

Early Foundations: Conscience and the Development of Moral Character

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The themes of moral self, identity, and character underscore the complex foundations of mature moral conduct. Adults act from a sense of self in which moral integrity may be an important component. They respond to everyday ethical challenges by enlisting identities – professional, familial, religious – that provide guidance. Adults are also integrated into networks of social relationships that motivate moral conduct, in communities that may either support or undermine acting on the basis of moral character. It is not surprising that the influences on moral self, identity, and character have inspired centuries of philosophical reflection on the nature of human conduct and, more recently, nearly a century of intensive psychological study. The themes of this volume are genuinely a lifespan developmental concern.

Well ... *almost* lifespan. This is because despite concerted interest in the origins of moral character in childhood, adolescence, and adulthood, developmental influences in infancy and early childhood have been long neglected. Moral development in classic theories describes how the child abandons the egocentric, authoritarian orientation of the early years in favor of a more mature, humanistic orientation. As a consequence, researchers have naturally been more interested in the developmental influences and transitions of middle childhood and beyond. The purpose of this chapter is to argue, however, that the time is long overdue for a reconsideration of the foundations of moral character in early childhood. Although classic theories capture much that is true about the early origins of moral character, research on young children during the past 25 years has contributed to a new understanding of the basis of early morality that shares much in common with later years in the emphasis on cooperation in close relationships, emotion understanding, sensitivity to others' needs, and an emerging

moral self. Taken together, these studies suggest that to a greater extent than traditionally realized, children and adolescents build on an early foundation in the development of moral character and self.

The chapter begins with a survey of classic moral development theories that continue to shape contemporary thinking about early childhood morality. Next is an overview of current research findings concerning infants and young children that relate to these formulations. Although little of this research is directly concerned with early morality, it addresses the psychological foundations that are believed to be at the heart of a young child's capacities to act morally, such as the ability to understand others' needs and feelings in a nonegocentric manner, awareness of intentionality in prohibitive violations, the constructive understanding of behavioral standards, moral affect (including empathy), and whether the self is conceptualized in morally relevant terms. Following this, the research literature on early conscience is summarized, with particular attention to the relational foundations of conscience development. The chapter closes with some conclusions about future directions for moral development theory and research.

EARLY CHILDHOOD IN CLASSIC MORAL DEVELOPMENT THEORIES

Prevailing theories of moral development describe infants and young children as obedience-oriented and self-interested – or in Piaget's word, "premoral." Although their explanations for this early orientation differ, psychoanalytic, behavioral, and cognitive-developmental theorists are surprisingly consistent in describing early childhood morality as fundamentally different from the moral perspective of later years, and this view strongly influences contemporary thinking.

To psychoanalytic thinkers, morality emerges from the reining in of instinctual drives by social controls that become progressively internalized. In this theory, the young child's dependency on parental love creates the incentives for compliance and the sanctions for noncompliance: anxiety over the loss of parental love, fear of punishment, and emotional reliance on the parent each motivate moral growth (Freud, 1940). In particular, the child's identification with the parent late in the preschool years promotes internalization of the adult's values and the emergence of internalized guilt when those values are violated. These formulations are consistent with some contemporary views of the relational incentives for moral internalization (Hoffman, 1988) and early conscience development (Kochanska, 1993).

Young children are portrayed in psychoanalytic theory as externalized in their moral orientation and motivated to avoid the consequences of non-compliance (loss of love, punishment) until parental values are eventually adopted.

Although learning theorists have a much different network of explanatory processes for describing moral development, they are consistent with the psychoanalytic view in their description of the young child as morally externalized and responding to the sanctions of caregivers as well as their example (Bandura, 1991; Skinner, 1971). Preschoolers are especially reliant on immediate rewards and sanctions because they have not yet acquired the self-regulatory capacities emphasized in some cognitive social learning formulations (Bandura, 1991). Learning views have also influenced contemporary thinking about early morality, particularly the importance of the young child's responsive imitation of the parent as a contributor to cooperation and compliance (Forman, Aksan, & Kochanska, 2004; Forman & Kochanska, 2001).

The ideas of cognitive-developmental theorists Piaget (1932) and Kohlberg (1969) have had the strongest influence on contemporary thinking about moral development. Piaget (1932) described young children as initially premoral and, late in the preschool years, as moving into a stage of heteronomous morality characterized by unilateral respect for authority, an absolutist understanding of rules, a consequentialist (rather than intentions-based) approach to wrongdoing, and belief in immanent justice. The decline in egocentrism and increased experience in cooperative, egalitarian peer relationships leads, he believed, to the more autonomous moral orientation of middle childhood that focuses on the human origins and purposes of rules and compliance. Kohlberg (1969) extended the Piagetian formulation in his characterization of young children as preconventional thinkers, characterized by a self-serving morality that respects punishments and rewards but seeks the best possible personal outcomes, while also recognizing that others are similarly motivated. The preconventional moralist is, like Piaget's heteronomist moralist, consequentialist, obedience oriented, and externalized. Kohlberg emphasized the cognitive developmental origins of changes in moral judgment, particularly the decline in egocentrism, that enables children gradually to better understand the perspectives of other people and the social interactions that can contribute to cognitive-moral conflict.

All three of these theoretical views offer useful portrayals of many aspects of early childhood morality. The infant's and young child's reliance on close relationships with caregivers provides the impetus, they each recognize, for

cooperation and compliance, although the internal processes mediating this differ (e.g., anxiety over love withdrawal, fear of punishment, preoperational thought leading to unilateral respect). Furthermore, each theory emphasizes that young children respond to parental rewards and punishments that convey standards of approved and disapproved conduct. Each theory also emphasizes how moral motivation is influenced by the developmental limitations of early childhood, whether conceived in terms of pre-Oedipal psychological structures, deficiencies in self-regulatory processes, or cognitive immaturity.

Perhaps for this reason, one of the most striking consistencies across these classic theories is the discontinuity between the moral (or premoral) orientation of early childhood and that of later years. Whether portrayed in terms of preconventional vs. conventional morality, heteronomous vs. autonomous moral orientation, pre-Oedipal vs. post-Oedipal introjections, externalized vs. internalized morality, or reliance on external controls vs. self-regulation, each theory describes greater discontinuity in the transition from early childhood to later childhood than for any other developmental transition in moral orientation. In a sense, mature morality develops as the child progressively overcomes the deficiencies and limitations of early childhood, whether considered in terms of cognitive egocentrism, dependency on parent-child relationships, or the reliance on external rather than internalized controls over behavior.

Decades of research on these alternative theoretical formulations have confirmed, questioned, and refined these ideas, of course (see Turiel, 2006, for a helpful review). What has remained consistent over time has been the naturally greater interest of moral development researchers in the more reasoned, relational, and humanistic morality of later years over the self-interested, authoritarian moral orientation expected of young children (see Carlo & Edwards, 2005; Lapsley & Narvaez, 2004; Turiel, 2006). This is important because the past three decades have also witnessed astonishing advances in other fields of developmental science concerned with infants' and young children's cognitive, emotional, and sociomoral development, to be reviewed below (see also Thompson, 2006a). Together, these studies have contributed to a new understanding of early childhood development that is fundamentally post-Piagetian and also poses new questions for classic moral development theories. If infants and preschoolers are not egocentric but are instead deeply interested in understanding others' feelings and goals, for example, what does this mean for the self-concerned morality believed to derive from cognitive egocentrism? If toddlers exhibit an early sensitivity to violations of their own standards and expectancies, what

are the implications of this for the view that moral values arise primarily from the internalization of parental standards? If conscience development in preschoolers is motivated not by parental talk about rules and the consequences of violating them, but instead by discussion of people's feelings, what does this mean for the humanistic bases for early morality?

As these questions imply, much of the research on young children that is relevant to early childhood morality is focused on broader features of early social understanding, self-awareness, and social relationships. New research also has explored specific features of early conscience and moral understanding. In the next sections, this research literature is reviewed and discussed with respect to its relevance to the construction of a new view of moral character and conduct in early childhood.

CONCEPTUAL AND SOCIAL FOUNDATIONS OF EARLY MORALITY

Moral development is based at any age on the conceptual capabilities of the child, self-understanding, and the networks of social relationships that guide moral conduct. No one would expect a young child, for example, to exercise postconventional moral judgment or exhibit a psychologically differentiated moral self. Developmental research in a variety of areas is yielding, however, a new portrayal of the conceptual, self-aware, and relational foundations of early morality.

Early Social and Emotional Understanding

One of the most important changes in contemporary thinking about early childhood derives from carefully designed experimental studies of infants' social understanding. They show that before the end of the first year, infants demonstrate an awareness of the subjectivity underlying people's attention, behaving, and feeling. For example, infants use pointing to redirect an adult's attention to something of interest, often to change their behavior (such as retrieving an object the infant wants; Tomasello, Carpenter, & Lizkowski, 2007), and they infer the goals underlying simple actions they observe in others, like reaching (Woodward, 1998). By 12 months, infants look to a parent when faced with an ambiguous event and, based on the adult's positive or negative emotional expressions, respond with approach or avoidance (Moses, Baldwin, Rosicky, & Tidball, 2001). By 18 months, toddlers will hand a friendly experimenter the broccoli that the adult clearly prefers as a snack rather than the crackers the child prefers (Repacholi & Gopnik,

1997), and will imitate an adult's intended action, even if the action was not completed (Meltzoff, 1995). Studies like these provide convincing evidence that rather than confusing their own perceptions, feelings, and desires with those of another person because of egocentrism, infants and toddlers are aware of these differences early and, equally important, strive to understand the mental states in others that account for these differences.

With increasing age, there are further advances in what is now called "theory of mind" – that is, young children's beliefs about mental states and behavior (Wellman, 2002). From their early understanding of the influence of intentions, desires, and emotions on behavior, young children begin to comprehend the importance of beliefs after age three and, in particular, how thoughts and ideas can be inconsistent with the reality to which they refer. Moreover, by ages five or six children begin to perceive people in terms of their individual traits and motives, and can offer accurate predictions of behavior based on the psychological characteristics they infer in others (Heyman, Gee, & Giles, 2003; Heyman & Gelman, 2000).

Taken together, this expanding research literature underscores that infants and young children are aware early on of the differences between their own subjective states and those of others; are developing considerable knowledge of how differences in intention, desire, feeling, and beliefs are associated with behavior; and are sensitive to individual differences in the psychological characteristics that cause people to act differently. Although they have far to go before they attain a mature understanding of the internal motivators of behavior, these findings explain why few contemporary researchers of early childhood describe young children as egocentric in any comprehensive sense. Young children may still act in a self-interested manner, but, like adults, they do not do so because they are unaware of others' feelings and goals.

Social Referencing

As described earlier, one reflection of infants' social and emotional sensitivity is when they encounter novel situations, people, or objects and turn to trusted adults. Experimental studies show that the adults' facial expressions, coupled with their attention toward the ambiguous event, significantly affect the infant's subsequent behavioral response (see Baldwin & Moses, 1996; Moses et al., 2001; see Thompson, 2006a for a review). Infants more readily approach a novel object or person when adults look positive or reassuring, but are more likely to withdraw or avoid the event when adults look concerned or upset. Social referencing is important because it is an early

means by which infants vicariously appropriate an understanding of events through the signals provided by another, and thus, in a broader sense, it is an early step to socially constructed meaning systems.

Viewed in this light, it is apparent how social referencing can contribute to the early acquisition of behavioral standards. Parents commonly display cautionary facial or vocal expressions when infants approach potentially dangerous situations, and they exhibit anticipatory cues of disapproval when toddlers are about to engage in forbidden activity. In doing so, they endow these activities with negative affective valence for the child. Indeed, during the second year, toddlers can be observed looking back to the parent when approaching a previously forbidden object or activity, as if to enlist the adult's emotional expressions to clarify or confirm the child's expectations about sanctioned conduct (Emde, Biringen, Clyman, & Oppenheim, 1991; Emde & Buchsbaum, 1990). In other circumstances, caregivers also use their emotional signals to induce sympathy for someone who has been harmed by the young child's actions.

In these and other ways, social referencing connects behavioral standards to the emotional signals of people to whom the infant is emotionally attached. Much less is known about how social referencing may also guide young children's evaluations of themselves when adults convey emotionally salient signals either to the child or to the outcomes of the child's activity. As described later, such evaluations are important contributors to the earliest appearance of self-evaluative emotions like pride, guilt, and shame in young children, but their efficacy is contingent on when infants and toddlers can view *themselves* as the referential targets of an adult's evaluative emotional expressions.

Sensitivity to Standards

Classic moral development theories portray young children as acquiring norms and standards from adult authorities (such as through social referencing). Although this is certainly true, it neglects the young child's active role in the construction of behavioral expectations. There is reason to believe that young children begin developing early normative expectations for everyday experience. Toward the end of the second year, for example, toddlers become increasingly concerned with how things ought to be, whether it concerns the conventional nominal references for the words they are rapidly learning (Tomasello & Rakoczy, 2003); or their expectations for daily routines (leading them to be inflexible about bedtime or morning rituals; Hudson, 1990); or even their appearance (by 19 months, toddlers



Normal teddy bear



Morally violated teddy bear

FIGURE 7.1. Variations in the toys shown to children.



Abnormal teddy bear



Functionally different teddy bear

FIGURE 7.1. (cont.)

show evident embarrassment when detecting a spot of rouge on their noses in the mirror; Lewis, 2000). In these and other behavioral domains, they are constructing representations of how things are done, and are sensitive to – sometimes responding aversively to – violations of these conventional normative expectations.

In the moral domain, Kagan (2005) has likewise noted that 19-month-olds respond negatively and with concern when faced with objects that have been marred, damaged, or disfigured. When they notice missing buttons from garments, torn pages in a book, or broken toys, he notes, they react with heightened interest and attention, negative evaluations (e.g., “It’s yukky!”), touching the flaw, and concern about who was responsible (see also Kochanska, Casey, & Fukumoto, 1995; Lamb, 1993). Kagan interprets these responses as an emerging moral sense, because these damaged objects violate implicit norms of wholeness and intactness that parents typically enforce through sanctions on breaking or damaging objects.

In my lab, I explored this further in a study (with Meredith McGinley) on toddlers’ responses to objects that were different from the norm in various ways. We were interested in understanding whether the sensitivity that Kagan and others have observed is specific to objects that are different in ways implying wrongdoing (i.e., broken or damaged), or whether children respond comparably to objects that are different in other ways, such as being the wrong color. Thus we compared toddlers’ responses to toys that were different from the norm in several specific ways. Some were obviously broken or damaged – such as a broken cup, or a teddy bear with one eye missing. Others were functionally impaired without being broken – such as a cup with a finished hole at the bottom (so it could not hold liquid), or a teddy bear without stuffing. Some were functional and intact but simply looked abnormal (for example, a cup with a handle at an unusual angle, or a teddy bear in psychedelic colors and with wings). An example of these variations for the teddy bear can be found in Figure 7.1. In addition to the teddy bear and the cup, similar variations were created for a doll’s blanket and a small, child-size table.

Thirty toddlers ranging in age from 14 to 23 months were individually shown a normal toy and each of the three variations of the toy in counterbalanced order, and then, when each had been presented individually, all four toys were presented together and the child was invited to indicate which was preferred. From videotaped records, the duration of the child’s looking at each toy, emotional expressions toward each toy, and touching the unusual features of the toy were coded reliably. The results showed that regardless of age, young children showed no differential responding to the

objects implying wrongdoing. Instead, they responded with interest, affect, and attention to all forms of atypicality, whether objects were damaged, functionally impaired, or simply looked abnormal.

These findings suggest that rather than reflecting an emerging moral sense, toddlers’ responses to broken toys and disfigured objects is part of a more general sensitivity to objects and events that are different from the conventional norms that young children are constructing. Just as young preschoolers play games involving misnaming familiar animals or misusing familiar household objects (e.g., stirring in a bowl with a banana), they are interested in cups with strange handles, teddy bears with an eye missing, and other variations on the norm. Even though responses to broken or disfigured objects are not unique in young children’s sensitivity to atypicality, however, this sensitivity probably becomes enlisted into an early moral sensibility as children become aware that broken and marred objects are also disapproved. In these instances, what is atypical is interesting not only because it violates the norm, but also because it is forbidden.

Obligation and Intention

The research on children’s sensitivity to violations of conventional standards seems consistent with Piaget’s (1932) portrayal of preschoolers as consequentialist in their moral orientation. In other words, young children seem focused on whether normative expectations are fulfilled, regardless of the reason why, and experimental studies highlight young children’s sensitivity to violations of prohibitory rules (Harris & Nunez, 1996). On the other hand, research earlier reviewed also indicates that infants and young children are attuned to the intentions underlying human behavior. Does this influence their judgments of rule violation? Nunez and Harris (1998) found that children as young as three distinguished prohibitive situations (e.g., “Sally’s mum says that if she plays outside she must keep her hat on”) in which a story character violated the prohibition intentionally (Sally goes outside and takes off her hat) or accidentally (the wind blows off Sally’s hat). Young children judged the story character as much more naughty when violations were intentional. Thus young children’s deontic judgments are more nuanced than classic moral development theories portray. Preschoolers are concerned with normative obligations, but they also attend to the intentionality of human violations.

Young children’s psychological awareness nuances their moral judgments in other ways also. Lagattuta (2005) examined young children’s understandings of the emotional consequences of compliance with a prohibition

(that frustrates what one desires to do) versus transgression (that fulfills the desire). When children were interviewed about how a story character would feel after complying with or violating a prohibitive rule (e.g., running into the street to retrieve a ball after being told not to run into the street), four- and five-year-olds attributed more negative emotion to the compliant story character and more positive emotions to the violator, explaining their judgments with reference to the story character's goals being satisfied or not. By contrast, seven-year-olds and adults more often attributed positive or mixed emotions to compliance, and negative or mixed emotions to story characters who transgressed. Thus a conceptual and emotional challenge for young children faced with everyday moral dilemmas is the conflict between the satisfaction of present desires and the longer-term consequences of violating a prohibition. In a sense, they are aware that violating prohibitions is bad, but that compliance can make you sad.

Young children's deontic judgments are also nuanced by their awareness of different domains of rules. Although children as young as two regard rule-breaking as "bad," during their third year they begin to distinguish between moral rules (which are universally applicable) and social-conventional rules (which are relative to location and time), viewing violations of moral rules as more serious and less revocable (Smetana, 1985; Smetana & Braeges, 1990). These domain distinctions are incorporated into parents' socialization strategies, which emphasize the human consequences of moral violations and the threats to social order posed by social-conventional violations, even when children are young (Smetana, 1989; Smetana, Kochanska, & Chuang, 2000).

Another way that young children are sensitive to human concerns is with respect to fairness. Research by Killen and her colleagues has shown that preschoolers regard straightforward social exclusion, such as by gender or race, as being wrong, even though they recognize the utility of exclusion for social-conventional purposes, such as to enhance group achievement (Killen, Piscane, Lee-Kim, & Ardile-Rey, 2001; Theimer, Killen, & Stangor, 2001). Thus an early sense of fairness and equity is apparent but fragile – most evident when young children's self-interest is not involved, and awaiting the more sophisticated conceptions of equity, need, and other distributive justice principles that emerge in middle childhood (Damon, 1977).

Taken together, it is certainly true that young children comply with the behavioral standards enforced by parents, but a more complete story is that young children are co-constructing behavioral expectations, as parental messages are integrated with their own developing, intuitive moral

sensibility. In their efforts to comprehend how things are typically – and therefore *should be* – done, preschoolers are sensitive to violations of prohibitive rules, but also to differences in the violator's intentions, the emotional dimensions of compliance and defiance, and the imperative strength of different rule domains. Their early awareness of the human consequences associated with violating moral rules is reflected also in the emergence of a beginning sense of fairness that is also based in human considerations. Together this suggests that young children are not just oriented toward obedience to rules, but also to the humanistic dimensions of rules and one's obligation to obey.

Moral Affect

A focus on moral judgment can make moral development appear to be a coldly cognitive phenomenon. But even casual acquaintance with infants and young children confirms the hot emotions involved in compliance, rule violation, negotiation over conflicting desires, misunderstanding of intent, and other issues in parent-child moral socialization.

Emotions are particularly influential in the growth of the moral self during the second year, especially the emergence of self-referential emotions like pride, guilt, shame, and embarrassment (Barrett, 2005; Lagattuta & Thompson, 2007; Lewis, 2000). Although identifying complex self-referential emotions like these is empirically challenging (especially when young children's self-awareness is so rudimentary), researchers have succeeded in reliably distinguishing a constellation of guiltlike behaviors (e.g., spontaneous confession, efforts at reparation); shamelike behaviors (e.g., avoidance of the adult, anxious mannerisms); and embarrassment (e.g., gaze aversion and self-touching) with predictable associations emerging between guilt- and shamelike responses and morally relevant behavior. Kochanska, Gross, Lin, and Nichols (2002), for example, observed young children's emotional and behavioral responses at 22, 33, and 45 months to experimental situations involving rigged mishaps in which children believed they had damaged the experimenter's special toy. Individual differences in these behaviors were stable over time and were modestly predictive of a battery of assessments of conscience at 56 months, which included compliance with rules, moral themes in story-completion responses, and the child's self-reported moral behavior.

Parental responses to young children's successes and failures, compliance and disobedience are significant influences on early manifestations of pride, guilt, and shame (Stipek, 1995; Stipek, Recchia, & McClintic, 1992). Young

children's anticipation of parental reactions is one reason for their emotional responses to success or failure. Kelly, Brownell, and Campbell (2000) found, for example, that mothers' negative evaluations of their toddler's behavior during a challenging task at 24 months predicted children's shame responses during subsequent achievement tasks at age three. Although it is likely that the responses that developmental scientists describe as early guilt or shame are based on anticipated parental reactions to failure or misbehavior, young children's sensitivity to violations of normative standards (some of which are not sanctioned by parents), and their investment in a positive sense of self at this age (Thompson, 2006a), together suggest that early expressions of guilt and shame are more than generalized conditioned anxiety responses. In a sense, the "good boy – good girl" morality described by Kohlberg as characteristic of conventional morality, entailing a commitment to moral conduct to maintain esteem in the eyes of others and support self-esteem, shares many characteristics with early childhood morality.

Empathy is another emotional resource for moral conduct that also emerges in early childhood (Bischof-Kohler, 1991; Thompson, 1998; Zahn-Waxler, 2000). Consistent with the advances in social and emotional understanding earlier described, young children respond with concerned attention to the sight and sound of another person's distress. But because empathy is an emotionally and motivationally complex experience for young children, who are often unsure what to do or incapable of assisting the distressed person, their emotional arousal may or may not be accompanied by comforting or prosocial initiatives. This makes indexing empathy in terms of helping behavior inappropriate, especially for younger children. Empathy may appear developmentally earlier than reliable prosocial initiatives, and may appear independently of prosocial behavior, which, in turn, is also not contingent on an empathic response.

Moral Self

When preschoolers are asked to provide open-ended verbal descriptions of themselves, they typically describe their physical characteristics, behavior, and activities (Keller, Ford, & Meacham, 1978). However, when they can respond to more structured prompts that are less reliant on verbalization skills, young children identify not only external features of themselves but also their internal characteristics and traits (Marsh, Ellis, & Craven, 2002; Measelle, Ablow, Cowan, & Cowan, 1998). Five-year-olds can reliably describe themselves in terms of their dominant affect, tendency toward anxiety or depression, social acceptance, feelings about themselves, and

academic competencies, and these self-descriptions are validated by their external correlates in parental and teacher perceptions of the child.

Using these new methods, Kochanska (2002a) has identified individual differences in a nascent "moral self" that emerges by age five. Preschoolers with a strong moral component to their self-awareness are more likely to endorse statements describing themselves as someone who feels badly about doing the wrong thing, apologizes for wrongdoing, tries to make amends or reparation, and related behavior. In her research, Kochanska has found that individual differences in this feature of self-awareness are predicted by earlier differences in children's observed responses to wrongdoing in the lab, and related morally relevant behaviors (Kochanska et al., 2002). This research is clearly at an early stage, but merits follow-up study to elucidate how the emergence of psychological self-conceptions might provide early foundations for the development of a more mature moral self and moral character.

Interim Conclusion

As students of infancy and early childhood have explored these and related topics, their studies have yielded an increasing variety of findings that are not easily understood within the context of traditional portrayals of early childhood. In several studies, for example, Warneken and Tomasello (2006, 2007) have shown that infants as young as 14 months old behave prosocially toward unfamiliar adults in the absence of reward or praise for doing so. In a series of laboratory experiments, an adult was engaged in simple tasks that he or she could not complete without simple assistance from the child (e.g., retrieving a marker the adult was using for drawing that accidentally fell on the floor; opening a cabinet for an adult with his arms full of books). All but two of the 18-month-olds (and two-thirds of the 14-month-olds) helped readily, most within a few seconds of the adult's apparent need; by contrast, toddlers did not assist when the same situations arose from the adult's deliberate action (e.g., tossing the marker on the floor rather than dropping it accidentally), and thus when no help was needed. We have replicated these findings in our lab.

Although we might disagree with the authors' description of this activity as "altruistic helping," it is apparent that the social-cognitive capabilities of the toddlers in these studies are more sophisticated than conventionally expected. Interpreting others' goals and needs, enacting behavior with a stranger that advances those goals, awareness of others' feelings, and – beyond this experimental context – sensitivity to intentionality in prohibitive

violations, identifying normative expectations for behavior, and the early emergence of a “moral self” are each developmental phenomena in the early years that suggest the need for a new portrayal of early moral sensibility.

The studies reviewed in this section, however, were not primarily focused on early conscience or moral development. The research on conscience, to which we now turn, offers a similar portrayal of young children who are sensitive and intuitive moralists, and whose orientation shares much in common with the more sophisticated forms of moral judgment, character, and identity of later years.

CONSCIENCE DEVELOPMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

What is “conscience”? Consistent with the rich history of this concept within psychological theory, current researchers define conscience as the cognitive, affective, relational, and other processes that influence how young children construct and act consistently with generalizable, internal standards of conduct (Kochanska & Aksan, 2004; Thompson, Meyer, & McGinley, 2006). Researchers have used a wealth of measures to study early conscience development, including young children’s cooperation with their caregivers at required tasks (such as cleaning up), unsupervised compliance with a behavioral standard, moral affect (including guilt and shame), moral reasoning (involving simplified semiprojective moral dilemmas), prosocial affect (such as empathy), prosocial behavior, and indicators of an emergent “moral self” in preschoolers (see Thompson et al., 2006, for a review). Many of these approaches are comparable to those that have been used for years with older children. Contemporary research on conscience development is distinctive, however, not only for the younger ages of the children that are studied, but also for a view of early morality that builds on contemporary thinking about close relationships, early social and emotional understanding, and the developing self.

Parent-Child Relationships and Early Conscience

Classic moral development theories describe parent-child relationships as central to early moral development, but portray relational incentives in bivalent ways: rewards and punishments, love and anxiety over loss of love, respect and fear. Informed by attachment theory, contemporary students of early conscience development acknowledge these incentives and add to them the emotional attachment shared by parent and child as an important gateway for values transmission and internalization. To Kochanska (2002b),

for example, the parent-child relationship enlists young children into a mutually responsive system of reciprocal cooperation that sensitizes them to the mutual obligations of close relationships. Although preschoolers obviously cannot be equal contributors to such a relationship, they are nevertheless motivated by the adult’s warm responsiveness to react cooperatively and positively to the adult’s initiatives. Such a relationship also orients young children to the human dimensions of moral conduct (e.g., consequences for another), and make children more receptive to the parent’s socialization initiatives (see also Maccoby, 1984, and Waters, Kondo-Ikemura, Posada, & Richters, 1991, for similar approaches).

The view that a positive parent-child relationship orients young children to respond cooperatively to the parent’s socialization initiatives has been supported in several longitudinal studies in which the mutual responsiveness and shared positivity of parent-child interaction have been found to predict later measures of conscience, such as the child’s cooperative conduct and rule-compliance without supervision (Kochanska, Forman, & Coy, 1999; Kochanska & Murray, 2000; Laible & Thompson, 2000; see review by Kochanska, 2002b). One reason is that mothers in these relationships use less power assertion and less coercive influence techniques, and thus elicit less emotional reactivity from offspring during discipline encounters (Kochanska, Aksan, Prisco, & Adams, 2008). Consistent with this view, researchers have found that a secure parent-child relationship is associated with conscience development in early childhood, with securely attached children responding more cooperatively and with greater internalization of values than insecurely attached children (Kochanska, 1995; Laible & Thompson, 2000; see Thompson, *in press*, for a review). Kochanska’s (1991, 1995) research has shown that a secure attachment is especially influential for children who are temperamentally relatively fearless, for whom the emotional incentives of the mother-child relationship (rather than the anxiety provoked by discipline practices) are motivational.

As these findings suggest, the influence of specific parental socialization practices may be mediated by the broader quality of the parent-child relationship in shaping early conscience. In a longitudinal study, Kochanska, Aksan, Knaack, and Rhines (2004) found that for securely attached children (assessed at 14 months), the parent’s responsiveness and use of gentle discipline (from 14 to 45 months) predicted conscience (assessed at 56 months), but for insecurely attached children there was no such association. As with temperamental variability, therefore, parental discipline practices cannot be expected to have the same influence on children who

differ in the security of attachment, suggesting that the early socialization of conscience is a process of parent-child interactive effects, rather than main effects of socialization strategy.

Parental Practices: Discipline and Conversation

As with older children, researchers have found that discipline practices that emphasize reasoning and provide young children with justifications are more likely to foster the internalization of values, even though preschoolers may also assert their autonomy through negotiation (Crockenberg & Litman, 1990; Kuczynski & Kochanska, 1990). Parental explanations may be especially important in early childhood for clarifying issues of causality, responsibility, and obligation that may be unclear in the minds of young children as they are caught up in conflicts involving salient emotions and desires. An adult's explanations may also be important for helping young children comprehend the human consequences of the child's behavior.

Parent-child talk during the disciplinary encounter – the traditional focus of research on moral socialization – has advantages and disadvantages for fostering moral internalization. Parents' explanations are directly tied to the prohibitive violation, but the child's emotional arousal may undermine thoughtful processing of the adult's message, especially if the child is young (Thompson, 2006a). There is increasing evidence, however, that parent-child conversation outside of the immediate discipline context is influential in conscience development. Laible and Thompson (2000) recorded conversations between four-year-olds and their mothers about past events in which the child either misbehaved or behaved appropriately. Mothers who more frequently discussed people's feelings in these conversations had children who, in independent assessments, were more advanced in conscience development. Even though maternal references to rules and the consequences of violating them were also identified in these mother-child conversations, it was only maternal references to emotions that predicted conscience in young children. These findings were subsequently replicated in a prospective longitudinal study in which maternal references to feelings (but not references to rules and moral evaluations) during conflict with the child at 30 months predicted the child's conscience development six months later (Laible & Thompson, 2002). Similarly, in another study, two- to three-year-old children whose mothers used reasoning and discussed humanistic concerns in resolving conflict with them were more advanced in moral understanding in kindergarten and first grade (Dunn, Brown, & Maguire, 1995). Together, these findings suggest

that what is important about parent-child conversations is not the clear and consistent articulation of rules and the consequences of rule violation, but how they sensitize young children to the human dimensions of misbehavior and good behavior, and help young children to comprehend the effects of their actions on others' feelings.

These conversational effects are consistent with a broader research literature documenting the influence of parental discourse for young children's representations of their experiences, themselves, and other people (see Thompson, 2006b, and Thompson, Laible, & Ontai, 2003, for reviews). Studies of early parent-child conversation show that when parents talk in a rich and elaborative manner with their young offspring, preschoolers are likely to acquire deeper memory of shared events and achieve greater understanding compared to children who participate in more directive or unelaborated conversations (Nelson & Fivush, 2004). With respect to early conscience, research also shows that mothers who take the initiative to resolve conflict with offspring, using justifications to explain and clarify their requests, and who manage to avoid aggravating tension (such as through threats or teasing), have children who are longitudinally found to be more advanced in assessments of conscience (Laible, 2004; Laible & Thompson, 2002). By contrast, mothers who are more conversationally "power assertive" when recounting the child's misbehavior in the recent past – conveying a critical or negative attitude, feelings of disappointment or anger, or providing reproach or punishment – have preschoolers with lower scores on measures of moral cognition (Kochanska, Aksan, & Nichols, 2003). The positive conversational qualities that are associated with enhanced early conscience development are observed especially in securely-attached mothers and children, which may help to explain why secure children are likely to score higher on measures of early conscience (Laible, Panfile, & Makariev, 2008).

These conclusions are consistent, of course, with the well-documented effects of inductive discipline practices on moral internalization with older children. But these findings suggest that the benefits of a parent's rational justifications and humanistic appeals are also apparent in early childhood, and in conversational contexts that are both within and outside of the specific discipline encounter. Furthermore, these studies suggest that conversational quality and the broader quality of the parent-child relationship are each important to early conscience development. In secure relationships – as a marker of relationships characterized by an orientation of mutual cooperation and responsiveness – mothers and children are also more likely to discuss moral conflicts in a manner facilitating the child's moral growth.

CONCLUSION

The story of the development of moral character and moral self that emerges from these research literatures is far richer and more interesting than the classic view of early morality from psychoanalytic, learning, and cognitive-developmental traditions. It is also very consistent with the portrayal of moral development in middle childhood from the same classic theories. Young children incorporate into an early developing moral sensibility their sensitivity to others' feelings, desires, goals, and needs, and respond in ways that balance recognition of others' interests with their own. They are also aware of the nuances of moral compliance, such as the importance of intention in prohibitive violation, the different domains of social rules, and the emotional consequences of compliance and violation. Their early developing awareness of normative standards becomes enlisted into moral sensibility as they recognize that some things (damage, harm, certain conduct) is not only nonnormative but also disapproved. In all of these conceptual discoveries, they are guided by their relationships with caregivers. These relationships are not only avenues for the transmission of rules but also of humanistic values, an orientation toward cooperation and prosociality that is shaped by the general quality of the parent-child relationship, and by conversation that occurs within and outside the discipline encounter. As a consequence of these relational influences, young children experience salient moral emotions – such as pride, guilt, and shame – that are closely tied to caregivers' evaluations of their conduct, and they are developing a sense of themselves as moral actors that is forged by close relational experience.

These characteristics of early childhood morality are nicely captured in a recent longitudinal study of the morally relevant conversations of two young children documented from the CHILDES database (MacWhinney, 2000). In their analyses of the spontaneous verbal utterances of these children between the ages of two and a half and five, Wright and Bartsch (2008) document how each child was an active interpreter of his or her moral behavior and that of others, applying rapidly developing conceptual skills to the analysis of everyday moral conflicts. The children, Abe and Sarah, rarely talked about moral rules or standards, but frequently evaluated the goodness and badness of people's dispositions and actions by appealing to others' feelings and welfare (e.g., at two years Abe said "I think they are mean to that man because they put him in that glue"). Each child also interlaced emotion concepts into their moral appraisals, commenting about the negative feelings associated with wrongdoing, but also about loving certain people and

other positive affects (e.g., at three and a half years, Abe said "I'm picking up mine because I want you to be happy"). Each child remarked more commonly on the internal than the external motivators of moral conduct, such as the feelings underlying or resulting from specific conduct.

Developmental science needs a new theory of moral development to accommodate these and other findings discussed in this chapter. Such a theory would provide a fresh portrayal of the early foundations of moral character in the experiences and thinking of early childhood, as well as describing how the conceptual and self-reflective advances of later years build on this foundation to foster more sophisticated moral judgments, conduct, and identity to come. Equally important, such a theory would offer insight into how early relationships and experiences create a legacy of moral sensitivity, self-awareness, and dispositions to others that are likely to influence moral conduct in later years. It is long past time for such a theory to guide a new research literature on moral development that is *truly* lifespan in orientation.

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The Development of the Moral Personality

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That moral rationality attaches to selves who have personalities is a notion so commonplace that it is likely to be contested only in certain quarters of academic psychology. Yet ever since Kohlberg's landmark articulation of the "cognitive developmental approach to socialization" (Kohlberg, 1969), there was a way of talking about moral development that scarcely required reference to personality. One could describe the ontogenesis of moral reasoning without invoking the usual indicators of personality, such as traits, dispositions, or character. If anything, personological considerations were regarded as sources of bias, backsliding, and special pleading that had to be surmounted in order to render judgments from the "moral point of view." Moreover, for Kohlberg, the moral stage sequence could not be used to describe persons or to chart individual differences, and he was opposed to the use of the stage theory as a way to make "aretaic judgments" about the moral worthiness of individuals. Moral stages were not, after all, "boxes for classifying and evaluating persons" (Colby, Kohlberg, Gibbs, & Lieberman, 1983, p. 11). Instead moral stages serve as a taxonomic classification of different kinds of sociomoral operations. They describe forms of thought organization of an ideal rational moral agent – an epistemic subject – and hence cannot be "reflections upon the self" (Kohlberg, Levine, & Hewer, 1983, p. 36).

But there has been a discernible movement, in both ethical theory (Flanagan & Rorty, 1990; Taylor, 1989) and moral development (Blasi, 2005; Hart, 2005; Lapsley & Narvaez, 2004; Narvaez & Lapsley, 2009; Walker & Frimer, this volume) to draw a tighter connection between moral agency and personality. At least among psychologists, the desire for thicker conceptions of the moral self was motivated partly by a desire to offer a compelling account of the relationship between moral judgment and moral action (Blasi, 1983). Moreover, it has proven difficult to tell a