduct defeats even its own purposes.

Viewed in the broader context of other arguments in the interview, this last stretch of discourse is a restatement, this time at the level of immediate social causality, of the belief that from an objective point of view “sin does not pay.” At every imaginable level, actions that are sinful fail to bring about the desired result. If there is any way at all to achieve something (and there may not be), sin is never the only way. Intelligent action and virtuous action are the same. No genuine benefit can come to anyone through unvirtuous action; and things will appear to be otherwise only to those ignorant of the true laws of cause and effect.
Babaji: She enjoyed the days destined to her. But stealing is bad.

First-order expansion: A person comes into the world with a certain destiny, which can be attributed to God's plan or purpose for that person in that particular life. It may be that this woman has enjoyed the days destined for her and it is time for her to go to her next life. If that is the case, it is useless to interfere. Her death at this time is the fulfillment of divine intention or natural law. Her death is right and good. But to steal is bad and goes against God's law and natural order. If that is her destiny, it is better to let her die than to commit sinful acts in a desperate attempt to save her.

Second-order expansion: Here the Babaji is challenging the end that is presupposed in the original dilemma. He implies that the rightness of the proposed goal (that the wife's life should be saved) is questionable, at least as an absolute value. In his view it is possible that it may be right or even best that the woman die, because it may be time for her to end that particular life and go on with her journey of the spirit through its various rebirths. In his view, allowing her to die may be the action most consistent with a concern for her well-being.

The Babaji does not make this conclusion lightly. He does not assume that, because such things are desired, an individual has no responsibility to intervene in another's illness or imminent death. Quite the contrary; even to the point of great personal sacrifice, one must do all one can to help another. It is rather that the Babaji's view allows for the possibility that the woman is meant to die at this time. That possibility enters as a consideration that has a bearing on reasoned action. But it is not something that can be known directly or assumed to be the case. Therefore, the mere possibility that it is the case does not relieve one of the responsibility to act.

Indeed, it would seem that the way to discern such issues of destiny is to act in whatever way one can within the constraints of dharma law, and then observe the outcome; the fact that a given end could not be accomplished in that way is evidence that the outcome was destined to be what it was. If one tries aggressively to intervene in events by means of actions that violate dharma law, then one is trying to force the outcome to one's own will and is neither respecting the destiny of others nor honoring the intentions of God.

On the other hand, if one neglects the actions that one could take in accordance with dharma, then one is neglecting to take one's right-

ful or intended place in the outcome of events, for it might also be the case that one had a destined or intended role to play in the event. That view seems to rest on a notion of coincidence just the opposite of our view of chance or accident. It is assumed that the way that things come together in any particular situation is meaningful and morally instructive, an expression of natural moral law or divine intelligence. Accordingly, what is moral coincides with what is efficacious and what is beneficial or advantageous.

According to that view, conflict between motivational domains (what is right versus what is advantageous) is merely apparent, the result of our ignorance of the reality underlying events and the totality of circumstances involved. What is right or wrong in any situation is not a matter of subjective judgment but rather an objective process; but, since one's personal ability to discern what is right or good in a situation is limited, it is an objective process of which one typically has only a partial view. Through instruction in dharma one has been given certain guidelines for acting in situations without overstepping the boundaries of what is humanly knowable. Given the known limitations of mortal judgment there is good reason to respect those guidelines.

Babaji: Our sacred scriptures tell that sometimes stealing is an act of dharma. If by stealing for you I can save your life, then it is an act of dharma. But one cannot steal for his wife or for his offspring or for himself. If he does that, it is simply stealing.

Interviewer: If I steal for myself, then it is a sin?
Babaji: Yes.

Interviewer: But in this case I am stealing for my wife, not for me.
Babaji: But your wife is yours.

First-order expansion: Our sacred scriptures tell of cases in which stealing is considered a virtuous act condoned by dharma. In order for that to be the case the act would have to be completely selfless, involving absolutely no personal gain for the person committing the act. For example, if I were to steal to help a stranger who had no personal relationship to me, that might be an act of dharma. This would be particularly true if the act were committed in the service of a holy man or individual who could be regarded as particularly god-like, close to God, or in some significant way equivalent to God. In such cases it is as if one were acting directly in God's service.

But stealing for selfish motives is not an act of virtue. A person
cannot rightfully steal for himself or his wife or his children. A man's wife and children belong to him. They are complementary to and interdependent with him. So he has a selfish interest in them. If a man steals for himself or for those who belong to him it is not a virtuous act; it is ordinary selfish stealing. What distinguishes stealing as an act of dharma from ordinary stealing is the complete absence of any self-serving motive.

Second-order exception: Here the Babaji proposes a variety of apparent exceptions to the generalizations he has already advanced about the inherent wrongfulness of stealing. Later he specifies more precisely the nature of such apparent exceptions in six dramatic narratives or stories to clarify and define his conceptions of natural moral law. The apparent exceptions are attributed directly to the scriptural record of historical experience and are not presented as personal opinion or subjective interpretation. The narrative that comes later (the story of the father and son who steal ghee in order to have the right food to serve their sadha guests) illustrates the customary nature of the type of apparent exception being drawn by the Babaji, and it suggests that it is not an exception at all but rather the kind of case that proves the rule of dharmic consequences for sin, including bad consequences for even selfless stealing.

Basically the Babaji argues that there is a point of view from which stealing could be seen as a virtuous act. This is true even given what has already been said about how such an act would be wrong for the sake of saving the life of one's wife. The Babaji's argument once again focuses on the ends presupposed by the causal structure of the original dilemma. Earlier the Babaji has considered the moral value of ends (stealing the drug in order to make it available to the woman) from the point of view of outcomes: the degree of likely benefit to the recipient of the action and the general harmony of action with the natural moral order. Here the Babaji considers the moral value of the end in relation to the motives of the actor.

The Babaji proposes that it would be an act of virtue if one were to steal for the benefit of a stranger (or, as we shall soon see, a holy man). That is virtuous because such an act is devoid of mundane self-interest. But to steal for one's wife or one's child is just like stealing for oneself; it is ordinary selfish stealing. One's wife and children are part of one's household, and their contribution to one's life and proximity to one's identity are so great that their life and death could not possibly be considered independently of one's own mundane advancement or personal attachment. Because of the purity of its motive, an act done out of compassion with no relation to personal gain or even to personal duty or personal responsibility has an exceptional status (and that is so even if the act is intrinsically a sin and is not to be recommended). Further elaboration of that position follows in our expansion of the Babaji's first dramatic narrative. The interview continues:

Interviewer: Doesn't Ashok have a duty or obligation to steal the drug?
Babaji: He may not get the medicine by stealing. He may sell himself.
He may sell himself to someone for, say, 500 rupees for six months or one year.
Interviewer: Does it make a difference whether or not he loves his wife?
Babaji: So what if he loves his wife? When a husband dies the wife does not die for him, or vice versa. We have come into this world alone, and we will leave it alone. Nobody will accompany us when we leave this world. It may be a son or it may be a wife. No one will go with us.
Interviewer: For whom do you feel one should steal? Let's say it is not his wife but a holy man or a stranger. Would it have been better if he had stolen for them?
Babaji: Stealing is bad. It is not right according to Hindu dharma, but if he stole for himself the degree of sin would be more.
Interviewer: Is it important to do everything one can to save another's life?
Babaji: Yes. But that does not mean stealing. You can borrow from someone. You can go without eating. You can give your food to others, or you can sell yourself.
Interviewer: Suppose Ashok had come to you, told you his situation, and sought your advice whether or not to steal. What would you have told him?
Babaji: I would have asked him not to steal. We have a practice in the villages. Everyone would have decided to give him the required money from the village common fund, or they would have collected some donation. But he should be advised not to steal.
Interviewer: But shouldn't people do everything they can to save a life?
Babaji: One should try to save another's life. Because, after all, he is a human being. But you should not do it by virtue of stealing.
By this point, we hope, it is unnecessary to expand the text or unpack its underlying consistencies and iterations. Instead we shall examine some detail the very next moment in the interview, when the Babaji adopts a traditional Oriya mode of moral argumentation, summarizing and justifying his conception of natural moral law with the first of six historical narratives.

Interviewer: Is it against the law for Ashok to steal?
Babaji: Yes. It's against the law.
Interviewer: Are the laws always morally right? Do you feel all laws are right?
Babaji: Let me tell you a story about stealing. Once some sadhus came to a poor man's house . . . [Here the Babaji narrates the story about the father and son who stole the ghee pot. The reader should now reread that story.]

Second-order enrichment: Let me tell you a story about an incident from which you can see for yourself the consequences of committing a sinful action such as stealing, even in one of those apparently exceptional cases involving selfless motives. A primary implication of the story is that although the man stole for righteous motives devoid of self-interest, the action nonetheless bore the dharmaic consequences of sin, involving him in further sin and greater suffering.

The story focuses on the host-guest relationship between ordinary men and holy men. In the Hindu world view the way one treats a guest is a test of one's relationship and attitude to dharmaic truth (the divine), and when the guests turn out to be holy men that issue is especially salient.

The Babaji begins by pointing out that holy men, who are certainly more aware of dharmaic truth than we are, never steal or ask for credit. They are able to meet all their needs by simply begging, and no one ever hesitates to give them what they need. The implication is that if Ashok had lived a more noble or holy life he would not find himself contemplating theft (this interpretation is borne out later in the interview); throughout his life Ashok must have been swimming against the dharmic current.

In any case the host, an ordinary man, stole only in order to honor the godliness represented in his guests. That is the purest of ends, yet his action resulted in disaster because he foolishly believed that the end could justify any means. His guests asked for ghee, a food suit-
to reverse the natural consequences of the sin and to instruct the father and son in the truths of dharma. Where theft had failed, dharmic means (prayer and ritual) worked, even to restore a dead person to life. The message is to avoid sin, even when, unlike Ashok, you have motives that are pure and meritorious.

This expansion or unpacking of the beliefs and arguments implicated in part of an interview text suggests that the analysis of such material must be informed by a theory of how meaning is constructed in discourse. If we attempt to understand the moral reasoning and beliefs of a “subject” by merely coding propositions explicitly mentioned in the surface structure of the text and matching them against a list of proposition types in a standard coding manual, we have committed ourselves to a view of language in which what is said is a complete and isomorphic representation of what is meant. How defensible is that approach to language and the analysis of interview texts?

One practical way to answer that question is to ask: How shall we classify the Babaji’s moral reasoning? How would it be stage-classified following Kohlberg’s standardized coding procedure, in which the surface structure of the interview text, consisting of explicit propositionalized judgments, is matched to criterion statements set out in a coding manual? How would it be classified if we analyze, as well, the expanded text and its implicit argument structure?

Kohlberg (1981) classifies moral reasoning into three developmental levels, each divided into two stages. At the lowest, “preconventional,” level (stages 1 and 2), subjects define the meaning of rightness and wrongness in terms of subjective feelings and interests. If the self likes it, it is right; if the self does not like it, it is wrong. There are no higher obligations. Egoism and self-interest reign. At the intermediate, “conventional,” level (stages 3 and 4), a consciousness of the collective emerges, and, although subjects continue to define the meaning of rightness and wrongness by reference to feelings, now the collective feelings of others are what matter. The idea of obligation is equated with the authority of the group (the commands of parents, interpersonal expectations concerning proper role behavior, the laws of legislators). If one’s reference group likes it, it is right; if one’s reference group does not like it, it is wrong. Conformity and consensus reign. At the highest, “postconventional,” level (stages 5 and 6 in Kohlberg’s earlier formulations; stage 5 in more recent formulations; Kohlberg, Levine, and Hewer 1983), rightness and wrongness are defined by reference to objective universal principles that stand above the feelings of either the self or the group. Those principles are justice, natural rights, and a humanistic respect for all persons, and a postconventional reasoner can appeal to them to criticize social institutions and personal preferences.

The Babaji interview was analyzed and stage-classified by two expert coders (Lawrence Kohlberg and Ann Higgins) following the procedures detailed in the Standard Issue Scoring Manual (Colby et al., 1987), whereby coding is restricted to what is explicitly stated in propositional form in the interview text. Kohlberg (personal communication) makes several observations about the interview and the coding process. He notes that “much of the material [in the interview] was unscorable.” One reason some of the material was unscorable was that it involved “spontaneous elaborations by the informant in the form of stories or allegories and references to Hindu mythology.” Fortunately, however, according to the coders, “there was enough scorable material to match to manual points even though many interesting points could not be fit to the manual.”

Not surprisingly, Kohlberg comes up with several perceptive informal observations on the interview. He notes that for orthodox Hindus society seems “to be defined by a mixture of custom and tradition and religious dharma as distinct from legal and political rules and systems.” He also notes that orthodox Hindus seem “less oriented to individual rights and to interpersonal balancing of feelings through role-taking and more oriented to custom.” He notes that the interview material “fit our manual much less easily than the Turkish and Israeli data on which I have personally worked. When the Turks invoked religious references it was either to straightforward divine command and punishment or to following the norms of being a good Muslim as a defined religious group” (personal communication).

Kohlberg wonders whether the distinction between convention and morality would hold up for orthodox Hindu adults (it does not; see Shweder, Mahapatra, and Miller 1987) and notes that while orthodox Hindus seem to “make much of the distinction between the legal and the religious . . . the religious encompasses the conventional and the moral for them.” Kohlberg classifies the Babaji’s orientation to religious dharma as “essentially stage 4, though somewhat unlike American law oriented or American religious-law oriented stage 4. American stage 4s seem to use a more clear social systems perspective when explaining or using their religious codes.” Kohlberg and Higgins give the Babaji interview a global stage score of 3/4. Kohlberg
of which, it may be assumed, are relatively good adaptations to the requirement of objective moral law.

In the orthodox Hindu view moral decisions have their own natural causality, and there is a direct interplay between moral causality, material causality, and social causality. Thus the consequence of a sin may be disease or a bad marriage.

Let us consider a few salient features of the Babaji’s view of the moral order. In Western academic circles we sometimes perceive a conflict between what is the morally right thing to do and what is the expedient or personally beneficial thing to do; and for us moral acts are not thought to be directly linked to material and social consequences. In the Babaji’s orthodox Hindu view, what is moral coincides with what is expedient for personal well-being. The conflict is only apparent; the perception of conflict results either from ignorance of the laws of moral cause and effect or from limited human understanding of complex circumstances. The Babaji believes it is arrogant to presume that we know which outcome is truly in the best interests of any or all persons involved, for these individual interests extend far beyond this life and are not usually knowable to us as ordinary mortals.

The Babaji believes that certain kinds of actions (for example, stealing, killing) are inherently sinful and other kinds of actions (for example, giving alms, sacrificing) inherently virtuous. Those qualities of sin and virtue belong to the actions themselves; intentionality and circumstances do not create sins or eliminate them. The act is sinful even if it is done unknowingly. In that view circumstances “out of one’s control” are regarded as one’s own fault; they are the manifestations of prior sinful actions. In that view wrongful action is not a breach against society or other people; it is sin against dharma, an attack on God and the natural order of things. And it is destructive not of society or other people, but of the person’s own eternal spirit, the essence of the person that is most godlike. To sin brings degradation to your truest self; and because this self is connected to all living beings, it is a sin against the whole of existence. The implication of that view of sin is that man should strive to be perfectly godlike, to be so enlightened or omniscient that no act is unintentional, to have no motive corrupting of dharmic choices for action, and have no circumstance out of control.

In his arguments the Babaji understands Ashok’s point of view, but he is more concerned with Ashok’s spiritual well-being than with his
worldly or social well-being or even with the prolongation of this particular incarnation of Ashok’s wife. The Babaji applies the same rigorous rules to Ashok that he would apply to himself. He achieves a moral and objective point of view by being impartial in exactly that way.

The Babaji also takes the perspective of Ashok’s wife, but again from the point of view of her spiritual well-being rather than from the point of view of one particular worldly life. His assertion on behalf of Ashok’s wife is that she has her own spiritual journey, which has been arranged for her by God, seemingly in a very personal and individual manner. Since a person’s spiritual path quite reasonably entails matters concerning when one life situation is to be ended and another begun, the time of one’s death can be regarded as part of a beneficent plan. For Ashok to cling desperately to the life of his wife is selfish, not empathetic or compassionate; it may even obstruct rather than benefit her spiritual development—like keeping a child from entering school because one would rather have him or her at home.

The Babaji has a clear hierarchy of spiritual and material goals, and he argues that there is a relationship between spiritual and material well-being. He does not deny the value of human life; quite the contrary, it is the supreme value of the material world. But it derives its value and sacredness from its relationship to the spirit or soul, of which material life is a manifestation. For that reason material well-being is not privileged over spiritual well-being. Spiritual well-being is fundamental because the condition and degree of purity of one’s soul have a decisive influence on the particular state of one’s body (male or female, healthy or sickly) in successive rebirths.

For the Babaji, human beings are responsible agents in the extreme for events within the domain of their authority to act, yet that domain has certain limits. He recognizes that his own human position is neither omniscient nor omnipotent within the scheme of moral-physical causality, and he does not consider his own intelligence to be the highest or most perfect intelligence acting upon human events. It is for the Babaji a matter of objective fact to acknowledge the limits of his own understanding and efficacy. In the West a large residue of causal determinacy is written off to “chance.” In India the universe is thought to be fully determinate, and given that there are serious spiritual consequences associated with any course of action, the boundaries for legitimate action are greatly respected.

That does not mean that human beings are impotent, or even that the limits on human action and accomplishment are narrow by Western standards. The Babaji does not view human beings as powerless or constrained to enact a limited set of obligatory roles or routines. Extraordinary and heroic effort is possible and may accomplish extraordinary ends. In the accounts and narratives presented in the interview, one finds possibilities for altruism that achieves its end through almost unthinkable sacrifice, knowledge that can cure the sick and bring the dead back to life through prayer and ritual and other dharmic techniques, repentance by a world conqueror moved by a moment of imparted insight into the divinity of life, and disciplines that lead to precession of the course of the divine plan. Indeed, the range of possible solutions to human problems is much greater than the one we are accustomed to think of in our own pragmatic terms. While there is a respect for the limits of human knowledge, heroic efforts are possible, and, if those efforts run with, instead of against, the current of dharmic law, extraordinary things may be accomplished. Such efforts make a human being more godlike; one cannot defeat the mind of God, but one can share in it.

One of the remarkable features of the interview is that the Babaji does not represent the dilemma in terms of rights or justice or life versus private property. He represents the dilemma in terms of the cause-and-effect relations associated with human action, and he argues that it is irrational to commit a sin once the laws of cause and effect and the interdeterminacy of moral and material events are properly appreciated.

It seems impossible to deny the inhuman an interest in abstract universal principles. In fact, abstract universal considerations dominate the interview (for example, dharmic virtue over material life).

Perhaps most significantly, the Babaji seems to view the dilemma in terms of a causal structure that is not at all coincidental with the causal structure that is presupposed, and thus unwittingly privileged, by those who composed it as a dilemma. The causal structure as understood by the Babaji is as follows:

1. Agency. One cannot assume human agency to be the only agency operating in the event. Considerations of divine intention place limits on human authority to act.
2. Separation of fused causes. It cannot be assumed that administering the medicine will save the woman’s life; it will not save her if it is her destined time to die. It cannot be assumed that the medicine is the only way to intervene, or even a superior form of treatment. It cannot be decisively determined that to save her is the responsible and compassionate thing to do. Since such things are not fully open
to our view they require sensitive testing by rightful action and observation of the consequences. Failure to save her life by taking every morally permissible action is evidence that her dying at this time is part of her destiny.

3. Consequences of action. Sinful actions never fulfill their purposes, at least not in the long run. Sinful actions have such disastrous consequences that no thoughtful person would use unvirtuous action as a route out of trouble. Those consequences pertain least of all to legal or societal punishment or to matters of social consensus; rather they pertain to mental, physical, and social well-being in this and future lives.

It is a sign of prior sin and negligence that Ashok finds himself in such a desperate situation. A householder who lives a life of dharma and amends to his responsibilities typically has a little money or property or credit or can raise money if he is in need. It is likely that Ashok is already blameworthy, and further acts of moral desperation (such as stealing) will only lead him further along the path of sin and spiritual degradation.

There is a common illusion that what is personally beneficial does not always coincide with what is virtuous. The wise understand that if a result cannot be accomplished by virtuous means then the result is not as beneficial as it may seem to be from the limited viewpoint of ordinary persons.

Presumably Kohlberg and Higgins coded the Babaji interview as stage 3/4 (conventional) because the informant does not weigh the value of life against property or speak about rights and justice, but rather refers repeatedly to a norm (dharma) construed by the coders as a social norm. There are several problems with classifying the interview as stage 3/4. Indeed, Kohlberg’s stage scheme seems unable within its own theoretical terms to represent accurately the orthodox Hindu view of the moral order. Here are some of the problems:

1. The Babaji views dharma not as a social norm, but rather as an independently existing and objective reality—somewhat like the laws of physics.

2. The Babaji argues that the moral-physical world is such that wrong actions lead to suffering and spiritual degradation; thus, if one understands the laws of cause and effect, committing a sin is irrational. Again, social consensus has little to do with it.

3. Although his concept of objective obligations has nothing to do with justice and rights, the Babaji adopts a hyperrational perspective on morality. There is no strain of subjectivism or egotism run-

ning through the interview, and moral obligation is understood to be entirely independent of individual or group preference or opinion.

4. There is no hedonistic orientation in the interview. There is no motive to avoid pain or maximize personal pleasure in this world. Indeed there is an expressed willingness to undergo painful sacrifice to help others. While there is a strong motive to avoid actions that bring degradation to the spirit or soul and cause suffering in future rebirths, to call that hedonism is to equate hedonism with the principle that spiritual cleansing is the highest possible value.

From expanding the Babaji interview text and identifying its implicit argument structure it seems apparent that the interview gives articulate expression to an alternative form of postconventional reasoning that has no place in Kohlberg’s stage scheme. In a sense the stage scheme is exploded by its own inability to classify adequately the moral reasoning of the Babaji. One may also begin to wonder how many other moral development interviews coded as stage 3/4 would turn out to be alternative forms of postconventional reasoning, if only we permitted ourselves to move from what is said to what is unsaid, to expand the interview text and identify its implicit argument structure.

Neorationalism and Divergent Rationalities

Ordinary conversations not only carry in condensed form a vision of the moral order, they are also the vehicles by which we reproduce the moral order by describing and evaluating events. Given the power of everyday conversations to transmit moral beliefs to children, why have moral development researchers taken so little theoretical interest in the moral world view indexed in and through everyday talk? Verbal interview protocols are, after all, a primary source of evidence in moral development research. Yet every well-known school of thought dealing with moral development quickly moves away from any sustained reflection about the nature of ordinary language use. Thus psychoanalytic researchers, with an interest in the development of conscience, focus on children’s intrapsychic conflict anxieties and on defense mechanisms leading to identification with powerful, envied, or feared others. Cognitive structuralists limit their attention to children’s purported efforts to construct for themselves the formal features of moral reasoning. Social learning theorists do examine social
communication, but they have bleached it of all implications or message content except reward and punishment, approval and disapproval; and they have kept their field of vision narrow, focusing on the process of modeling or mimicking significant others. No one has taken seriously the substance, content, or meaning of what children and adults say and do to each other. Few have taken to heart the idea that moral development is, in large measure, a problem in the acquisition of moral knowledge through the inferences embedded in social communications.

There has been a long and destructive debate in philosophy and in the social sciences over whether moral judgments (that is right or wrong; that is good or bad) are cognitive or emotive judgments. In our view one of the main victims of that debate has been research on the moral arguments embedded in ordinary conversations in everyday life. The moral noncognitivists or so-called emotivists (including social learning theorists and psychoanalysts) premise their research on the idea that rightness and goodness are not real or natural or objective qualities of things. Since, the emotivists argue, rightness and goodness do not describe anything objective in the external world, moral judgments cannot appropriately be said to be either true or false, nor are moral judgments capable of justification through argumentation or other rational means. And since from the point of view of the moral noncognitivists there is nothing really out there to be described with such terms as right or good, the only thing that is real in moral discussions is the pragmatic use in nondescriptive ways—to express opinions, to command or commend, to dominate and control, to preserve privilege, to resolve intrapsychic conflicts, and so on. Not surprisingly, the moral noncognitivists emphasize the pragmatic use of moral discourse and, for the most part, display little interest in either the semantic content of the moral universe suggested by a moral judgment or the reasons, grounds, warrants, or arguments in support of a moral judgment advanced implicitly or explicitly in moral discourse.

The moral noncognitivist or emotivist viewpoint has been driven by two very special and probably false assumptions about what a truly cognitive-scientific discipline is. The first is the positivist's assumption that any term or concept that plays a part in the production of knowledge must be verifiable either by logical interdefinition or by empirical means. The relevant terms or concepts in the moral area are terms such as right or good; since moral concepts cannot be verified in that way, it follows that there cannot be genuine moral facts or objective moral knowledge. The second questionable assumption is that real objective knowledge implies convergence in beliefs; and thus that in any genuine cognitive-scientific discipline disputes get resolved over time. The moral noncognitivist's conclusion: Since disputes over what is right or wrong (abortion, capital punishment, polygamy, arranged marriage, adolescent circumcision) do not go away, moral judgments cannot be a form of objective knowledge.

Ironically, the moral cognitivists (including Kohlberg and other cognitive structuralists) have shared with the moral noncognitivists precisely those two assumptions about the nature of genuine objective knowledge. The moral cognitivists, however, actually think they can achieve that kind of objective knowledge in the moral domain. Given that goal, it is understandable that the moral cognitivists are not interested in the pragmatic uses of moral discourse or in nonrational processes (imitation, modeling, identification, reward and punishment, indoctrination, genetic inheritance) for reproducing moral judgments in the next generation. Instead, they set themselves the task of defining the objectivity and rationality of moral judgments in terms of those very two assumptions about genuine objectivity and rationality mentioned earlier. Thus the moral cognitivists have launched themselves on various projects to establish that moral disputes (all moral disputes? some of them? at least one of them? the disputes defined as moral?) could be resolved by the methods associated with (what they view as) genuine science, by inductive inference from indubitable facts or by deductive reasoning from undeniable premises.

The moral cognitivist's goal is to build an abstract airtight moral system whose rational appeal will be universally obvious to any competent thinker (a slippery notion), whether that thinker is a Hindu priest, a Chinese mandarin, an African Bushman, or a Radcliffe undergraduate. In practice the competent thinkers usually turn out to come from a small pool of philosophers, mostly Western, and even they never seem to be able to agree on what is rationally appealing. It is small wonder that the moral cognitivists have taken so little interest in the parochial and context-bound moral discourses of everyday life, where premises are always debatable, terms are rarely explicitly defined, and a complete and consistent account of the entire moral order is never forthcoming.

A second reason for the lack of attention to everyday moral discourse in the child development field may have something to do with the history of high-status research in the psychological sciences. Laboratory experimental research programs on perception, memory,
learning, and decision making (the traditional high-prestige topics) have made some progress by relying on a small set of research heuristics: (1) be indifferent to content; process and structure are primary; (2) language is epiphenomenal; it can be ignored; (3) what's really real is inside the skin; the individual is the only relevant focus of analysis; (4) search for universals, study automatic processes, or both; if psychology is to be a genuine science it must uncover highly general laws; (5) don't think about anything that can't be measured.

Whatever the explanation for the survival power of those heuristics in the history of American psychology, they are widely diffused, institutionally entrenched, and deeply intuitive for many psychological researchers. Thus it is not surprising that there has been resistance to the study of the semantics of everyday moral discourse. To study meaning is to study content. To study discourse is to study language. To study language is to shift the locus of study beyond the individual to the communicative array, a collective product. It is to credit as much importance to what is local and special as to what is general and universal. And it is to recognize that objective knowledge is possible even in the absence of a formal, general, or standard measuring device.

Our own interest in the socialization of moral beliefs by means of inferences and arguments implicit in, and carried by, everyday discourse is related to our view that it is time to displace the tiresome terms of the traditional dispute between cognitivists and noncognitivists. It is also time to replace some of our research heuristics, especially in the study of moral development.

That displacement is today conceivably thanks to several important insights from the philosophy of science. In effect we are now in a position to "soften" (David Wong's apt expression) our view of the real hard-knowledge-producing disciplines. It turns out that convergence may not be a defining feature of a genuine cognitive-scientific enterprise, and paradigm conflicts do not always go away, even in physics (Hesse 1972; Pinch 1977). It turns out that not all respectable concepts or terms can be verified by logic or direct observation; knowledge systems are presuppositional, analogical or metaphoric, and holistic. And not only can theories not be proved (by now a commonplace piece of received wisdom) it may turn out that they cannot be disproved, either; measurement error and anomaly may not be distinguishable on any formal grounds.

In another context (Shwed 1986) this neorationalist approach has been identified with the idea of "divergent rationalities" and with the attempt to broaden the notion of rationality to include not just inductive and deductive logic but several other cognitive elements as well: the presuppositions and premises from which a person reasons; the metaphors, analogies, and models used for generating explanations; the categories or classifications used for partitioning objects and events into kinds; and the types of evidence viewed as authoritative—intuition, introspection, external observation, meditation, scriptural evidence, evidence from seers, prophets, or elders, and so on.

One effect of all this softening up of the hard sciences is that it is now possible to "harden" our view of the soft sciences and disciplines and to define a more realistic rationalist agenda for studies of morality and moral development. For example, it is possible to argue that moral concepts and judgments refer to natural or objective entities in the world, as long as it is understood that the existence of moral facts and objective moral knowledge is not incompatible with the existence of irreconcilable moral disputes, and that there can be more than one valid moral universe, just as there can be more than one valid physical science representation of the nature of light.

The Babaji interview presents us with an alternative version of an objective postconventional moral world. Given a neorationalist conception of objective knowledge, there is no longer any necessary to deny that it is rational or postconventional. The objective moral world is many, not one; or, as Nelson Goodman (1984) has put it: "One might say that there is only one world but this holds for each of the many worlds" (p. 278).

Appendix: The Babaji Interview Using Kohlberg's Interview Form A (Modified)

A woman suffered from a fatal disease. To cure her, doctors prescribed a medicine. That particular medicine was available in only one medicine shop, The pharmacist demanded ten times the real cost of the medicine. The sick woman's husband, Ashok, could not afford it. He wrote to everyone he knew to borrow money. But he was able to borrow only half of the price. He asked the pharmacist to give him the medicine at half price or to give it to him on credit. But the pharmacist said, "No I will sell it at any price I like. There are many persons who will purchase it." After trying so many legal ways to get the medicine, the desperate husband considered breaking into the shop and stealing the medicine.
Should Ashok steal the drug?
No. He is feeling desperate because his wife is going to die, and that's why he is stealing the drug. But people don't live forever, and providing her the drug does not necessarily mean she will live long. How long you live is not in our hands but in God's hands. And there are other ways to get money, like selling his landed property, or even he can sell himself to someone and can save his wife's life.

He has no other way out. He has neither money nor anything. Stealing is bad. He has made a mistake.

But his wife is going to die! There is no way within Hindu dharma [religion, duty, obligation, natural law, truth] to steal even if a man is going to die.

But doesn't Hindu dharma prescribe that you try to save a person's life? Yes. And for that you can sacrifice your blood or sell yourself, but you cannot steal.

Why doesn't Hindu dharma permit stealing? If he steals it is a sin—so what virtue is there in saving a life? Hindu dharma keeps man from sinning.

Why would it be a sin? Isn't there a saying, "One must jump into fire for others"? That is there in our dharma—sacrifice, but not stealing.

But if he doesn't provide the medicine for his wife, she will die. Wouldn't it be a sin to let her die? That's why, according to the capabilities and powers which God has given him, he should try to give her shamanistic instructions and advice. Then she can be cured.

But that particular medicine is the only way out. There's no reason to necessarily think that that particular drug will save her life.

Let's suppose she can be saved only by that drug, or else she will die. Won't he face lots of difficulties if his wife dies? No.

But his family will break up. He can marry other women.

But he has no money. How can he remarry? Do you think he should steal? If he steals, he will be sent to jail. Then what's the use of saving her life so keep the family together? She has enjoyed the days destined for her. But stealing is bad. Our sacred scriptures tell that sometimes stealing is an act of dharma. If by stealing for you I can save your life, then it is an act of dharma. But one cannot steal for his wife or his offspring or for himself. If he does that, it is simply stealing.

If I steal for myself, then it's a sin?
Yes.

But in this case I am stealing for my wife, not for me. But your wife is yours.

Doesn't Ashok have a duty or obligation to steal the drug? He may not get the medicine by stealing. He may sell himself. He may sell himself to someone for, say, 500 rupees for six months or one year.

Does it make a difference whether or not he loves his wife? So what if he loves his wife? When the husband dies, the wife does not die for him, or vice versa. We have come into this world alone, and we will leave it alone. Nobody will accompany us when we leave this world. It may be a son or it may be a wife. No one will go with us.

For whom do you feel one should steal? Let's say it is not his wife but a holy man or a stranger. Would it have been better if he had stolen for them? Stealing is bad. It is not right according to Hindu dharma, but if he stole for himself the degree of sin would be more.

Is it important to do everything one can to save another's life? Yes. But that does not mean stealing. You can borrow from someone. You can go without eating. You can give your food to others, or you can sell yourself.

Suppose Ashok had come to you, told you his situation, and sought your advice whether or not to steal. What would you have told him? I would have asked him not to steal. We have a practice in the villages. Everyone would have decided to give him the required money from the village common fund, or they would have collected some donation. But he should be advised not to steal.
But shouldn’t people do everything they can to save a life? One should try to save another’s life. Because, after all, he is a human being. But you should not do it by virtue of stealing.

Is it against the law for Ashok to steal?
Yes. It’s against the law.

Are the laws always morally right? Do you feel all laws are right?
Let me tell you a story about stealing. Once some sadhus [wandering mendicant holy men] came to a poor man’s house. He and his son were the only members of the family. The sadhus wanted this man to be their host for that night. Holy men never ask for credit. They never steal. They have only what they earn from begging alms, which they cook and eat.

The sadhus arrived at the man’s house as guests, and as guests they were considered as a god. So the man and his son pawed whatever belongings they had and arranged dinner for the sadhus. Before going to their dinner the sadhus said that ghee was essential for their dinner. [Ghee, or clarified butter, is classified in the native theory of foods as a “cool” food—one of the foods eaten by holy men]. Both the father and the son pondered again and again where to get the ghee. They were really “in a stew.”

They went to the sadhu of a nearby monastery to get some ghee. But the sadhu refused to give them ghee. So they made a hole in the wall and the son entered the storeroom of the monastery. It was full of wealth, but the son picked up only the ghee pot. While he was halfway through the hole, suddenly the sadhu got up and caught hold of the son’s two legs. But outside the father was pulling the son’s hands. So a tussle went on for some time. The son told the father to take the pot of ghee and offer it to the sadhu guests. He also told his father to cut off his head and take it away so that the sadhu of the monastery would not be able to recognize him. The father did this and threw away his son’s head.

The father did such things only because he wanted to help the sadhus. After he offered ghee to his guests the sadhus were satisfied. The next morning the father bade them farewell, and they asked, “Where is your son? He is not seen.” The father started to cry. The sadhus asked him why he was crying. So he told all the details and facts, and said it was nobody’s fault.

The sadhus said, “You have made a mistake. Okay. If you have done it only to satisfy us, if you had no evil intention under it, if you had no temptation for the wealth, and if your son died only for this,

then we will pray to God for his life.” They asked, “Where is your son’s head?” They wanted to show God the decapitated head. The father took the head of the son to the sadhus. They sprinkled some Tulsi water on the head. So the son returned to life.

In the story the sadhus brought the son back to life because he had stolen for others. Likewise Ashok is doing this for his wife, isn’t he? The relationship between a wife and husband and between a man and a holy man are quite different. Suppose a river is flowing. This idea is also from our sacred scriptures. Pieces of wood are all tied together in a bundle and floating down the river. They are tied perfectly. Slowly the tie loosens. After some time individual pieces of wood leave the flow and stop on the bank of the river. They become changed. They could not be together as they were before. This world is like that. The son will go his way. We will go our way. If you think only of the truth, if you obey Hindu dharma, then stealing is not allowed. Maybe we are together, five souls [literally, “hearts”] are joined and we are sitting here. You will go to your home. I will go to my home. No one has the power to detain anyone. So anyone who has faith in God, he will not try to steal to detain his wife’s journey.

Don’t people steal in certain circumstances?
Yes, people are stealing, and we cannot know what punishment they get for this. If you understand how you have come into this world you will not steal. Stealing is a great sin.

Which is a greater sin, to kill a man or to steal?
Both are great sins. You must have gone to Dhauli [the battlefield where King Ashoka slaughtered hundreds of thousands of Oriya Kalinga in battle—the place where in repentence for the slaughter Ashoka converted to Buddhism, later to spread Buddhism to Southeast Asia]. When Ashok conquered Kalinga, a monk came to him and said, “You are defeated.” Ashok said, “What? I have already conquered Kalinga, killed thousands of people, and with their blood the water of the river Daya has turned red. What do you mean I am defeated?” The monk said, “You are born as a man. You proclaim that you are a great man.” Ashok said, “You please come with me, so you can see how many persons are beheaded, how many dead bodies are lying down there. You see my sword. I have killed many persons with this sword.”

The monk said, “It is by killing hundreds of thousands of people that you have failed. If you can give life to any one of these then I will
say you are great. Their wives and children, those who depend on them, how they are crying. You are only killing. You have not recognized the atman [soul, divinity] in them. How have you conquered?" So Ashok, the butcher, changed. He threw down his sword and begged forgiveness from the monk.

Is the husband killing his wife by not stealing the drug?
No, he is not killing. If something is with me and I do not give it, then it is my fault. The husband must have some homestead land, or some vehicle. If he has nothing then he has at least his sell, which he can sell.

No, Ashok has nothing. He is poor.
He can sell himself. We have the tradition of Hans Chandra—the king who sold himself to give remuneration that he owed. It is a time when God puts you to a test. At such a time you can sell yourself. Suppose I earn 7 rupees a day. I can borrow 500 rupees on a condition to serve the man for five years. Alternately, when the wife is going to die, he can die in her place. He will die in sorrow anyway.

But had he stolen the drug, he would have saved her.
Definitely it will be a sin. Thinking in terms of dharma he cannot steal. This is a fact. If I steal it’s my dharma that’s involved. My wife will not be sent to jail. I will be sent. Dharma is like that—I will be at fault. There’s a story I want to tell you. During the age of the Mahabharata [the Indian epic] Kali [the goddess of destruction] came to earth and Sahadeva tied her up. She was bound. That was during the age of Satya Yuga [Truth]. A peasant was ploughing the land of a Brahman. Once while he was ploughing he found a golden armlet in the earth. So he went to the Brahman and said, “Here, take this golden armlet since I have found it on your land.” The Brahman said to the tiller, “It’s yours to take since you ploughed the land.” So they quarreled with each other, each trying to give the golden armlet to the other. When one gives it to the other the latter says, “Why should I commit a sin?” So no one took the armlet.

Both of them went to the king, Yudhisthira. It was the tradition in those days to give such disputed things to the king. The king said, “Our time of rule is over, and we are going to the Himalayas. We cannot stay here, and there is no use of taking such property with us to the Himalayas.” So Yudhisthira told them to ask Sahadeva to judge the dispute. Sahadeva was a man capable of seeing both the past and the future. So do you know what he did? He freed Kali! He let her loose. Immediately the Brahman claimed the armlet. Then the tiller claimed the armlet because he got it while ploughing. The fighting continued between them. Everything depends on the age, whether it’s the age of Kali or the age of Satya Yuga. This is the age of Kali.

Do you know any laws that are morally wrong?
Family planning. According to dharma it is wrong.

What’s wrong with it?
The operation and the sterilization. They are murdering through abortion.

Is the law forbidding dowry morally wrong?
Dowry is not part of our dharma. But it’s in practice nowadays. One should give voluntarily.

What about the law permitting untouchables to enter the temple? Is that law morally wrong?
There is a history of touchable and untouchable. It’s not a sin if a Hadi [an untouchable caste in Orissa] touches a Brahman or a Karan [a clean caste in Orissa] or visits the temple. But there is a reason behind the idea of untouchable. Suppose you have taken your bath and I have not. Untouchables do not keep their own sanctity. Human beings are all equal. God has created the hierarchy among them so that they will work according to their duty. Untouchables can enter the temple but they should be cleaned. They should perform their daily duties like bathing properly.

If they perform their daily duties properly can they enter then?
Yes. No restriction. Even God has not restricted them. You know what the goddess Laxmi [goddess of wealth, consort of Vishnu] has said: “From Hadi [sweepers] to Chandala [another untouchable caste] all will touch prasad [a holy food] on their head.”

What about the law requiring equal inheritance between son and daughter? Is that law morally wrong?
Both son and daughter are equal; they are born to the same father, and for him everyone is equal. But the thing is that the daughter gets married and becomes part of her husband’s family. It is the son who takes care of his parents. They live with him. And it is the son who performs all the death rituals and, after the parents’ death, other rituals for the ancestors as well. That’s why we do it: 60 percent for the
son and 40 percent for the daughter. If both of them were unmarried and the brother did not finance the sister's marriage, then as in the government's law, it ought to be 50/50.

But the law says that even if the son and daughter are married they must share equally. Is that morally correct? The son has many duties to perform for ceremonies and other occasions. They are costly. If he manages all these duties then the daughter cannot take an equal amount. Thinking in terms of dharma the government law is wrong.

Can you think of any Indian custom or tradition which is morally wrong? Eating with your younger brothers' wife is against our custom. It is not wrong according to dharma; it's not bad. But you will feel guilty if you do it — you will feel that you have made a mistake.

Foreigners are not allowed in Juggernaut temple. Is that morally right? They are not allowed because they do not believe in the Hindu religion. They are all Christians.

Suppose the foreigner had converted to Hinduism? If he were a Hindu he would be allowed to enter. If he believes in the Hindu religion he will be allowed.

Untouchables are not allowed in the temple. Is that morally correct? I told you before about touchability and untouchability. Suppose we were untouchables. We would be feeling guilty. Because we have not taken our bath or washed our dress we do not enter the temple. Untouchables do not perform cleansing rituals — they don't keep to habits of purification. So they are not allowed in sanctified places.

Are all the practices, customs, and traditions of Hinduism right? The traditions of the Hindu religion are not bad but good.

The Indian population is increasing. Suppose the government passed a law that no family can have more than three children. Otherwise the child should be killed. Would that law be okay? No. Such a law should not be obeyed.

Why should it not be obeyed? Suppose a child is born. There is no way within the context of Hindu dharma to kill him. Take, for example, the case of a tree studded with fruit. It is a great sin to cut down that tree. If it is an obstacle or if it harms or gives some kind of pain then we are bound to cut it down. Otherwise one should not cut the tree. If we see it bending down on us, then we cut it. Imagine the government saying, "You have five or six children but you may not keep them!" There's a lot of difference between the age of the gods and our age, between the age of the epics and the present age.

Why do you think that stealing is forbidden in Hindu dharma? If one steals, in the next life who knows what form he will take? Any man who realizes this will not steal. That's why it is restricted.

Are the punishments the same for different kinds of stealing? Yes.

What about someone who steals to save a life? His punishment should be less. But it is a matter of dharma. We cannot steal, and it is not us who gives punishment. God is considering their case. There was once a king. He was always offering things to Brahman — he offered hundreds of thousands of cows as donations to Brahman. Once one of the donated cows "played hookey" and returned to the king's cowshed. The king was not aware of this fact. So by mistake he again donated that particular cow to a different Brahman. Soon the first owner of that donated cow saw that cow while the second Brahman was taking it with him. He recognized the symbols on the cow's tail and the turmeric spot. So he proclaimed that the cow had been a gift of the king to him. He told the second Brahman to go to the king. When the king saw them coming he shivered. He wondered why the two Brahman had come to him with a cow. Both of them put forth their claim. The king told the second Brahman, "You see I have already donated this cow. You return it to the first Brahman and I will donate a hundred thousand cows to you." But the second Brahman said, "No. I must take this cow because you have donated it to me." So both of them started quarreling with each other over the ownership of the cow. The quarrel lasted so long that at last the cow died.

But even though the king had unknowingly redonated the cow he had to shoulder the sin. On the other hand, the king had donated hundreds of thousands of cows and even golden-made cow heems. When Yama [the god of Death] saw him, he said, "This king has done so many virtuous things and but one vice—unknowingly redonating that cow. So his mistake is only one percent. Still, he has to undergo
the effect of sin,” Yama asked the king. “Would you like to enjoy first the sin or first the virtue?” The king said, “I have not done this knowingly. Still, since I have committed a serious mistake, I will first experience the sin and then the virtue.” Then Yama uttered the word Kadamba (lizard) and threw the king into a well in the jungle. How can the king be saved? When Krishna goes to that place, then only will the king get salvation. Otherwise no one can remove him from the well. So even if we do something unknowingly, it can be wrong—from the point of view of dharma it is a mistake.

(Ashok did break into the store. He stole the drug and gave it to his wife. Ashok was arrested and brought to court. A jury was selected. The jury’s job is to find whether a person is innocent or guilty of committing a crime. The jury finds Ashok guilty. It is up to the judge to determine the sentence.)

Should the judge give Ashok some punishment, or should he let him go free? Why?

According to law—when he has stolen he should be punished, Ashok has committed a crime in this world. God gave him hands and legs, yet he has not saved money by working and laboring. Now he has no money and cannot buy the medicine or cure the disease. With all his leafragry he did not think of his wife’s getting ill before. So if he steals now, he has to bear the punishment.

Thinking in terms of society, should people who break the law be punished?

It is written in one Hindu sacred scripture that whenever may be the religion, be it Muslim or Christian, it is wrong to denigrate or blame other religions. God has not said I have one particular name. Whoever prays to him in any name—one should not think him wrong. But if someone is about to destroy Hindu dharma or break Christian dharma, then he should be punished. The destruction of Hinduism is not the point; it’s the destruction of any dharma.

How does this apply to how the judge should decide?

The case should be considered. He was involved in stealing. On the other hand we have to look carefully at the law. Why was that pharmacist demanding fifty rupees for a drug that cost five rupees? So, the pharmacist has done wrong. He should get punished.

Ashok acted out of conscience. Should a lawbreaker be punished if he is acting out of conscience?

Yes. He should get punished.

Should be get the same punishment from the judge as the person who steals for his own benefit?

Yes, the same punishment. It is our law that one cannot forcibly enter into another’s house.

One man steals for himself, and another steals to save a life. Is the next life will they be reborn in the same way? Will God give the same kind of punishment for both offenses?

They’ll get different kinds of punishment.

Then why shouldn’t the judge give less punishment to the person who steals to save a life?

What’s the same is that they get punished—the means is the same. The degree can differ. One person gets fined two rupees for taxation punishment. Another is fined five rupees. Not everyone gets six months’ imprisonment. Some get one year. The judge will consider the type of stealing in deciding on the punishment. Suppose I kidnapped a girl, and another person, being hungry, stole away some black-grain cutlets [a type of grain fried as a cutlet; in this case a trivial theft]. In both cases it is stealing, but there is a difference between the degree of stealing. Before the creation of the world the Formless One created these three—Brahma, Vishnu, and Siva. During that time there were demons in the world. The Formless One decided to kill the demons and create the world. The world was full of water all around. Seeing this, Vishnu plucked a hair from his body and threw it away. It created a mountain on the earth. This trinity, Brahma, Vishnu, and Siva, lived on the mountain and created a flower garden. They thought about all the things they would create. Meanwhile, many days passed, and the Formless One wondered where the three had gone and why they had not returned. He told this to the First Mother and asked her to go and see what the three were doing. When she reached the mountain Brahma and Vishnu had gone somewhere; only Siva was there, alone. The garden was all decorated. Seeing the First Mother, Siva became excited and starting have sexual intercourse with her. Brahma and Vishnu returned and saw it all. They abused the First Mother—so she cursed them and told them they would suffer after being born in the womb of the mother they
Menstrual Pollution, Soul Loss, and the Comparative Study of Emotions

There are three general questions in the comparative study of emotions: (1) What is an emotional life? (2) With respect to which aspects of emotional functioning are people alike or different? and (3) How are these likenesses and differences to be explained? This essay is concerned with all three questions, with special focus on the second.

To ask whether people are alike or different in their emotional functioning is really to pose several more specific questions: Do people vary in terms of the type of feelings felt (the taxonomic question), the situations that elicit those feelings (the ecological question), the perceived implications of those feelings (the semantic question), the vehicles for expressing those feelings (the communication question), the appropriateness of possessing or displaying certain feelings (the social regulation question), and the techniques or strategies used to deal with feelings that cannot be directly expressed (the management question)?

To speak of the emotional life is to talk about felt experiences. Three-year-olds, Hiluk islanders, and psychoanalysts (in other words, almost everyone, except perhaps the staunchest of positivists) recognize that emotions are feelings. To understand the emotional life of a person is to understand the types of feelings (anger, envy, fear, depe-