Beyond Self-Constructed Knowledge: The Study of Culture and Morality*

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This essay is a review of what is known and what is not known about three issues in comparative ethics: (a) What are the ideas and concepts associated with moral thinking in normal (non-sociopathic) Western adults? (b) What are the processes resulting in a judgment that something is a vice or a virtue? and (c) Are those ideas, concepts, and processes available in different cultures and at different ages?

The Idea of a Moral Issue

Most normal Western adults acknowledge some kind of distinction between the following two sets of issues: (a) Whether or not to seduce one’s daughter, honor a promise, arbitrate fairly, help a stranger in distress, and (b) Whether or not to marry the girl next door, choose law as a profession, grow a beard, go on a diet. For Western adults, the first set of issues, but not the second set, are recognized as moral issues, and what makes them moral issues is that they activate a particular cluster of associated ideas and concepts.

The “science of vice and virtue,” as Hobbes (1651/1969) called it, has gone quite far in clarifying some of the ideas and concepts associated with moral thinking in normal Western adults (e.g., Black, 1962; Cavell, 1979; Donagan, 1977; Durkheim, 1974; Feinberg, 1980; Freud, 1930/1961; Gewirth, 1978; Hart, 1961; Kant, 1785/1959; Kohlberg, 1971; Mackie, 1980; Perelman, 1963; Piaget, 1965; Raphael, 1969; Rawls, 1971; M. Singer, 1963; Turiel, 1978; Whiting & Whiting, 1960). Two of the most basic ideas are the concepts of duty and legitimate regulation.

The concept of duty is really a gloss for the observation that,
whether or not Western adults are able to articulate the principles underlying their judgments, they tend to perceive moral issues as categorical, objective, and imperative. The moral is perceived as categorical in that it is believed that to do what is virtuous speaks for itself; virtue is thought to be in no need of justification. Western adults feel no need to justify keeping a promise or refraining from incest, and, indeed, the presence of an ulterior motive (helping someone in distress in the hope of a reward) makes it seem and feel less virtuous (Lepper & Greene, 1978).

The moral is also perceived as objective. What is virtuous is thought to be virtuous regardless of whether one recognizes it as such. The moral is thought to have external facticity; it is not thought to be of our own making. Wanting to do something or even liking to do something is not thought to be sufficient to make it seem or feel virtuous (Nucci & Turiel, 1978; Turiel, 1978, 1980).

Finally, the moral is perceived by Western adults as imperative. The moral is thought to tell us what we must do or must not do regardless of how we feel about it and regardless of what we want to do; the moral carries a sense of obligation to follow it. Moral constraint is thought to be bigger than one’s personal preferences. The moral is something we believe we ought to respect whatever our inclinations and desires. Of course, whether we will respect it is another matter. This Western adult idea, that there is something called “duty” and that it is somehow inherently worthy of respect, is what Kant (1785/1959), Freud (1930/1961), and Durkheim (1974) had in mind when they spoke of the “categorical imperative,” “the super-ego,” and the “collective conscience.”

Duty, however, is not the whole explanation. There is also the concept of legitimate regulation. Moral issues have reference to those areas of conduct where Western adults believe it is legitimate for others to limit your liberty to do as you wish (e.g., seduce your daughter, shout racial slurs in a supermarket, walk naked down the street). Conversely, areas of moral concern are those areas where Western adults believe it is legitimate for them to mind other peoples’ business and regulate other peoples’ conduct. The moral realm is a public, collective realm, where one is not free to choose, where what one does is not thought to be exclusively one’s own business.

Legitimate regulation is really a gloss for the Western adult ideas of harm and justice. The principle of harm states that the only grounds for limiting someone’s liberty to do as they want is a determination that harm will be done to someone. This principle justifies regulation and constraint by reference to the detrimental consequences of one’s conduct for others and oneself. Thus, one is not
free to inflict physical pain on another, destroy someone’s property, or even impugn someone’s reputation. In effect, the principle of harm forces us to define what kinds of effects it is permissible to have on one another. For example, are others to be allowed to offend our sensibilities or sense of decency by such acts as painting their house a garish color, or printing the words *Fuck You* on their T-shirt, or necking in public with someone of the same sex? In some parts of the Western world these effects count as harm. In other parts of the Western world they are merely viewed as effects to be tolerated.

Implicated in the principle of harm is the concept of personhood and the idea of territories of the self. Personhood is implicated in the principle of harm because one must decide which entities in the environment (e.g., dogs but not sheep; corporations but not fetuses) have the right to protection from harm. Indeed, one might argue, that to be a person (as opposed to a thing) is to have others grant you the right of protection from harm; the more you are treated like a person the more you become one (see Stone, 1974). Also implicated in the principle of harm is the idea of “territories of the self” (Goffman, 1971). This idea is implicated because to apply the principle of harm one must decide how expansively to define the realm worthy of protection. Are the protected territories (the extensions of the observing ego beyond its-“self,” what Hindus call *maya* or illusion) to include only our physical bodies? What about our possessions, our relatives, our emotions, our plans, our values, our reputation, our tastes? And which invasions of which territories are to count as harmful attacks? Armed with a sufficiently expansive definition of the territories of the self, it becomes possible to view such behavior as nudity in a public place as a harmful attack on one’s sensibilities, justifying coercion, regulation, and the imposition of dress codes.

The principle of justice is the other main idea underlying the Western adult concept of legitimate regulation. This principle says that (a) like cases must be treated alike and different cases differently (Hart, 1961), (b) “what is right (or wrong) for one is right (or wrong) for any similar person in similar circumstances” (M. G. Singer, 1963), or alternatively, “persons who belong to the same essential category ought to be treated in the same way” (Perelman, 1963). Presupposed by the principle of justice is the concept of a relevant likeness or difference. By promoting equality of treatment (e.g., in registering people to vote), the principle of justice forces us to decide which likenesses or differences to emphasize or overlook (e.g., age, education, residence, literacy, knowledge of political issues, color, marital sta-
tus, wealth, property ownership). In effect, the principle of justice forces us to categorize people into those we treat in like fashion and those we do not. Indeed, it forces us to define the kinds of people there are to have relationships with.

So far I have described a cluster of ideas, including duty (the categorical, the objective, the imperative), legitimate regulation (harm, personhood, territories of the self), and justice (relevant likenesses or differences), associated with the Western adult concept of morality. It is crucial to recognize that these ideas are formal or abstract ideas.

What makes the ideas of duty and legitimate regulation formal or abstract is that, as Hegel noted long ago (see Donagan, 1977), they provide morality with identity but not content. They provide morality with identity by relating morality to the renunciation of egoism, harm, and inequity, and by distinguishing what is right from what is pleasurable or self-serving. But, they tell us nothing about the specific duties of an ethical life, nothing about what particular type of society to fashion, nothing about the specific kinds of relationships it is proper to have with one another.

Hart’s discussion of the principle of justice illustrates the gap between the form and the content of moral thinking (also see Perelman, 1963). The principle of justice states, “Treat like cases alike and different cases differently” (Hart, 1961, p. 155). Hart, speaking in Hegelian tones, is quick to point out, however, that the principle of justice “cannot afford any determinate guide to conduct . . . ‘Treat like cases alike and different cases differently’ is the central element in the idea of justice [but] it is by itself incomplete . . . This is so because any set of human beings will resemble each other in some respects and differ from each other in others and, until it is established what resemblances and differences are relevant, ‘treat like cases alike’ must remain an empty form” (Hart, 1961, p. 155).

One implication of Hart’s discussion is that the principle of justice is compatible with all sorts of nonidentical treatment of people. Thus, for example, given our culture’s beliefs that there are relevant differences between those “under age” and everyone else, we do not believe it to be unjust or unfair to deny a 13 year old the right to vote or enter into contract. Indeed, it is out of respect for the principle of justice that relevant differences between people are thought to make a difference in how they are treated, a principle advanced by Anatole France in his facetious reference to the “majestic equality of French law,” which according to him, “forbids rich and poor alike from sleeping under the bridges of Paris.”

A second implication of Hart’s discussion is that the principle of
justice is compatible with quite diverse social categorizations. Many contemporary Americans seem to be willing (a) to overlook questions of literacy, education, intelligence, and knowledge of political issues, when deciding whether someone is entitled to vote; (b) to overlook evidence on sex differences in longevity when calculating the size of annuity payments; and (c) to ignore the racial and religious correlates of work performance when hiring someone for a job. There are, however, many cultures where the difference between the literate and the illiterate, the educated and the uneducated, the bright and the dull, the propertied and the dispossessed, the pure and the impure, the first-born and the latter born, the “children of god” and the “heathen” is perceived to be as significant, and as worthy of emphasis, as the difference between a 13 year old and an adult appears to us. Of course, that is not secular humanism, and it is certainly not the contemporary Christian recognition that each of us has a soul possessed of infinite value. But, it also may not be injustice, at least not from a formal or abstract point of view. Different cases get treated differently.

The point can be generalized: The formal or abstract idea of morality is compatible with diverse substantive or concrete moralities. Stated another way: The formal or abstract concepts of duty, harm, and justice cannot help us understand why some peoples but not others seclude their women during menstruation, arrange marriages, permit slavery, condone premarital or extramarital sexuality, legalize abortion, or practice capital punishment. Each of these practices can be defended or condemned, and has been defended or condemned, in the name of duty, harm, and justice. To understand the differences between moralities, it is necessary to go beyond such abstractions as duty, harm, and justice. One must examine some rather concrete, culture-specific ideas about what is a vice and what is a virtue. Most people have well-developed ideas about each; lists are easily elicited. Depending upon the culture, any of the following might appear on a list of vices: Eating a cow, eating a dog, breastfeeding a seven year old child, selling oneself into slavery for a fee, deciding never to have children, opening another’s mail, not returning a greeting, engaging in premarital sexual relations, burning a book, sleeping with one’s husband during menstruation, eavesdropping, wearing blue jeans to a formal wedding, not veiling one’s face in public, using a familiar or informal form of address for a superior, seducing one’s daughter. The question arises: Is there any organization to a person’s—or a people’s—list of vices and virtues? Can the list be reduced to an underlying thematic core, and what are those themes?
It does seem possible to reduce apparently unstructured lists of vices and virtues to a relatively small set of what I shall refer to as “social existence themes.” These themes can be thought of as the content out of which one constructs a sense of self; they are underlying dimensions of personal definition. These themes can also be thought of as existential problems that must be solved if life in society is to be possible. Being existential problems they cannot be escaped; they are universal. However, the problems posed by life in society can be solved in different ways, hence, the possibility of crosscultural and historical variations in the content of moral codes.

I have identified an initial and tentative set of ten such themes, derived from (a) the work of Hobbes (1651/1969), Marx (1867/1906), Freud (1930/1961), and Levi-Strauss (1963), (b) a corpus of interviews with children and adults conducted by Pool (Committee on Human Development, University of Chicago), and (c) detailed observations of transgressions in the society of children in preschool settings (Much & Shweder, 1978). These ten social existence themes include: (a) the problem of personal boundaries (What’s me vs. What’s not me?); (b) the problem of sex identity (What’s male vs. What’s female?); (c) the problem of maturity (What’s grownup vs. What’s childlike?); (d) the problem of co-substantiality (Who is of my kind, i.e., and thus shares “food” and/or “blood” with me vs. Who is not of my kind?); (e) the problem of ethnicity (What’s our way vs. What’s not our way); (f) the problem of hierarchy (Why do people share unequally in the burdens and benefits of life?); (g) the problem of nature vs. culture (What’s human vs. What’s animal-like?); (h) the problem of autonomy (Am I independent, dependent or interdependent?); (i) the problem of the “state” (What I want to do vs. What the group wants me to do); and (j) the problem of personal protection (How can I avoid the “war of all against all?”).

There are two points to be made about such themes. The first is that vices and virtues take on meaning in their association with one or more social existence themes. Thus, for example, Dan (10 years old) is being interviewed about Laura who decided to wear blue jeans to her friend’s formal wedding. Dan is asked by the researcher, “Do you think there was ever a time when people thought it was okay for people to wear blue jeans to a wedding?” Dan replies, “I don’t know; maybe some guy off the street, some guy who is in a street gang decided to get married. He’d say, ‘Everybody wear jeans, gym shoes, and we’re gonna have hot dogs.’” Here, but one associative step removed from the transgression event, we find ourselves in the midst of images of hierarchy (types of food, types of clothes) and the problem of nature vs. culture (the image of the “street,” the “wild
outdoors vs. the domesticated home, and the image of the “gang,” untamed power vs. socialized authority). Scratch a little on people’s ideas about vice and virtue and one discovers, for example, that pre-marital sexuality (in women) is associated with animality (nature vs. culture) and the lower classes (hierarchy), and that the problem of personal boundaries gives meaning to diverse judgments of vice, from eavesdropping and opening another’s mail to choosing not to have children.

The second point to be made about social existence themes is that they describe moral codes at precisely the level where cross-cultural (and historical) differences are likely to occur. Consider for example, two cultures: India and the United States (see Shweder & Bourne, 1982). The practices and institutions of these two societies are in radical contrast. Caste, arranged marriage, kin avoidance, the taboo on cow slaughter, prohibitions on divorce and remarriage, female seclusion—each is eschewed in the West. How are these divergent moral orders to be understood? It seems unlikely that Indians lack a concept of duty (the notion of dharma is well developed), harm, or justice (the notion of karma is also well developed). It seems more likely that American and Indian solutions to various social existence themes go in opposite directions (see, e.g., Dumont, 1970; Kakar, 1978; Mayer, 1960; Ramanujan, 1980; Shweder & Bourne, 1982; Srinivas, 1952/1965). Thus, whereas Americans tend to portray the person as an autonomous unit, with relationships to other individuals, indeed with the social order itself being established only through discretionary choice (e.g., the myth of a social compact and emphasis on “contract”), Indian thought stresses the priority of the social whole and the natural interdependence among hierarchically arranged persons, whose relationships to one another are preordained and mandatory (the myth of the social organism and the emphasis on karma; that is, this worldly existence is viewed as one’s just dessert for conduct in previous lives). Whereas American social thought ascribes an equal moral status to all persons, and views the individual qua individual, as a supreme value, inherently worthy of respect, Indian social thought emphasizes the differential apportionment of moral value across persons and groups. Indeed, transferring Read’s (1955) apt formulation to the Indian case one might argue that, for Indians, “people are not conceived to be equals in a moral sense: their value does not reside in themselves as individuals or persons; it is dependent on the position they occupy within a system of interpersonal and intergroup relationships.” What this means, as Read notes, is that being human per se “does not necessarily establish a moral bond between individuals, nor does it provide an ab-
strict standard against which all action can be judged.” Contrast this view with the American case where moral obligations are thought to transcend particular social relationships and where, as Trilling (1973) remarks, each individual imagines that he is “an object of interest to his fellow man [and worthy of respect?] not for the reason that he has achieved something notable or been witness to great events but simply because as an individual he is of consequence.”

The contrasts between Indian and American social and moral thought could be elaborated at great length. For example, Indians tend to emphasize the differences between any pair of people (e.g., differences in caste, lineage, sex, relative birth order); and no two people are seen as morally equivalent in all the relevant respects. This view implies a case-by-case approach to moral appraisal, a particularistic attitude which is in sharp contrast to the moral humanism or moral universalism of the West where emphasis is placed on the essential similarities among all peoples when questions of morality arise (e.g., their common humanity, their possession of a soul possessed of infinite value). Indians no less than Americans treat “like cases alike and different cases differently,” but as Shweder & Bourne (1981) have noted, where Americans overlook differences and emphasize likenesses, Indians do quite the opposite (also see Ramanujan, 1980). For Americans, equality is acknowledged by stressing the ways people are the same. In India, hierarchy is acknowledged by taking account of all the ways people are different; diversity is encouraged and ranked, and those lower in rank are no more one’s moral equals or entitled to the same rights than a child is entitled to the same voting rights as an adult in the American family.

Americans, to a far greater extent than Indians, strive to enlarge the realm of the “personal,” to seek independence and personal autonomy. Dumont (1970) remarks that in the West each person conceives of himself as a replica of all of humanity; to be mature is to be self-sufficient, dependent on no man. In contemporary America the ideal self is the autonomous self. Free to undertake projects of personal expression (personal narratives, autobiographies, diaries), use mirrors, make a “room for oneself,” inhabit a personal space, the autonomous Western individual imagines that he lives in an inviolate protected region where he is “free to choose” (see Friedman & Friedman, 1980), where what he does is his own business. By contrast, Kakar (1978) and others (Marriott, 1974; Ramanujan, 1980) point to the role of mutuality, interdependency, and fusion in the Indian concept of self. Where the American seeks to go it alone, the Indian seeks a confirming presence. Where the American asserts his right to be let alone, the Indian takes an active interest in regulating others and in being regulated, and in caring for others and being cared for.
In summary, the formal or abstract concepts of duty and legitimate regulation (harm and justice) specify some general conditions for life in society, any society. What differentiates one moral order from the next, however, are various concrete or substantive conceptions about the nature of persons, social transactions, and the social order, and it is possible that these conceptions can be summarized in terms of a limited number of social existence themes.

**Judgments of Vice and Virtue: Where Do They Come From?**

In 1651 Thomas Hobbes argued that what is virtuous (e.g., expressing gratitude for a gift or keeping a promise) is self-constructed and rational, obvious to reason, “intelligible even to the meanest capacity,” equally apparent to young and old, ignorant and educated, savage and modern, Mussulman and Jew. Hobbes hypothesized a process of rational reasoning underlying our judgments of vice and virtue. That rational process is a simple form of hypothetical means-ends calculation. Hobbes postulated self-preservation as a universal goal of life, linked this goal to hypothetical reason (“If I am to survive I ought to do, or not do, such-and-such”), and devised a list of vices and conduct which were injurious to personal survival, including unprovoked assault, lying, prejudicial arbitration, ingratitude, revenge, and intractability. In effect, Hobbes argued that the virtues, founded on an elementary and universally available rational process (means-ends calculation), should be easy to recognize and self-construct and should be acquired rapidly (early in life) and universally. Voltaire (1764/1962) succinctly reiterated Hobbes’s view: “A day suffices to figure out the duties of man.”

Three hundred years later Hobbes’s empirical claims have yet to be adequately tested. Some agree with Hobbes that the virtues are capable of self-construction through rational processes (e.g., Kohlberg, 1969, 1971, 1973; Nucci, 1977; Turiel, 1978). Some claim that the virtues are rational but not self-constructed. Still others claim that the virtues are neither rational nor self-constructed (Durkheim, 1974; Freud, 1930/1961; Morris, 1973; Perelman, 1963).

**Judgments of Vice and Virtue: Rational or Non-Rational?**

Ostensibly, the distinction between a rational process and a nonrational process is the distinction between processes guided by reason and evidence and by processes beyond the dictates of reason and evidence. Each of the following are rational judgments: “If someone pulls your hair it hurts,” “A whole is greater than any of its parts,” “Pregnancy is connected to copulation,” “Peace does not destroy life, war does not preserve it.” Each of the following are
nonrational judgments: “People have souls and they transmigrate,” “God blesses men in the sign of their prosperity,” “A fetus is entitled to life,” “Monogamy is preferable to polygamy,” “Cows and sheep are eatable but not dogs and horses,” “To each according to his work,” and “To each according to his needs.”

What makes the first set of judgments rational judgments is that they are the products of a process driven by reason and evidence, a process guaranteed, over time, to produce agreement among those on a search for truth. By “reason” I have in mind canons of deductive logic, patterns of means-ends calculation, thought guided by principles of statistical inference or experimental logic. By “evidence” I mean sense-perception, such as the observation of regularities in nature. If one person (any person) asserts that the breast milk of a pregnant woman is poisonous, and another person (any person) denies it, there are procedures that can be followed (i.e., appeals to reason and evidence) that should reduce the disagreement, at least if both people act rationally. If, in the light of criticism and appeals to evidence, such as instruction in the principles of statistical inference, someone continues to assert that the breast milk of a pregnant woman is poisonous we might well label his judgment “irrational” and send him for analysis to either Sigmund Freud or Amos Tversky.

Notice that nonrational judgments are not the same as irrational judgments. What makes the second set of judgments (cited above) nonrational is that they are beyond the scope of logic and evidence. Unlike irrational judgments, nonrational judgments are not degraded performances or deficient applications of rational standards. Quite the contrary, nonrational judgments can be neither proved nor disproved. They violate no canon of logic and no body of evidence, nor do they necessarily follow from any canon of logic or body of evidence. One is free either to accept or reject these judgments without fear of logical or empirical transgression. Equally logical and informed observers will disagree, for example, about abortion as virtue or vice, and the discrepant opinions of these equally informed and logical observers will not disappear over time, except by force of arms or through political domination. Indeed, whereas rational processes tend, over time, to lead to uniformity of belief, nonrational processes favor diversity of opinion. The distinction between rational virtues (sometimes referred to as natural virtues) and nonrational virtues (sometimes referred to as artificial or sentimental virtues) is central to moral studies.

The basic idea is that certain virtues, the rational virtues, will be apprehended as causal relationships or facts of nature, unchangeable and universal truths. In other words, just as it is a fact of nature, a fact
available for anyone to observe, that if you cut your finger deeply with a knife it will bleed, and it will bleed for Hindus and it will bleed for Christians, and it is a fact that we can not change, so too it is a universal and unalterable fact of nature that lying, prejudiced arbitration, ingratitude, intractability, revenge, contempt, will result in the "war of all against all," a sorry state of affairs for anyone interested in his/her personal well-being.

The nonrational virtues, on the other hand, are those virtues whose prescriptive force is neither a fact of nature nor a dictate of reason (e.g., Hume, 1740/1969; Mackie, 1980; Shweder, 1981; Shweder, Turiel & Much, 1981). For example, nothing in logic and no regularity of nature dictates whether it is polygamy or monogamy, sexual equality or sexual inequality that is a vice or a virtue. Similarly, nothing in reason or nature prescribes the virtue of respecting the Sabbath, not worshipping an idol, or the viciousness of burning a book, indulging in luxuries, or displaying one's nude body in public. From the perspective of logic and science the choice between monogamy and polygamy, for example, looks arbitrary and nonrational. Both the monogamist and the polygamist can reason impeccably and pay regard to all the available evidence yet still disagree about the institution of marriage.

The nonrational virtues are symbolic forms. As such, the nonrational virtues have two important properties. First, the nonrational virtues have prescriptive force because they stand for or say something about something else. (For example, eating with your hands in America is an expression of "animality" vs. "humanity"—eating like a pig). That is, the nonrational virtues have semanticity or reference. Second, the nonrational virtues bear no intrinsic (or causal) relationship to the things they refer to or the things they express. For example, just as a detached scientific observer could never infer the properties of microorganisms from a detailed inspection of the word microorganism (a long word referring to a small thing), so too nothing in the detached scientific inspection of the smoldering piece of cloth called a flag could reveal an attack or insult to the body politic. The nonrational virtues bear an arbitrary relationship to the ideas they express and hence the nonrational virtues are unintelligible in and of themselves.

The nonrational virtues (in India: vegetarianism, prohibitions on widow remarriage, kin avoidance) have semanticity and arbitrary reference. Two things follow from these properties. Firstly, unlike causal relationships (if your hair gets pulled, it hurts), the nonrational virtues are not intrinsic facts of nature or unalterable regularities universally available for anyone to discover. Quite the contrary, the
nonrational virtues, like other symbolic forms (e.g., the English language), are relative and alterable (e.g., English is not universally spoken and it is possible for people to decide to speak a different tongue). Secondly, to be comprehended, the nonrational virtues presuppose a background of tacit understandings which for the outside observer (e.g., the anthropologist) call out for expansion and exegesis. In and of themselves symbolic forms are incomplete. Symbolic forms always communicate more than is actually said (Cavell, 1979; Ziff, 1972). To understand what the nonrational virtues are “saying” and what they are saying something about, it is necessary to discover the shared body of categories, beliefs, presuppositions, and premises that make it acceptable in some cultures but not in others to spit on the floor, eat a cow or a horse, copulate before marriage, breastfeed a five year old, isolate a woman during menstruation, marry a widow, abort a fetus, walk naked on a beach, or prostrate oneself before a superior. To do ethnography is in large part to undertake this task of systematic exegesis.

Hobbes (1651/1969), Rawls (1971), and Gewirth (1978) and many others have hypothesized rational processes underlying our judgments of vice and virtue. As noted above, the rational process hypothesized by Hobbes is a simple form of hypothetical means-ends reasoning in the service of self-preservation.

Rawls postulates a more complex rational process. He seems to agree with Hobbes that the virtues serve our self-interest, but he holds out a form of contrary-to-fact, or counterfactual reasoning, as the fundamental rational process underlying moral codes. The virtues, argues Rawls, are what we would rationally choose, serving only our self-interest, if we had to choose, ignorant of all the ways we are different from others, and ignorant of our place in society, our intelligence, our personality, our potential power. Given that our self-interest must be served under a “veil of ignorance” (is early childhood “veiled” in this way?), Rawls argues that any rational person would agree to a contract committing everyone to grant to everyone else as much liberty as is compatible with one’s own liberty, and any rational person would agree that social inequalities should be tolerated only if they benefit those worse off in society (see Dworkin, 1977).

The rational processes hypothesized by Hobbes, Rawls, Gewirth and others differ in their complexity. Hobbes’s rational process is quite elementary, the kind of process that might well be available to young children. Rawl's's counterfactual is more complex. Gewirth (1978), who would require of the man of virtue a conceptual analysis of all the ideas (rights, autonomy, dignity, honor) logically implied or
presupposed by the notion of a voluntary purposeful agent, does not claim that what is virtuous is obvious to reason, only that what is entitled to be considered virtuous is the same across cultures and history and that these true virtues are accessible by means available to all people, namely, the canons of deductive and inductive logic. Given the availability of these logical canons, one might expect, with reflection over time and/or with education, a developmental and crosscultural convergence of opinion about what is a virtue and what is a vice. At least one might expect such convergence if the virtues are the product of rational processes.

On the other side, there are those who emphasize the nonrational aspect of moral codes (e.g., Collingwood, 1972; Dumont, 1965, 1970; Geertz, 1973; Morris, 1973; Perelman, 1963; Read, 1955). The basic idea is that the content of a moral code (a prohibition on spending money on luxuries, worshipping idols, or remarrying if one’s husband dies) cannot be derived without tacit or explicit reference to certain historically specific, culturally-based nonrational ideas, ideas that are capable of neither proof nor disproof. To argue that moral codes are nonrational is to suggest that abstract moral concepts (duty, harm, justice), rational processes (hypothetical reason, counterfactual reason, deductive reason), and direct experience are all insufficient for deriving a substantive notion of vice and virtue. Something nonrational has to be added.

Earlier I discussed the gap between the abstract idea of justice (“treat like cases alike and different cases differently”) and the content of a moral code. As we saw, the idea fails to specify who it is that is to be treated in like or different fashion. Worse still, the idea of justice fails to specify in what particular way those treated in like fashion are to be treated (Hart, 1961, p. 155). Thus, it would be unjust to execute one murderer guilty of killing his wife while sentencing others guilty of the same crime to life terms in prison with an opportunity for parole. (Note: very few men who kill their wife would ever kill again.) However if all murderers are treated in like fashion it is no less just to execute them all than to let them out on parole after 10 years. Again, the abstract idea of justice contributes little to the content of a moral code. “Treat like cases alike and different cases differently” does not help us decide what we are to do, for example, with “one time” murderers. Something nonrational has to be added.

Something nonrational has been added by both Hobbes and Rawls. Hobbes equates the vices with those practices (lying, revenge, ingratitude) which reduce our personal chances of physical survival. By this equation, it is not legitimate for us to take an interest in what other people do to each other when what they do to each other has
no detrimental consequences for our own physical well-being, and it is certainly none of our business whether someone aborts a fetus, marries his sister, sells himself into slavery, shoots heroin, or walks naked into the grocery store. For the Hobbesian these practices are not harmful (to me) and thus are not vicious. What this Hobbesian argument adds to the abstract principle of harm (see above) are certain nonrational assumptions about the territories of the self. For many people, sticks and stones are not all there is to harm. An attack on one's sensibilities can be as tormenting as a physical assault.

Even Rawls seems to sneak in some nonrational assumptions. He argues that under a "veil of ignorance" any rational person would agree to a contract committing everyone to grant everyone else liberty and equality. But, as Dworkin (1977) notes, Rawls does not explain why, given that one would have agreed to such a contract under a veil of ignorance, that one should now consent, fully knowledgeable that one is talented, intelligent, rich, and powerful. Indeed, in India, where the social order is not conceived after the metaphor of a contract between co-equal voluntary agents, social inequalities and individual differences are thought to have moral significance, and these inevitable inequalities and differences are thought to have moral significance because the world is thought to be fair. Mindful of karma, the idea of just dessert for the past conduct of one's reincarnated soul, Hindus believe that social inequalities and individual differences are not only not to be overlooked but are to be emphasized in any truly moral order. Again the nonrational makes its appearance. Certainly it is not irrational to subscribe to the idea that people have souls and they transmigrate, or to believe in the justice of received inequalities. "There but for fortune go you or go I" hardly seems more, or less, rational.

Judgments of Vice and Virtue: Self-Constructed or Socially-Constructed?

Orthogonal to the distinction between rational and nonrational judgments is the distinction between self-constructed and socially-constructed knowledge. Self-constructed knowledge is the product of "individual invention" (Piaget, 1970). It is knowledge that someone has figured out for himself. Hobbes and Voltaire both viewed knowledge of the virtues as self-constructed. The means-to-ends relationship linking the virtues (e.g., keeping promises) to self-preservation was viewed as so "obvious to reason" that any child and certainly any adult in any culture should be able to induce the virtues for himself.
Piaget conceives of knowledge as individual invention. The mind of the child confronts the practical exigencies of reality, and through a dialectical process of analogical extension (i.e., assimilation), hypothesis revision (i.e., accommodation), and reflective abstraction the child constructs for himself a valid body of knowledge and an adequate set of logical, scientific, and moral canons (the propositional calculus, Mill's laws of agreement and difference, the principle of justice). It is as if each generation, indeed each individual, reconstructed the rules of thought anew.

The view that morality is self-constructed is pervasive among followers of Piaget, such as Kohlberg (1969, 1971) and Turiel (1978). Turiel, as well as Nucci, (1977) and Smetana (1981), for example, argues that moral codes are constructed by each individual out of common experiences in social interaction. Mindful of the universal goal of survival, the child is said to be able to recognize the unfortunate and unpleasant consequences of attacks on persons, property, and promises, for example, and these perceived consequences stimulate the construction of a moral code. Thus, according to Turiel and others, moral codes stem from the child's interpretation of directly experienced events rather than from the social transmission of rules, values, concepts, or instructions about how one ought to behave.

The opposite of self-constructed knowledge is socially-constructed knowledge. Socially-constructed knowledge is knowledge that one acquires with the assistance of previously organized, preregulated, prepackaged "collective representations." That form of display of correlation-relevant information known as a 2 x 2 table is an example of a collective representation. Many natural language utterances are preregulated collective representations. For example, "Brothers and sisters don't marry" or "Father's brothers and mother's sisters husbands are both 'uncles'."

Socially-constructed knowledge is not something one figures out for oneself. Socially-constructed knowledge is received knowledge; it is something passed on or transmitted through processes of "other-dependent learning" (D'Andrade, 1981). As D'Andrade notes, much that we know is learned from other people. The teaching by others can be formal, but it is typically informal. The teaching can be intended, but it is typically unintended. The teaching can be explicit step-by-step instruction, but more typically it relies on powerful suggestions and occasional correction. D'Andrade argues that "people are very good at discovering what they must learn under conditions of informally guided discovery, and not so good when they must learn entirely on their own." Talk, conversation, and the "language-games" of everyday life ("What if everybody did that,"
"Let’s make a deal," "Play by the rules," "A person’s a person no matter how small," "If you don’t look after yourself who will?") probably play an important part in processes of informally guided discovery. One might even hypothesize that moral understandings are tacit understandings achieved primarily from having lived in a distinctive cultural environment which is packed with implicit messages about what is of importance, what is of value, who counts as a person, what are the territories of the self, and which likenesses or differences among people should be emphasized or overlooked.

Observations in preschool settings suggest that children are exposed to constant and intense verbal socialization pressures (Much & Shweder, 1978). Much (1981) analyzed a large corpus of verbal exchanges between children and teachers in nursery school and kindergarten. To cite but one example, Much notes that children are expected to develop an appropriate affiliative and cooperative orientation to others, and she documents the way verbal exchanges surrounding transgression events convey a variety of messages including the ideas that what other people want counts, all the children are friends in school, one is free to deny affiliation to others as one chooses. For example:

Mr. Price and some (nursery school) children are sitting in the back playroom. A teacher from another classroom appears at the door with a child from her unit. Alice (age 4) 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 unfriendly 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 room.

As Much (1982) comments, “In this episode the child Alice understands 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 affiliation. They call Alice’s attention to three evaluative criteria that compete with Alice’s evaluation of the event according to who holds rights. The value of ‘friendliness’ is introduced and prescribed (4, 5, 6) along with a category visitor (6) which classifies the outside teacher as a member or person with whom one is expected to affiliate. The rationale of affiliation is expanded in (7) by reference to the actions of the outside teacher relative to the actions of members of Alice’s class: the principle of reciprocity is
brought to bear. The message is that rights are not the only or most important consideration bearing upon the event” (1982, p. 1). Through her examination of discourse in preschool settings Much (1982) has identified a powerful process for the social construction of knowledge.

The distinction between self-constructed vs. socially-constructed knowledge is orthogonal to the distinction between rational judgments vs. non-rational judgments. All logically possible combinations occur.

There are rational, self-constructed ideas. For example, if you cut your finger deeply it is likely to bleed, or hot things hurt. To the extent these ideas are rational, one expects disagreements over such matters to get settled, and to get settled by appeals to evidence and canons for correct reasoning. Over time there should be increased agreement among all rational people about the consequences of cutting one’s finger or touching a fire. To the extent those ideas are self-constructed, they should be acquired even in the absence of socialization pressure and even when collective representations of the idea are unavailable or inaccessible. No one needs to be told that hot things hurt; it is something nearly everyone can figure out for him/herself.

There are rational, socially-constructed ideas. For example, the idea that pregnancy is related to copulation. To the extent this idea is rational, there should be a tendency towards uniformity of belief among all peoples. To the extent the idea is socially-constructed, it is an idea that is difficult to figure out for oneself. “Other-directed” learning processes are required for the idea to be attained; someone tells you! In fact, Montague (1937) has discussed how difficult it would be for any one individual to induce the connection between copulation and pregnancy from the observation of contingencies. As they grow up, most children, sooner or later, get the idea, but it is never something they figure out for themselves.

There are nonrational, socially-constructed ideas. For example, the idea that polygamy is a sin or that a 3-month-old fetus is entitled to protection from harm. To the extent such ideas are nonrational, they are often “hot,” provoking disputants to exercise political or military power (as the Mormons discovered) to somehow settle the disagreement. Except for cases of successful political or military domination, nonrational processes are implicated when disputes and disagreements do not tend to disappear over time. Indeed, on a worldwide scale, polygamy is the preferred form of marriage. To the extent those ideas are socially-constructed they are endorsed or denied in direct proportion to socialization pressures from the local
political or military powers (e.g., parents, teachers) in one's own life.

Finally, there are nonrational, self-constructed ideas. For example, the stuff of dreams and all those ideas of interest to psychoanalysts who study the personal meanings of private symbols.

The Distribution of Moral Thinking

As noted, an adequate account of Western adult moral thinking must take into account at least the following ideas, concepts, and processes. First, the distinction between what is moral and what is nonmoral is (a) defined formally, by reference to the abstract idea of duty (in turn analyzable into the idea of the categorical, the objective, and the imperative), and by the abstract idea of legitimate regulation (in turn analyzable into the idea of harm and the idea of justice); (b) defined substantively, by reference to the resolution of 10 social existence themes (what is me vs. what is not me); and (c) defined by reference to specific ideas about the nature of persons, the territories of the self, and the relevant likenesses and differences for constructing social categories. Second, the distinction between rational virtues (and vices) and nonrational virtues (and vices) is defined (a) by reference to what is uniform (or universal) vs. what is relative, and (b) by reference to what is unalterable vs. what is changeable. Third, the distinction between self-constructed virtues (and vices) and socially-constructed virtues (and vices) is defined by reference to the irrelevance or relevance of collective representations in the acquisition of moral ideas.

It is striking that only a few of these ideas, concepts, and processes have ever been systematically studied from either an ontogenetic or crosscultural perspective. Indeed, a review of the rich literature on morality reveals that despite three hundred years of brilliant reflection on Western adult moral understandings, contemporary theorists display no agreement about such basic issues as what is universal, what is relative, and what develops, in moral codes. At the moment, a reduction in the degrees of theoretical freedom (or is it anarchy?) that is available to moral theorists seems unlikely without the fresh input of pertinent crosscultural ontogenetic evidence, evidence which, for the time being, is totally lacking from the literature. The needed evidence should address two crucial issues for moral studies: (a) What is the crosscultural and ontogenetic distribution of moral thinking (the ideas and concepts detailed above); and (b) How much agreement is there between children and adults in different cultures about what is a vice and what is a virtue and why.

One thing seems clear from contemporary research. Children and most adults in most cultures are not very good at spontaneously
articulating the distinctions, ideas, and concepts underlying their sense of morality. Most people do not know how to talk like a moral philosopher. This failure of children and most adults to reflect on their own moral codes and explicate the criteria underlying their moral sensibilities has led some theorists, most notably Piaget (1965) and Kohlberg (1969, 1971, 1973; also see Edwards, 1978; Gibbs, 1977; Turiel, Edwards, & Kohlberg), to argue that the moral sentiment is unequally distributed across age groups and cultures, and appears, if at all, primarily among Western adolescents and adults.

Piaget (1965), for example, identifies morality with the principle of justice and argues that preadolescent children lack moral understandings per se. Piaget describes the child's understanding of prescriptions as "heteronomous": Any act in obedience to rules set down by adults is judged to be good, while any act that does not conform is judged to be bad. Only in late childhood does the child adopt a pure moral orientation whereby morality, framed in the name of what is just, becomes distinct from and superior to the dictates of adults. Or so Piaget argues. It is as if each child relived the French Revolution, throwing off the Ancient Regime and getting together with peers to write a constitution.

Kohlberg's theory of moral development expands the Piagetian view by identifying three levels in the attainment of moral understandings, and dividing each level into two stages. Thus, children move from a preconventional level (stages 1 & 2) in which what is virtuous is whatever avoids punishment or brings reward, through a conventional level (stages 3 & 4) in which what is virtuous is defined as conformity with the dictates of authority figures, to a level of principled morality (stages 5 & 6) in which morality is identified with the principle of justice and a humanistic respect for persons. For both Piaget and Kohlberg, it is only at the most advanced developmental level that one acquires a principle of justice or attains moral understandings per se. Indeed, for Kohlberg, most adults in most cultures confuse virtue with conformity and never truly develop a moral orientation.

The claim that the moral sentiment is unequally distributed across age groups is challenged by recent research by Turiel (1978, 1980), Nucci and Turiel (1978), Weston and Turiel (1980), Nucci (1981), Smetana (1981), Much and Shweder (1978), and Pool, Shweder and Much (1981). Although the distinctions and principles examined by these researchers are not always labeled or interpreted in the same way, the research does suggest that many of the distinctions and principles discussed earlier are readily available to young children (3–5 years), at least in the United States. All these studies relax the requirement for demonstrating moral knowledge set by
Kohlberg that informants be able to reflect on their moral codes and propositionalize, argue, and articulate the principles underlying their moral sensibility. Instead, these studies demonstrate the child’s ability to grasp a distinction or understand a principle by investigating the child’s modulation of excuse patterns when accused of wrongdoing, the child’s inclination or disinclination to mind other children’s business (e.g., accuse another of wrongdoing), and the child’s ability to be systematically discriminating in answers to direct probes about criteria, such as relativity or alterability, or in the application of adjectives of appraisal (e.g., rude, unfair) to transgression events.

For example, Much and Shweder (1978) conducted a socio-linguistic analysis of naturally occurring excuses and justifications elicited by accusations of wrongdoing in a kindergarten setting. Three-hundred-and-twelve transgressions committed by children were classified, using adult formal criteria such as the “alterability” and “relativity” of the relevant rule. Most of the transgressions fell into three classes, which in the Much and Shweder study were probably mislabeled morality, convention, and law (school rules). Subsequent research suggests that the three classes of rules correspond more accurately to the distinction between rational virtues, nonrational virtues, and the heteronomously-imposed regulations of adults. The following is an example of a breach of a rational virtue (viz., One must not do physical harm to others; Revenge does not justify harm):

Tammy and Nina are washing the table where brownies were mixed. Agnes comes to help.
Tammy: I’m sorry, but you can’t help.
Alice: She can help. You don’t have to be just rude.
[Tammy begins to cry]
Teacher (approaching): What’s the matter?
Tammy: She pinched me.
Teacher (to Alice): Why?
Alice: She wouldn’t let Agnes help.
Teacher: That’s not your business. I told Tammy to clean the table. I’m very angry that you hurt Tammy.
[Alice cries. The teacher kneels down and comforts her until she stops]

The following is an example of a nonrational virtue (viz., One must not watch while others undress):

Some children have gotten their clothes wet and are changing into extra pairs of trousers kept by the school. They are in a dressing area with a double door that opens separately above and below. Gary, Abel, and Edith stand around the open top half of the door. Edith stands on a chair, looking through the door; Gary and Abel peek over the top.
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Vickie: You silly dummies . . . you’re all peeking. We’re getting dressed, you guys. We’re still getting dressed . . .
Teacher (approaching): What’s wrong? Are you changing clothes?
Vickie: Yes.
[ Teacher closes the door]
Edith (to Gary): Keep that locked. Now don’t open it.
Vickie: Don’t look, now, don’t look!

The following is an example of a heteronomous regulation (viz., when it is time to go out, everyone goes):

It is time for the kindergarten children to go out. Douglas expresses his intention to stay in.
Teacher: Sorry, dear, we’re all going out. No one is staying in.
Douglas: No! My mother said! I just got a sore throat.
Teacher: Sorry, everybody is going out.
Douglas: But when you have a cough, you can’t go out.
Teacher: Well, if you can’t go out, then you stay home because you’re sick. I have a cough and I’m going out.
[Douglas goes out with the class]

Much and Shweder (1978) discovered that children’s breach recognitions, i.e., instances of accusing another of wrong doing or minding another’s business, differentiated rational virtues (e.g., no physical harm) and nonrational virtues (e.g., No peeking at naked bodies), on the one hand, from the heteronomous regulations of adults (e.g., Time to go outside). Five-year-olds spend a lot of time minding each others’ business and expressing moral outrage, although they show little of Piaget’s heteronomous respect for adults (teachers) and little of Kohlberg’s conformity to institutional (school) rules.

Much and Shweder also discovered that violations of rational virtues are excused or justified with a different pattern of language use than are other types of breaches. The kinds of language associated with violations of rational virtues, viz., denial (“I didn’t do it”), act redefinition (e.g., ‘I didn’t steal her chair. Nobody was in it and I sat in it’), and retributive justice (e.g., “She wouldn’t let Agnes help”), imply a perception of the rational virtues as unalterable and intrinsically valid.

Research by Nucci and Turiel (1978) and Turiel (1978) and Weston and Turiel (1980) provides an even more direct evidence that young children possess knowledge of some of the formal criteria pertinent to the moral domain. The basic message of all these studies is that when directly asked to classify observed transgressions (e.g., stealing, violations of dress codes) in terms of alterability (“Can the rule be changed?”) or relativity (“Suppose there is another country in which no families have the rule. Is that all right?”) preschool
children and adults display high levels of agreement about what is alterable, what is relative and what is not. Similar results have been obtained by Nucci (1977, 1981) and Smetana (1981) (also see Damon, 1977; Shantz, in press).

Pool, Shweder, and Much (1981) also found substantial levels of agreement between children’s (7–9 years old) and adults’ application of adjectives of appraisal (e.g., rude, unfair, cruel, stupid) to a corpus of described breach episodes. Utilizing a hierarchical clustering technique, Pool, Shweder, and Much discovered that children clearly differentiate between what is mean-cruel, what is rude-impolite, and what is not allowed. The findings are consistent with the view that American children possess many of the distinctions and concepts constitutive of Western adult moral codes. Indeed, the research by Turiel (1978), Nucci and Turiel (1978), and Weston and Turiel (1980) suggests that the idea that children lack moral understandings per se may be a methodological artifact of requiring young children to articulate justifications for their moral understandings. For example, Kohlberg argues that, for young children, what is virtuous is confused with whatever avoids punishment, as in a child who responds to the question “Why is it wrong to steal?” with “Because you will be punished for it.” It is certainly the case that when asked for a justification children do express themselves sometimes in the idiom of reward and punishment. However, further interviewing of the type conducted by Turiel and others reveals that children do not define rightness and wrongness by punishment. Rather, the resulting punishment is seen as a demonstration of its wrongness. In other words, the child is not saying that because you will be punished it is wrong, but instead is stating that you will be punished because it is wrong. In fact, when the issue is pressed further and children are asked a question like “What if there were no punishment?” for the transgression, they maintain that the act would still be wrong.

There are many problems with the studies just cited. For one thing, they are incomplete. While the studies document the presence of this or that distinction (e.g., alterability, relativity) or this or that concept (e.g., the principle of harm) in children of this or that age (from age 3 to adolescence), they never examine in detail the systematic organization of a moral code. Secondly, some of the studies tend to collapse theoretically the distinction between moral and nonmoral onto the distinction between rational virtues and nonrational virtues equating the moral (defined in terms of justice and harm) with the rational virtues. This is a problem because the nonrational virtues (what Turiel calls conventions) have a moral force and may well be conceived by children and adults in terms of justice and harm. Consider, for example, two brief excerpts from interviews...
with children (8–10 years old) conducted by Pool (graduate student, University of Chicago).

Dan is asked whether it was wrong for Laura (who didn't like the groom) to wear blue jeans to Sarah's formal wedding.

Dan: Yeah. She didn't have to do that; she could have let her feelings out some other way. If she was that mad, she could have said, "I can't come to her wedding. I've gotta go out to Kalamazoo to visit my grandmother."

Interviewer: Well, what if she just wanted to wear blue jeans? Isn't it her business what she wears.

Dan: Not if . . . if Sarah said everybody wears evening gowns, tuxedos, bow ties, then everybody should wear that. She's the hostess . . . ?

Throughout the pilot interviews, children and adults seem to interpret violations of nonrational or conventional virtues (burning the flag, eating with your hands, being nude, wearing blue jeans at a wedding) in terms of their detrimental consequences for others (including offensiveness to the values of others) and by reference to the principle of justice.

The studies cited previously do make it clear that, for young American children, reasoning about symbolic forms like table manners (alterable, relative) is different from reasoning about causal-intrinsic forms like the painful effects of pulling someone's hair (unalterable, universal). However, the relationship of this distinction (symbolic vs. causal-intrinsic) to the moral still remains to be documented.

A third problem with the studies cited is that they cannot answer the question, What is the source of the moral understandings of American children. Are these children merely the beneficiaries and recipients through socialization practices of a distinctive Western mode of moral understanding? Or, alternatively, as Hobbes (1651/1969) and Turiel (1978) argue, have they worked out for themselves a set of distinctions and principles that all rational featherless bipeds, even those "of the meanest capacity," even those in other cultures, find necessary for survival in society?

There is as little consensus among those who study other cultures as there is among those who study children. One set of researchers (e.g., Benedict, 1946; Geertz, 1973; Gellner, 1973; Hobhouse, 1906; Horton, 1968; Levy, 1973; Whiting, 1959) argues that moral thinking is unequally distributed across cultures. A second set of researchers (e.g., Durkheim, 1974; Ladd, 1957; Malinowski, 1976; Read, 1955; M. Singer, 1963) argues that moral thinking per se (excluding the content of what is considered a virtue or vice) is a cross-cultural universal.
The idea that moral thinking is unequally distributed across cultures is sometimes associated with the distinction between the savage (or primitive) mind and the modern (or domesticated) mind. While the savage vs. modern mind contrast has been drawn in various terms (concrete vs. abstract, functional vs. taxonomic, percept-driven vs. concept-driven) (e.g., Gellner, 1973; Horton, 1967; Levi-Strauss, 1966; Levy, 1973; Tylor, 1871), the image of a conflated, undifferentiated mind shared by savage and child (or characteristic of the savage as child or the child as savage) is one of the most pervasive in the cultural development literature. The undifferentiated savage is said to fail to differentiate moral concerns from other forms of appraisal (emotional reaction, personal gain, power) (Gellner, 1973; Hobhouse, 1906; Horton, 1968), and thus, not unlike Piaget’s heteronomous child or Kohlberg’s conformist, the primitive is said to lack an understanding of moral concepts per se. Or so cultural developmentalists like Hobhouse, Horton, and Gellner argue.

The idea that the moral sentiment is unequally distributed across cultures is also associated with the view that different cultures rely on different processes of social control. One version of this view distinguishes cultures which rely on shame and/or empathy and/or “stage fright” from those which rely on guilt (Benedict, 1946; Geertz, 1973; Levy, 1973). A closely related version of this view distinguishes externally-oriented cultures from internally-oriented cultures (e.g., Burton & Reis, 1980; Whiting, 1959). The idea of morality that one discovers in Western adults is held to be distinctive of interiorized guilt cultures.

On the other hand, many researchers argue that moral thinking is universal. Malinowski (1926/1976, pp. 50–54), for example, addressed the question of why rules are obeyed in savage society. Criticizing past accounts for what he viewed as excessive emphasis on the habitual and external bases of social order (an emphasis also found in Piaget’s description of heteronomy and in Kohlberg’s notion of conformity), Malinowski remarked that undifferentiated motives such as “desire to satisfy public opinion,” or “the force of habit,” or “conformism” account but to a very small extent for obedience to rules. Malinowski offered ethnographic case material documenting the ability of Melanesian natives to think about and critically appraise the prescriptions and taboos of their culture according to a limited number of distinct criteria. The rules of “law” are one “well-defined category within the body of custom,” Malinowski argued; if we attend to the principles and concepts employed by natives for deciding whether or not to respect a rule, other well-defined categories, including morality, can be identified. Indeed, 30
years later Read (1955) and Ladd (1957) present some evidence of a full-blown moral concept (as described earlier) among two relatively diverse peoples, the Gahuku-Gama of New Guinea and the Navaho, while, in a classic essay, M. Singer (1963) is able to conclude that “there are sufficient reasons for doubting the prevailing assumption that most cultures of the world are shame cultures, and that Western culture is one of the rare guilt cultures.” The issue is far from resolved.

There are many problems with the crosscultural evidence on moral thinking. For one thing, the evidence is anecdotal. This is as true of those who argue for the universality of moral thinking, such as Malinowski, as it is of those who argue against it such as Levy. When the evidence is extensive and systematic (e.g., Whiting, 1959) the measures of morality are usually indirect and debatable. Whiting indexes the “superego” with Human Relations Area File evidence on “patient responsibility,” i.e., willingness to blame oneself for getting sick. There seems to be no compelling reason to accept the implication that exteriorized cultures, for example, those who initially say it is wrong to do such-and-such because it will disturb your ancestor’s ghost, define right and wrong by reference to external effects. If asked, members of such cultures might well grant, as do many apparently externally-oriented adults and children in America, that if the ancestors did not know about the transgression it would still be wrong. No one seems to have asked. When the evidence is intensive (e.g., Ladd, 1957), the “sample” typically consists of a single informant. None of the studies presents the reader with the type of interview protocols or observational evidence needed to determine rigorously whether a particular issue is viewed as moral or nonmoral, rational or nonrational. In none of the studies is the full range of pertinent distinctions, ideas, principles, and concepts examined (e.g., justice, harm, personhood, self). Not a single study has evidence on the moral codes of children. It is not surprising that to this day it is not possible to draw a strong conclusion about the crosscultural distribution of moral thinking.

**Conclusion**

In summary, crosscultural developmental researchers have much to contribute to our understanding of moral codes. To my mind, the four most important outstanding questions are: (a) How widely distributed across cultures is the distinction between what is moral vs. what is personal?” (b) Is the distinction between what is moral and what is personal available to the mind of the preschool
child? (c) Is thinking about justice, harm, and duty distinct from thinking about nonrational conventional virtues (e.g., dress codes or rules of politeness) or alternatively, are the nonrational virtues symbolic expressions of the moral order? and (d) What are the symbolic processes involved in transmitting nonrational assumptions (e.g., "What I want to be when I grow up is my own business") from one generation to the next? I look forward to future research on these questions.

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