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Moral Reasoning: Developmental Emergence and Life Course Pathways Among Cultures

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Abstract

Our capacity for moral reasoning is in many ways what makes us distinctly human. We are born with shared moral sensibilities. As we develop from childhood into adulthood, our moral reasoning branches off in diverse directions shaped by culture. This chapter reviews developmental and cultural research on moral reasoning, which is understood to intersect with emotions. Moral reasoning is described as an intra- and interpsychological phenomenon that is important in moral judgments and actions. The chapter situates current research in the historical context of early scholarship. Then, there is a review of the foci and findings of four contemporary theories: the Cognitive-Developmental, Domain, Identity, and Cultural-Developmental approaches. This is followed by a section on two recurrent research topics: care and prosociality, and social contexts and processes of moral reasoning. The conclusion addresses the necessity of future research across the entire life course, and implications of globalization on moral development.

Key Words: moral reasoning, moral development, moral emotions, moral behavior, moral identity, culture, globalization, contexts, processes, life course

Morality is fundamental to the human condition. From early on, children make distinctions between right and wrong (Bloom, 2013), and the people and institutions around them convey myriad moral messages in direct and indirect ways (Miller, Fung, Lin, Chen, & Boldt, 2012; Li, 2011, 2012). From early on, too, developmental scientists have addressed morality. Freud (1930/1961), for example, argued that every child by the age of 5 has developed a moral conscience that is both a comfort and a curse. The conscience, an internal representative of societal norms in Freud’s view, allows the child to become a contributing member of society. But a person’s conscience is also a lifelong obstacle to satisfaction of the ever-pressing instinctual desires for sex and aggression—desires that if heedlessly expressed would make coexistence impossible. To Freud, then, moral development was a Catch 22. We cannot live happily without a conscience, nor can we live happily with it.

Also writing in the early 1930s, Piaget (1932/1965) held a more sanguine view. Based on his interviews with Swiss children and observations of their games, Piaget argued that the young child’s internalization of the moral rules conveyed by parents and other authorities is followed by increasing autonomy from those rules in late childhood or early adolescence. In Piaget’s view, this constitutes a window of opportunity rather than a moment before mayhem—as Freud might have predicted. Piaget’s argument was that through egalitarian peer interactions, adolescents negotiate and remake some of the moral rules of society. In so doing, they not only voluntarily take ownership of the new rules, but society also evolves in an increasingly democratic direction. To Piaget, then, the entry into adolescence was a time for moral renewal at both the individual and collective levels.
Not in all societies, however. According to Piaget, it could not occur in what he described as “primitive” cultures where adolescents conform to their elders without question.

Freud and Piaget asked the kinds of questions about moral reasoning and development that researchers have continued to address: is morality the equivalent of societal norms, or is morality a set of concepts that go beyond society? Is morality separate from or compatible with individual interests and desires? How do moral conceptions develop in the course of childhood and adolescence? Who has notable influence on moral development: parents, peers, or other contexts? To what extent does moral development differ between cultures?

Freud and Piaget differed on their answers to just about all of these questions. In one notable respect, however, they were similar. Neither saw reason to focus on people’s religious beliefs as part of morality. To Freud (1927/2010), religion was an “illusion”—to invoke the title of his famous book on the topic. In his view, religious beliefs constitute mere regressions to the infant’s “oceanic” sense of being one with the world (Freud, 1930/1961).

Piaget held that any reference to religion and the supernatural masks the structure of genuine moral reasoning. Consequently, he left all such references by his samples of Geneva children and adolescents uncoded (Edwards, 1981). The avoidance of the role of religion in moral reasoning has characterized research up until fairly recently, including the absence of coding schemes that encompass religious and spiritual concepts.

The past few decades of research on moral reasoning, however, have seen calls for the inclusion of highly diverse kinds of moral reasoning. This includes religious and spiritual reasons, and many other previously unexamined concepts (Colby & Damon, 1992; Dier, 1982; Gilligan, 1982; Miller, 1989; Shweder, 1990). In this respect, moral development research is akin to other areas of psychology that also have changed from focusing on uniformity to covering multiplicity. Instead of a focus on one kind of self, one kind of intelligence, and one kind of creativity, for example, researchers now describe multiple selves (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1995), intelligences (Gardner, 1993; Sternberg, 1985), and creativities (Csikszentmihalyi, 1988; Lubart, 1999). Many moral development researchers also have moved to address multiple kinds of moral reasoning.

One of my own most vivid moments of recognizing multiplicity in moral psychology occurred about two decades ago when I went to interview a middle-aged, fundamentalist Baptist American woman as part of a research project on the moral reasoning of adults from religiously conservative and liberal communities in the United States and India (Jensen, 1997a, 1997b, 1998a, 1998b). I could tell from the moment that I pulled into her driveway that she held strong convictions. Her parked car was plastered with bumper stickers, including “Life is short. Pray hard. Read the Book!” Once inside the front door, there were religious items all over—crosses on the wall, a Bible on the coffee table, plenty of sofa pillows with scripture in needle point. After some lemonade and friendly small talk, I started my recording device, but I had barely gotten halfway through the questions for the first moral issue when she suddenly gripped my arm and implored me to kneel down on the floor with her and ask Jesus to come into my heart. She was passionate, beseeching. I desperately cast about in my mind for a graceful reply to a plea that I had never encountered (see also Jensen, in press a). Perhaps an American researcher would have had more familiarity with the situation, but being a fairly recent immigrant from Denmark I had none. Religion is largely, if not entirely, absent from individual and collective considerations in Denmark (Vainio, in press; Zuckerman, 2008). For example, unlike in the United States, meetings in city hall do not start with a prayer. There is no pledge of allegiance invoking divinity. Nor does the monetary unit avow a “trust in God.” On worldwide surveys assessing the extent of religious and spiritual belief and behavior, Denmark repeatedly comes out rock bottom (Gallup, 2013).

But here I was face-to-face with a most sincere religious plea—or “witness” as she would have called it. I finally gave her hand a gentle squeeze and said that now was not the right time. The experience was entirely outside my research protocol, but it was a singularly revealing moment in my work because I understood that whereas I had come to the woman’s house in search of knowledge about human psychology, she had opened her door to try to save my soul. Moreover, this purpose was of supreme moral importance to her because to become “saved,” in this religiously conservative Christian worldview, is not only the path to better moral understanding and behavior in this life, but also to salvation in the next. I took from this encounter that morality suffuses intra- and interpersonal psychology. Our moral concepts are highly diverse, with some concepts being widely
shared and others less so. While morality is framed by collective worldviews, it also spurs individual action—as in the case of this woman, even if she was the only one among many religiously conservative participants to try to convert me.

**Organization and Scope**

In the following, the focus is on the questions that Freud and Piaget asked about moral reasoning almost a century ago, as well as on new questions that have come about—often as a consequence of researchers conducting research outside of the American and European middle-class and of the world having changed quite dramatically in the space of a century. Because theory more than anything else shapes research, I first review the key ideas and findings of four contemporary theories: the Cognitive-Developmental, Domain, Identity, and Cultural-Developmental approaches. This review includes attention to findings for diverse cultural groups. Subsequently, I present a discussion of recurrent and emerging research issues. Specifically, the section on key recurrent issues addresses care and prosociality, and contexts and processes of moral reasoning. The section on emerging issues focuses on two topics: the necessity of addressing moral reasoning across the entire life course and implications of globalization on moral development. Throughout, I include research quotations from children, adolescents, and adults from diverse cultural communities in an attempt to render their moral psychology in an authentic and vivid way.

Before turning to theories, a few brief notes on definitions and scope. First, development is addressed broadly and descriptively in terms of psychological change that occurs in human beings as they age. It may involve increase or decrease, it may be quantitative or qualitative, and it may be gradual or stagelike (Zelazo, 2013). Apart from aiming to provide descriptions of people’s moral psychology, moral development researchers often have aimed also to provide moral prescriptions. In the conclusion, I return to the link between descriptive and prescriptive purposes in moral development research.

Second, culture is defined as symbolic, behavioral, and institutional inheritances that are shared and co-constructed by members of a community (Goodnow, 2010; Heine, 2012; Shweder et al., 2006). Culture is not synonymous with country or ethnicity, for example, but rather describes communities whose members share key beliefs, values, behaviors, routines, and institutions. As scholars addressing cultural issues have long observed, cultural communities include heterogeneity among groups and individuals (Gramsci, 1971; Saltzman, 1981). Variation also exists between cultural communities, including on their degree of heterogeneity, intergroup conflict, and change over time (Strauss, 1992; Weisner, Bradley, & Kilbride, 1997; Whiting & Edwards, 1988). An important aspect of difference both within and between cultures pertains to access to power (Jensen, Chapter 1, this volume).

Third, the present focus is foremost on research addressing moral reasoning and concepts. Moral reasoning is described here as an intra- and interpsychological phenomenon that is important in individual and collective moral judgments and actions (Jensen, 1997a; Pizarro & Bloom, 2003). In other words, as I describe later, moral reasoning takes place not only in the mind of an individual, but also in dyadic and group contexts.

Moral reasoning is also described as intersecting with emotions in human development, rather than being sharply differentiated (e.g., Eisenberg, Spinrad, & Sadovsky, 2006; Krettenauer, Malti, & Sokol, 2008; Smetana & Killen, 2008; Tangney, Stuewig, & Mashek, 2007). Scholars have occasionally put forth the strong hypothesis that emotions are what determine moral actions, with reasoning being a separate epiphenomenon (Haidt, 2001; Kagan, 1987). However, most research indicates that reasoning and emotions intersect and that the nature of the intersection depends on factors such as the type of moral issue, development, and culture. With respect to type of issue, Monin, Pizarro, and Beer (2007) have noted that shocking violations (such as sibling incest) pull more for emotional reactions, whereas complex dilemmas (such as paying taxes) pull more for reasoning. In a recent edited volume, Larzko and Malti (2010) concluded that moral cognition intersects with moral emotions in different ways depending on development. For example, longitudinal research has found that moral emotions become better aligned with moral decisions in the course of adolescence (see also Krettenauer, Colasante, Buchmann, & Malti, 2014; Malti, Keller, & Buchmann, 2012). Culture, too, matters in the sense that both moral reasoning and emotions are shaped through socialization. For example, moral reasoning that emphasizes autonomy, community, and divinity is correlated with emotions of anger, contempt, and disgust, respectively (Rozin, Lowery, Imada, & Haidt, 1999).

Our capacity for moral reasoning is in many ways what makes us distinctly human (Tomasello,
Carpenter, Call, Behne, & Moll, 2005). Undoubtedly, humans rationalize their behaviors in a post hoc manner from time to time, but that is not all that we do. As findings in this chapter will indicate, we also put reasoning to intra- and interpersonal uses in shaping moral behaviors at both the individual and collective levels. Also, moral reasoning becomes an internalized mechanism that underlies habitual behaviors. Moral reasoning also comes to the fore in a deliberative manner when we re-evaluate long-established behaviors and when we reflect on new situations.

Before proceeding, I would like to note that my aim is to provide a broadly inclusive account of key theoretical and research issues on moral reasoning and development and an account of their respective contributions to the collective scientific enterprise. With that goal in mind, I shared this chapter with scholars who take an array of research approaches to moral psychology. No author, of course, is free of a vantage point. As the originator of the cultural-developmental approach to moral psychology, I think it important to bridge the universalistic perspective of developmental psychology with the pluralistic perspective of cultural psychology (Jensen, 2011). Nonetheless, I have benefitted tremendously from the feedback of my colleagues and have included their suggestions.

Four Contemporary Theories  
A Cognitive-Developmental Approach

Starting in the late 1950s, Kohlberg (e.g., 1958, 1964, 1969, 1981, 1984) formulated a cognitive-developmental approach to moral reasoning that in myriad ways has influenced much of the subsequent research on morality. Inspired by Piaget (1932/1965) among others (Baldwin, 1895, 1906, 1906–1911; Dewey, 1930; Kant, 1785/1949), Kohlberg wanted to find out if moral reasoning develops in a predictable sequence. To help answer this question, he interviewed children and adolescents about “hypothetical dilemmas,” the most famous of which pit the value of life against the value of property or the value of one person’s life against the value of several people’s lives. In the best known of these dilemmas, Heinz, who lives in a German village, has a dying wife who might be cured by a particular medicine. Heinz, however, cannot afford it, and the town pharmacist will not lower his high price or extend credit. As a research participant, one has to decide whether Heinz should steal the drug and, even more importantly, why or why not.

Drawing on participants’ responses to the dilemmas, as well as on his readings of Western rationalist moral philosophy, Kohlberg concluded that moral reasoning occurs at a sequence of three levels. Each level includes two stages, for a total of six. Figure 15.1 provides a visual representation of the theory. According to Kohlberg, every child starts out at the Pre-Conventional Level, reasoning strictly in terms of ego-centered considerations—a reminiscent of an uncivilized Freudian child. The child initially focuses on avoidance of punishment and obtainment of rewards (Stage 1) and then on satisfaction of self-interests (Stage 2). In one of Kohlberg’s studies, for example, a boy in Stage 2 argued that Heinz “should steal because he needs his wife to cook for him” (Kohlberg, 1981, p. 115).

Next follows the Conventional Level and a shift to group-centered considerations. Here, the focus is on adhering to the norms of family and other groups to which one belongs (Stage 3) and maintaining social order (Stage 4). The third

![Fig. 15.1 Kohlberg's cognitive-developmental sequence.](image-url)
Post-Conventional Level goes beyond both the self and one’s society—reminiscent of the Piagetian adolescent’s perspective. Here, the emphasis is on democratic procedure and social utility (Stage 5) or universal principles pertaining to justice and individual rights (Stage 6). Kohlberg partly derived the last stage from his interviews with philosophers. For example, one philosopher spoke in terms of Stage 6 when reasoning that stealing the drug “was wrong legally, but right morally.” He elaborated in a lengthy interview where, among other things, he argued that “all property has only relative value and only persons can have unconditional value. The decision [is] a principled one. [It] must be made from a disinterested point of view that . . . is consistent with the decision of any rational agent in a similar situation” (Kohlberg, 1981, p. 163).

To Kohlberg, it was not only that his six stages describe what moral development is like. Kohlberg made the far more audacious claim that his stages describe what moral development ought to be like. If more people can be educated to reach Stage 6, according to Kohlberg, we will be more moral, and we can join together to create communities that are more just. Like Piaget, Kohlberg thought that interactions and discussions with peers advance moral development. The desire to go from moral psychology to moral philosophy, “from is to ought” to use Kohlberg’s well-known words (1981), certainly did not originate with Kohlberg. But it is an aspiration that has continued to both inspire and discomfit moral development research.

Extensive research has found that the first three of the cognitive-developmental stages are common across diverse cultures, whereas the others are not. Across cultures, younger children often use the concepts from Stages 1 and 2, and, in the course of adolescence, the concepts from Stage 3 become common (e.g., Colby, Kohlberg, Gibbs, & Lieberman, 1983; Kohlberg, 1984; Snarey, 1985; Walker, 1989). Stages 4 and 5, however, are less common, and Stage 6 is so rare that it was removed from the cognitive-developmental scoring manual by the early 1980s (Colby & Kohlberg, 1987; Kohlberg, 1986). In Snarey’s (1985) comprehensive review of 44 cross-cultural studies using the cognitive-developmental approach, 66% of studies found no reasoning at Stages 4 or 5. Even in the 34% of studies where these two stages did occur, they were rare. Reasoning in terms of Stages 4 and 5 was mostly characteristic of a subset of Western or Westernized middle- and upper-middle-class adolescents and adults residing in urban areas.

Extensive research across cultures has also found that children, adolescents, and adults think in terms of numerous moral concepts that Kohlberg’s cognitive-developmental approach does not take into consideration. Kohlberg was no keener on including concepts pertaining to religion and spirituality as part of morality than Freud and Piaget were (e.g., Colby & Damon, 1992; Jensen, 1995, 1997a, 1997b, 1998a, 1998b; Richards, 1991; Richards & Davison, 1992; Shwed, Mahapatra, & Miller, 1990; Shwed & Much, 1986; Vasudev & Hummel, 1987; Walker, Pitts, Hennig, & Matsuba, 1995). Walker, who has contributed extensive research from the cognitive-developmental vantage point, has critiqued this omission. He observed that the cognitive-developmental manual includes 708 “criterion judgments” for scoring moral reasoning but is “bereft” of notions of religiosity, spirituality, or divinity (Walker et al., 1995, p. 384).

Furthermore, many researchers have concluded that concepts pertaining to community, collectivity, and interdependence also are not well accounted for by the cognitive-developmental approach (e.g., Dienes, 1982; Edwards, 1981, 1982, 1986, 1997; Ma, 1988; Snarey, 1985; Tappan, 1997; Tietjen & Walker, 1985; Walker & Moran, 1991). Yet members of many cultures place a premium on such concepts. For example, research with Chinese children has shown that by age 4, they are well aware of notions pertaining to shame, loss of face, social discretion, and role-based duties (Fung, 1999; Miller, Wiley, Fung, & Liang, 1997). The development of a conscience is well under way at an early age in these children—as Freud would have predicted. This conscience, however, seems in step with Confucian ideals of social hierarchy and harmony, rather than the ideals of justice and individual rights at the end of Kohlberg’s cognitive-developmental sequence.

In sum, children across many cultures develop along the path of the first half of the cognitive-developmental stage sequence. From early on, however, they also take other paths with other end goals. A small proportion of middle-class, Western, and Westernized urban adolescents and adults also reason in terms of some of the concepts in the second half of Kohlberg’s sequence, but those also are not the only concepts in their moral repertoire. Accordingly, some theorists have aimed to revise the top half of the Kohlbergian sequence with the aim of maintaining a stagelike structure with different end-goal concepts (Gibbs, 1979, 2014; Gibbs, Basinger, Grime, & Snarey, 2007; Ma, 1988; Rest, Narvaez, Bebeau, & Thoma, 1999;
Snarey & Keljo, 1991). Alternative models by Gibbs and by Rest and colleagues have generated a lot of research, including of an applied nature. As we will see later, however, most researchers addressing a broader swath of moral concepts have not utilized Kohlbergian or post-Kohlbergian theory.

As a final note in regards to Kohlberg’s cognitive-developmental approach, it is interesting to ponder that Snarey’s review of cross-cultural studies was published in 1985. The world has changed significantly since then. By 2008—for the first time in human history—more people were living in urban areas than in rural ones (Population Reference Bureau, 2008). Most of the urbanization has occurred in developing countries. These migrants are certainly not all middle class, and, although exposed to ideas from the West, they also are not all Westernized. Nonetheless, a question worth asking is whether some of the kinds of Stage 4 and 5 concepts that were found among Western and Westernized adolescents and adults in Snarey’s review might have spread. With urbanization and globalization, it would not be unreasonable to expect that more people have moral perspectives that include society as a whole and individuals as unfamiliar and independent entities. If these kinds of moral concepts are becoming somewhat more common, they would not attest to a cognitive-developmental stage structure. Instead, they would suggest the importance of particular cultural and contextual milieus in moral development. It also seems plausible that other moral concepts—local and/or hybrid ones—might form part of people’s moral repertoires in non-Western globalizing parts of the world.

The Domain Approach

In the latter half of the 1970s, Turiel and his colleagues proposed taking a step back from Kohlberg’s question of how moral reasoning develops to the question of what is moral in the first place (e.g., Nucci & Turiel, 1978; Turiel, 1975). Turiel and his colleagues wanted to find out whether children differentiate moral from nonmoral issues. Based on a similar tradition of Western rationalist philosophy that Kohlberg drew on (Duncan & Fiske, 1977; Dworkin, 1978; Gewirth, 1978; Rawls, 1971; Searle, 1969), they argued that in order for a rule to be moral, key criteria are that it applies to everyone and that it cannot be altered (e.g., Turiel, 1983; Turiel, Killen, & Helwig, 1987). If children were to be asked whether these criteria of universality and inalterability apply to different kinds of issues, would they make distinctions between moral and nonmoral issues? Also, would their reasoning in response to the issues vary? To address these research questions, Turiel and his colleagues have often presented children and adolescents with vignettes. For example, in one vignette, a child pushes a peer off a swing, and in another, a child calls a grandfather by his first name.

Turiel and his colleagues have concluded that three domains of knowledge can be differentiated, even if occasional overlap occurs (e.g., Nucci, 1981; Nucci & Turiel, 1993; Smetana, 1983; Turiel, 1983; Turiel et al., 1987). One of these domains is moral. The other two, termed “conventional” and “personal,” are not. Domain researchers have recently renamed the latter two domains “societal” and “psychological” (Killen & Smetana, in press), but here the original terms will be used since nearly all research cited has used them. According to Turiel and his colleagues, the three domains differ on criteria, reasoning, and issues. With respect to criteria, conventional and personal rules—unlike moral ones—apply only to one’s group or oneself, respectively. Also, conventional and personal rules—unlike moral ones—are alterable. With respect to reasoning, moral rules are justified in terms of references to justice, fairness, and harm to other individuals. Conventional reasoning, in contrast, focuses on communal and religious norms, interests, and authorities. Personal reasoning focuses on the welfare of the self. Based on these criteria and modes of reasoning, according to domain theorists, examples of moral issues include stealing and aggressive acts (such as pushing someone off a swing). Conventional issues involve a wide variety of acts, such as those pertaining to forms of address (such as calling a grandfather by his first name), attire (such as wearing a head scarf), sexual customs (such as premarital sex), and familial arrangements (such as divorce). Personal issues include one’s choice of friends and recreational activities. Figure 15.2 depicts the domain approach.

The implication of Turiel’s conclusion is a notable narrowing of the moral domain. Morality, from this perspective, is solely that which goes beyond both self and society, akin only to the highest levels of development in Piaget’s and Kohlberg’s approaches.

Within this perspective, too, there is a limited focus on the development of this differentiation. The argument is that the features of the three domains are inherent and that a young child through independent observation and exposure to diverse behaviors will conclude that harm to
another individual or discrepant treatment of two similar individuals, for example, are prima facie of moral consequence. Meanwhile, the child will also conclude that eating with one's hands, running around naked, or feeling happy about listening to music are not of moral consequence.

Research findings across cultures have shown that children make a distinction between the moral and nonmoral as defined by the domain approach, for a very particular set of issues. In many parts of the world, children—even as young as 3 years of age—differentiate “moral” vignettes in which an innocent child is pushed, hit, or robbed from “conventional” vignettes, in which children eat food with their fingers or fail to follow the rules of a game. By and large, children respond to these vignettes in terms of the criteria and reasons that the domain approach predicts (e.g., Ardila-Rey & Killen, 2001; Hollos, Leis, & Turie, 1986; Killen & Suyemoto, 1995; Kim & Turie, 1996; Nucci, Camino, & Sapiro, 1996; Nucci, Turie, & Encarnacion-Gawrych, 1983; Song, Smetana, & Kim, 1987; Yau & Smetana, 2003). In other words, contrary to Kohlberg’s theory, even very young children are capable of referring to fairness and avoidance of harm to other individuals in response to some moral issues.

In many other instances, however, the predicted correspondence across issues, criteria, and reasoning does not hold. This has been found, for example, for matters pertaining to showing respect (such as honoring a deathbed promise), helping others in need (such as taking an ailing elderly parent into one’s household), sexuality (such as coed bathing), and avoiding disgusting behaviors (such as eating one’s dead pet dog). In many parts of the world, children, adolescents, and adults apply “moral” criteria of universality and inalterability to these matters, but they reason in terms of what the domain approach deems nonmoral concepts such as role-based duty, social order, and spirituality (Bersoff & Miller, 1993; Edwards, 1987; Haidt, Koller, & Dias, 1993; Miller & Bersoff, 1992, 1994; Miller, Bersoff, & Harwood, 1990; Miller & Luthar, 1989; Nisan, 1987; Shweder et al., 1990; Vasquez, Kelchner, Ebenbach, & Banaszynski, 2001; Zimba, 1994).

Research also indicates that a large number of people will judge an issue to be moral but do not universalize their judgment. In other words, the universality criterion is not universal, or at least it is not necessarily the only or foremost criterion (Blasi, 1987, 1990). Based on a review of scholarship across history and cultures, Wilson (1992) concluded that “universalism is not natural, localism is” (p. 197). Studies with religiously conservative groups, for example, have documented their hierarchical worldview (e.g., Ammerman, 1987; Jensen, 1997a, 2006; Valnio, in press). In this view, God is above humans. Among humans, differences exist in some respects between various groups, including believers and nonbelievers. Based on such a worldview, a conservative Christian can maintain that one may require more morally out of a Christian than a non-Christian (e.g., sexual abstinence prior to marriage, modesty in dress, tithing). An orthodox Jew can hold that moral expectations for Jews are different from those for non-Jews (e.g., keeping kosher, circumcision).

Furthermore, research where participants discuss their own moral experiences also suggests a more complex picture. Such research is illuminating because it provides emic rather than etic information about morality; that is, how research participants rather than theorists define and delineate morality. Research with Canadian adults, for example, has shown that they discuss a wide variety of reasons to justify their moral actions, including their own psychological well-being—a reason that the domain approach presumably would deem personal rather than moral (Walker, 2013; Walker et al., 1995). Research with moral exemplars from the United States has found that they vary considerably on the concepts they invoke to account for their remarkable moral contributions and behaviors. Common concepts pertained to justice, charity, harmony, and religious faith (Colby & Damon, 1992). Only the first of these concepts is moral, according to domain theory. In short, accounts from people’s real moral lives—whether ordinary
or extraordinary—of their moral motives blend considerations from the three domains.

Taken together, these findings suggest that children in many parts of the world recognize that not all issues are of the same hue. Children and adults from diverse cultures, however, appear to regard a wide variety of issues and reasons as moral that are not included within the moral palette of the domain approach. In recent years, some research on domain theory has compared judgments of vignettes in which the circumstances (what domain researchers term “contexts”) surrounding a judgment vary (e.g., Gasser, Malti, & Buholzer, 2014; Killen & Stangor, 2001). This research often compares “straightforward” scenarios (e.g., exclusion based on group membership in general) to “multifaceted” ones (e.g., exclusion based on group membership under varying circumstances). Children’s and adolescents’ responses to the multifaceted scenarios tend to encompass diverse reasons, such as fairness and group functioning. Domain theorists, however, still only classify the former as a moral reason (Killen & Smetana, in press). Thus, in their recent chapter summarizing large amounts of research based on the domain approach, Killen and Smetana (in press) primarily discuss moral reasoning in terms of justice, fairness, and harm to other individuals. The handbook chapter on morality scarcely cites decades’ worth of emic and cultural psychology research, but there is frequent mention of “complexity” and “contextual variables.” Exactly how much this attention to complexity and context will lead domain theorists toward consideration of the full spectrum of cultural and emic findings and a softening of the rather sharp lines differentiating their three domains remains to be seen.

Moral Identity Theory

The examination of the lives of moral exemplars from the United States by Colby and Damon (1992) was published in the early 1990s and became a key impetus for theory on moral identity. Blasi, too, had called for a focus on moral identity by this time (e.g., 1984). Colby and Damon’s project was a purposeful attempt to open up to new research in a number of ways. They focused on real rather than hypothetical or vignette-based moral issues and decisions. They focused on moral goodness rather than avoidance or actual commitment of transgressions. They also wanted to add moral behavior to the predominant research focus on moral reasoning.

Based on their interviews with 23 exemplars, Colby and Damon concluded that reaching a moral judgment is necessary but insufficient in forming a moral identity. There is a need for a dialectical process whereby one’s reasoning and judgments support one’s moral behaviors, which, in turn, render future reasoning both more habitual and refined. Describing this dialectic between reasoning and behavior, Colby and Damon wrote that “the optimal condition for moral development is when habitual morality is supported by one’s reflective self” (p. 309). In regards to moral reasoning, Colby and Damon found that the majority of exemplars reasoned at the Conventional Level of Kohlberg’s cognitive-developmental sequence, with only four exemplars scored at Stage 5. They did not take this finding to mean that moral reasoning does not impact moral behavior, but rather that the nuances of people’s reasoning and the full scope of their exemplars’ moral habits were not fully captured within cognitive-developmental theory. Extending their work, Damon and Colby (in press) have recently conducted archival case studies of moral and political leaders in the 20th century, including Jane Addams, Dag Hammarskjold, and Nelson Mandela. Damon and Colby argue that these leaders drew and reflected on their social and cultural contexts in developing their moral ideals and identities and that they also contributed to cultural transformations.

Recent scholarship on moral identity has addressed a number of issues (Lapsley & Narvaez, 2004; Narvaez & Lapsley, 2009), many of which are still subject to debate (Hardy & Carlo, 2005, 2011). For example, researchers have argued that whereas a dialectic between reasoning and behavior is necessary to form a moral identity, it is also necessary that morality per se is regarded as central to one’s sense of self (Blasi, 1993, 2004). Another issue is the extent to which someone with a moral identity is focused on self-interest. Researchers generally agree that having a moral identity entails a commitment to causes larger than the self (Narvaez & Lapsley, 2009), but Walker and colleagues have highlighted that moral identity development is more likely to be successful if self-interest lines up with or at least does not run counter to these larger causes (Frimer & Walker, 2009; Walker, 2013).

Given Erikson’s long-standing prominence in theory on identity development in general and given his focus on adolescence as the key time for identity formation (Erikson, 1950), it is not
surprising that developmental scholars addressing moral identity also have homed in on adolescence (Hardy, Walker, Olsen, Woodbury, & Hickman, 2013). They have observed that it is an important time in life for the acquisition of a sense of responsibility (Nunner-Winkler, 2007), the emergence of substantial consideration for others (Carlo, 2006; Youniss, McLellan, & Yates, 1997), consistently feeling positive emotions when making moral rather than selfish decisions (Malti et al., 2012), and some measure of moral expertise (Narvaez & Lapsley, 2005). Damon and his colleagues have recently argued for a research focus on the development of purpose in adolescence—a kind of coherent moral commitment that would seem to be a developmental prerequisite to a fully formed moral identity (Damon, 2008; Damon, Menon, & Bronk, 2003).

Focusing not only on the individual personality characteristics of adolescents, Hart and colleagues (Hart, 2005; Hart, Atkins, & Ford, 1998; Hart & Matsuba 2009) have developed a model of moral identity development that also emphasizes broad social factors. For example, Hart and Matsuba (2009) found that volunteering in adolescence is dependent on an interaction between poverty and the proportion of children to adults within a community. In American communities with low rates of poverty, there is more youth volunteering as the ratio of children to adults goes up. In communities with high rates of poverty, however, there is more youth volunteering as this ratio goes down. Their argument, in short, is that moral engagement and development of moral identity depend not only on characteristics of the individual, but also on social contexts.

Much of the research on moral identity and exemplars has been conducted in the United States. Hardy and Carlo (2011) have called for research on the role of culture, including among diverse groups within the United States. In this regard, a recent chapter by King, Mueller, and Furrow (2013) on the cultural issues involved in research with exemplars is illuminating (see also King, Clardy, & Ramos, 2014). Their points would seem to apply equally to research on moral identity because exemplars represent the pinnacle of identity development. Two of the key points are that there is bound to be cultural variation on criteria for having attained moral identity and exemplarity, and that methods commonly used in this line of research, such as one-on-one interviews, are not equivalent in their familiarity and meaning across cultures. Thus, King and colleagues encourage collaboration between researchers and local leaders in order to better contextualize findings and ensure that generalizations rest on valid theoretical and methodological approaches.

In sum, theory and research on moral identity is burgeoning. Additional future attention to culture in this area could open up fruitful research directions. Given cultural variation in the ways that the life course is partitioned and the key purposes assigned to each phase, one might expect an interaction of development and culture in moral identity. Probably the oldest known conception of the life course is in the Dharmashastras, the sacred law books of the Hindu religion. Although first written about 3,000 years ago, this concept continues to hold sway in the everyday lives of Indians (Kakar, 1998). For instance, the third stage of varanaprasta in the Hindu Indian life course begins in middle adulthood and literally means “forest bound.” It entails moral ideals of gradual disengagement from social responsibilities and material attachments in order to focus on contemplative spiritual pursuits. According to Sarawathi, Mistry, and Dutta (2011), the ideals of this stage find behavioral expression among Indian adults who, on reaching 60 years of age, either pass on their property to their children or let them know of their will, and also in the “throng” of older adults who worship at temples during early morning and late evening prayers. This example indicates how indigenous notions of developmental moral ideals raise useful research questions for future scholarship on moral identity. These include the extent to which moral identity is: (a) based in personality or social roles, (b) reshaped and redefined at different points across the entire life course, and (c) inclusive or exclusive of various material and immaterial self-interests.

**The Cultural-Developmental Approach**

The intersection between development and culture is explicitly addressed by the cultural-developmental approach. This fairly new theory focuses on how life course developmental trajectories for diverse kinds of moral reasoning vary across cultures (Jensen, 2008, 2011, 2012, in press b). The cultural-developmental approach introduces the concept of a “template.” The template charts trajectories across the life course for three kinds of moral reasoning: the Ethics of Autonomy, Community, and Divinity—a tripartite distinction originally proposed by Shweder and his colleagues (Jensen, 1995; Shweder, 1990;
Shweder, Much, Mahapatra, & Park, 1997). The trajectories are proposed as a template in the sense that their emergence in childhood, and slopes of development from childhood through adulthood, depend on the prevalence of the three Ethics within a culture and the hierarchy among them.

Briefly, the Ethic of Autonomy involves a focus on persons as individuals. Moral reasons within this ethic include the interests, well-being, and rights of individuals (self or other), and fairness between individuals. The Ethic of Community focuses on persons as members of social groups, with attendant reasons such as duty to others and concern with the customs, interests, and welfare of groups. The Ethic of Divinity focuses on persons as spiritual or religious entities, and reasons encompass divine and natural law, sacred lessons, and spiritual purity.

Research on the three ethics has involved interviews about hypothetical vignettes, issues of general discussion in the society of study (such as suicide in the case of terminal illness), and participants’ own moral experiences. These have been analyzed with the standard coding manual for the three ethics (Jensen, 2004). Each reason is coded into one of the three Ethics of Autonomy, Community, and Divinity, allowing for an assessment of the degree to which a person uses each. Each reason is also coded into one of numerous subcategories. The manual differentiates from 13 to 16 subcategories for each ethic, such as “Self’s Psychological Well-Being” and “Rights” for Autonomy, “Duty to Others” and “Social Order or Harmony Goals” for Community, and “Scriptural Authority” and “God-Given Conscience” for Divinity. Apart from facilitating careful and comprehensive coding of all of a person’s moral reasons, the use of subcategories allows for an assessment of the specific type of moral concept used within an ethic. Research has also surveyed people on their use of the three ethics by means of three different questionnaires. The questionnaires vary on the extent to which they pertain to personal or impersonal moral experiences, and specific or general moral issues (Guerra & Giner-Sorolla, 2010; Jensen, in press; Jensen & Padilla-Walker, in press; Padilla-Walker & Jensen, 2014).

Findings from both interviews and questionnaires have shown the presence and reliable differentiation of the three ethics among notably diverse age and cultural groups (Arnett, Ramos, & Jensen, 2001; Guerra & Giner-Sorolla, 2010; Guerra, Giner-Sorolla, & Vasiljevic, 2013; Haidt et al., 1993; Hickman, in press; Jensen, 1995, 1997a, 1997b, 1998b, 2008, Rozin et al., 1999; Vainio, in press; Vasquez et al., 2001).

The cultural-developmental template for the Ethics of Autonomy, Community, and Divinity was based on findings for the three ethics. It was also based on a large set of valuable findings from different research traditions, including cognitive-developmental and domain theories (e.g., Piaget, 1932/1965; Kohlberg, 1984; Turiel, 1983), cultural psychology and anthropology perspectives on morality (e.g., Shweder et al., 1990; Trommsdorff & Chen, 2012; Whiting & Edwards, 1988), and research on the origins and development of prosocial emotions and norms (e.g., Thompson, 2012; Warneken & Tomasello, 2006). Findings were synthesized with an eye to what reliably and validly had been replicated across age and cultural groups (see Jensen, in press b).

Figure 15.3A shows the template of trajectories for each ethic from childhood into adulthood. The argument is that Ethic of Autonomy reasoning emerges early in childhood across cultures. The degree to which persons use this ethic stays relatively stable across adolescence and into adulthood, although there may be some decline in adulthood in cultures where there is a strong push for collectivity or submission to divinity. Furthermore, the argument is that the specific types of Autonomy reasons that persons use are likely to change with age. For example, findings indicate that children more than adults invoke self-interest, whereas adults surpass children on concern for the welfare of other individuals.

According to the cultural-developmental approach, the Ethic of Community rises across the life course, both in degree of usage and diversity of types of reasons. For example, findings have consistently indicated that younger children in

![Figure 15.3A The cultural-developmental template of moral reasoning.](image-url)
diverse cultures invoke Community reasons, such as family interests and customs (Kohlberg, 1984; Miller et al., 1990; Olson & Spelke, 2008; Shweder et al., 1990; Thompson, 2012). Moral reasoning related to the family is likely to rise in the course of adolescence and adulthood as a person's awareness of and experiences with diverse types of family considerations increase, such as duty to family in addition to family interests and customs (Miller et al., 1990). By late childhood and adolescence, Community reasons that pertain to social groups other than the family are added (Carlo, 2006; Whiting & Edwards, 1988), including concern for friends (Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker, 2006) and peers and authority figures in places such as school and work (Schlegel, 2011). Cross-sectional and longitudinal findings have shown that by late adolescence or adulthood even more Community reasons are invoked, such as a focus on societal organization (Eisenberg, Carlo, Murphy, & Van Cour, 1995; Eisenberg et al., 2002; Nisan, 1987; Walker, 1989; Zimba, 1994).

Turning to the Ethic of Divinity, the cultural-developmental proposal is that its use will often be low among children but will rise in adolescence and become similar to adult use (Jensen, 2008). This potential infusion of divinity reasoning in adolescence may especially characterize religious cultures that emphasize scriptural authority or that conceptualize supernatural entities as largely distinct from humans, such as possessing omniscient and omnipotent abilities. The reason is that these culturally articulated religious concepts are of such an abstract nature that they may be readily translated into moral reasoning only by adolescents whose cognitive skills allow for more abstraction than those of younger children (Adelson, 1971; Keating, 1990; Kohlberg, 1976; Plagert, 1972; Trommsdorff, 2012). In cultures, however, where scriptural accounts of supernatural entities are less salient or where people regard such entities as less distinct from humans, it is possible that Divinity concepts are more accessible to and hence used more by children in their moral reasoning (Saraswathi, 2005).

The developmental trajectories in Figure 15.3A, as mentioned, have been presented as dynamic. The cultural-developmental approach emphasizes that development and culture co-modulate and that there is a need to know not only about ontogeny, but also about culture in order to make reasonably specific predictions about development. For example, research has found that religiously conservative adults in the United States reason substantially in terms of the Ethics of Divinity and Community, but de-emphasize the Ethic of Autonomy. Religiously liberal adults, in comparison, emphasize the Ethics of Autonomy and Community, but not Divinity (e.g., Jensen, 2008; McAdams et al., 2008). These findings on the different hierarchies of ethics translate into different expectations for developmental trajectories of moral reasoning within the two religious cultures (Jensen, 2008, 2011). Within religiously liberal groups, as illustrated in Figure 15.3B, the expectation is that children, adolescents, and adults frequently will use the Ethic of Autonomy. Community reasons will be rarer among children but will then become quite common among adolescents and adults. Divinity will be used infrequently at all ages, and, if it emerges, this will only occur in the course of adolescence. Figure 15.3C shows predictions for religiously conservative groups. The expectation is that these children, adolescents, and adults will use Autonomy infrequently. There may be some decrease over the life course because of the strong emphasis on renouncing self-interest among religious conservatives.
With respect to Community, the expectation is that its prevalence will rise steadily from childhood to reach a high level in adulthood. The Ethic of Divinity will be low among children but will then rise markedly in adolescence and remain high throughout adulthood.

A recent series of publications has provided support for the cultural-developmental approach while also pointing to future research topics. The Ethic of Autonomy has indeed been found to be lower among adults than children and adolescents in India where there is an emphasis on familialism and communalism (Kapadia & Bhangaokar, in press) and among religiously conservative American communities where submission to divinity is paramount (Hickman & DiBianca Pasoli, in press; Jensen, in press a; Jensen & McKenzie, 2014). With respect to Autonomy reasoning, recent research also indicated a decline from childhood into adulthood among religiously liberal Americans, rather than the predicted steady trajectory (Jensen, in press a). This is rather striking because most major developmental theories of moral development, from Piaget to Kohlberg to Turiel, have positioned Autonomy reasoning at the endpoint of moral development. After all these years, it seems that room remains for more examination of the actual extent of adult use of the Ethic of Autonomy—even in cultures where Autonomy is prevalent.

The Ethic of Autonomy does appear to be particularly high among people in their late teens and 20s who live in cultures where there is a period of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000, 2004, this volume). The primacy of this ethic was observed by Guerra and Giner-Sorolla (in press) in four of the five different cultures they examined. Emerging adults reasoned more in terms of Autonomy than the other two kinds of ethics in Brazil, Israel, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom. The interesting, if not entirely surprising, exception was Japan, where Autonomy was tied with Community. Hickman and DiBianca Pasoli (in press) also found that among Hmong immigrants to the United States, emerging adults emphasized the Ethic of Autonomy, whereas their parents did not. As they poignantly explain, "they are dealing with the competing demands of Hmong moral models handed to them by their parents and relatives versus those that are more prevalent in American society (such as their non-Hmong peers) and more typical of American emerging adults." Finally, even among American Latter Day Saint emerging adults, Padilla-Walker and Nelson (in press) have found evidence for considerable attention to the Ethic of Autonomy, even as the Ethic of Divinity was generally rated as significantly more important.

The Ethic of Community, as predicted by the cultural-developmental approach, has been found to be higher among adults than among children and adolescents. This was the case in recent research with Indian participants (Kapadia & Bhangaokar, in press) and among both religiously liberal and conservative participants in the United States (Jensen, in press a). There is clearly a need, however, for more research. The findings are cross-sectional. They are also limited to three cultural groups, even if these are notably diverse.

With respect to the Ethic of Divinity, the thesis that an infusion of divinity reasoning takes place in adolescence in religious cultures that emphasize scriptural authority and abstract conceptions of the supernatural found support in a comparison of American evangelical children, adolescents, and adults (Jensen in press a; Jensen & McKenzie, 2014). Hickman and DiBianca Pasoli (in press), too, observed low use of the Ethic of Divinity among American evangelical children but high use among their parents, and they surmise that adolescence must be when the shift occurs.

Turning to a different religious tradition, Pandya and Bhangaokar (in press) have examined the cultural-developmental proposal that the use of Divinity in moral reasoning may emerge at a fairly young age within cultures such as India where religion suffuses everyday life. They found that Divinity reasoning in Indian children is common and just as common as Autonomy reasoning. In interviews, children responded to vignettes, including one in which the choice was to help an injured kitten or proceed to play soccer in an important school tournament. Speaking in terms of the Ethic of Divinity, an 8-year-old girl reasoned that: "God has given life to the kitten, so her life is precious and we must save her. Like all animals and plants, God exists in the kitten too, and so, it is our duty to save her or at least do what we can to help her feel better." The early developmental prominence of the Ethic of Divinity among Indian children supports the cultural-developmental proposal. Unexpectedly, however, Pandya and Bhangaokar also found that third-graders used Divinity significantly more than sixth-graders. Furthermore, Kapadia and Bhangaokar (in press) who studied adolescents
and adults from the very same city and context in India found low use of the Ethic of Divinity, as compared to the Ethics of Autonomy and Community. These findings would seem to call for replication, preferably with comparable stimulus materials across age groups of children, adolescents, and adults. As Pandya and Bhangooak write, there is a “lacuna in contemporary moral psychology” of research on divinity considerations (see also Trommsdorff, 2012). It is a lacuna, that at a minimum, goes back to Freud and Piaget. Attention to the role of religion in morality has been on the rise (e.g., De Waal, 2013; Markus & Conner, 2013), and the inclusion of the Ethic of Divinity in the cultural-developmental approach provides a theoretical starting point for additional research.

In sum, the cultural-developmental approach provides a new conceptual approach to moral psychology, along with research tools for surveying and coding moral reasoning. Research findings support a co-modulation of ontogeny and culture in the development of moral reasoning. Research also suggests that even if babies are moral (Bloom, 2013), they are instantly immersed in different cultural environments, and, as they grow into adulthood, they become increasingly culturally diverse in their moralities.

There is a need for longitudinal and sequential research on the cultural-developmental trajectories to better understand the complementary roles of ontogenetic development and culture. It would also be useful for future work to further examine intersections among the three ethics in development and behavior (for one such study, see Padilla-Walker & Nelson, in press), as well as the processes whereby each of the three ethics are either promoted or suppressed in the course of development (see description below of study by DiBianca Fasoli, 2013). Future research could also fruitfully address connections between the cultural-developmental approach and identity theory. For example, one might expect that a person who has arrived at a certain constellation of ethics that is applied across an array of moral issues (i.e., a moral identity) would be particularly likely to experience fluctuation in this constellation of ethics during periods of developmental change (e.g., moving from one phase of the life course to another) and during periods of cultural change (e.g., within a culture as a whole or in the context of moving from one culture to another).

**Key Recurrent Topics**

**Care, Beneficence, and Prosocial Morality**

In the late 1970s and 1980s, Gilligan (1977, 1979, 1982) came to the conclusion that there are two kinds of moral orientations. She based this on interviews with American children and adults about hypothetical moral issues and on interviews with women who were contemplating having an abortion. One is a “justice” orientation, focused on how to negotiate among competing individual interests and rights in an impartial manner. This orientation, according to Gilligan, is characteristic of a male gender identity. The other orientation, however, pertains to “care” and is more characteristic of a female identity. Here, the concern is with bringing into harmony one’s own needs with the needs of those with whom one has relationships. Reflecting on Kohlberg’s Heinz dilemma, an 11-year-old girl voiced this orientation: “If he stole the drug, he might save his wife; then, but if he did, he might have to go to jail; and then his wife might get sicker again, and he couldn’t get more of the drug and it might not be good. So they should really just talk it out and find some other way to make the money” (Gilligan, 1982, p. 28). Gilligan argued that care had not received adequate attention in moral development research.

It is noteworthy that Gilligan’s call to listen to different moral voices occurred in the context of her broader critique that there had been a lengthy history of downgrading girls and women in psychological theory. She noted, for example, that Freud thought that girls developed a less independent and impartial conscience than boys and that Piaget deemed girls less committed to negotiating complex moral rules. Across cultures, research on gender differences has more often than not found that children, adolescents, and adults—whether female or male—speak of both care and fairness (e.g., Shimizu, 2001; Walker, 1984), although there may be other kinds of gender differences in regards to morality (e.g., Krettenauer et al., 2014; Malti et al., 2012). Gilligan’s differentiation of two orientations in the late 1970s, however, spurred and fit with new lines of research on multiplicity in general and caring in particular.

Research has shown the emergence of caring and prosocial behaviors in infancy and toddlerhood (Vaish & Tomasello, 2014). This research has primarily been conducted in Europe and the United States. Findings indicate that very young children show tendencies toward collaboration,
helping persons in need, sharing the rewards of joint activities, and protesting when someone engages in destruction, theft, or violation of group norms (Thompson, 2012; Vaish & Tomasello, 2014; Warneken & Tomasello, 2006). In response to situations in which someone needs help, toddlers and young children also express recognition of this need in both their reasoning and emotional expressions of sympathy and empathy (Eisenberg, Lennon, & Roth, 1983; Hoffman, 2000; Zahn-Waxler, Radke-Yarrow, Wagner, & Chapman, 1992). In a recent review, Vaish and Tomasello (2014) argued that early prosocial tendencies are universal and based in the evolutionary human heritage of interdependence and group-mindedness. They also conclude that “all of these tendencies are modified significantly by socialization and culture such that they might eventually look quite distinct across different groups and individuals” (p. 294). Trommsdorff (in press a, in press b), too, has argued that early prosocial tendencies find culturally diverse expressions in development.

Indeed, research has documented notable ways in which care and prosociality take distinctive cultural forms. Findings from India, for example, have documented that children and adolescents speak of care. Their reasoning, however, emphasizes role-based duties (Bersoff & Miller, 1993; Miller, 1989, 1994; Miller & Bersoff, 1992; Miller et al., 1990; Miller & Luthar, 1989). In a research program spanning more than two decades, Miller and her colleagues have furthermore shown that, in India, beneficence and care for others is considered obligatory. The Indian concept of dharma, in particular, entails responsibility to care for friends and family members. Duty is seen as inherent in one’s social roles. This perspective, according to Miller, is different from the starting assumptions of cognitive-developmental and domain theories that regard care as discretionary (Miller & Bland, 2014). It also departs somewhat from Gilligan’s argument that caring is important as long as it does not override self-interest (Miller & Bland, 2014).

Cultural research has also shown that care and prosociality are extended not only to other individuals, but also to communities as a whole, such as family and school (Shimizu, 2000, 2001). In interviews, Shimizu (2001) found that Japanese adolescents argued, for example, that they had a responsibility to repair broken school property because they were affiliated with the school and so that the school would look well-maintained to others. As one student explained, “When I see something broken, I try to fix it . . . [because] when we have guests visiting the school, I wouldn’t want them to see the school property broke and think, ‘This school property looks great on the outside, but not on the inside.’” (Shimizu, 2001, p. 468). Relatedly, Chinese have the concept of filial piety that entails moral obligations not only to individual family members but also in regards to the welfare and reputation of the family as a whole (Dien, 1982; Hwang, 1999). Furthermore, within a variety of Asian cultures, such as the Hmong, moral reasoning about obligations to the family unit encompasses not only living members but also ancestors (Hickman & DiBlanca Fasoli, in press).

Padilla-Walker and Carlo (2014a), in a recent edited volume on prosociality, encouraged a multidimensional approach. This includes consideration of different “targets” of prosociality (such as a stranger, family member, and peer group), different “types” of behavior (such as helping, cooperating, and promotion of norms), and varying extents of “cost to self” (ranging from self-regarding to entirely self-denying; Padilla-Walker & Carlo, 2014b). The motive to care about individuals and groups, then, seems to be universal. Why we care, how we care, and in regards to whom, however, varies with development and among cultures. The vast majority of research on prosocial reasoning, emotions, and behavior has been conducted with children and adolescents (Padilla-Walker & Carlo, 2014b). Research with adults of different ages would help to clarify how seemingly universal early prosocial tendencies come to “look quite distinct across different groups and individuals,” to return to the words of Vaish and Tomasello (2014). Presumably, this would tell us about culture as well as about the parameters of our evolutionary heritage.

Social Contexts and Processes

The field of moral psychology has seen a steady expansion of the social contexts of moral development that scholars take into account. In fact, recent research increasingly focuses not only on the moral reasoning of the individual, but also on how social contexts frame and drive moral reasoning and development. Around the turn of the 20th century, Freud (1930/1961) emphasized parents and family—a focus that continues today (e.g., Grusec & Goodnow, 1994; Kochanska, Forman, Aksan, & Dunbar, 2005; Walker, Hennig, & Krettenauer, 2000). Given
the nature of Victorian middle-class child care, Freud focused in particular on mothers—a focus that has been expanded as middle-class Western child care arrangements have changed and as researchers have reported on cultures with highly diverse family systems (e.g., Edwards, Ren, & Brown, this volume; Harkness, Mavridis, Liu, & Super, this volume; Morelli, this volume; Shwalb & Shwalb, this volume).

In the course of the early part of the 20th century—as mass education in Europe and the United States became common and compulsory—Piaget (1952/1965) emphasized peers. This focus not only continues but is burgeoning. Undoubtedly, this is because mass education now has worldwide reach. Also, with modernity and globalization, adolescents and emerging adults have become increasingly agentic and autonomous vis-à-vis adults (Giddens, 1990), and, as such, they have more scope for individual moral identity formation and the promotion of civic change. In many ways, this is reflected in research on the values of youth cultures, peer and friendship groups, and youth civic organizations (e.g., Flanagan, Lin, Luise-Mills, Sambo, & Hu, this volume; French, this volume; Hammad & Toolis, this volume; Larson, Jensen, Kang, Griffith, & Rompalla, 2012; Youniss & Smollar, 1985; Youniss & Yares 1997).

Half a century ago, anthropologists (Whiting & Child, 1953) described the relation between cultural beliefs and practices as a “custom complex” consisting of “customary practice and of the beliefs, values, sanctions, rules, motives and satisfactions associated with it” (quoted in Shwedler et al., 2006, p. 872). This idea usefully captures the way that individual moral reasoning occurs in contexts of common behaviors within family, friendship groups, school, and so forth. Research documents the development of custom complexes in diverse cultures. Masses of research in the United States, for example, document how the development of moral reasoning and emotions that is based on sensitivity to the feelings of others, fairness, and reciprocal cooperation occurs in the contexts of authoritative and sociable parenting and egalitarian peer and school cultures (see Killen & Smetana, in press; Whiting & Edwards, 1988). A substantial research record among Chinese shows that moral reasoning and emotions focused on role-based reciprocity, improving the self, and social harmony occur in the contexts of a training style of parenting (Chao & Tseng, 2002), prosocial peer groups (Chen, 2011), and mentor–mentee models of schooling (Li, 2011, 2012). In short, the development of particular kinds of moral reasons occurs in synergy with multiple behavioral contexts to form what essentially is a custom complex.

There is more to the story, however. Contexts do not always convey the same moral messages. From a developmental perspective, it is noteworthy that, generally, there is a rise with age in the number of social contexts that a person is part of (Whiting & Edwards, 1988)—although perhaps in old age there is a tapering off. From a cultural perspective, it is noteworthy that with modernity and globalization there also is a rise in the number of contexts to which a person is exposed. Family is undoubtedly salient everywhere, although family composition and who is considered a family member varies widely. But media, for example, is a context that has grown in significance in daily life at remarkable speed during the past decades, and, while media such as TV and the Internet have spread globally, they are also still more prominent in urban than rural areas (Rubenstein, 2014) and used more hours of the day by children in developed than developing countries (Jensen & Arnett, in preparation). As the number of contexts that a person is involved with increases with age and modernity, there will be exposure to more divergent moral messages, as well as to greater selection on the part of the individual to interact with contexts and messages that resonate most (Jensen, 2003, 2011; Jensen & Arnett, 2012; Jensen, Arnett, & McKenzie, 2011).

A recent study of adolescent-parent dyads in rural and urban Thailand illustrates how these dynamics among development, context, and cultural change impact moral reasoning (McKenzie, 2014). In the rural area, examined by the researcher, adolescents and parents spent a lot of time together in family and village contexts. In discussing moral issues that they had experienced, the rural dyads were similar in their use of the three Ethics of Autonomy, Community, and Divinity. All rural participants especially emphasized Community consideration. In the urban area, there were more contexts, including media and commercial venues, and adolescents and parents spent less time together. Compared to the rural dyads, the urban ones reasoned more in terms of the Ethic of Autonomy and less in terms of the Ethic of Community. Globalization appears to have opened up a gap between the two Thai communities in contexts and moral reasoning, even if they are a mere 25 miles apart. There was also a gap among the urban dyads, with
adolescents speaking more of Autonomy and less of Community than their parents. Whereas urban parents used Autonomy and Community reasoning roughly equally, urban adolescents’ moral reasoning was dominated by the Ethic of Autonomy. Thus, although urban adolescents and their parents both live in a globalizing cultural community, their level of exposure and developmental openness to experiences with globalization differed, as reflected in their moral reasoning.

Turning to processes of moral development, Shweder and Much (1986) argued some time ago that everyday social communication is a significant constitutive factor in the development of moral reasoning. As described earlier, moral psychology has come a long way in focusing on people’s everyday moral experiences rather than pursuing an exclusive focus on vignettes and hypothetical issues generated by researchers. What is still lacking to large extent in research, however, is attention to the social communicative process of moral reasoning. The vast majority of research still asks individuals to generate moral reasons in interviews or to select among reasons on questionnaires. Some recent research, however, has analyzed reasoning as an interpersonal or group phenomenon. DiBianca Fasoli (2013; Hickman & DiBianca Fasoli, in press, for example, conducted a micro-linguistic analysis of conversations between young children and parents from a religiously conservative American congregation. The aims were to compare the moral reasoning of the two age groups and delve into the ways that parents and children respond to one another. As it turned out, parents regularly sought to route their children’s reasoning from a focus on Ethic of Autonomy to Ethic of Divinity considerations. These findings speak not only to the co-modulation of moral development and culture, but also to a particular communicative process within the family whereby that co-modulation takes place.

Focusing on group processes, Larson and his colleagues have examined how cognition, including moral considerations, develops over time as adolescents take regular part in community organizations (Larson, 2000, 2007; Larson & Angus, 2011; Larson et al., 2004; Larson & Hansen, 2005). Through qualitative analyses of longitudinal data, they have found that adolescents, through joint conversations and participation, increased on collective perspective-taking, empathy for others, and recognition of diverse moral codes. To give an example, Jackie, an American 14-year-old, reported that a year before joining SisterHood she had been engaged in antisocial activities: “getting into fights and getting into gangs ... I really didn’t care about people, I had no remorse.” But she said that SisterHood, “surely did help me, because ... this year, I think about people’s feelings more, and how I would feel if that was me” (Larson et al., 2012). As Larson et al. (2012) point out, traditional societies have long organized adolescent rites of passage with the aim of passing on responsibility for moral value systems to youth, and, although overseen by adult community members, it is notable that youth typically participate in these rites as members of a peer group (see also Schlegel & Barry, this volume). Traditional rites of passage do not really allow for much diversity of moral codes, unlike the kinds of urban American youth groups studied by Larson. Both, however, indicate how moral reasoning and values are developed through interactions—communicative and behavioral—in social groups, such as among peers.

To give one final example of the importance of moral reasoning as more than an internal process, a recent study asked American children, adolescents, and adults from religiously liberal and conservative communities to reason about public moral issues, in which they rendered judgments for people in general, and about private moral experiences, in which they evaluated their own behavior (Jensen, in press; Jensen & McKenzie, 2014). One striking finding was that, contrary to the widespread idea that these two groups on opposite sides of the so-called culture wars (Hunnet, 1991) simply speak different moral languages (Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009), it turned out that they calibrate their morality depending on the context. For example, conservative adolescents and adults frequently used Ethic of Divinity reasoning, but more so for public than private issues. Among liberals, Divinity was mainly invoked by adults and only in contemplation of private issues. The religious conservatives and liberals, then, have come to diverge with age on what they think should be the moral lingua franca of society.

Taken together, the findings from the three research programs suggest that the development of moral reasoning in humans involves intra- and interpersonal dialogical processes. Morality, in part, is a process in which we have internal dialogues using some distinct private moral reasons for weighing our behaviors. Morality is also a social process in which we dialogue, debate, and argue
with others. We do this person-to-person, such as between a child and a parent. We also do this at the level of groups, such as among peers and within the public sphere.

A fuller understanding that moral development involves intra- and interpersonal reasoning will require more research. Furthermore, it is worth keeping in mind that the field of moral development has reams of publications in which individuals essentially reason about public issues. In this light, it is perhaps not so surprising that predictions about their individual behaviors from their reasoning have been hard to establish. If we want to know about individual moral behavior, we might do better by focusing on private moral reasoning and on the actual moral dialogue between individuals in everyday social contexts, such as in their families and civic groups.

**Future Directions**

Before concluding, I wish to highlight what I take to be two promising and important future research directions. One calls for a focus on the entire life course, and the other pertains to new questions arising in the face of globalization.

**From Origins to Old Age**

Recent theory on moral development and psychology has been characterized by a search for cognitions and emotions that constitute foundations of moral behavior. This search has often focused on biological foundations through evolutionary and neuroscience research and on early developmental foundations through research with infants and young children (for reviews, see Bloom, 2013; Thompson, 2012). Babies do indeed show a variety of moral sensibilities (Bloom, 2013; Vaish & Tomasello, 2014), but they are not particularly diverse in their morality. As should be clear from the present review of findings, however, adults from different cultures are diverse. There is universality and also increasing multiplicity with development. This implies that it is insufficient to reach conclusions about moral development on the basis of research with children, let alone young ones. Research across the full life course is necessary. We need to ask to what extent do early moral reasons remain, change, or disappear? And to what extent do new moral reasons emerge later in life? Recently, Bloom (2013) wittily observed that “there’s some truth to the claim that lot of developmental psychology is the study of the interested and alert baby” (p. 25). It truly is time that the field moves beyond the kind of fixation on young children that also characterized Freud’s work almost a century ago.

**Globalization**

As should also be clear from the present review, today’s children and adolescents growing up in urban areas all over the world typically are exposed to moral messages from many sources: parents, peers, after-school counselors, extracurricular activity coaches, television, magazines, websites, and so forth. Adults, too, are exposed to myriad local and global contexts. What moral messages do these sources convey? To what extent do the messages reinforce or work against one another? These are important questions for future research. Meanwhile, in a number of areas of the world, especially rural and poor ones, the social contexts are different. Children’s daily access to mass media is much less pronounced. Adolescents, especially girls, are far less likely to attend secondary educational institutions. Adults spend little time involved in the global economy. Children, adolescents, and adults in rural communities spend more time in the contexts of family and small communities. What are the Implications for their moral development?

Certainly, globalization does involve a massive and powerful movement of Western images, people, and ideas—including moral ones—to the rest of the world. But the flow also runs in the other direction. As scholars have pointed out, globalization may be met with a variety of individual and group responses, from resistance to new ideas, to wholehearted assimilation of the new ideas, to integration or hybridization of multiple kinds of ideas (Giddens, 1990; Hermans, this volume; Jensen & Arnett, 2012). A focus specifically on how these processes come into play in regards to moral ideas is timely.

**Conclusion**

As mentioned at the outset, moral development researchers have often aspired to provide moral prescriptions. Piaget (1932/1965) held that autonomy is better than heteronomy, Kohlberg (1981) boldly asserted that his stage sequence was simultaneously descriptive and prescriptive of moral development. It seems no mere coincidence that he published The Philosophy of Moral Development (1981) before The Psychology of Moral Development (1984). But therein also lies the problematic issue that letting one strict philosophical definition of morality

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determine psychological research is bound to leave out the emic and diverse features of people's moral lives. Of course, the other side of the matter is that detailed, descriptive, explanatory, and predictive accounts of these emic and diverse features do not, in and of themselves, lead to unambiguous policy. As should be fairly clear from the present review, theories and research vary on how clearly and explicitly they are aimed at prescription and policy. Moving from description to prescription, in fact, requires what I—with a nod to my Danish compatriot Søren Kierkegaard—would call a "leap of philosophy." As we conduct research on moral reasoning and development in a global world, we need to give increasingly careful consideration to the extent to which we are making such a leap—implicitly or explicitly. We would probably also do well—and here I am leaping—to appreciate that even as theories of moral reasoning and development differ, they may still make contributions to the collective scientific enterprise.

The research questions that Freud and Piaget raised about morality almost a century ago in regards to its definition, development, and context remain highly relevant. Contemporary research findings have demonstrated some pervasive patterns for how children and adults define morality, how they develop morally, and common contexts of moral relevance. Current and emerging research, however, is also seriously reframing Freud's and Piaget's questions. This reframing is taking place in light of the fact that children in different parts of the world grow up and live in different cultural circumstances. This reframing is also taking place in light of the fact that children and adults live in a rapidly globalizing world of cultural change. The new focus then is on the plural definitions, developmental pathways, and contexts that children, adolescents, and adults experience with respect to morality.

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