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CONSCIENCE AND MORAL DEVELOPMENT

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[In this Note on Moral Theology the author describes recent discussions on conscience and moral development. The first section distinguishes different aspects of conscience; the second sketches topics in moral and psychological development, particularly the difficulties engendered by two widely accepted accounts of moral development by Lawrence Kohlberg and Carol Gilligan; the third section considers the emerging literature on moral and spiritual practices.]

CONSCIENCE HAS BEEN DESCRIBED as "that still small voice that makes you feel smaller still." The term is used in two senses: "anterior conscience" for all the searching and deliberation that leads up to a moral decision, and "subsequent conscience" that reflects back on decisions we have made. When we say, "My conscience is bothering me about that," we are referring to subsequent conscience. I focus here on anterior conscience.

Conscience eludes precise definition, just like rationality, emotion, and choice. Let me first rule out some common misunderstandings. Conscience is not a separate faculty of the mind. It is a human process of assessment and judgment and not the authoritative voice of God. Vatican II correctly notes that "their conscience is people's most secret core, and their sanctuary. There they are alone with God whose voice echoes in their depths."[1]

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[1] *Gaudium et spes,* Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, no. 16 (*Vatican II,* ed. Austin Flannery, inclusive language ed. [Northport, N.Y.: Costello, 1996]). See also Josef Fuchs, S.J., "Conscience and Conscientious Fidelity," in *Moral Theology: Challenges for the Future: Essays in Honor of Richard A. McCormick, S.J.,* ed. Charles Curran (New York: Paulist, 1990) 108–24; and John Webster, "God and Conscience," *Calvin Theological Journal* 33 (1998) 104–24. For a brief account of conscience in moral theology, see Richard M. Gula, "Conscience," in *Christian Ethics: An Introduction,* ed. Bernard Hoose (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1998) 110–122; Charles E. Curran, *The Catholic Moral Tradition Today: A Synthesis* (Washington: Georgetown University, 1999) 172–90; also Robert J. Smith, *Con-*

God's voice may add resonance to our deepest reflections but it does not bypass them with direct dictation. Conscience is not merely a social construction, because, just as the conscience of Antigone, it can recognize a higher claim that exposes the pretensions of tyranny and oppressive social conventions. At the same time, conscience is not that place where the sovereign individual stands over against the inevitable tyranny of the group. Etymologically, conscience breaks down to "con" and "scientia," that is "with-knowing." This moral knowledge is self-reflexive and socially connected, knowing that is accountable to my deepest self, to human communities, and ultimately to God. Larger purposes and standards beyond the self exert their moral tug on the individual through conscience. Loyalty to those purposes inevitably relates the conscientious person to others in common cause and mutual accountability.[2] Since these communal claims can be deceptive, they must be measured against the truth that is known in the heart and before God.

Conscience is not a distinct faculty, because it integrates a whole range of mental operations. Sidney Callahan provides a useful definition: "conscience is a personal, self-conscious activity integrating reason, emotion, and will in self-committed decisions about right and wrong, good and evil."[3] Conscience begins in initial sensitivity to moral salience and moves to conscious empathy. Mulling its options, conscience engages in "cross-checking" of critical thought, empirical possibilities, affective valence, imaginatively grasped analogies, intuitive insight, and social corroboration. Reason tutors emotion and emotion instructs reason; intuition is measured against remembered experience; imagination projects possible scenarios that are evaluated by affective resonance and critical reflection. All of these operations lead up to the act of making a moral judgment with as much freedom and commitment as we can muster. No amount of elaborate cross-checking can manufacture self-commitment.[4] Finally, conscience produces more than individual decisions; it enters into the self-constitution

science and Catholicism: The Nature and Function of Conscience in Contemporary Roman Catholic Moral Theology (Lanham, Md: University Press of America, 1998).

[2] See Josiah Royce, *The Philosophy of Loyalty* (New York: Macmillan, 1909) and H. Richard Niebuhr, *Radical Monotheism and Western Culture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970). On the general notion of conscience, see Philippe Delhaye, *The Christian Conscience* (New York: Desclée, 1968); Walter E. Conn, *Conscience: Development and Self-Transcendence* (Birmingham: Religious Education, 1981); William Schweiker, *Responsibility and Christian Ethics* (New York: Cambridge University, 1995) 70–75, 152–59, 175–85.

[3] Sidney Callahan, *In Good Conscience: Reason and Emotion in Moral Decision Making* (San Francisco: Harpercollins, 1991) 14.

[4] Recent neuroscience describes the integration of image, affect, and concept in mental functioning that supports this method of cross-checking in moral delibera-

of the person over time. Moral choices shape the character of the one who makes them insofar as they integrate personal character or retard moral development.[5] We become what we do.

ASPECTS OF CONSCIENCE

Moral theologian Timothy O'Connell distinguishes three meanings of anterior conscience which can be called conscience as capacity, as process, and as judgment.[6]

Humans have the *capacity* to determine right from wrong and to recognize moral claims upon them. Apart from those who are brain-damaged or pathological, humans have this capacity for responsibility as part of the equipment of their species. Possessing the ability, however, does not guarantee its proper exercise any more than possessing reason makes one consistently rational. Despite the skepticism of postmodernism, there is considerable evidence for a common human morality. Humans live under analogous moral systems and can argue about moral issues across cultural and linguistic boundaries. We condemn the atrocities in Kosovo as violations of human dignity; they cannot be excused as customary Balkan behavior.

Conscience also involves a practical *process.* It seeks to determine the right and appropriate action in particular situations. Perceiving moral salience and the ability to take the perspective of others into account prompt this reflection.[7] Depending upon the complexity of the moral situation, we

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tion. See Antonio Damasio, *Descartes' Error* (New York: G. P. Putnum's Sons, 1994) and Timothy O'Connell's discussion of his findings in *Making Disciples: A Handbook of Christian Moral Formation* (New York: Crossroad, 1998) 65–70.

[5] For a good overview of the recent literature, see Johannes A. van der Ven, *Formation of the Moral Self* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

[6] Timothy E. O'Connell, *Principles for a Catholic Morality,* rev. ed. (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1990) 110–14.

[7] Considerable research has been done on perspective-taking as the basis of moral empathy; see R. B. Cialdini, S. L. Brown, B. P. Lewis, C. Luce, and S. L. Neuberg, "Reinterpreting the Empathy Altruism Relationship: When One into One Equals Oneness," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 73 (1997) 481–94; M. H. Davis, L. Conklin, A. Smith, and C. Luce, "Effect of Perspective Taking on the Cognitive Representation of Persons: A Merging of Self and Other," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 70 (1996) 713–26; P. A. Oswald, "The Effects of Cognitive and Affective Perspective Taking on Empathic Concern and Altruistic Helping," *Journal of Social Psychology* 136 (1996) 613–23; S. Camel and S. Glick, "Compassionate-Empathic Physicians: Personality Traits and Social-Organizations Factors that Enhance or Inhibit this Behavior Pattern," *Social Science of Medicine* 43 (1996) 1253–61; N. A. Spilling, "Counseling and Social Role-Taking: Promoting Moral and Ego Development," in *Moral Development in the Professions: Psychology and Applied Ethics,* ed. James R. Rest and Darcia Navarez

strive to clarify matters by determining our options, assessing their relative moral worth, imagining consequences, seeking advice, recalling relevant standards and comparable experiences. We do not follow a set sequence in moral reflection but a more circular path that tests one source against another. Because this process integrates so many different aspects of the person it cannot be capsulized into a formula or technique.[8] In order to deliberate wisely and accurately we need specific skills: honest searching for the facts, prudent reflection, a willingness to entertain dissenting opinions and unpleasant consequences, acknowledgment of personal bias and fallibility. These skills of conscience as process are rooted in the deeper aspects of conscience as capacity. They depend upon the degree of personal maturity, emotional stability, social awareness, and the virtuous or vicious habits that define the agent's character.

Eventually the process of conscientious deliberation comes to the point of decision, a *judgment* that embraces the truth that some course of action ought to be followed. As Callahan writes: "We commit outselves in wholehearted decisions of conscience when we achieve a fully congruent, reflective equilibrium of reason, intuition, and emotion. The picture finally comes into focus. After a fully personal engagement, there is nothing held back, suppressed, or untested in the struggle. We act at full capacity, as morally competent as we can be."[9] The truth discovered in the process of deliberation makes a claim upon us. We have found the right thing to do, or the more morally compelling course, or the least harmful of the available options. Traditional moral theology insisted that even an objectively erroneous conscience still obliges the person.[10] Failing to obey the claim that we have come to recognize would violate our personal integrity. At times we consciously choose what to do; at other times we recognize that the choice has already been made. The skills of acting well can be distinguished from the skills of reflecting well. To decide to act on one's conscience calls for another set of virtues: resoluteness, courage, persistence, and passionate attachment to the moral good.

Hasty and poorly informed processes of deliberation can produce judgments that are held with great conviction. Nevertheless, we can always ask

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(Hillsdale, N.J.: Erlbaum, 1994) 85–99. For a fuller treatment see Arne Johan Vertelsen, *Perception, Empathy and Judgment: An Inquiry into the Preconditions of Moral Performance* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 1994) 153–218.

[8] See Richard M. Gula, S.S., *Moral Discernment* (New York: Paulist, 1997).

[9] Ibid. 137. For a logical defense of probabilism in the operation of conscience, see Walter Redmond, "Conscience as Moral Judgment," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 26 (1998) 389–405.

[10] See Bernard Häring, *Free and Faithful in Christ: Moral Theology for Clergy and Laity* 1 (New York: Seabury, 1978) 239–42.

someone to rethink his or her judgment, because the process of making the decision is always fallible. Questioning the discernment and deliberation that led up to a decision does not violate the integrity of the person who made it. What happens when people claim that conscience dictates actions that will be seriously harmful to others? If they cannot be persuaded to reconsider the matter, they should be prevented from acting on their conscience.

SOCIAL DIMENSION OF CONSCIENCE

Conscience relies on the moral quality of the groups to which we belong. We gain our moral bearings from the communities we are born into and deliberately choose, beginning with family and extending to peers, other adults, religious and professional communities. We carry their voices in our heads, for better and for worse. Recent research indicates that people identify with those values and principles that are supported by communities that matter to them. O'Connell writes in his recent work on moral formation that we live up or down to the standards of the groups to which we belong: "the more my relationships depend on my having a particular role, the more that role will be central to me. And the more a particular role is central to me, the greater the likelihood that in role-related settings I will behave in accord with that role."[11] His investigation of psychological and sociological resources leads him to a clear conclusion: "values are transmitted through groups."[12] In groups we find our identity and the inspiration and accountability to lead a moral life. Ministers who prefer one-to-one interaction with individuals may be less effective in forming Christian conscience. "Much more important are those interventions that join people not to the minister but to one another, and that is the sort of activity that most ministers enjoy less."[13]

Developmental psychologist William Damon writes:

> In the end we must help our communities recapture what sociologist Amitai Etzioni refers to as their "moral voices". . . . Etzioni shows how our modern-day disinclination to "lay moral claims" has eroded the routine moral reactions of our communities and their members. He offers a compelling example of a psychiatrist who argues that doctors should not ask someone to make a risk-free bone marrow donation in order to save a sibling, because refusing to do so might produce guilt in the person who was asked and refused. Etzioni's reply: "If they refuse, they *should* feel guilty."[14]

[11] O'Connell, *Making Disciples* 98.

[12] Ibid. 170.

[13] Ibid. 172.

[14] William Damon, *Greater Expectations: Overcoming the Culture of Indulgence in America's Homes and Schools* (New York: Free, 1995) 236, citing A. Etzioni, *The*

Society is deprived of a crucial moral resource when families and communities fail to provide models of sound values and hide behind value neutrality.[15] The aimlessness and cynicism of some young people may say less about them than it does about their parents and the other adults in their world.[16] Families can help their children learn how to reflect morally by engaging them in discussions about real life issues in an encouraging manner. One study found that this style "includes behaviors such as eliciting the child's opinion, asking clarifying questions, paraphrasing, and checking for understanding—reminiscent of the Socratic style of questioning."[17]

David Popenoe traces the decline of social virtue to deficiencies in the family and the institutions and communities that had supported families in the past. "The central significance of the community for moral development is this: moral development in children takes place in part through repetition and reinforcement, and through adapting fundamental moral values to a variety of social circumstances beyond the family."[18] When the child begins to move beyond the family, other institutions need to reinforce the values learned at home. Communities where similar standards are echoed in schools, teams, youth groups, and other associations form the most stable characters in the young. Popenoe, who has studied family systems in several cultures and paid special attention to the effect of absent fathers, offers this bracing advice to those who want to support social virtues: "As individuals, we should seek to stay married, stay accessible to our children, stay active in our local communities, and stay put."[19] A study of ten communities over a decade found that adolescent adjustment depends more upon a local consensus of values than any other predictor,

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Spirit of Community: Rights, Responsibilities, and the Communitarian Agenda (New York: Crown, 1993) 35.

[15] The importance of moral modeling in social learning is developed in Albert Bandura, *Social Foundations of Thought and Action: A Social Cognitive Theory* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1986).

[16] The impact of divorce, for example, on children appears more profound and lasting than has been previously acknowledged; see Judith Wallerstein and Sandra Blakeslee, *Second Chances: Men, Women and Children a Decade After Divorce* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1996).

[17] Lawrence A. Walker and John H. Taylor, "Family Interactions and the Development of Moral Reasoning," *Child Development* 62 (1991) 264–81, at 280.

[18] David Popenoe, "The Roots of Declining Social Virtue" in *Seedbeds of Virtue: Sources of Competence, Character, and Citizenship in American Society,* ed. Mary Ann Glendon and David Blankenhorn (New York: Madison Books, 1995) 71–104 at 82.

[19] Ibid. 98; see also D. Popenoe, "American Family Decline, 1960–1990: A Review and Appraisal," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 55 (1993) 527–42.

including wealth or ethnicity.[20] This consensus is not often found in diverse modern societies, particularly when contrary values are supported in mass media.

Consciences are dulled when the young are not taught an adequate moral vocabulary and when moral debate is "dumbed down" into the vocabularies of self-interest and utilitarian advantage.[21] Mass media creates a pseudo community, particularly in the various forms of "youth culture." We are just beginning to appreciate the moral impact of the eighteen thousand hours of television that the average American youngster has seen by age eighteen. Sissela Bok argues persuasively that television's relentless depiction of violence as entertainment desensitizes habitual viewers to its human consequences.[22] Mass media creates certain expectations in the young which are often impervious to moral scrutiny or criticism. For all these reasons, conscience-formation is a more formidable task than it was when surrounding institutions reinforced the values inculcated in a stable home.

ISSUES IN MORAL DEVELOPMENT

Moral development is a perennial concern of moral philosophy and theology, but in recent decades it has gained attention from psychological research and debates over the role of public schools in shaping the values and behavior of students. William Bennett, Thomas Lickona and other advocates of traditional morality decry the public school's abandonment of explicit moral instruction.[23] They point out that American public education had always aimed at moral formation. The 19th century's *McGuffey's Readers* focused on biblical narratives and moral lessons to train dutiful citizens for a Protestant nation. Later, John Dewey strove to inculcate the

[20] See Francis A. J. Ianni, *The Search for Structure: A Report on American Youth Today* (New York: Free, 1989).

[21] See Robert N. Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley: University of California, 1985)

[22] See Sissela Bok, *Mayhem: Violence as Public Entertainment* (Reading, Mass: Addison-Wesley, 1998).

[23] See William J. Bennett, *The Book of Virtue: A Treasury of Great Moral Stories* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993) and his *The Moral Compass* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995); Thomas Lickona, *Educating for Character: How Our Schools Can Teach Respect and Responsibility* (New York: Bantam, 1991); Kevin Ryan and E. A. Wynn, *Reclaiming Our Schools: A Handbook on Teaching Character, Academics, and Discipline* (New York: Merrill, 1992); Kevin Ryan and Karen Bohlin, *Building Character in Schools* (San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 1999).

virtues of democracy through collaborative "progressive education."[24] A number of dissenting voices, however, argue that there is little evidence to indicate that schools can teach moral principles or stimulate moral development in the young.[25]

Mary Ann Glendon writes that democratic culture relies on civic virtues that have to be inculcated in every generation: "The American version of the democratic experiment leaves it primarily up to families, local governments, schools, religious and workplace associations, and a host of other voluntary groups to teach and transmit republican virtues and skills from one generation to the next."[26] Whether schools, especially public schools, can shoulder this responsibility today is an open question. Robert D. Heslep has made a comprehensive proposal for moral education based on civic values that are central to the American polity.[27] Although early education may have the most formative impact on students' moral character, some evidence exists that undergraduates are still shaping their value systems, while this openness may diminish for students in graduate and professional schools.[28]

Psychological studies of moral development take two different directions, from the past and from the future. The first views human development as primarily remedial. Growth into healthy, mature adulthood comes through gradually rectifying the traumatic events of infancy and childhood. This therapeutic model typically leaves the profile of moral maturity sketchy, perhaps in deference to the multiple life plans available in a pluralistic culture. Particularly for neo-Freudians, most moral formation occurs in the first decade of life, and much of it is negative. The problems of adult life can be traced back to the struggle of the child to differentiate from his or her parents sexually, morally, and psychologically. Here authentic conscience needs to be discovered beneath the tyranny of the superego that employs guilt and shame to repress the unruly id and reinforce

[24] See Robert B. Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University, 1991).

[25] See Robert J. Nash, *Answering the Virtuecrats: A Moral Conversation on Character Education* (New York: Teachers College, 1997).

[26] Mary Ann Glendon, "Introduction: Forgotten Questions," in Glendon and Blakenhorn, *Seedbeds of Virtue* 1–16, at 2.

[27] Robert D. Heslep, *Moral Education for Americans* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1995); see also Jacques S. Benninga, *Moral, Character, and Civic Education in the Elementary School* (New York: Teachers College, 1991).

[28] See John R. Wilcox and Susan L. Ebbs, *The Leadership Compass: Values and Ethics in Higher Education,* ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report 1 (Washington: George Washington University, 1992) and Sharon Daloz Parks, "Is It Too Late? Young Adults and the Formation of Professional Ethics," in *Can Ethics Be Taught?,* ed. Thomas R. Piper, Mary C. Gentile, and Sharon Daloz Parks (Boston: Harvard Business School, 1993) 13–72.

conventional morality. Problems of adult gender identity originate in the different forms of attachment that boys and girls have with the primary care giver, usually their mother.[29] Recently a more romantic form of this remedial approach is taken by the popular literature that urges adults to rediscover their "inner child" in order to unleash their native powers of growth.[30] Analyses of contemporary moral behavior based upon evolutionary psychology[31] and primatology also take their cues from the more remote past.[32]

Generally, however, moral development looks more to the future for guidance. In Aristotelian terms, all natural growth is directed by the final cause, the perfected state of the entity. Human nature has innate potentials and inclinations to develop towards moral maturity, granted education and proper choice. The state of human flourishing that is found in the virtuous measures the intermediate stages. Although various thinkers and cultures depict human flourishing differently, naturalist ethics almost always posits some general features of individual and social maturity that normatively guide appropriate human growth.

American psychological research on moral development has until recently been dominated by Harvard's Lawrence Kohlberg and his disciples, in particular his former colleague who emerged as his foremost critic, Carol Gilligan. Considerable writing in women's studies and feminist ethics have been based on her work. It is sobering to realize how much of American research and writing on moral development over the past 30 years has been constructed on the work of Kohlberg and Gilligan with little or no awareness of the significant limitations of their theories about morality.

Resisting Freudian dogma on childhood formation and the ethical emotivism and behaviorism that were prevalent in the 1960s, Kohlberg posited

[29] For an overview, see Guyton B. Hammond, *Conscience and Its Recovery: From the Frankfurt School to Feminism* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1993). He examines the influential works of Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley: University of California, 1978) and Jessica Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Problem of Domination* (New York: Pantheon, 1988).

[30] See Alice Miller, *The Drama of the Gifted Child* (New York: Basic Books, 1981).

[31] William Damon argues for the natural inclinations towards empathy, fairness, etc., in children in *The Moral Child: Nurturing Children's Natural Moral Growth* (New York: Free, 1988).

[32] See Robert Wright, *The Moral Animal: The New Science of Evolutionary Psychology* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1994); David Buss, *The Evolution of Desire: Strategies of Human Mating* (New York: Basic Books, 1994); James Q. Wilson, *The Moral Sense* (New York: Free, 1993); Stephen J. Post, *The Evolution of Altruism and the Ordering of Love* (Washington: Georgetown University, 1994).

a highly rational model of moral reflection.[33] He derived a sequence of six stages of moral development from the stages of cognitive development outlined by Jean Piaget, whose work had recently been discovered by American psychologists.[34] If children progressively learned to incorporate the structures of causality, space, time, and the like into their thinking, Kohlberg reasoned, they should also progressively move to understand and employ the analogous universal moral structures. They would move from pre-conventional morality based on fear or shame to more conventional motives based on self-interest and peer respect.[35] The higher stages of morality would be post-conventional since the mature person comes to acknowledge moral obligations as autonomous claims. The final stage set the goal for moral development: acting according to universal moral principles for the good of humanity.[36]

Philosophically, Kohlberg adopted a form of Kantian ethics in which obligation is central and moral claims are properly autonomous, that is, based on universalizable duties rather than on any emotive incentive or practical consequence. He grounded morality simply and exclusively on justice, that is, the fair and rational treatment accorded to others as equals and asserted that virtue is one and "the name of this ideal form is justice."[37] He concluded that there is an invariant, cross-cultural sequence in moral development that was attained step by step, with no regression to previous stages or straddling of the levels of moral reasoning.[38]

Why concentrate on moral reasoning? In part, because verbally expressed rational skills are more accessible to measurement than the more interior dynamics of emotion, intuition, and imagination. Kohlberg's model permitted researchers to ignore the elusive arenas of moral sensitivity to

[33] See Joseph Reimer, "The Case of the Missing Family: Kohlberg and the Study of Adolescent Moral Development," in *Approaches to Moral Development: New Research and Emerging Themes,* ed. Andrew Garrod (New York: Teachers College, 1993) 91–102.

[34] Jean Piaget, *The Moral Judgment of the Child* (New York: Free Press, 1965).

[35] John Kekes questions this denigration of moral traditions in favor of autonomous reasoning that purports to transcend them; see his *A Case for Conservatism* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University, 1998).

[36] See Lawrence Kohlberg, *The Philosophy of Moral Development: Essays on Moral Development* 1 (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981) and 2 (Harper & Row, 1984).

[37] Kohlberg, *Philosophy of Moral Development* 1.30–31.

[38] It would be an understatement to say that developmental psychologists welcomed this model. It promised a scientific (that is, "measurable") rationale for morality and it could explain moral variety without appealing to relativism. Moral disagreements arise from the conflicting perspectives held by persons at different stages of moral development. At best, people can grasp the moral point of view of the next stage beyond them, but they find more sophisticated perspectives unintelligible.

interpersonal and social complexities, intuitive judgments, moral dispositions, and character as the basis of action.[39]

Unfortunately this whole movement appears to be based on flawed empirical and philosophical assumptions. Empirical evidence showed that infants are not as egocentric as Piaget and Kohlberg posited. Martin L. Hoffmann argued that children experience claims upon them that cannot be accounted for by rewards and punishments. Even though they are unable to articulate those claims verbally, one-year old infants typically display rudimentary forms of empathy and two year olds become aware of rules.[40] Interview results challenged Kohlberg's insistence on "hard stages" since "most children mix responses from the second and third stages, and most adults mix responses from states 3 and 4," writes psychologist Owen Flanagan.[41] Even by Kohlberg's measure, almost no one attains the highest stage of moral development, and "on the new scoring system the highest stage has *no* empirically confirmed instances."[42]

Philosophically, Kohlberg's instrument appears narrow and rigid. Are all moral encounters and concerns reducible to fairness and impartiality? Consider relations between friends or family members: while fairness is a consideration, it cannot possibly be the sole guide. Does it make any sense to counsel a mother to treat her children solely according to what duty requires of her? Flanagan concludes that there is no "universal and irreversible sequence of stages according to which moral personality unfolds and against which moral maturity can be unequivocally plotted."[43]

Even staunch advocates of Kohlberg's approach now concede that moral sensitivity, motivation, and character must be studied as well as moral

[39] Ernest T. Pascarella writes that "although principled moral reasoning is the focus of nearly all the research on the impact of college on moral development, it does not encompass the full range of moral development" ("College's Influence on Principled Moral Reasoning," *Educational Record* [1997] 47–55, at 50). See also Norma Haan, Elaine Aerts, and Bruce A.B. Cooper, *On Moral Grounds: the Search for Practical Morality* (New York: New York University, 1985).

[40] See Martin L. Hoffman, "Empathy, Role-taking, Guilt, and Development of Altruistic Motives," in *Moral Development and Behavior,* ed. Thomas Lickona (New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1976) 129–30; M. Hoffman, "Affect and Moral Development," in *New Directions for Child Development* 16, ed. D. Cicchetti and P. Hesse (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1982). Also see *The Emergence of Morality in Young Children,* ed. Jerome Kagan and Sharon Lamb (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1987).

[41] Owen Flanagan, *Varieties of Moral Personality: Ethics and Psychological Realism* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1991) 187.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Ibid. 195. Five years later, Flanagan called Kohlberg's theory "a dismal failure, an utterly degenerate research program despite many true believers" (Owen Flanagan, *Self-Expression: Mind, Morals, and the Meaning of Life* [New York: Oxford University, 1996] 138).

judgment.[44] Finally, neither Kohlberg nor his followers have successfully demonstrated that clear thinking produces morally right conduct. In fact, research done on the cognitive processes of real-life moral virtuosos finds them scoring mostly at the level of conventional morality, a finding that calls into question the whole industry of testing and moral education inspired by Kohlberg.[45]

More generally, this debate raises the question of whether any descriptive account of moral experience can ever rise to the level of a normative account.[46] Even the descriptions of moral development will be selected according to some conception of an end state that itself exercises normative influence, whether acknowledged or not. Referring to the desirable condition as "maturity" or "health" begs the question, unless some definition of these terms is presented. Kohlberg's putatively descriptive sequence was deeply influenced by his stage 6 which was the very model of Kantian moral autonomy; he later expanded his ideal as a liberally democratic citizen along Rawlsian lines.[47]

Carol Gilligan's work on moral development suffers from similar reductionist tendencies. Her book *In a Different Voice* remains an academic bestseller nearly two decades after it appeared.[48] She challenged the rationalist and androcentric model of Kohlberg and proposed two seminal ideas: first, that there are two basic perspectives in moral reflection, one based on justice, the other on care; secondly, that men predominantly but not exclusively favor justice while women mostly prefer the care perspective. These ideas led to a vigorous academic debate about the adequacy of the care/justice hypothesis and a widespread assumption by many that Gilligan had demonstrated clear gender differences in moral reflection. Despite her caveats, her book was read not as a hypothesis about a differ-

[44] See James Rest, Lynne Edwards, Stephen Thoma, "Designing and Validating a Measure of Moral Judgment: Stage Preference and Stage Consistency Approaches" *Journal of Educational Psychology* 89 (1997) 5–28, at 5.

[45] William Damon, "The Moral Development of Children," *Scientific American* (August, 1999) 73–78; see also Anne Colby and William Damon, *Some Do Care: Contemporary Lives of Moral Commitment* (New York: Free, 1992).

[46] See Norma Haan, "Moral Development and Action from a Social Constructivist Perspective," in *Handbook of Moral Behavior,* ed. Krutines and Gewirtz 1.251–73. On the relation between social sciences and morality, see *The Moral Domain: Essays on the Ongoing Discussion between Philosophy and the Social Sciences,* ed. Thomas E. Wren (Cambridge: MIT, 1990); also Owen Flanagan, "Ethics Naturalized: Ethics as Human Ecology" in *Self-Expressions* 117–41 where he argues that "ethics naturalized is not ethics psychologized" (ibid. 117).

[47] See Donald R. C. Reed, *Following Kohlberg: Liberalism and the Practice of Democratic Community* (South Bend, Ind.: University of Notre Dame, 1997).

[48] Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1982, 1993); see Reed, *Following Kohlberg* 221–60.

ent voice but as proof that she had discovered the different voice of women. Gilligan's subsequent writings have not clarified the matter. A collection she edited "maps the moral domain" exclusively along the justice/care dichotomy, while conceding that men and women are not anchored in a single perspective.[49]

In the debate that followed, empirical evidence was advanced to assert that men and women do not in fact score differently on moral reasoning tests, even Kohlberg's.[50] Whether someone employs a care or justice perspective may have more to do with the nature of the problem presented than with the person's gender. In addition, men and women seem to switch readily from one perspective to another, with only minuscule groups of either gender using one perspective exclusively.[51]

There are more fundamental problems with the hypothesis of two moral voices that make the debates about measuring gender preferences moot. Why should all moral considerations have to be jammed under the rubrics of care or justice?[52] Lawrence A. Blum suggests that community, honesty, courage, prudence are equally important and not reducible to care and impartiality.[53]

Gilligan's original position and subsequent hypotheses rest on theories of childhood development, specifically Nancy Chodorow's neo-Freudian account of infant development that imprints a preference for separation on boys and attachment on girls. Gilligan later speculated that universal childhood experiences of powerlessness and attachment form the basis of the two voices and explains why people of both genders have access to each perspective.[54]

In terms of moral philosophy, there may be less to "care" than meets the eye. People can be caring toward some groups but indifferent toward oth-

[49] See Gilligan, "Remapping the Moral Domain: New Images in Self and Relationship," in *Mapping the Moral Domain: A Contribution of Women's Thinking to Psychological Theory and Education,* ed. Carol Gilligan, Janie Victoria Ward, Jill MacLean Taylor (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1988) 3–19, at 8.

[50] See Lawrence J, Walker, "Sex Difference in Moral Reasoning," in *Handbook of Moral Behavior and Development,* ed. Kurtines and Gewirtz, 2.333–64.

[51] See Linda K. Kerber et al., "On *In a Different Voice:* An Interdisciplinary Forum, "Signs 11 (1986) 304–33; also Helen Haste and Jane Baddeley, "Moral Theory and Culture: The Case of Gender," in *Handbook of Moral Behavior and Development* 1.223–49.

[52] See Owen Flanagan and Kathryn Jackson, "Justice, Care and Gender: the Kohlberg-Gilligan Debate Revisited," *Ethics* 97 (1987) 622–37.

[53] Lawrence A. Blum, "Gilligan and Kohlberg: Implications for Moral Theory," *Ethics* 98 (1988) 472–91, at 483.

[54] See Lawrence A. Blum, *Moral Perception and Particularity* (New York: Cambridge University, 1994) 237–67. He believes recognizing multiple moral perspectives will correct the tendency towards gender stereotyping that an uncritical reading of Gilligan has engendered (ibid. 258).

ers. Distinct moral understandings, habits, and emotions are involved in caring for intimates as compared to caring for strangers, likewise in caring for groups as compared to caring for individuals. Ordinary moral development gradually extends concern for one's closest connections to concern for strangers, including those affected by social arrangements. Justice and fairness might be considered components of this expanded caring rather than its alternatives. Marilyn Friedman charges that Gilligan treats relationships too individualistically by removing them from their institutional settings.[55] Kathryn Tanner reconstructs an ethics of care so that it is not confined to immediate relations or fall prey to a gender essentialism which she sees as flaws in Gilligan's approach.[56]

The popularity of Gilligan's binary model has not been diminished by its many critics. Nor has it been dimmed by her inability to chart a distinct developmental pattern for girls and women, a project she insisted was necessary before any further comparisons between the moral experience of men and women could be made.[57] This has not stopped them from being taken as canonical in some quarters. A recent textbook for graduate students in student development lists the many applications of her theory in teaching, social work, developmental psychology, moral and political philosophy, and student affairs.[58] While there is an intuitive plausibility to Gilligan's account, unfortunately her observations fall short of being empirically established or philosophically adequate.

PRACTICES AND MORAL DEVELOPMENT

Moral development has not yet become a major concern for virtue ethics, even though the topic was central to the moral philosophy of Aristotle,

[55] Marilyn Friedman, *What Are Friends For? Feminist Perspectives on Personal Relationships and Moral Theory* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University, 1993) 154. Perhaps the most sustained critique of Gilligan's work from a psychological perspective is found in Flanagan, *Varieties of Moral Personality* 196–252. Van der Ven discusses Kohlberg and Gilligan in *Formation of the Moral Self* 199–234 and also brings biblical moral perspectives into consideration, although one suspects that "love/justice" can be just as binary as "care/justice." See also Joy Kroeger-Mappes, "The Ethics of Care vis-à-vis the Ethic of Rights: A Problem for Contemporary Moral Theory," *Hypatia* 9 (1994) 108–31.

[56] Kathryn Tanner, "The Care That Does Justice: Recent Writings in Feminist Ethics and Theology," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 24 (1996) 171–91, at 188. See also *An Ethic of Care: Feminist and Interdisciplinary Perspectives,* ed. Mary Jeanne Larrabee (New York: Routledge, 1993); and Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen, Annelies Knoppers, Margaret Koch, Douglas Schuurman, and Helen Stark, *After Eden: Facing the Challenge of Gender Reconciliation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993).

[57] See Gilligan, "Adolescent Development Reconsidered" in *Moral Domain* xi–xxxviii.

[58] See Nancy J. Evans, Deanna S. Forney, Florence Guido-DiBrito, *Student Development in College: Theory, Research, and Practice* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998) 195–200.

the traditional source of much virtue ethics.[59] Psychologists concentrate more on the moral development of children than on that of adults.[60] Attention is being increasingly given to the role that moral "practices" play in the formation of virtue and adult character.

William Damon quotes Spinoza's aphorism, "The palace of reasoning may be entered only through the courtyard of habit."[61] The importance of practices in the formation of virtuous habits has gained increasing attention since Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue.*[62] In his usage, practices are socially established activities that lead those who participate in them to appreciate certain things as goods and to internalize standards of excellence in achieving them. Practices are done for their own sake, such as friendship, not for additional ends, such as practicing free throws in basketball. Martha Nussbaum recommends the engaged reading of literature as a practice that expands moral perception and empathy. This skill is a necessary component of humanistic education, even for lawyers and scientists.[63] Diana Fritz Cates argues that the practice of committed friendship trains desires and moral vision in the virtue of compassion. The willingness to engage others, even strangers, in their suffering gains added meaning as a practice within a Christian frame of reference.[64]

[59] For example, note the lack of focus on developing moral habits in the otherwise excellent anthology *Virtue Ethics: A Critical Reader,* Daniel Statman, ed., (Washington: Georgetown University, 1997). Notable exceptions are N. J. H. Dent, *The Moral Psychology of the Virtues* (New York: Cambridge University, 1984) and David Carr, *Educating the Virtues: An Essay on the Philosophical Psychology of Moral Development and Education* (New York: Routledge, 1991).

[60] For a survey of the field, see William Damon, *The Moral Child.* Also Susanne Denham, *Emotional Development in Young Children* (New York: Guilford, 1998) and *What Develops in Emotional Development?,* ed. Michael F. Mascolo and Sharon Griffin (New York: Plenum, 1998).

[61] Damon, *Moral Child,* 142 (no reference to Spinoza).

[62] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1981) 169–89; see David Miller, "Virtues, Practices and Justice" in *After MacIntyre: Critical Perspectives on the Work of Alasdair MacIntyre,* ed. John Horton and Susan Mendus (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1994); Elizabeth Frazer and Nicola Lacey, "MacIntyre, Feminism and the Concept of Practice," ibid. 265–82.

[63] See Martha C. Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1997), esp. 85–112; and her *Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life* (Boston: Beacon, 1995); see also, Vigen Guroian, *Tending the Heart of Virtue: How Classic Stories Awaken a Child's Moral Imagination* (New York: Oxford, 1998); Lee H. Yearley, "Selves, Virtues, Odd Genres, and Alien Guides," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 25 Supplement (1998) 127–55; see also Diana Fritz Cates, "Ethics, Literature, and the Emotional Dimension of Understanding," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 26 (1998) 409–31.

[64] Diana Fritz Cates, *Choosing to Feel: Virtue, Friendship, and Compassion for Friends* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1997). On how different forms of

Maria Antonaccio describes recent attention to "practices" as conscious efforts at moral formation.[65] She distinguishes between an "existential" model of *askesis* advocated by Pierre Hadot's study of Stoic sources, a "therapeutic" model in Nussbaum, and an "aesthetic" approach in Michel Foucault.[66] Antonaccio doubts that these attempts to ground moral development in practical exercises can succeed while their authors refuse to consider a normative theory of human nature and moral ideals. Although theories of human nature or development are unpopular in an era that stresses particularity and pluralism, she writes that "some form of theoretical reflection is necessary in order to judge what form of 'therapy' human beings need, and to assess critically the processes of formation already underway."[67]

Some writings on practices use a faith tradition to specify a normative view of human nature that guides moral and spiritual development. Spiritual practices are being recognized as central to Christian moral formation. Dorothy C. Bass edited a collection of essays on 12 central Christian practices, such as hospitality, keeping Sabbath, and forgiveness, that shape the mind and heart in the Christian way of life.[68] With Craig Dykstra she writes that "when we see some of our ordinary activities as Christian practices, we come to perceive how *our daily lives are all tangled up with the things God is doing in the world.*"[69] Catherine M. Wallace analyzes the virtue of fidelity as a constitutive element of the practice of marriage. Fidelity has more than instrumental value in keeping a marriage intact; more importantly, it does something to the spouses by training their desires and reshaping their identities over time.[70]

From the perspective of evangelical Christianity, Brad J. Kallenberg

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love are formative practices, see Caroline J. Simon, *The Disciplined Heart: Love, Destiny and Imagination* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997).

[65] Maria Antoncaccio, "Contemporary Forms of *Askesis* and the Return of Spiritual Exercises," *The Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* 18 (1998) 69–92.

[66] See Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault,* ed. Arnold I. Davidson (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1995); Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1994); Michael Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* 2: *The Use of Pleasure* (New York: Random House, 1985) and *The History of Sexuality* 3: *The Care of the Self* (New York: Random House, 1986).

[67] Antonaccio, "Contemporary Forms of *Askesis*" 86.

[68] *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People,* ed. Dorothy C. Bass (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997).

[69] Ibid. 6–8.

[70] Catherine M. Wallace, *For Fidelity: How Intimacy and Commitment Enrich Our Lives* (New York: Random House, 1998). Also Joseph J. Kotva, Jr., "The Formation of Pastors, Parishoners, and Problems: A Virtue Reframing of Clergy Ethics," *Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* 17 (1997) 272–90.

writes: "Christianity cannot be explained or understood without reference to a distinctive cluster of practices. In order to participate in the tradition called Christianity one must necessarily participate in these practices."[71] He highlights certain practices of community moral formation: witness, worship, works of mercy, discernment, and discipleship. Reinhard Hutter points out that Luther redefined the marks of the Church to be practices. There is an invariant inner circle of practices that constitute community life and a more adaptable outer circle of practices that give witness and service to the world.[72]

It may be that the ordinary practices of Christian spirituality provide means of moral formation that will not be found in philosophical virtue ethics.[73] Since philosophers are wary about endorsing any particular way of life, their accounts of virtue and character may inevitably remain somewhat formal.[74] Christian spirituality, by comparison, has developed a whole series of practices that are meant to help individuals and communities develop in a particular way of life. At the same time, looking at the internal standards of excellence embedded in the practice and measuring it against biblical and communal wisdom can keep Christian spirituality from becoming narcissistic pietism.[75]

[71] Brad J. Kallenberg, "The Master Argument of MacIntyre's *After Virtue,*" in *Virtues and Practices in the Christian Tradition: Christian Ethics After MacIntyre,* ed. Nancey Murphy, Brad J. Kallenberg and Mark Thiessen Nation (Harrisburg, Penn.: Trinity International, 1997) 7–29, at 22.

[72] Reinhard Hutter, "The Church as Public: Dogma, Practice, and the Holy Spirit," *Pro Ecclesia* 3 (1994) 352–57, at 355. See also Martha Ellen Stortz, "Practicing Christians: Prayer as Formation," in *The Promise of Lutheran Ethics,* ed. Karen L. Bloomquist and John R. Stumme (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998) 55–73.

[73] I make a more extended argument that spiritual practices form the link between Scripture and the moral formation of Christians in my *Go and Do Likewise: Jesus and Ethics* (New York: Continuum, 1999).

[74] See John Kekes, *Moral Wisdom and Good Lives* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University, 1995).

[75] Not all spiritual practices have this normative context; see Robert Wuthnow, *After Heaven: Spirituality in America Since the 1950's* (Berkeley: University of California, 1998).