

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The social and moral development of individuals, and the relations of cultural contexts to individuals' thought and actions are broad topics that have been approached in a variety of ways. Especially with regard to morality, there have and continue to be sharp differences and heated controversies about their defining features, how they are formed during childhood and adolescence, the role of judgments and emotions, and relations of individuals and society. In the early part of the twentieth century, some of the major social scientific theorists, including psychologists like Jean Piaget (1932), Sigmund Freud (1930), and those of the behavioristic movement (John Watson, 1924, but later articulated more explicitly by B.F. Skinner, 1971), addressed issues of morality and its development in different ways. Emile Durkheim (1925/1961), a sociologist, also presented a point of view that included propositions about children's development.

One perspective on the development of morality was that it entailed the construction of judgments about justice, equality, and cooperation. In line with his general theoretical approach, Piaget proposed that children's moral development stems from their reciprocal interactions with others, including adults and peers. He also theorized that individuals and society are in reciprocal relationship, and individuals make judgments that are both in accord with society's traditions and accepted practices and that serve to potentially transform those traditions and practices (Piaget, 1950/1995). Alternative perspectives were presented by Freud, the Behaviorists, and Durkheim. Although there are significant differences among these three approaches, they share the viewpoint that moral development primarily involves

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accommodations to, and internalization of, the norms, standards, and practices of society. In those approaches, it is important to mention, the role of biological factors is also taken into account. The most elaborated form of this is in Freud's theorizing that societal norms place severe restrictions on biological needs and instincts. As a consequence, social life involves a good deal of conflict for individuals. Durkheim's position, as another example, included the assumption that there are "natural" propensities for individuals to become attached to social groups. In Durkheim's view, as a consequence of these natural propensities social life is mainly harmonious for individuals.

In general, views of morality as entailing the construction of judgments or the acquisition of societal norms have continued to be debated during the last part of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first. In each approach, there have been extensive modifications and extensions of the early work. The approach I present in this book is based on the proposition that individuals construct judgments through their social interactions and that they form several different kinds of judgments about a multifaceted social world. The approach is consistent with philosophical conceptions of morality as entailing judgments about welfare, justice, and rights. Within this approach, I account for relations between morality and culture. Morality can be a source of social harmony since it concerns how people ought to relate to each other. Societal arrangements, social norms, and cultural practices do embody ways for people to relate to each other with fairness, and to respect the welfare of others. Societal arrangements, social norms, and cultural practices, at the same time, can embody ways that allow for injustices and can be detrimental to the welfare of groups of people, especially those situated in lower positions on the social hierarchy. Under those circumstances, morality is a source of conflict because people make judgments about injustices and inequalities embedded in the social system.

The approach I present is grounded in analyses of the psychology of the development of moral and social judgments of individuals, and how those judgments are applied to societal arrangements and cultural practices and can result in harmony, conflict, and opposition in people's social lives. In the course of discussing the approach my

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colleagues and I have taken to social and moral development, I consider several alternative approaches, including ones that presume that morality is formed through either accommodation to or identification with one's culture. In those approaches, cultures are seen as entailing generally shared beliefs that make for social harmony. In those perspectives, conflicts and tensions arise mainly when people have not adequately acquired the morality of the culture.

Social conflicts, tensions, and moral failings are matters that in the United States have been very much part of public discussions during the last half of the twentieth century. These discussions about morality and society, engaged in by politicians, social leaders, and social scientists, often have taken two forms. Especially in the latter part of the century – during the 1980s and 1990s – many have maintained that American society is in decline and facing a serious moral crisis stemming from the failure of many people, especially the young, to adequately incorporate the moral values and ideals of the society. Often, the era of the 1960s is identified as contributing to the moral decline because of an abandonment, at the time, of traditional values.

Others attribute social conflicts not to a decline in the morality of the society, but to long-standing social injustices having to do with matters like racial discrimination, the rights of women, and economic inequalities. From that perspective, the 1960s was an era in which issues of social justice were confronted and discussed publicly. I believe that the social and political events, as well as public discussions that have occurred during the last half of the twentieth century – especially as articulated in the 1960s and 1990s – inform our understanding of some important differences in social scientific thinking about morality, development, social conflicts, and the relations of individuals to society. The events and discussions also highlight different views of social opposition. To provide an overview of the contrasting approaches, in this chapter I consider perspectives put forth in the 1960s and in the latter part of the century.

A salient characteristic of the 1960s in the United States, as well as in other parts of the world, was social and political protest against governmental policies and social practices considered unjust. One issue that galvanized public protests and demonstrations was the

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engagement of the United States in the war in Vietnam. Large numbers of people labored greatly to have the U.S. government end its involvement in the war. A second issue resulting in social and political activities, including public protests and demonstrations, was the treatment of black people. Many people strived to end racial discrimination, unequal treatment, and the lack of economic opportunities. A third issue, the role of women in the larger society and within the family, did not often involve large public demonstrations. Instead, this issue was the topic of discussion and debate in political arenas, the workplace, the family, and in written expositions.

The antiwar movement mainly pertained to events occurring at the time in that it focused on the perceived injustices of the Vietnam war (though issues were raised regarding war in general and the long-term actions of the United States as a powerful nation). Both the civil rights and the feminist movements were not solely limited to events occurring at the time. Attention was given to matters pertaining to long-standing practices of discrimination, prejudice, inequalities, injustices, and poverty. Martin Luther King, Jr., the universally acknowledged leader of the civil rights movement, articulated the moral and long-term goals of the protests and demonstrations in a well-known letter he wrote while in jail in Birmingham, Alabama, in April 1963. King, who had been jailed for leading a nonviolent demonstration, wrote his letter in response to a public statement from eight Alabama clergymen. The clergymen wrote that the demonstrations were unwise and untimely and violated the principles of law and order and common sense. They also complained that the demonstrations were directed by outsiders (King resided in Atlanta, Georgia).

In his lengthy letter, King made it clear that he viewed the demonstrations as necessitated by the injustices of racial prejudice, unjust laws supporting racial discrimination, and freedoms denied to some because of their color: "I am in Birmingham because injustice is here . . . Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere" (King, 1963, p. 3). Moreover, King regarded the civil rights movement as part of a historical process entailing oppression and struggle: "History is the long and tragic story of the fact that privileged groups seldom give up their privileges voluntarily . . . we know through painful experience

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that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed" (p. 6). And inevitably freedom will be demanded: "Oppressed people cannot remain oppressed forever. The urge for freedom will eventually come. This is what happened to the American Negro" (p. 12). Oppression produces discontents among those oppressed and leaves society in a state of tension. Tension can also be used for positive ends: "I have earnestly worked and preached against violent tension, but there is a type of constructive tension that is necessary for growth . . . to create the kind of tension in society that will help men to rise from the dark depths of prejudice and racism to the majestic heights of understanding and brotherhood" (p. 5).

King's perspective, along with that of many others concerned at the time with the war in Vietnam, civil rights, and the treatment of women, reflects an orientation to society, culture, morality, the psychology of moral behavior, and the acquisition of morality. In this orientation, morality is not equivalent to adherence to existing or traditional societal values or norms. Rather, the principles of justice, equal respect for persons, and freedom from oppression are the standards by which individuals and society should be guided. Indeed, in his letter to the clergymen, King was critical of those in authority within established social institutions, such as the church, for their acceptance of existing ways: "Where were their voices of support when tired, bruised, and weary Negro men and women decided to rise from the dark dungeons of complacency to the bright hills of creative protest . . . Far from being disturbed by the presence of the church, the power structure of the average community is consoled by the church's silent and often vocal sanction of things as they are" (King, 1963, p. 15). Nor is it the case that moral wisdom necessarily resides in traditions or established practices. In his famous address at the March on Washington (August 28, 1963), King called for transformations in the ways blacks had been treated since the end of the Civil War: "Now is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice. Now is the time to lift our nation from the quicksands of social injustice to the solid rock of brotherhood."

Similarly, the movement for the rights of women was seen by its proponents as an attempt to correct past wrongs of injustice, inequalities,

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and exploitation. Feminists regarded the power structure of many communities, societies, and cultures that were controlled by men as perpetuating injustices and, in some cases, involving oppression.

It was implicit in the feminist and civil rights movements that acceptance of the ways of society or the practices of a culture is not always beneficial. King himself made this explicit in social scientific terms when he addressed the annual convention of the American Psychological Association in 1967. Recognizing that psychologists often cast psychological health in terms of adjustment to social conditions and arrangements, he urged them to think otherwise: "There are some things concerning which we must always be maladjusted if we are to be people of good will."

During the last two decades of the twentieth century, public social activities and much public rhetoric has taken a different turn from the 1960s. This is not to say that people, in general, had different ways of making moral judgments during the two periods. Rather, different perspectives were more or less frequently espoused in public activities and discourse. One contrast is that there has been less in the way of public social and political protest. To be sure, many issues of justice and rights engage people – including the rights of women, sexual harassment, civil rights, gay rights, abortion, and euthanasia. However, a good deal of the political and social commentary, and in many instances the analyses of social scientists, have involved laments about the dire moral state of the nation and the lack of civility in people's social interactions, a nostalgia about times past, and implicit or explicit critiques of the events of the 1960s. The tone has been that too many have failed to incorporate the traditional values of the society (often referred to as family values), so they are unable to form the appropriate traits or habits of character and are unwilling to sacrifice personal freedoms and desires for the good of the society. Embedded in these perspectives is the idea that adjustment to, or acceptance of, the norms, mores, standards, and practices of society is good and necessary.

These assessments of moral failings have been made by politicians and by social scientists. The pronouncements of politicians, though perhaps also aimed at obtaining benefits in the electoral process, are

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informative of the perspective on individuals, society, and morality. An interesting example comes from responses to large-scale demonstrations in 1992 that took place in the inner city of Los Angeles, which included rioting, looting, and burnings. The demonstrations were, themselves, in reaction to the acquittal of four white Los Angeles policemen in their trial on charges of severely beating a black man upon arresting him after a car chase. The beatings had been captured on videotape, broadcast nationally, and discussed on television news shows and in the newspapers. As a consequence, the trial of the policemen received a great deal of attention in the media and by the public – as, of course, did the reaction by blacks in Los Angeles to the acquittal of the policemen.

Several politicians attributed the demonstrations and riots to a lack of “traditional values” in communities of the type that had taken part. They claimed that the events reflected “a poverty of values” in the inner cities, where there is a breakdown of family structure, personal responsibility, and social order. The poverty of values, it was said, resulted in such moral ills as the bearing of children outside of marriage, drug use, and dependence on welfare. More generally, the view has been espoused that there has been a decline of morality by virtue of permissiveness and changes in the structure of families. A common theme has been that there is a connection between family values and traditional values. It is thought that the underpinnings of morality are due to the preservation of a set of values or ideals in the traditions of society handed down from generation to generation. It is presumed that the process of transmitting the traditions occurs within the family. Therefore, the family structure must be maintained so that each generation can learn from previous ones. Another common theme is that the process went awry in the era of the 1960s because traditional values were overthrown in favor of self-interest, unbridled freedoms, casual sex, drug use, evasion of responsibility, disrespect for authority, a rejection of morality by relativistic attitudes, and a devaluing of marriage and the heterosexual family. The prevalence in the inner cities of single mothers has exacerbated the situation. To properly acquire moral values, children need to be part of intact families, with a mother and a father. One group that has been negatively affected is

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the so-called underclass from the inner cities, since they fail to develop the appropriate values derived from society's traditions.

The causes of moral decay also presumably stemmed from another group in society – a class of elites who themselves have the wrong values, espouse relativistic positions on morality, and steer others into improper directions. The media have been singled out for blame. Back in 1992, one of the most vocal politicians was then Vice President Dan Quayle. In one of his speeches, the vice president criticized a popular weekly television program ("Murphy Brown") for depicting its lead character as bearing a child while unmarried (A. Rosenthal, "Quayle Says Riots Sprang from Lack of Family Values," *New York Times*, May 20, 1992). Quayle's suggestion that a fictional television character contributed to the nation's moral decline by "mocking the importance of fathers" (p. A20) was itself mocked by many. Nevertheless, part of Quayle's message in this regard is shared by many. It is the message that there are elites in the society, represented by those in the media, intellectuals, and academics, who contribute to the decline of morality by criticizing traditional values. Ordinary people, with their common and moral sense, stand in between the elites and the underclass of the inner cities.

Several aspects of these messages are mirrored in positions taken by people who try to account for social scientific evidence and who include scholarly analyses that go beyond political rhetoric. In one instance, a direct link was made to the pronouncements of politicians through the very title of the essay, "Dan Quayle Was Right" (Whitehead, 1993). Dan Quayle was right, according to Whitehead's interpretations of social scientific evidence, in his claim that the absence of fathers in the family has very negative consequences for children. Whitehead, too, traced the problem to a rapid rise, in the 1960s, in the rates of divorces and out-of-wedlock births. These trends were supported by a set of new beliefs that emerged from American cultural orientations: that it would be better economically for women to join the work force, that divorce would not be harmful to children, and that diversity in the structure of families would be better for the nation. These beliefs, argued Whitehead, are in accord with American orientations to individual choice, freedom, self-expression,

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and social progress. However, the changes in family structure resulted in regress rather than progress because “the social arrangement that has proved most successful in ensuring the physical survival and promoting the social development of the child is the family unit of the biological mother and father” (Whitehead, 1993, p. 48). Moreover, the family is a needed communitarian institution that serves to teach children self-restraint, responsibility, and right conduct. As shown by social scientific evidence, these goals cannot be accomplished within single parent or divorced families. The consequence of the changes in families has been greater poverty and a greater likelihood that children will have emotional and behavioral problems, drop out of high school, get pregnant as teenagers, abuse drugs, be in trouble with the law, and be at much higher risk for physical and sexual abuse. Movies and shows on television provide children with models to emulate who display improper and destructive behaviors and life styles.

Several other writings have appeared that convey the themes in Whitehead’s essay. Whitehead’s writings were directed to the public at large, citing social scientific evidence. The writings of two others, Allan Bloom and William Bennett, have also reached a wide readership. Bloom, a philosopher from the University of Chicago specializing in ancient Greek philosophy, wrote a tome (1987) about the highly negative influences of the culture of the 1960s especially on American universities and, in turn, on society as a whole. *The Closing of the American Mind* (with the subtitle, *How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today’s Students*), in spite of its scholarly tone and somewhat obscure language, reached a large audience. It was a national best-selling book. For Bloom, too, the 1960s created a crisis for the nation. His focus was on the lowering of standards and capitulation to militant students in universities during that period, and an associated doctrine of moral relativism. A major consequence is that decades later university students, and older people, embraced a radical individualism that leaves them narcissistic and preoccupied with themselves, with a psychology of separateness or detachment from others. Bloom also attributes a major cause of the decline to feminism, which, he believes, is contrary to the natural attachment of

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mother to child that is a foundation for family life. Family life, however, has experienced a breakdown, as evidenced by the high divorce rate, due to the feminist turn against the attachment of mother and child. The breakdown in family life contributes to individualism and detachments, which in turn has negatively affected university life and the moral state of society.

William Bennett, too, is a philosopher by training (with Ph.D. from the University of Texas). He has straddled the academic and political arenas, putting forth similar moral messages and critiques of society in each persona. He is best known to the general public for his governmental and political activities as first, Secretary of Education in President Ronald Reagan's administration during the 1980s, and then as director of drug policy in the administration of George Bush. Less well known is that Bennett was Director of the National Humanities Center at Research Triangle Park (North Carolina), during which time he wrote extensively about moral education and critiqued those psychological theories of moral development (e.g., Kohlberg, 1969) guiding the implementation of programs of moral education in the schools (Bennett, 1980; Bennett & Delattre, 1978, 1979). In those writings, as well as in the later periods, Bennett, (1992, 1993, 1995, 1998), put forth the views that morality consists of dispositions or traits of character consistent with cultural traditions and the "memory of society," and that children need to incorporate habitual virtuous behaviors through firm control on the part of adults (see also Kirkpatrick, 1992; Ryan, 1989; Sommers, 1984; Wynne, 1979, 1985, 1989).

Bennett and his colleagues took great issue with the ways children were taught morality in the schools because, they argued, such programs typically were designed to stimulate changes in moral judgments, deliberation, reflection, and the consideration of alternative moral choices and decisions. In this view, morality neither involves judgments (as claimed in theories of moral development like those of Piaget, 1932, or Kohlberg, 1969) nor making choices in values (as claimed in the values clarification approach of Simon, Howe, & Kirschenbaum, 1972). Judgment, reflection, and decision making were deemed largely tangential to morality and, therefore, detrimental to its acquisition because they divert children from learning to behave in