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# *Introduction: morality as family practice*




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A universal function of the family is to raise children to think and feel in ways that resonate with notions of morality that relate to social situations, specifically to expected and preferred modes of participation in these situations. As Aristotle notes, '[N]one of the moral virtues arises in us by nature . . . [R]ather we are adapted by nature to receive them, and are made perfect by habit' (Aristotle, 1994 [4th century BCE]: 26). That is, children are born with a capacity for acquiring knowledge and morality, but the flourishing of these qualities relies upon routine experiences with intimates. The prime intimate social unit is the family; family members ideally provide secure environments that promote an openness to learn about how one should treat other people, build social relationships, enact social identities, and at the same time how one should apprehend and creatively reconfigure objects in the world.

This is a tall order for families, and yet across the world's societies, rarely do family members reflect upon and strategize about how to raise a moral, sentient, and knowledgeable child beyond selection of and reliance upon children's schools, religious organizations, and other institutions outside the family. Yet, as the articles collected in this volume indicate, morality is embedded in and is an outcome of everyday family practices. The flow of social interactions involving children is imbued with implicit and explicit messages about right and wrong, better and worse, rules, norms, obligations, duties, etiquette, moral reasoning, virtue, character, and other dimensions of how to lead a moral life. While philosophers debate the essence of morality, anthropologists and sociologists the socio-cultural configuration of morality, and psychologists the developmental progression of morality, there is surprisingly little research on how morality is enacted and socialized through family interactions involving children. The present volume provides five accounts of children's immersion experiences in mundane social interactions with parents, which are imbued with moral expectations and meanings and which apprentice children into moral life-worlds.

Beyond articulating morality as family practice, all of the analyses presented in this volume draw from a large-scale project on the Everyday Lives of Families funded by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation. The study is multidisciplinary and cross-national, including 32 US families residing in the Los Angeles area, eight Italian families residing in Rome, Italy, and eight families in Linköping, Sweden. This volume draws from the US and Italian family corpora. Each family consisted of two working parents and two or three children, one of whom was between the ages of eight and 10. The US families were ethnically, religiously, and gender diverse (same sex and different sex parents). Each family was ethnographically interviewed, videotaped at home and in community settings, and family members were systematically tracked while at home at 10 minute intervals to note use of space, objects and participation in activities. The videotape corpus of family and home life consists of approximately 50 hours per family and was collected over two weekdays and two weekend days across a week, from the time the family woke up until the children went to bed, with the exception of time spent by parents at work and children at school. While the analyses in this volume are qualitative and focus on discursive and interactional structurings of morality and knowledge, they speak to variation and continuities within and across situations, families and countries.

Because this volume considers morality in relation to children and their families, it is useful to briefly frame the articles in relation to classic research on the development of morality, which itself is a subject of controversy. Piaget (1965 [1932]) proposed a developmental sequence leading to children's understanding that a person has to take responsibility for one's behavior and that rules for social conduct are contingent, conventional and negotiable rather than intrinsically correct and fixed across contexts. This progression parallels his thesis that children move from egocentrism to more sociocentric perspective-taking and that moral reasoning involves complex cognition as well as affect. The research in this volume on families suggests that long past the early stages of childhood, parents are continuously attempting to direct their children's awareness to the moral dimensions of particular social situations in which they are engaged. For example, in Fasulo, Loyd and Padiglione's study, we learn of a case in which an Italian teenage boy's poor hygiene becomes the object of moral scrutiny. The boy is reprimanded by his mother then warned to wash himself well or she will do it for him. Kremer-Sadlik and Kim find that US parents regularly monitor the moral displays of elementary school-aged children during sports activities, for example, admonishing them for a defeated attitude or unsportsmanship-like conduct. Wingard's analysis of the same age cohort evidences the constant efforts of parents in corralling their children to prioritize certain activities (e.g. doing homework) as moral obligations over other possibilities (e.g. shopping).

Following Piaget, Kohlberg's model of moral development (1984) emphasizes a progression from children acting morally out of desire to avoid punishment from authority figures to a contractual, reciprocal sense of interpersonal morality to eventually a sense of fairness in relation to societal norms and rules codified for the good of the larger social group. This model has been heavily critiqued by Turiel and his colleagues (Turiel, 1977; Nucci and Turiel, 1978; Turiel et al., 1987), who cite Kohlberg's failure to distinguish between different kinds of rules

(e.g. personal and conventional). Disagreeing with both Kohlberg and Turiel, Much and Shweder (1978) and Shweder and Much (1986) argue that moral and conventional dimensions of rules are difficult to untangle and are enmeshed and constructed in relation to cultural frameworks.

Contributions to this volume attest to yet another problem with all linear trajectories of moral development, which is that earlier levels of moral reasoning do not necessarily disappear and transform into more complex levels of moral judgment, but rather persist as moral practices linked to particular social contexts. For example, Wingard's analysis of moral socialization into time management indicates that Kohlberg's early stage of children conforming to moral expectations based upon conformity to authority and avoidance of punishment persists as a routine form of moral practice with school children. Parents often exert their authority in getting school children to comply with parent-determined prioritized activities; punishment and reward are often components of such moralizing interactions. Similarly, in Fasulo, Loyd and Padiglione's study, when an Italian mother presses her 13-year-old son to conform to her standards of hygiene, she uses herself as the absolute arbiter, chiding him with her disgust, ordering him to wash his armpits, and advising him in the face of his resistance that 'it is useless that you act like this'.

These observations suggest that an authoritative parenting style crosses cultural lines, in that US and Italian parents both utilize this strategy. Yet the articles indicate a more complex picture, in that there exists not only variation in the display of parental authority in similar situations within a single society, but also variation in parental authority across *different* social situations within and across societies. This point is evidenced in Fasulo, Loyd and Padiglione's analysis, where they find that in both Italy and the US, parents tend to exert direct control over matters of children's *hygiene*, while in matters of children's carrying out *cleaning* tasks (e.g. making the bed), US parental directives tend to be less coercive and children allowed more autonomy in completing the task. They conclude that for many US parents, children's engagement in household tasks is valued over the quality of the final result of the cleaning task. The Italian parents observed value the quality of the household completed task, to the extent that they tended not to assign children to make beds and do other such tasks, but rather took on this role themselves, with their children as spectators.

An important theme in the research on children's moral development is that morality entails cognitive as well as affective competence. Saliently, the development of moral awareness goes hand in hand with the ontogenesis of theory of mind, wherein children come to understand that other people in their surroundings may have thoughts and feelings that differ from their own perspectives (Dennett, 1987; Gopnik, 1990; Wellman, 1990). Socialization into moral perspective-taking is addressed in Kremer-Sadlik and Kim's study focusing on parent-child interactions surrounding sports activities. The moral language addressed to children raises their awareness of other players as well as what is expected of them as participants in a sports game (e.g. fairness and respect) or as a loyal fan, all of which apprentice children into not only arbitrary conventions but also the importance of striving towards empathy and intersubjectivity.

The articles by C. Goodwin and M.H. Goodwin in this volume turn around the relation of cognition to morality, arguing that the acquisition of knowledge itself is inherently moral. C. Goodwin's analysis probes an interaction involving a father and his daughter working on a homework assignment, wherein the father attempts to secure and sustain his daughter's attention to him and epistemic alignment with the task at hand. Attention is a critical focus of moral socialization, in that it is at the heart of both knowledge acquisition and the establishment of sociality, especially respect (Baron-Cohen, 1996; Clark, 2001; Ochs, 1988; Rogoff, 2003; Rogoff et al., 2003). What C. Goodwin introduces to the discussion is that attention-seeking and attention displays constitute the moral backbone of relationships. When attention of one interlocutor flags, the other may interpret this as a moral failing and sign of disrespect. An important advance is Goodwin's point that attention consists of distinct stances that involve a range of epistemic, moral, and cooperative orientations among others, which are incrementally and interactionally consequential for family alignment, conflict, and attribution of character.

The morality of cognition is central to M.H. Goodwin's analysis of 'occasioned knowledge exploration' in family interaction. In philosophical discussions, morality has been conceptualized as a human process rather than a product. MacIntyre (1984), for example, insists that a moral person is one who is on a 'quest' for what constitutes 'the good'. It is not that 'the good' is pre-decided, and one simply has to locate it; rather, the quest entails an evolving moral education and striving to articulate and generate a sense of what is good for self and society. Similarly, Taylor (1989) poses the moral person as one who continuously attempts to engage in a life-long 'narrative understanding' of the moral meanings of one's experiences. And Havel's prison letters (1989: 190) also pose the moral imperative for humans to maintain a 'persistent and productive openness' and to pursue 'a ceaseless process of searching, demystification, and penetration beneath the surface of phenomena in ways that do not depend on allegiance to given, ready-made methodology'. These insights place moral value on the pursuit of knowledge as a life goal. Goodwin's study examines how this moral orientation towards knowledge exploration is socialized through children's and parents' joint participation in serendipitous and routine activities in which a parent sparks children's curiosity and invites playful and supportive learning. The analysis illuminates how ordinary family activities, such as taking a walk in the neighborhood, may be seized by a parent as an opportunity to draw children into a moral universe in which open and enjoyable learning is a good unto itself and apprentice children into the intellectual tools for opening their life-worlds to new understandings.

The collected studies in this volume take the reader into the lived worlds of family morality. The reader is privy to dialogues involving parents urging children in the heat of a sports game to display stamina, respect, and loyalty (Kremer-Sadlik and Kim). A small drama with a big message centers on a father's frustration in attempting to recruit his daughter to align with him to do a homework assignment (C. Goodwin). An especially improvisational father draws his children into playing

with words and going out on a limb to speculate about how the world works (M. Goodwin). There is also the serious business of sobering children into the social fact that growing up means that obligation precedes pleasure and that time is finite and must be managed, all of which may be delivered in the car ride home after picking up the kids from school (Wingard). And finally the oft-cited association between purity and danger (Douglas, 1966) finds its way into bathrooms, bedrooms, and other domestic niches, where parents discipline children into valuing hygiene and cleanliness as sacred states of the body and the home (Fasulo, Loyd and Padiglione). Moral conceptions of the good saturate the everyday lives of families, giving substance to MacIntyre's claim (1984) that virtue is intrinsic to practice.

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