Morality across Cultures: A Value Perspective

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Morality, like art, means drawing a line someplace. —Oscar Wilde

Theories of moral development and moral reasoning have long emphasized universal principles that are common to all people in all societies. A growing body of research indicates, however, that universality in some aspects of morality is accompanied by important cultural differences (see Miller, 2006, for a review). What is judged to be morally reprehensible in one culture may be judged as irrelevant to morality in another culture, and criteria that determine the severity of moral infractions depend on specific cultural contexts. Thus, considering Oscar Wilde’s famous statement about morality, quoted above, morality is comparable to art not just because it necessitates "drawing a line someplace" but also because, like art, morality may consist of different lines or arrangement of lines that result in different images.

Recent advances in research on personal values can contribute to a deeper understanding of individual and cultural differences in moral outlooks. Like moral principles, values are
conceptions of the desirable that guide the way people behave, evaluate other people and events, and explain choices and actions. Values reflect what people believe to be good or bad, and what should or should not be done (Hitlin & Piliavin, 2004). Values, however, are not identical to moral principles: They are cognitive representations of basic motivations and broad personal goals. Therefore, they may refer to a broader spectrum of guiding principles than what is usually encompassed by theories of morality.

In this chapter we seek to integrate insights derived from research on values and research on morality to achieve a better understanding of the motivational underpinnings of individual and cultural differences in moral outlook. We discuss the commonalities and differences between values and moral principles. We then apply the values perspective to organize different models of morality. We review past research on cross cultural differences in morality and show how values contribute to understanding them. Finally, we outline future directions for research integrating values and morality.

**Values and the Moral Domain: Guiding Principles versus Moral Principles**

Personal values are broad socially desirable goals that vary in their importance and serve as guiding principles in people’s lives. They are the combined product of socialization, unique personal experiences, and genetic heritage (Knafo et al., 2008; Schermer, Feather, Zhu, & Martin, 2008). People in a particular society share some important values, but they also vary considerably in their personal value hierarchies.

Values and moral principles are similar in important respects: Like moral principles, values are used as criteria to select, evaluate, and justify actions, people, and events (e.g., Cushman, Young, & Hauser, 2006; Roccas & Sagiv, 2009; Schwartz, 1992). Both values and moral principles transcend specific circumstances. Thus, for example, striving for success in life is a
value, whereas seeking to obtain a high grade on an exam is a specific goal (Roccas, Sagiv, Schwartz, & Knafo, 2002). Similarly, not harming others is a moral principle, but avoiding hurting one's friend during a game is a specific goal. Like moral principles, values are inherently socially desirable: Most individuals in most societies agree that they are right, good, and worthy (Schwartz, 1992). Finally, multiple conflicting moral principles and multiple conflicting values may be relevant to a behavioral choice. Thus, sometimes one's choices entail resolving a conflict between important values (Schwartz, 1992; Tetlock, 1986) or moral principles (Miller & Bersoff, 1992).

Values and moral principles differ, however, in an important way: The morality domain is delimitated. According to classical views of morality, a social infraction is judged to be a moral violation only if it infringes on an objective obligation – one that is independent of specific social consensus and personal preferences (e.g., Bersoff & Miller, 1993; Miller, Bersoff, & Harwood, 1990; Turiel, 1983, see Smetana, 2006, for a review). Thus, for example, murder is viewed as belonging to the moral domain, because the judgment that it is wrong is independent of social consensus or personal preferences. Violating the dress code of one's school, however, may constitute a violation of a social norm; it might even be punishable, but it is not generally judged to be a moral violation. In contrast, personal values refer to any socially desirable broad motivational goal. Thus, whereas all moral principles are likely to be viewed as parts of the value domain, not all values are viewed as belonging to the moral domain (Schwartz, 2007).

Despite this apparent clarity of the classical definition of morality, there is growing evidence of cross-cultural and intra-cultural differences regarding what is included in the moral domain. Actions that are viewed as belonging to the moral domain in one culture may be viewed as belonging to the realm of social convention or personal choice in another culture. Even within a
culture, there is often disagreement regarding what should be viewed as pertaining to the moral domain. Thus, for example, conservative Republicans have moral concerns that Democrats do not recognize as pertaining to the moral domain (Haidt & Graham, 2007). Such inter- and intra-cultural differences can lead to severe conflicts because morality is a core issue in people's self-definitions.

We propose that applying a values framework to studying moral principles will provide a unifying theoretical perspective for analyzing the spectrum of moral principles within and across cultures. For this purpose, we use Schwartz’s (1992, 2009) value theory to organize moral principles and discuss their relationship to values.

Schwartz (1992) value theory identifies ten motivationally distinct types of values: hedonism, stimulation, self-direction, universalism, benevolence, tradition, conformity, security, power, and achievement. These values are structured in a circle according to their conflicts and compatibilities. The circle is organized by two basic dimensions: conservation versus openness, and self-enhancement versus self-transcendence. Conservation values (tradition, conformity, security) emphasize self-restriction, order, and resistance to change. These values express motivation to avoid uncertainty, ambiguity, and instability. They conflict with openness-to-change values (self-direction, stimulation) that emphasize independent action and thought and readiness for new experience. The second dimension contrasts self-enhancement and self-transcendence values. Self-enhancement values emphasize enhancing one's own personal interests even at the expense of other people. They conflict with self-transcendence values (universalism, benevolence) that emphasize concern for others’ welfare. Hedonism values share elements of both openness and self-enhancement. Schwartz’s value theory has been tested in more than 270 samples from more than 70 countries, using different measurement instruments (Davidov, Schmidt, & Schwartz, 2008; Schwartz, 2006; Schwartz & Sagiv, 1995; Spini, 2003).
Individuals from different cultures differ in their values. Thus, for example, individuals from West European countries tend to attribute greater importance to benevolence and universalism and less importance to power values than people from many other countries. Individuals from East Asian and African countries tend to emphasize conformity and tradition more than people from many other countries (see Sagiv, Schwartz, & Arieli, in press, for a review).

**What Is Included in the Moral Domain? Different Perspectives and Models**

Defining the moral domain has been controversial in psychology. The developmental analysis of morality (Kohlberg, 1969, 1981; Piaget, 1965/1932) followed the Western philosophical tradition of defining morality in terms of issues related to rights and justice. From a values perspective, this view of morality resonates with universalism values (see Panel A in Table 1), which are values that emphasize concern for social justice and care for humanity and nature. The developmental perspective regards self-interest as belonging to the lowest level of morality. Thus, according to this view, attributing importance to self-enhancement values (power and achievement) should correlate negatively with moral development. In support of this view, Helkama et al. (2003) found that the higher the moral reasoning level of medical students, the more importance they placed on universalism values and the less importance they placed on self-enhancement values.

Gilligan (1982) proposed a "morality of care" as an alternative to Kohlberg's "morality of justice" (see Panel B in Table 1). This approach highlights the importance to moral judgments of care for close others and interdependence with them, an emphasis closely aligned with benevolence values. Gilligan's findings that women tend to use this moral ethic more than men are consistent with findings that women assign more importance to benevolence values than do men (Schwartz & Rubel, 2005).
A more explicit content-based definition of morality was developed in the social-cognitive domain (e.g. Turiel, 1983). This perspective (see Panel C in Table 1) distinguishes the moral domain from two other domains: the conventional and the personal. Turiel defines the moral domain as consisting of principles that are universally applicable and obligatory, and includes in the moral domain issues of justice and care. The conventional domain is contextually relative and alterable and refers to norms, group interests, and relations to authorities. Finally, the personal domain concerns the welfare of oneself and one’s private life. Thus, from a value perspective, the moral domain in Turiel’s analysis includes universalism and benevolence values; the conventional domain includes conformity, tradition, and security values; and the personal domain includes the other half of the value circle: power, achievement, self-direction, stimulation, and hedonism.

Cultural psychologists and scholars with various relativistic perspectives questioned Turiel’s conception of the moral domain (e.g., Miller, 2006). For example, analyses of interviews with Hindu Indians about norm violations led Shweder, Much, Mahapatra, and Park (1997) to develop a tripartite model of morality that includes ethics of autonomy, community, and divinity (see Panel D in Table 1). The ethic of autonomy focuses on obligations based on an individual’s worth and dignity. Moral violations are conceptualized in terms of harm, infringements of personal rights, and injustice. The ethic of community focuses on obligations toward the community one lives in. The basic moral obligation is to transcend one’s self-interest for the sake of the community. Moral violations refer to lack of respect for the community’s history, hierarchy, and collective interests. The ethic of divinity addresses issues of the divine and sacred, and avoidance of moral impurity. Moral discourse focuses on issues of purity and pollution of
the divine essence of the individual. Thoughts and actions that are deemed to be inconsistent with what is sacred and divine are viewed as moral violations.

Each of these moral codes resonates with some of the values identified by Schwartz (see Panel F in Table 1): Issues of the autonomy ethic (avoiding harm and injustice) are related to benevolence and universalism values. These values emphasize the welfare of others. People who emphasize these values attribute high importance to social justice and equality. They value helpfulness and kindness. Thus, unjust and harmful actions should evoke stronger condemnation the more one assigns importance to benevolence and universalism values (Roccas & McCauley, 2004).

The ethics of community shares with values of tradition, security, and conformity a concern for the consequences of one’s actions for the community. These values emphasize the importance of social harmony and express a desire for adherence to social expectations and to the group’s traditions and structure. Thus, actions denoting insolence and lack of respect for the community should evoke stronger condemnation the more one assigns importance to tradition, security, and conformity values (Roccas & McCauley, 2004). The community moral code is also compatible with benevolence values that express concern and care for ingroup members. Finally, the ethics of divinity is similar to the emphasis that people with tradition values place on faith and on abnegation of personal striving for the sake of religious imperatives.

Recently, Guerra (2009) developed a quantitative measure of the relevance of Shweder et al.’s (1997) three moral codes to the judgment of possible violations. She explored the relations of moral codes to the importance attributed to different values in two cultures: Brazil and the United Kingdom. For most values, relationships with the moral codes replicated across British
and Brazilian students and were consistent with our reasoning regarding the compatibilities delineated above between moral codes and values.

Shweder’s theory inspired the search of finer distinctions among moral domains. Moral foundations theory (Graham & Haidt, this volume; Haidt, & Graham, 2007, see Panel E of Table 1) focuses on five moral systems: harm/care, fairness/reciprocity (both related to the ethics of autonomy), ingroup/loyalty, authority/respect (both related to the ethics of community), and purity/sanctity (related to the ethics of divinity). The harm/care “foundation” is expressed in sensitivity to suffering and disapproval of those who cause harm. The fairness/reciprocity foundation is expressed in sensitivity to injustice, inequality, and infringements of personal autonomy. The ingroup/loyalty foundation is expressed in a sense of duty toward one’s ingroups. The authority/respect foundation leads to a concern for status and hierarchy and sensitivity to actions that challenge the accepted social stratification.

The finer distinctions embedded in Haidt’s model should be reflected in the relationships with values (see Panel F in Table 1). The harm/care foundation shares with fairness/reciprocity a concern for the welfare of others, which is reflected in benevolence and universalism values. The harm/care foundation, however, puts more emphasis on concern for close others, which is compatible with benevolence values, whereas the fairness/reciprocity foundation emphasizes more general principles that are more compatible with universalism values. The ingroup/loyalty foundation shares with authority/respect a concern for the integrity of the community and its traditions, norms, and leadership, which is expressed in values of tradition, conformity, and security. The ingroup/loyalty foundation, however, has an additional aspect: concern for the welfare of community members, which is compatible with the emphasis of benevolence values on the welfare of people with whom ones is in close contact.
In sum, analyzing the value basis of the various models of moral domains enables us to coherently organize the different models. Self-transcendence values (benevolence and universalism) are related to concerns about justice and harm, which are underscored in all of the models reviewed above. Conservation values (conformity and tradition) are related to concern about norms, social order, and purity, which are underscored in the more recent theories of morality.

Interestingly, all of the models of moral domains explicitly emphasize only half of the values circle – those values that focus on relationships with people and groups. Consistent with this analysis, preliminary findings from a recent study (Schwartz, 2007a) revealed that 70%-80% of an adult Israeli sample labeled all or most of benevolence, universalism, conformity, tradition and security values as moral values. In contrast, fewer than 20% labeled any of the power, achievement, hedonism and stimulation values as moral, and fewer than 30% labeled more than one of the self-direction values as moral.

If only half of the values circle relates to morality, is the other half of the circle irrelevant to this domain? The other half refers mainly to openness to change and self-enhancement values. Openness to change values focus on independence of action and thought and on novelty, change, and excitement. The expression of these values is likely to be related to violations of norms and expectations. Thus, these values may be perceived as immoral to people who emphasize the ingroup/loyalty, authority/respect and purity/sanctity moral foundations. Self-enhancement values focus on the importance of promoting self-interest even at the expense of others. Behaviors associated with these values are likely to violate moral imperatives associated with issues of harm/care and fairness/reciprocity. This analysis suggests that the value circle refers to prescriptive as well as proscriptive morality (Janoff-Bulman, this volume; Janoff-Bulman, Sheikh, & Hepp,
2009). Whereas self-transcendence and conservation values focus on what one ought to do (respect authority, care for others), openness to change and self-enhancement values focus more on what one ought to avoid doing (caring about oneself, expressing one's individuality).

We investigated the associations between the five moral foundations and Schwartz’s ten value types in a sample of Israeli students ($N = 146$). Figure 1 presents the correlations between each foundation and the ten value types. Each line in the figure portrays the pattern of relationships between one foundation and each of the ten value types. As expected, harm/care and fairness/reciprocity correlated most positively with universalism and benevolence values and most negatively with power and achievement values. Ingroup/loyalty and authority/respect correlated most positively with tradition and conformity values and most negatively with the opposing self-direction values. In addition, the correlation of benevolence values was stronger for ingroup/loyalty than for authority/respect. Finally, as we reasoned, the pattern of relationships with values of purity/sanctity was similar to the pattern found for authority/respect and ingroup/loyalty, but the correlation with tradition values was stronger.

**Values and Cross Cultural Differences in Moral Outlooks**

Shweder's insight that culture affects the inclusiveness of the moral domain has received additional support in studies across a variety of cultures: Whereas issues of harm and fairness are judged to be part of the moral domain in all cultures, other issues, such as purity, loyalty to the ingroup, and respect to authority, are considered part of the moral domain in some cultural groups but not in others. Thus, when asked to consider the morality of specific actions, people from Western cultures apply mainly the ethic of autonomy, whereas people from non-Western societies usually apply all moral foundations (see Vasquez, Keltner, Ebenbach, & Banaszynski, 2001, for comparisons of Americans and Filipinos; Jensen, 1998, for Americans and Indians;
Guerra, & Giner-Sorolla, 2010, for Britons and Brazilians). These differences in the inclusiveness of the morality domain are consistent with differences in value patterns in those cultures: People from non-Western cultures attribute greater importance to tradition and conformity values than people from Western cultures (Schwartz, 2007b).

Differences in the application of moral foundations are also found between cultural groups within a nation. For example, religiously conservative participants in the USA apply the divinity ethic more and the autonomy ethic less than religiously liberal people (e.g., Jensen, 1997). These differences are consistent with positive correlations between tradition values and religiosity (Roccas, 2005; Saroglu, Delpierre, & Dernelle, 2004; Schwartz & Huismans, 1995) and political conservatism (Barnea & Schwartz, 1997).

Similarly, in a study of moral condemnation, Haidt, Koller, and Dias (1993) showed that Americans from high socioeconomic backgrounds limit the moral domain to actions that directly harm others. In contrast, people from Brazil and Americans from low socioeconomic backgrounds include in the moral domain actions that evoke disgust or show disrespect for community symbols. Values can help us to understand these differences too: Education consistently correlates negatively with the importance assigned to values of tradition, security, and conformity (Schwartz, 2005) – the values that are most closely related to community and divinity moral principles. Thus, educated people attribute lower importance to values emphasizing adherence to social and religious expectations. Consistently, they do not see actions that conflict with these values as moral violations.

The universal emphasis on the ethic of autonomy highlights a paradox: Although people from all cultures believe that harming others is wrong, actions that can cause immense harm to others are sometimes applauded and considered to be moral. A blatant example is the wide
support that military attacks sometimes evoke. We suggest that although the ethic of autonomy is considered to be part of the moral domain in all cultures, people and groups vary in the inclusiveness of the targets to which this ethic applies: In some cultural groups, concern about justice and protection from harm (i.e., the ethic of autonomy) applies to all people, whereas in others such concern applies mainly to ingroup members.

Integrating research on values with research on morality can help us to understand why the application of the ethic of autonomy is not universal. Discussing the meaning of social-justice and equality values, Schwartz (2007a) proposed that in some cultures people tend to understand these values as applying to all people, including outgroup members. In other cultures, however, people tend to understand these values as applying mainly to the ingroup. These findings suggest that cultures may differ in the inclusiveness of the targets to which the ethic of autonomy applies. Societies that view the individual as an integral part of the collective (i.e., societies in which conservation values are highly important, Schwartz, 2007b) encourage a narrower view of the application of the ethic of autonomy.

Another process that could explain why violations of the ethic of autonomy are sometimes perceived as morally justifiable lies in the relative importance of different moral principles. The more inclusive the moral domain, the more likely it is that one needs to prioritize conflicting actions that draw on different moral foundations. As research on the *culture of honor* exemplifies, in cultures where honor is highly important, harming a person who violated one's honor may be justifiable (e.g., Cohen, Nisbett, Bowdle, & Schwarz, 1996; Vandello & Cohen, 2008). Similarly, in cultures that foster a *duty-based interpersonal moral code* (e.g., Hindu Indians; Miller, 1994), principles of interpersonal responsibility may be prioritized over principles of justice (Miller & Bersoff, 1992). Thus, one can feel morally justified in harming
others or in violating justice principles, because actions that draw on the ethics of community or divinity can have priority over actions that draw on the ethics of autonomy. Considering the values that are important in different cultures, one can predict not only which moral foundations apply (see Table 1) but also which principle is likely to be preferred over others.

In sum, we reasoned that people who emphasize conservation values have an inclusive conception of the moral domain, but a narrower application of the ethics of autonomy. They view this ethic as applicable mainly to ingroup members. In contrast, people who emphasize values of openness hold a more inclusive view of the applicability of the ethic of autonomy, but hold a narrower conception of the moral domain. They view the moral domain as consisting mainly of the ethic of autonomy.

*Integrating Values and Moral Outlooks: Future Directions*

*Who Is a Moral Person?*

Cultures are likely to vary in their definitions of the "moral person" and the meaning they attribute to "being moral" depending on the inclusiveness of their moral domain. We suggest that "being moral" is a personal value, a stable broad goal that serves as a guiding principle in life. The meaning of this value could be inferred from its relations with other values (Schwartz, 1992). In social contexts in which morality is limited to issues of harm and justice, people who attribute high importance to being moral are likely to attribute high importance to values emphasizing concern for others. In contrast, in social contexts in which the domain of morality includes issues of divinity and community, a person who aspires to be moral will also attribute importance to values emphasizing adherence to group norms and religious imperatives.

We exemplify this possible synergy between research on values and research on morality by comparing a sample of religious Israeli Jews (n = 68) and a sample of non-religious Israeli
Jews ($n = 132$). Respondents completed a values questionnaire to which we added an item labeled "being moral." They rated the importance of all value items as guiding principles in their lives. As expected, in both groups, being a moral person was considered important by most respondents ($M$s of 5.53 and 5.52 in the religious and secular groups, on a scale ranging from -1 to 7).

We inferred the meaning of being moral by considering its correlations with the ten values. In both groups, being moral correlated positively with benevolence values that express concern and care for others. In addition, being moral correlated positively with tradition and negatively with universalism and self-direction values in the religious group. In the non-religious group, it correlated positively with universalism and negatively with power and hedonism values. Thus, tradition values that express adherence to norms and authorities are associated with being moral in the conservative religious group, whereas universalism values that express acceptance and tolerance towards all human beings are associated with being moral in the secular sample.

Thus, while members of all groups in society are likely to agree that being a moral person is a positive aspiration, cultural groups vary in the meaning they attribute to being moral and in the values they associate with being a moral person. Such a difference may lead not only to different judgments and actions in specific situations, but also to cross-cultural misunderstanding and miscommunication.

Multiple Identities and Multiple Moralities

The increased heterogeneity of societies (Putnam, 2007; Verkuyten, 2006) is accompanied by a sharp increase in the number of people who belong simultaneously to groups that may differ in their values, norms, and moral outlooks. The multiple identities stemming from the varied groups to which people simultaneously belong form a complex puzzle of
partially overlapping social identities (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005; Roccas & Brewer, 2002; Tadmor, Tetlock, & Peng, 2009). Immigrants who identify with their culture of origin as well as their host culture; people with strong religious convictions who work in a non-religious professional environment; employees in multinational companies who identify with the organization as a whole as well as with their local subsidiary – all need to juggle multiple identities.

Multiple identities may lead to exposure to the moral outlooks of different cultural groups that may differ extensively in their views of right and wrong and of what is included in the moral domain. In this sense, people with multiple identities are fluent in multiple “languages” of morality. Thus, for example, an Asian-American may be aware of the moral domains of both Asian and Western cultures. As discussed above, the different values emphasized in these two cultures may yield different views about moral domains. Some actions (e.g., harming another person) are likely to be viewed as moral violations in both cultures. Others may be seen as moral violation in one culture but not in the other (e.g., divinity violations may be seen as immoral in Asian cultures more than in the U.S.; limiting one's autonomy may be seen as a moral violation in the U.S. more than in Asian cultures).

How do people manage the compatibilities and conflicts between the multiple moral outlooks embedded in their multiple identities? Possibly, exposure to different views of morality will lead people to include more life domains in their moral universe? The Asian-American in the example above may regard as immoral anything that is viewed as immoral in any of her cultural groups. Thus, she may view more areas as part of the moral domain compared to either Asians or Americans. But the exposure to different views of morality may have the opposing effect as well: A bi-cultural person may recognize that moral outlooks depend on the social and
cultural context. Thus, exposure to multiple identities may lead to more tolerance of moral infractions.

We suggest that the way in which people integrate their multiple identities has a profound influence on their moral outlook. Multiple identities could lead to a more restricted or more inclusive representation of the moral universe depending on how people integrate their multiple identities into a coherent self concept. When integrating multiple identities, one can form an exclusive and simple social identity in which there is a single ingroup identification based on the dominance of one identity over the other (e.g., in the example above, the person will identify with the Asian group only) or on the intersection of one’s multiple ingroups (e.g., she will view as ingroup members only those who are both Asian and American). This representation of one’s multiple identities is positively related to an emphasis on conservation values (Roccas & Brewer, 2002). Conversely, one can acknowledge and accept the distinctive aspects of each group and form an inclusive and complex social identity. The most complex social identity (merger) is represented when divergent group memberships are simultaneously recognized and included in their most inclusive form. In the example above, the person will view as ingroup members all Asians and all Americans (Roccas & Brewer, 2002). This representation of one’s multiple identities is negatively related to emphasis on conservation values (Roccas & Brewer, 2002).

We reason that people with a complex social identity are aware of the differences between their multiple ingroups in beliefs, values, and moral outlooks. They are likely to be aware that issues considered to be immoral in one of their ingroups are considered to be a matter of personal choice in the other group. Thus, people with a complex representation of the interrelations among their multiple ingroups are more likely to accept the notion that people may act in different ways, all morally admissible. For them, the membership in multiple ingroups may
translate into a permissive moral outlook. In contrast, we reason that people with a simple social identity are likely to develop a sense of absolute morality. They are likely to view moral obligations and moral violations as universal, and regard behaviors that defy their moral outlook as ones that should not be accepted in any society.

**Conclusions**

In this chapter we have sought to tie theories of morality to the psychology of values. Integrating insights from research on values and research on morality contributes to achieving a better understanding of the motivational underpinnings of individual and cultural differences in moral outlook. Analyzing the value basis of moral domains enables us to coherently organize different theoretical models of morality. Taking values into consideration helped us tease apart the two types of inclusiveness that permeate theories and debates about morality: People who emphasize conservation values hold an inclusive conception of the moral domain but an exclusive view of the targets as worthy of concern. In contrast, people who emphasize values of openness hold an inclusive view of the applicability of moral imperatives related to concern for others but an exclusive conceptualization of the moral domain.

**References**


Table 1

Mapping Models of Morality and Values

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Figure 1. Correlations between moral foundations and personal values (N = 146).