

## *Children's Social and Moral Reasoning*

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### **Introduction**

The study of morality has been approached from different perspectives within several disciplines, including philosophy, anthropology, sociology, and psychology. In psychology, proponents of the major theoretical approaches have attempted to explain the acquisition or development of morality. Behavioristic and social learning theorists have proposed that moral development entails a process of acquiring behaviors (Skinner, 1971) or internalizing the standards and values of society so that they are maintained without the necessity of external surveillance (Aronfreed, 1968). Psychoanalytic theorists, too, have presumed that morality comes from the incorporation of societal standards (Freud, 1930). In the psychoanalytic account the process of moral development, as well as the maintenance of morality, is full of conflict and tension for individuals. This is because in acquiring society's moral standards the individual must control strongly felt instinctual drives and needs (through the formation of what Freud referred to as a superego). The emotion of guilt operates so as to maintain control over instincts.

An alternative view on moral development, keeping with a long line of philosophical analyses from Aristotle to Kant and to modern versions (e.g., those of Dworkin, 1977; Gewirth, 1978; Rawls, 1971), is that it involves the construction of judgments about welfare, justice, and rights through children's social interactions. Extensive study of children's moral judgments dates back to the work of Jean Piaget (1932). Piaget's research was extended a number of years later by Lawrence Kohlberg (1981), who was instrumental in drawing attention to the importance of processes of judgment in the moral realm (as well

as in stimulating renewed interest in Piaget's research on moral development). Taken together, the research of Piaget and Kohlberg went far in demonstrating that children do not solely accommodate to societal standards or comply with rules and parental or other social expectations. Rather, children attempt to understand social relationships, and in the process construct judgments about right and wrong, about how people should act towards each other.

There is now substantial evidence demonstrating that children form systematic judgments about right and wrong, in the moral sense, that are central to their actions, social interactions, and development. Piaget and Kohlberg each also described a sequence for the development of moral judgments in which concepts of justice and rights are not constructed until late childhood or adolescence. Research on a variety of aspects of children's social and moral judgments conducted over the past two decades has shown, however, that young children begin to develop moral judgments, distinct from other types or domains of social judgments. After a brief overview of the ways Piaget and Kohlberg characterized children's moral judgments, we consider the research on how children form moral judgments that differ from their judgments about the domains of societal convention and personal jurisdiction. We also consider issues raised by this "domain" approach for development and culture.

## **The Development of Social and Moral Judgments**

The moral thinking of young children was described by both Piaget and Kohlberg as concrete and oriented toward punishment, respect for authority, and the maintenance of existing social rules and laws. Piaget (1932) described moral development as moving from an orientation characterized by heteronomy, or a strong respect for adult authority and rules, to an autonomous morality in later childhood in which rules are understood as social constructions formulated in social relations of cooperation among peers. According to Piaget, the young child views social rules as fixed and unalterable, and conceptualizes moral obligation in terms of strict adherence to the rules or commands of adult authorities. A morality based on adult constraint gives way in later childhood to a morality based on mutual respect, or cooperation. This progression is facilitated by the older child's cognitive development from egocentrism to perspectivism, and by a corresponding shift in the child's social relations from one-way relations of adult constraint to reciprocal relations of mutual respect among peers.

Similarly, Kohlberg (1981) characterized children's moral reasoning in terms of a punishment and obedience orientation. Kohlberg believed that Piaget mischaracterized the thinking of the young child as reflecting a reverence for rules; Kohlberg, rather, saw young children's moral thinking as expressing an expedient concern with obedience to authority in order to avoid punishment. Nonetheless, Kohlberg likewise saw the young child as prone to take the perspective of authority in moral judgments and to exhibit a focus on the concrete consequences of moral acts and disobedience. Based on analyses of children's reasoning about moral dilemmas, Kohlberg described moral development as moving through a series of stages, in which morality is defined first in terms of punishment or obedience to

authority, through a conventional level in which individuals take the perspective of the legal system and uphold existing laws (a "law and order" orientation), and finally, in adulthood, a principled level may be reached where individuals develop truly moral abstract principles of justice and rights (an orientation reached only by a minority of adults).

These propositions yield a portrait of young children's moral reasoning as oriented toward authority and characterized by rigid adherence to and respect for, existing social rules, norms, and customs. A substantially different picture of children's moral judgments has emerged from research that examined directly whether children make distinctions between different kinds of social rules and acts. It is a portrait in which children distinguish among social rules in accordance with different domains of social reasoning, and in which they possess conceptions of autonomy, rights, and democracy which sometimes lead them to take a critical perspective on the dictates of authorities and existing social systems. Even young children possess moral concepts that are independent of authority or existing social sanctions or rules, and their moral judgments are *sensitive to both the content of social rules and the context of their application*.

Researchers working within what has come to be known as the "domain approach" have proposed that children's thinking is organized from an early age into the domains of morality and social convention (Turiel, 1983). The *moral domain* pertains to issues of harm, fairness, and rights. The *social conventional* domain comprises behavioral uniformities that serve to coordinate social interactions in social systems (e.g., the organizational rules of the classroom, or uniformities involving matters like dress, etiquette, or titles). Research with children of a variety of ages has shown that they discriminate between moral and social conventional events and reason about them differently (see Turiel, 1998, for a review). Two types of assessments have been employed in the research on children's domain distinctions. The first, termed *criterion judgments*, pertains to the criteria used in making judgments of acts or rules associated with each domain. Criterion judgments include judgments of the generalizability, universality, rule-contingency, and alterability of prohibitions regarding the act. Judgments of moral transgressions (e.g., hitting, stealing) have been found to be generalizable (i.e., wrong across social contexts), non-rule-contingent (i.e., wrong even if there were no rule against it), and rules that pertain to moral acts are seen as unalterable. In contrast, social conventional transgressions (e.g., calling a teacher by his/her first name, eating with one's fingers) are seen as relative to the social context, contingent on the existence of an explicit social rule, and rules regarding social conventions are seen as alterable by authority or social consensus. For example, children judge it acceptable to call a teacher by his or her first name in a school in which there was no rule or social uniformity prohibiting it, and existing rules prohibiting the behavior were seen as alterable if the relevant authorities approved. In contrast, hitting is judged as wrong even if a teacher permitted it, and rules about hitting were not seen as alterable by the commands of those holding authority.

The second type of assessment in the research on morality and convention is children's reasons or justifications for the judgments they make. Reasoning in the moral domain is characterized by references to issues of harm, fairness, and rights. Reasoning in the social conventional domain is characterized by references to rules, authority, social customs, and the coordination of social behavior. The different reasons given by children for moral and social conventional transgressions correspond to their criterion judgments and help account for their differential judgments of generalizability and rule contingency. Because

moral events entail acts with intrinsic consequences of harm or unfairness, children's judgments of these acts are independent of social conventional aspects of the social system, such as authority or the presence of explicit social rules. In contrast, social conventions derive their meaning from being embedded within an existing social system with prescribed rules and roles, social hierarchies, or shared symbolic meanings that may be specific to the group. Accordingly, the meaning of a social convention may change along with social agreement or the commands of recognized authorities, and conventions may vary across social systems and across time and place. It has been proposed that different social interactions are associated with each of the domains, by which children construct different types of social judgments (Turiel, 1998). For example, when faced with a moral transgression (e.g., one child pushes another off a swing), children may consider the direct consequences of the act, and arrive at the conclusion that the act is wrong (Turiel, 1983). However, when observing a violation of social convention (e.g., a child calls a teacher by her first name) with no intrinsic consequences of harm or unfairness, children must infer the wrongness of the behavior from features extrinsic to the event. If others (e.g., adult authorities) react to the event as a rule transgression or as part of authority jurisdiction, children will see the act as a violation of social convention.

A large number of studies have yielded evidence that children distinguish morality from convention on these dimensions (see Turiel, 1998, for a review). As a means of conveying how young children make this distinction, we present an example of responses given by a 5-year-old boy. The boy's responses come from a study (Weston & Turiel, 1980) in which children from 5 to 11 years of age were presented with hypothetical stories of preschools in which certain actions are permitted. In one story children are allowed to be without clothes on warm days (a conventional issue). In a second story children are allowed to hit each other (a moral issue). Prior to the presentation of these hypothetical stories, the children had judged both acts as wrong. The first interview excerpt begins with the boy's responses to the question of whether it is alright for a school to allow hitting and the second with his responses as to whether it is alright to allow children to remove their clothes (the excerpts come from Turiel, 1983, p. 62):

No, it is not okay. (WHY NOT?) Because this is like making other people unhappy. You can hurt them that way. It hurts other people, hurting is not good. (MARK GOES TO PARK SCHOOL. TODAY IN SCHOOL HE WANTS TO SWING BUT HE FINDS THAT ALL THE SWINGS ARE BEING USED BY OTHER CHILDREN. SO HE DECIDES TO HIT ONE OF THE CHILDREN AND TAKE THE SWING. IS IT OKAY FOR MARK TO DO THAT?) No. Because he is hurting someone else.

Yes, because that is the rule. (WHY CAN THEY HAVE THAT RULE?) If that's what the boss wants to do, he can do that. (HOW COME?) Because he's the boss, he is in charge of the school (BOB GOES TO GROVE SCHOOL. THIS IS A WARM DAY AT GROVE SCHOOL. HE HAS BEEN RUNNING IN THE PLAY AREA OUTSIDE AND HE IS HOT SO HE DECIDES TO TAKE OFF HIS CLOTHES. IS IT OKAY FOR BOB TO DO THAT?) Yes, if he wants to he can because it's the rule.

For this child all rules are not alike and the type of act involved is evaluated in relation to the jurisdiction of the person in authority. With regard to removing one's clothes, the

justification of the act and the school policy are based on rules and authority. Although the principal is the "boss and in charge" of the school, it matters in one case but not in the other. This boy's responses provide an example of the general findings of the study (Weston & Turiel, 1980). The majority of children at all ages responded in similar fashion, distinguishing between moral and conventional issues regarding rules and authority.

Research on very young children's ability to distinguish morality and social convention suggests that judgments of these events undergo important development during the preschool years. A set of studies have examined criterion judgments with children from 2 years to 5 years (e.g., Smetana, 1981, 1985; Smetana & Braeges, 1990). Children appear to reliably distinguish basic or prototypical moral and social conventional events by about 4 or 5 years, although not at 2 years. Between these ages, children distinguish the events on some criteria, but not others. For example, during the third year, children apply judgments of generalizability to distinguish moral events from social conventions (with moral events more likely to be judged wrong across social contexts than social conventions). By the end of the third year, they also judge moral transgressions to be independent of rules or authority (Smetana & Braeges, 1990).

Although young children appear to begin to construct a domain of moral judgment by the end of the third year of life, complications in acquiring reliable justification data from very young children have made it difficult to determine the basis of their judgments of generalizability or rule contingency. One possibility, consistent with the domain perspective, is that young children abstract out harm from moral events and use these emerging concepts of harm to guide their moral judgments. Another possibility, however, is that young children may be simply responding to adult patterns of punishment or sanctions (e.g., hitting is punished by adults, therefore it is wrong) rather than using features of actions such as harm in making these judgments. Because moral actions have consequences of harm or unfairness, it is difficult to address this question with normal moral acts such as hitting used in these studies. However, a procedure devised in a study by Zelazo, Helwig, and Lau (1996) gets around this problem. In the study, children were given examples of unusual or "noncanonical" moral events to make judgments about. For example, children were given the fanciful example of an unusual animal, from a far away place, that feels good when it is hit but is hurt when petted. This noncanonical example was contrasted with the "normal" case of an animal that is hurt when hit and that likes to be petted. In the study, 3–5 year olds were asked to judge the actions of agents with harmful or beneficent intentions who performed the actions of hitting or petting on each of these animals. It was found that 3 year olds judged it wrong to inflict harm on either animal, even in the noncanonical case when the action involved petting. Children's moral judgments were not based on a simple association between hitting and punishment, but on an understanding of the harm believed to underlie acts in both normal and noncanonical instances. Three year olds also have been shown to make similar judgments about acts of psychological harm (Helwig, Zelazo, & Wilson, 2001). These results suggest that children develop concepts of harm by 3 years, which they may use to distinguish moral acts from other kinds of social events.

Children also have been found to distinguish morality from authority and legal rules, and to adopt a critical perspective on authority, especially when it conflicts with the demands of morality (Damon, 1977; Laupa, Turiel, & Cowan, 1995). For example, Damon

(1977) found that young children do not accept as legitimate parental commands to engage in acts which violate moral rules, such as commands to steal or to cause harm to another person. Other research explored children's judgments and reasoning about the attributes that give legitimacy to authority, and how children account for the type of act commanded (see Laupa, Turiel, & Cowan, 1995). When reasoning about acts entailing theft or physical harm to persons, 4–6-year-old children give priority to the act itself, rather than the status of the person in a position of authority. For example, commands for children to stop fighting were seen as legitimate whether or not they came from adults or children holding positions of authority. Children also judged commands from a peer (with or without a position of authority in a school) to stop fighting as more legitimate than conflicting commands from an adult authority, such as a teacher. However, with regard to other acts, such as turn taking or interpretations of game rules, children do give priority to adult authority over children or other adults who are not in positions of authority. Children's judgments of obedience in these cases are based on the attributes possessed by authorities, such as their social position in a school or their superior knowledge and experience. Children's reasoning about authority is not based on unilateral respect or an unexamined acceptance of authority injunctions; rather, even young children make subtle discriminations taking into account the type of command given and the attributes that lend legitimacy to individuals in positions of authority.

Children also take a critical perspective on rules and laws when they conflict with the demands of morality – as demonstrated by a recent study (Helwig & Jasiobedzka, 2001). In this study, children (6–11 years) were presented with hypothetical examples of a variety of laws, including socially beneficial laws (e.g., traffic laws or vaccination laws) and laws that involved injustice (e.g., laws discriminating against individuals on the basis of age, income, or eye color). Children were asked to evaluate each law, to judge if it would be legitimate for governments to pass the law, and to judge if it was acceptable to violate the law. In general, children evaluated the socially beneficial laws as more acceptable and legitimate than the unjust laws. Consistent with their law evaluations, children at all ages judged the violation of unjust laws to be more acceptable than the violation of socially beneficial laws. In fact, the majority of children in the youngest age group (6 year olds) judged violations of unjust laws, but not socially beneficial laws, to be acceptable. These findings reveal that even young children consider the content of law and are sensitive to features of laws such as their potential to lead to injustice or harm in making judgments of obedience and law violation.

*The Development of Social Thought and Action* Most of the studies considered thus far examined children's judgments regarding different aspects of morality and social convention. This leaves open the question of whether children's actions are related to, or influenced by, their judgments. Within the perspective we have presented it is, indeed, proposed that thought and action are closely related to each other (Piaget, 1932). This does not mean that we can simply predict what people will do from what they say they would do. There are many reasons people may not be able to predict their own actions, including that they cannot necessarily foresee the variety of issues that may come up in particular contexts (Ross & Nisbett, 1991; Turiel & Smetana, 1984). The proposition instead is that people's judgments influence how they approach situations calling for actions, and that actions, in



turn, influence the development of their judgments. One feature of this proposition is that children's social interactions influence the development of judgments. A second is that children's judgments are important in how they frame events they experience, and that the different domains of judgments have a bearing on this process.

A number of studies have examined children's social interactions around moral and social conventional events, with children ranging from 2–3 years of age to late childhood, in a variety of contexts such as the home, the school, and the playground. The research has shown that children's social interactions are varied and differentiated according to domains of reasoning (e.g., Much & Shweder, 1978; Nucci & Nucci, 1982a, 1982b; Nucci & Turiel, 1978). Specifically, it has been found that children's responses to moral transgressions (e.g., when one child hits another, fails to share, or takes another child's objects) revolve around communications about the act's effects on others, and attention to the perspectives, needs, and expectations of others. By an early age, children are aware of, and focus on, the consequences of moral actions, including pain and injury and the emotions felt by others. Most of the observational studies have found that young children do not respond as frequently to conventional violations as to moral transgressions. However, adults do respond to violations of social conventions, and their communications generally focus on issues of disorder, the importance of maintaining rules, and obedience to authority, rather than on harmful consequences or the perspectives of others. These findings suggest that the types of events that children experience, as well as the communications they receive or generate during social interactions are distinguished in ways predicted by the domains of social reasoning. The results of these studies are consistent with the proposition that children's domain distinctions are based on early social experiences.

Other research supports the proposition that there is a correspondence between the domains of judgment and how children approach behavioral situations (Turiel, 2000). In this study, observations were made in elementary and junior high schools of spontaneously occurring social interactions entailing moral events (e.g., hitting, fighting, sharing, taking another's goods) and conventional events (e.g., lining up for activities, sitting in assigned seats). Observations were also made of events that combined moral and conventional components (e.g., rules, practices, or authority dictates that entail unfair treatment). Shortly after an event was observed, participants were interviewed to ascertain how they perceived the situations and how they evaluated and judged various aspects of the events. About a month later, the same participants were administered an interview about hypothetical situations describing transgressions comparable to the observed events (a total of 311 participants were administered the two interviews).

The findings on judgments about the hypothetical situations provide a comparison with judgments about the events experienced by the children. As expected, most of the children reasoned about the moral and conventional transgressions depicted in the hypothetical situations in accordance with their domain classification. It was also found that in the events that involved a mixture of components, children were able to separate the moral and conventional components and judge in different ways about each. For the actual events, the majority of children at each age judged that the moral acts would be wrong even if no rule existed, whereas a minority judged that the conventional acts would be wrong under those circumstances. Similarly, a majority judged that evaluations of moral acts were not based on authority expectations, whereas a minority did so for the conventional acts. The

findings on justifications provide further evidence that participants were making domain distinctions with regard to the actual events as well. The justifications for the moral evaluations and judgments were mainly based on welfare and justice, and justifications for conventional events were based mainly on tradition, authority, and personal choice. The participants also judged each component of the mixed events differently, reasoning about one on the basis of welfare and justice and the other on the basis of tradition, authority, and social coordination.

## Culture and Social Development

The research we have reviewed demonstrates that starting at a young age children form different domains of social judgment. Children make moral judgments based on issues of harm, fairness, and rights, and differentiate morality from social conventions, punishment, and explicit rules. Children do not appear to go through a period of rigid adherence to social rules, and unilateral respect for adult authority, but often adopt a critical perspective in evaluating and judging the legitimacy of rules and authority.

Most of the research discussed thus far was conducted in North America – in Western cultures. It may be, therefore, that the types of judgments found in this research reflect a particular cultural orientation. Our view is that the development of judgments about morality and social conventions stem not from a particular cultural orientation but from children's experiences with others and their ways of making sense of those experiences. It has been argued by some, however, that the distinction between morality and convention stems from a Western cultural construction connected to a general orientation to persons and society (Shweder, Mahapatra, & Miller, 1987). That view is based on the proposition that cultures can be divided, more or less, on their orientations to individualism or collectivism (Triandis, 1996). Western cultures are oriented to the idea of persons as autonomous human agents who are free to belong or not to belong to social systems and groups. Social relationships in Western societies are seen as derivative and arising out of consent and contract between these autonomous individuals. This leads to the idea of conventionality – that some obligations are determined by social contracts or arrangements that individuals willingly enter into. The morality of Western societies can be characterized as rights-based, or one concerned with protecting and fostering the rights of individuals to pursue their activities free from unnecessary external influence.

In collectivistic cultures the person is seen as part of a social network of interdependence and morality is based on duties and maintenance of the social order. Moral duties include what are seen as consensus-based conventions in Western cultures. Shweder et al. (1987) conducted research in India, where supposedly the concept of the self as an autonomous, bounded individual existing free from society but living in society is an alien notion. They proposed that Indians would be likely to treat as moral certain events that Americans would view as conventional or up to the individual's choice, such as matters relating to diet, clothing, and other cultural or religious customs. They conducted a study with Orthodox Hindus (both Brahmans, or upper-class temple priests, and untouchables) from a provincial town in India, as well as with American middle- and upper-middle-class individuals. Participants



were presented with a large number of items describing violations of practices and norms. Some were of the type that we would define as moral and conventional. A number of the items they used pertained to content often identified in Western cultures with convention, such as food and dress. These items, however, were also tied to religious practices. Examples of this type are violations of prohibitions against a widow eating fish or wearing bright clothing, or a son eating chicken and getting a haircut the day after his father's death. It was found that although a number of the moral items were judged in similar ways by Indians and Americans, some of the "conventional" ones were judged differently by the two groups. Items like the ones just described pertaining to food and clothing were judged by Indians as serious transgressions and it was thought that the practices were not alterable.

The conclusions drawn by Shweder et al. (1987) about these findings – that what Americans might treat as conventional is treated by Indians as moral – fails to account for a significant aspect of what goes into people's application of their moral judgments. We are referring to their assumptions about reality. As shown by a re-analysis of the items (Turiel, Killen, & Helwig, 1987), assumptions about the "reality" of an after-life and the effects of earthly actions on unobservable entities, such as the soul of a deceased husband, father, or ancestors entered into their moral judgments. As an example, it is believed that if a son were to get a haircut and eat chicken the day after his father's death the father would fail to receive salvation. Although the beliefs about reality varied across cultures (Americans did not believe these practices to result in these kinds of consequences), the moral concern with avoiding inflicting harmful consequences on others appears to be shared. The events interpreted by Shweder et al. (1987) as inherently conventional appear to have been transformed into moral events (having harmful consequences for others) by virtue of the specific beliefs brought to them by Indians. This example shows the importance of considering such beliefs (termed informational or "factual assumptions" in subsequent research on this topic, see Wainryb, 1991) in studying the application of moral judgments.

Other research has confirmed that the moral and social conventional domains are distinguished in India and other cultures. For example, Miller and Bersoff (1992) found that children and adults in India reasoned about school dress codes as social conventions, seeing them as alterable and relative across social contexts, whereas theft was reasoned about as a moral event in the same manner as in the West. It has been found that children and adults in several cultures distinguish morality and social convention, including Indonesia (Carey & Ford, 1983), Nigeria (Hollos, Leis, & Turiel, 1986), Korea (Song, Smetana, & Kim, 1987), Zambia (Zimba, 1994), and Brazil (Nucci, Camino & Sapiro, 1996). Moreover, research in India (Neff, 2001) and in other presumably collectivistic cultures (Wainryb & Turiel, 1994) has shown that persons are often conceptualized as autonomous agents. In particular, people in positions of dominance in the social hierarchy (e.g., as based on social caste or gender) are accorded entitlements to personal choices.

## **The Development of Concepts of Autonomy, Rights, and Democracy**

The development of children's autonomy is an area that has received much attention in recent research. In Piaget's (1932) classic study, autonomy was described mainly as a

feature that emerges within children's moral reasoning in later childhood, when children transcend heteronomy and begin to make moral judgments that are independent of authority and existing social rules. As previously noted, however, even young children have been found to distinguish morality from authority and social convention and to identify a moral domain comprising issues of rights, welfare, and fairness. The turn away from describing moral development in terms of a general shift from heteronomy to autonomy has led researchers to refocus their attention on children's reasoning about their own autonomy throughout the age span. Researchers have also taken up the question of how early emerging concepts of autonomy relate to, and inform, more sophisticated moral concepts of individual rights and freedoms.

Research directly examining emerging concepts of autonomy has found that young children identify a domain of personal issues, distinct from the moral and social conventional domains, comprising matters considered to be up to the individual's personal choice and beyond the bounds of legitimate regulation by parents, teachers, and other authorities. For example, American elementary school children have been found to judge issues such as choices about friends, appearance (clothing, hairstyle), and preferences for leisure activities, as up to the child to decide (Nucci, 1981). From the age of 7 onward, participants in Nucci's (1981) study stated that there should not be a rule governing these matters and that they should be up to individual choice. Recent research (Nucci & Smetana, 1996) suggests that the personal domain emerges during the preschool years. Preschoolers (3–4 year olds) have been found to make similar judgments about age-appropriate personal issues. Observations of parent–child interactions show that children are much more likely to challenge parental authority over personal issues than moral or conventional issues. Nucci (1996) provides the following example of a conflict between a parent and a child over what a child is going to wear on the last day of nursery school:

Mother: Evan, it's your last day of nursery school. Why don't you wear your nursery school sweatshirt?

Child: I don't want to wear that one.

Mother: This is the last day of nursery school, that's why we wear it. You want to wear that one?

Child: Another one.

Mother: Are you going to get it or should I?

Child: I will. First I got to get a shirt.

Mother: [Goes to the child's dresser and starts picking out shirts.] This one? This one? Do you know which one you have in mind? You have to decide, because we have to do car pool.

Here, this is a new one.

Child: No, it's too big.

Mother: Oh Evan, just wear one, and when you get home, you can pick whatever you want, and I won't even help you. [Child puts on shirt].

The example illustrates a conflict between the parent's assertion of a dress convention (wearing the nursery school sweatshirt on the last day of school) and the child's assertion that it is a matter of personal choice. The example illustrates, first, that the child challenges adult rules when they are perceived to infringe upon the child's sense of autonomy and choice. Second, the adult responds by recognizing the child's agency and autonomy and

through negotiation and compromise. Although the child ultimately complies in the immediate instance, the interaction concludes with the mother offering the child autonomy about what to wear after school is over. Nucci (1996) proposes that these kinds of conflicts and negotiations are central to the formation of a sense of autonomy and self, a process that begins very early in life and continues throughout childhood and into adolescence. The negotiations and discussions provoked by these conflicts appear to be important in aiding the child's gradual construction of independence and self-efficacy within an expanding personal domain.

The specific example given above certainly has a middle-class, North American "feel," at least in the particular content invoked and in the granting of autonomy to very young children. Nevertheless, evidence is accumulating that the personal domain is not a specifically North American or Western cultural construction. Nucci, Camino, and Sapiro (1996) examined the judgments of middle- and lower-class children and mothers in cities and rural regions of Brazil. They found that children across social classes and regions differentiated among personal, moral, and social conventional issues in the same way as found in North America. However, there were social class differences in the ages at which personal issues were identified, with middle-class children claiming areas of personal discretion at earlier ages than lower-class children. Similarly, mothers of lower-class children and mothers from rural regions were less likely to grant personal decision-making autonomy to young children. However, by adolescence, these differences disappeared. Both mothers and children tended to grant personal decision making autonomy to adolescents over similar issues, and gave reasons of autonomy, choice, and the development of uniqueness and identity in justifying their judgments.

Studies of social interactions of preschoolers in Japan (e.g., Killen & Sueyoshi, 1995) suggest that the development of autonomy is an important goal even in a culture frequently described as "collectivistic" and promoting group conformity over individual achievement and rights. Killen and Sueyoshi (1995) found that Japanese preschools were hardly "harmonious," as sometimes described. Instead, Japanese preschoolers were involved in a variety of interpersonal conflicts over personal claims, the distribution of resources, and ways of structuring games and other group activities. Teachers preferred a strategy of allowing children to resolve most conflicts among themselves. The interventions of teachers largely took the form of encouraging children to speak up for themselves and to express their desires or to tell others why their actions were wrong. This style differs from the approach to discipline found in many American preschools in which transgressors are sent to "time-out". The Japanese teaching style may be seen as fostering both children's autonomy and independence (in promoting a tendency to speak out and to assert themselves), along with their interdependence, by encouraging them to resolve conflicts among themselves and thus to enhance group cohesion. Another study conducted in Japan (Yamada, 2000) found that mothers of preschoolers do allow their children areas of personal choice in ways not unlike American mothers (Nucci & Smetana, 1996). More research in other cultural settings is needed, to be sure, but the available research suggests that the construction of a personal domain and individual autonomy is not particular to Westerners, and that there may even be similarities across cultures in the sorts of issues judged to be matters of personal choice.

Basic concepts of personal autonomy and individual choice of the kind discussed so far

are likely to serve as a foundation for more abstract notions of individual freedom, such as in concepts of civil liberties like freedom of speech and religion (Nucci, 1996). Freedom of speech and religion are important individual and political rights, often associated with modern democratic political systems. Until very recently, it was assumed that concepts of civil liberties and democracy do not develop until adolescence (Gallatin, 1985). This conclusion was based on previous research showing that young children are unable to define basic terms such as democracy, or that they often subordinate individual rights and freedoms to other concerns in certain situations (e.g., in times of war, or when rights conflict with other important social goals). However, research examining children's reasoning about rights and democracy has shown that these concepts have emerged by the early elementary school years, although they are not always applied in the same way as are those of adolescents or adults. For example, research investigating children's and adolescents' reasoning about freedom of speech and religion (Helwig, 1995, 1997, 1998) has found that by 6 years of age, children judge restrictions of these rights by governments or other authorities as wrong and illegitimate. Moreover, young children, as well as older children and adults, view freedom of speech and religion as universal moral rights that should be upheld in all countries. Younger children (6–8 year olds) link these rights mainly to concerns with ensuring personal autonomy and individual self-expression. However, older children (8–11 year olds) and adolescents recognize broader societal, cultural, and democratic aspects to these rights. For example, with age, freedom of speech increasingly was seen as serving interpersonal or societal purposes, such as fostering communication or facilitating the discovery of important innovations that might help to improve society, or as allowing for minorities to express themselves through protest or other democratic means in order to rectify social injustices. Freedom of religion was seen by older children as serving not only individual autonomy and personal expression, but also as ensuring that group and cultural traditions may be preserved and respected.

Developmental differences have been found not only in how young children conceptualize freedom of speech and religion but also in how they apply these concepts. In one study (Helwig, 1997), children were asked whether it would be acceptable for various authorities (e.g., the government, a school principal, or parents) to prohibit adults or children from talking about a forbidden topic (e.g., rock music) or practicing a religion different from that of the authority when the authority disapproves. Consistent with their conceptualization of these rights as grounded in simple personal choice and autonomy, younger children tended not to draw distinctions among different authorities or agents and to view prohibitions on freedom of speech and religion as wrong in equal measure, whether it involved restrictions in the school, the family, or society at large, and whether or not it involved child or adult agents. Younger children focused on personal choice and individual wants and desires (e.g., "It should be up to them; people should be able to do what they want"). Older children (starting at about 11 years of age), adolescents, and adults, however, drew distinctions between children and adults and between different social contexts. For example, many older children and adults saw it as acceptable for parents to prohibit their young (but not adult) children from practicing a religion different from their own. They considered parents' rights to socialize their children as they wish, and children's competence and ability to make choices about matters of religion. Many older children and adults did not see children as competent to decide their own religion, and this

decision therefore should be left up to the parents. They did not, however, see it as appropriate for other authorities (e.g., school principals and governments) to make choices about children's religion, nor did they see it as appropriate for parents to decide their grown adult children's religion.

Research focusing on judgments of democratic and other forms of social organization has shown that children prefer democratic over nondemocratic forms of government (Helwig, 1998). Elementary school age children were also asked about whether it would be appropriate for governments of both democratic and nondemocratic types to pass laws restricting the right of a minority to criticize the government. Although at all ages children thought that such laws would be wrong, older children were more likely to consider the type of government in evaluating whether or not such laws were acceptable. Older children were more likely to see such laws as acceptable if passed by a democratic government (e.g., a representative democracy) rather than a nondemocratic government (e.g., a government ruled entirely by the rich). The reasoning of the older children appears to reflect a concern with adhering to and upholding democratic procedures which they judged as fair; younger children, by contrast, simply focused on the decision as restricting individual's personal choice, and thus they failed to draw distinctions among types of governments or to consider how the decision was arrived at.

In a study of children's reasoning about fair procedures for making decisions in groups (Helwig & Kim, 1999), young children were more likely to endorse autonomous or democratic decision-making procedures such as consensus (where everyone must agree on a decision), than decision making based on unilateral adult authority across a variety of decisions made in the peer group, family, and school contexts. Older children, in contrast, drew distinctions about when and for what decisions either consensus or adult authority would be appropriate. For example, older children thought that consensus would be an appropriate way for a class to decide on where to go for a field trip, but not for decisions about the curriculum. Older children reasoned that teachers had more knowledge about curriculum matters than children, and that children would be tempted to compromise their education by choosing "easy" subjects. In contrast, a field trip was seen more as a recreational activity by older children, and thus within the bounds of children's personal choice.

The findings of the research on personal choice, autonomy, and civil liberties show that young children develop notions of personal autonomy, which they use to ground emerging concepts of political and civil rights such as freedom of speech and religion. Interestingly, younger children sometimes seem to overapply their notions of personal choice and autonomy, leading them to assert their autonomy in areas where older children or adults often do not (e.g., as in decisions about religious membership in the family or about curriculum in the school context). The findings, therefore, show a complex pattern where children develop concepts of autonomy at an early age and become increasingly sophisticated with development about the conditions under which autonomy should and should not be asserted. In some cases, this may even lead to situations where children assert or attempt to claim autonomy over areas where it may not be developmentally appropriate for them to exercise it.

## Conclusion

The findings of the extensive body of research we have reviewed lead to a picture of children's social and moral development as entailing the construction of distinct domains of judgment through their social interactions. Children distinguish between different types of social rules and construct domains of moral, social conventional, and personal concepts. Children take into account the consequences of actions on others and construct concepts of harm, fairness, and rights, which they use to evaluate individual actions, social rules, and social systems. Neither young children's social judgments nor their social relations can be characterized in unitary terms as reflecting heteronomy or unilateral constraint. Rather, children's social judgments are heterogeneous and differentiated by domain, and their social interactions are characterized by both relations of cooperation and conflict, with peers and authority figures, throughout development. Accounting for the different kinds of social interactions children experience, and the concepts they construct from these experiences, is an important task for an understanding of children's social and moral judgments and behavior.

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