

Chapter 2

Morality and Religious Rules

Conventionality is not morality.

Self-righteousness is not religion.

To attack the first is not to assail the last

(Charlotte Bronte, 1977[1847], p. 3.)

One question frequently asked by those concerned with moral or character education is whether morality can be addressed independent of religious values. Responding to that question is timely and relevant to teachers and parents alike. The current request to put God and prayer back into the classroom derives from an old and enduring belief that extends beyond the parochial scope of specific religious groups. The belief is that morality and religion are inseparable. The problem this point of view presents to teachers and administrators of any pluralist democracy is that it forces school personnel to choose among the values of differing religious groups. For schools in the US this issue presents teachers and administrators with the particular legal dilemma of whether they can teach about morality without, at the same time, violating First Amendment freedoms and constitutional provisions regarding the separation of Church and state. In the 1970s many schools dealt with this issue by retreating into the value relativism of programs of values clarification (Simon, Howe, & Kirschenbaum, 1972). Other schools and districts have simply attempted to avoid the issue entirely by not engaging in any purposeful effort at moral or character education. From the perspective of fundamentalist and non-religious parents alike, the promotion of value relativism, and the purposeful avoidance of moral teaching in public schools is a cause for alarm. Moreover, assumptions of the inseparability of religion and morality raise concerns among fundamentalists that the teaching of

values within public schools without bible study and prayer will undermine the moral beliefs of their children. In the 1980s and 1990s, parents of fundamentalist children in the US have responded to such concerns by withdrawing their children from public schools, and in increasing numbers engaging in the practice of home schooling (Lyman, 1998).

The ramifications for civil society in the US or any other pluralist democracy of a failure to satisfactorily resolve such educational concerns are self evident. One index of the complexity of questions regarding the relation between morality and religion is the fact that this has been an enduring area of controversy debated by philosophers since Plato's time (Crittenden, 1990). At least one aspect of these issues, however, has been resolved by research which has examined whether children and adolescents make a distinction between the rules and practices specific to their religion, and those moral issues that ought to be common to religions other than their own and to secular society as well. In that research, we applied the distinction we have drawn between moral and non-moral areas of social regulation to examine how Christian and Jewish children conceptualize the rules of their respective religions.

Morality and Religious Norms as Seen by Catholics

The first of these studies focused on traditional Roman Catholics. This was for two main reasons: (1) Catholicism has a clearly designated authority and procedure for interpreting and determining what constitutes sinful behavior (i.e., the Pope, usually after consultation with other bishops, has the ultimate authority to interpret and hence determine matters of doctrine, and (2) Catholicism as one of the world's largest and oldest organized religions, has become an integral part of many socio-cultural systems.

In the study (Nucci, 1985) Catholic adolescents and young adults were asked to make a number of judgments about actions considered sins by the Catholic Church. Some of the actions such as stealing, killing, rape, slander etc., entailed harm or injustice toward another and were classified by us as matters of morality. Other actions such as failure to attend religious services on Easter or Christmas, fasting prior to communion, the use of contraceptives, masturbation,

premarital sex between consenting adults, divorce, and ordaining women entailed violations of worship patterns or social behavior prescribed by Catholicism as an institution. These actions were classified as nonmoral and akin to matters of social convention. Items were presented in questionnaire form with all items randomized to control for response bias. Items used in the study are listed in Table 1 (one item, homosexuality is not listed since it was the focus of a subsequent study to be discussed in chapter 5). It should be pointed out that nonmoral religious prescriptions are not, strictly speaking, conventions, since they are presumably derived from scripture and are not considered by the devout to be the products of social consensus. With Catholicism this issue is complicated by the existence of Church authorities (i.e., the Pope and the bishops) empowered to determine such issues for members of the Catholic faith. It was still our view that such issues would not be treated as matters of morality by Catholics.

Participants in the study were asked to make three kinds of judgments. First, they were asked to rate the seriousness of each transgression using a four point scale on which 1 = not wrong at all and 4 = very seriously wrong. The remaining two judgments required subjects to employ criteria for identifying the moral (i.e., prescriptivity, universality) as set out in domain theory. Judgments of the prescriptivity of various actions was evoked by asking (1) whether it would be wrong or all right for the Pope in conjunction with the Bishops to remove the attendant moral and conventional rules, and (2) if it would be wrong or all right for a Catholic to engage in a given behavior once the rule was removed. Judgments of the universality of acts as constituting wrongful behavior were evoked by asking whether it would be all right or wrong for members of another religion to engage in the behavior if the other religion had no rules or standards regarding the acts.

Participants in the study were 100 sophomores attending religion classes at two Chicago catholic high schools and equal numbers of undergraduates attending a Chicago are university. A preliminary set of questions determined that both groups were devout practicing church-goers (92% of the university Catholics and 95.3% of the high school students received communion at least monthly). In addition, nearly all of the participants in both groups adhered

to the traditional Catholic beliefs that Mary remained a virgin at the time of Christ's conception, that Christ is God and rose from the dead, and that Peter was the first head of the Church.

With regard to subjects' judgments of the seriousness of transgressions, we found that both the high school and college age Catholics rated the moral transgressions as more serious than violations of catholic conventions. This finding occurred despite the fact that according to Church dogma, engagement in a number of the prohibited conventional behaviors entail the same severe penalty (i.e., damnation) as engagement in the prohibited moral acts. These data are consistent with findings from other research in secular settings indicating that children and adolescents tend to rate moral transgressions as more serious than violations of convention (Tisak & Turiel, 1988), and indicate that the Catholic adolescents and young adults in our study based their judgments of the greater seriousness of moral transgressions on criteria other than the punishments assumed by Catholic dogma. It is our view that these Catholics judged the moral transgressions to be more serious because of the intrinsic effects such actions as hitting, stealing, slander and rape have on the recipient of the act.

Findings for the high school and college age Catholics' responses to questions regarding the removal of Church rules are presented in Table 1. As can be seen in the table, the

Insert Table 1 about here.

overwhelming majority of the participants (on average 91.6% high school, 98% university) viewed it as wrong for Church authorities to remove rules governing moral transgressions such as hitting and stealing. In contrast, on average, less than half of the high school (40.8%) and university (32.7%) Catholics viewed it as wrong for the Pope to remove the Church rules regarding non-moral (conventional) behaviors such as fasting prior to communion, the ordination of women, the use of contraceptives, or engaging in premarital sex. Responses to questions regarding whether or not it would be wrong to engage in the various actions once religious prohibitions were removed essentially paralleled the findings regarding the removal of the rules

themselves. It would appear that to the extent that devout American Catholics grant the Pope and other religious leaders the authority to alter the standards for "good" or "right" Catholic conduct, this authority extends only to actions in the non-moral (conventional) domain. One possible explanation for this finding is that the majority of American Catholics, contrary to Church dogma, do not view the Pope as infallible in matters of faith. Our own data would tend to bear that out. Only 23% of our university sample and 28% of our high school participants adhered to the belief in papal infallibility. These findings are in line with other surveys of American Catholic attitudes dating back to the 1970s (NBC News, 1979). For the remaining quarter of our subjects, who professed a belief in papal infallibility, our findings may reflect an incredulity on their part that the Pope would make the error of removing Church rules governing moral actions. In either case, these results are in line with the view that people may generate ideas about the prescriptivity of moral actions independent of the rules or pronouncements of religious authorities.

With respect to relativity questions (i.e., questions about other religions), we found that Catholics tended to universalize only the moral issues. The findings are also summarized in Table 1. On average 91% of the high school participants and 97% of the university students viewed it as wrong for members of another religion to engage in acts that were moral transgressions (e.g., stealing, harm to another) even if the other religion had no rules regarding the acts. In contrast to moral issues, less than half of the Catholics (on average 33.8% high school, 18.2% university) were willing to universalize Catholic conventions and treat as wrong engagement in such conventional actions by members of religions which do not regulate those behaviors. The tendency of the participants in the study to acknowledge the relativism of their Church's conventions is highlighted by findings that the percentages of participants viewing acts as wrong for members of another religion was significantly less than the percentages of participants who viewed it as wrong for Catholics themselves to engage in the behaviors if the Pope removed the governing rules. In sum, these findings indicate that Catholics distinguish between Church conventions, which serve to organize and regulate the behaviors of persons who

define themselves as Catholics, and those moral acts which have an intrinsic effect upon the rights and well-being of others, Catholic and non-Catholic alike.

Our study of Catholics provided very strong support for our hypotheses regarding morality and religion. It must be said, however, that Catholicism, because of its organizational structure seems ideally suited for the type of question we posed. Catholics, particularly since Vatican II, have become accustomed to the notion that Church regulations may be altered by the hierarchy, and therefore relative to the historical period. As our research has shown, Catholics extend this relativity only to Church regulations that refer to matters of convention. Nonetheless, one might ask whether members of fundamentalist or orthodox groups, which eschew the notion of a temporal Church hierarchy and presumably derive their rules directly from scripture, would react in a similar fashion when asked about the alterability or universality of their religious conventions. To address these issues we conducted subsequent studies with Amish-Mennonite and Dutch Reform Calvinist Christian, and Conservative and Orthodox Jewish children and adolescents.

Morality and Religious Norms as Seen by Fundamentalist Christians and Jews

The findings I will be discussing came from several different studies (Nucci, 1985; Nucci & Turiel, 1993). The results from these studies, however, present a fairly consistent picture, and so to keep from being repetitive, I will talk about them together. We modified our methods from the study with Catholics, and employed extensive interviews rather than questionnaires. This allowed us to get a better sense of the reasons children had for the responses they gave to individual questions. Before I get into the details of our methods, let me say something about the backgrounds of the children and adolescents who participated in the research.

Christian participants. The Christian children who participated in the research were conservative Mennonites from a rural area of Indiana and a subgroup of Amish-Mennonite children from the same area. The Mennonites constitute a religious denomination within the

larger Anabaptist community which had its origins in the Swiss reformation. Historically, the Amish are an off-shoot of the Mennonite community which itself has branches that are relatively "liberal" in comparison with the group that participated in our study. Within the particular Indiana locale where we conducted our research, the Amish and Conservative Mennonites shared the same parochial school overseen by congregational pastors and administered by an Amish principal. The beliefs and life-style of the Conservative Mennonites and Amish in this population were essentially the same with very minor differences in the dress of women within each group. The group as a whole is distinguished by their isolation from much of contemporary society and their rejection of most aspects of modern technology. With regard to the latter, the life-style of this population was a bit less restrictive than the lifestyle adopted by their relatives in Pennsylvania (e. g., families within this community were permitted to own cars, most homes had electricity, and the school was very proud of its one Apple computer). These accommodations to modernity were justified as serving the ability of the community to effectively conduct their work. As explained by the Amish school principal, the group remained committed, despite these accommodations, to serving as a witness to Christ by remaining outside the mainstream of American customs and maintaining themselves as a "queer people." One of the children humorously quipped to me regarding their lifestyle, "If you think we're weird you ought to go to Pennsylvania." Among the beliefs and practices held by these children and their families were a number common to other Anabaptist groups such as the rejection of infant baptism and papal authority. In addition they adhered to a prohibition against radio or television in the home, and a prescribed plain mode of dress, the latter being more marked among the women than the men. Women, for example, were all required to wear a prescribed head covering following baptism, and were prohibited from wearing trousers. In most cases the girls in the study wore solid color calf-length homemade dresses patterned after those of their 17th century ancestors. A total of 64 Amish/Mennonite children participated in the study. Half of the children were girls and half boys distributed across four age-groups (10 to 11, 12 to 13, 14 to 15, and 16 to 17 years of age).

Jewish participants. To expand our investigation within the Judeo-Christian tradition we followed our study with the Amish/Mennonites with one focusing on Jewish children. Two groups of Jewish children from the Chicago metropolitan area participated in our interviews. The first group was 64 Conservative Jewish children with equal numbers of boys and girls at ages 10 to 11, 12 to 13, 14 to 15, and 16 to 17 years. These children (and their families) were all active members of Conservative synagogues and attended parochial private religious schools. The second group was 32 Orthodox Jewish children with equal numbers of boys and girls at ages 14 to 15, and 16 to 17 years. The Orthodox children attended an Orthodox Jewish academy (high school) and followed Jewish dietary laws, dress customs, and holiday rituals. Many of the Conservative children followed these same practices, but with less consistency than the Orthodox. For example, the Orthodox boys wore head coverings at all times, while most of the Conservative boys wore theirs only at school or during prayer. In addition, the Conservative children tended to observe few of the dietary laws (such as prohibitions against eating pork) prescribed by Orthodox Judaism, and came from homes that purchased foods from non-Kosher producers. We chose to interview children from these two groups because they were representative of the two branches of traditional Judaism. None of the Orthodox children, for example, was part of a fundamentalist sect such as the Hassidic.

The schism between the Orthodox and Conservatives had its historical origins in the Enlightenment as a response to Spinoza's critiques of traditional Judaic teachings. The Orthodox rejected Spinoza and the Enlightenment out of hand. Others, however, were deeply influenced by Spinoza, and later Hegel, to formulate the philosophy of the reform movement. The Conservatives took a middle position between the Reform movement and the Orthodox. Like the Reform movement, they accepted that aspects of Jewish scripture were to be understood as historical products, rather than solely a record of divine revelation. Like the Orthodox, however, they found the Reform movement's rejection of traditional ritual unacceptable. The Conservatives view rituals and religious norms as fundamental connections to historical Jewish experience (Borowitz, 1968).

The interview. Each of the Christian and Jewish children was individually interviewed for approximately 90 minutes (spread over several sessions) regarding his or her conceptions of moral and nonmoral religious prescriptions. Amish/Mennonite children were asked about four moral issues (stealing, hitting, slander, damaging another's personal property) and seven nonmoral religious issues (day of worship, work on the Sabbath, baptism, women wearing head coverings, women preaching, interfaith marriage, premarital sex between consenting adults). The premarital sex questions were only asked of children 14 years-of-age and older. The interview used with Jewish children included the same moral issues (stealing, hitting, slander, and damage to personal property) that were used with the Amish/Mennonites. The nonmoral religious issues discussed with Jewish children matched those we had used with the Christians, but modified to make them appropriate for Jewish subjects. The nonmoral issues were: day of worship, work on the Sabbath, men wearing head coverings, male circumcision, women reading from the Torah, interfaith marriage, maintaining Kosher dietary laws, and premarital sex between consenting adults. Three issues (dietary laws, interfaith marriage, and premarital sex between consenting adults) were presented only to children above the age of thirteen. Interviews for both sets of children asked three main sets of questions. Each question set was designed to generate a specific criterion judgment and corresponding justification. The first dealt with the alterability of religious rules. The children were asked, "Suppose all the members of the congregation and the Ministers(Rabbis) agreed to [alter/eliminate] the rule about [the act], would it be wrong or all right for them to do that?" "Why/why not?" The second question dealt with the children's views of the universality of the status of the acts as transgressions. The issue here was not whether children believed that an act was universally considered to be wrong, but whether in their minds the acts *should* be considered wrong. Children were asked, "Suppose that in another religion they don't have a rule about [the act], would it be wrong or all right for them to [engage in the act] in that case?" "Why/why not?" Since the groups in these studies, unlike the Catholics in our initial research, do not acknowledge a final earthly authority (i.e., the pope and bishops) over scriptural interpretation,

we included a third set of questions aimed at determining whether the status of acts as transgressions was contingent on God's word as recorded in scripture. Each child was asked: "Suppose Jesus[God] had not given us a law about the act, the Bible [Torah] didn't say anything one way or another about [the act]. Would it be wrong or all right for a Christian [Jew] to do [the act] in that case?" "Why/why not?"

Interview outcomes. Let us begin discussion of the results of those interviews by considering the findings presented on Table 2 regarding children's (alterability) judgments of whether it would be wrong or all right for religious authorities to remove or alter the rules governing various actions. As shown in the table, all three groups of children consistently stated that it would be wrong for the authorities or the collective membership of the congregation to remove rules prohibiting actions in the moral domain.

Insert Table 2 about here.

These findings are in line with what we would predict on the basis of domain theory, and are consistent with what we found with Catholics. The children's responses to the same question with respect to what we had considered nonmoral issues, however, were not consistent with a distinction between morality and nonmoral issues, and were clearly different from the pattern of answers provided by Catholics. For example, nearly as many Amish/Mennonite children said it would be wrong for religious authorities or the congregation to alter the prohibition against work on Sunday as said it would be wrong to remove the rules against moral transgressions such as hitting and hurting others or damaging another's personal property. Orthodox Jewish children were even more reluctant than the Amish/Mennonites or Conservative Jews to grant their religious authorities power to alter or remove nonmoral religious rules. There was no statistical difference between the overall percentages of alterability judgments Orthodox Jewish children made of moral and nonmoral issues.

These outcomes appear to embody the assumptions shared by fundamentalist Christians and Conservative or Orthodox Jews that religious norms are established through scripture rather than earthly authority. For the Amish, this is consistent with their historical rejection of papal authority, and their reliance on literal interpretations of the Bible for guidance in their daily lives. The justifications children from each of these three denominations provided in explaining their judgments about the nonmoral issues tended to bear that out. The most common reason given for objecting to the notion of religious authorities altering such rules was that the rules were a part of "God's law." In the case of the Amish/Mennonites, and Orthodox this justification was given 80 percent of the time in support of judgments that it would be wrong to alter such rules.

Looking at the complete set of justifications, however, indicated to us that a "revealed truth" orientation was not all that was operating in the alterability judgments of these Christian and Jewish children. Between 30 and 40 percent of the justifications Jewish children gave for their judgments regarding the alterability of nonmoral religious norms focused on the organizational, historical, or symbolic functions such norms provided in terms of structuring the religion as a social system. In the case of Amish/Mennonites and Conservative Jews, such reasons were generally given in support of the notion that religious authorities could in fact alter or remove some religious rules. However, such judgments were also offered in support of the notion that it would be wrong to change existing rules. This was particularly the case with Jewish children who were keen on the notion of maintaining such rules to sustain links with the past. With respect to moral issues, it was apparent that children had reasons beyond "God's law" to object to alterations in the governing rules. Approximately 40 percent of the justifications provided by Amish/Mennonites and 75 percent of the justifications provided by Jewish children for objecting to alterations in the rules governing moral actions focused on the intrinsic features of the acts as hurtful or unjust.

If we turn from the alterability results to consideration of our findings with respect to the children's responses to generalizability questions, we find an increased differentiation between

moral and nonmoral issues. As can be seen in Table 2, actions that entail moral transgressions were judged by over 90 percent of the children to be wrong even for members of another religion which had no rules governing the acts. There were no denominational differences in these findings; Christians and Jews treated these issues in the same way. In contrast, far fewer children from any of the three denominations we examined responded that it would be wrong for members of another religion to engage in actions we had identified as nonmoral, if the other religion had no rules governing the acts. It would appear then that, as with the case with Catholics, the Amish/Mennonite and Jewish children we interviewed universalized moral issues, but viewed as relative to their religious prescriptions many nonmoral actions. There were denominational differences associated with these judgments with the Amish somewhat more willing than Jewish children to universalize the nonmoral rules of their religion, and Orthodox Jews to be more willing to universalize Jewish norms than were Conservative Jews. This observed difference between Christians and Jews is not surprising given the proselytizing nature of Christianity sustained by the belief that Christ came to save mankind and that each Christian should serve as a witness to this and spread the "good news." While both Judaism and Christianity contain natural law perspectives within their religious traditions that would support generalizing moral rules, Jews make an explicit differentiation between moral laws that any human being should be able to construct from direct experience, and those rules that can only be known through God. The latter set of rules are thought to constitute a special set of obligations for Jews. In effect, one can be a good person without being Jewish, but one cannot be a good Jew without adhering to this second (nonmoral) set of rules (Danon, 1972).

The justifications children provided across the denominations help to explain their generalizability judgments. Across denominations, there was a tendency for children to contextualize nonmoral religious rules as relative to particular religious systems. This is somewhat surprising with respect to the Amish/Mennonites given the "God's law" justification provided for their alterability judgments, and the requirement to bear witness to Christ as mentioned above. The Amish, however, bear witness in a much less intrusive way than is done

by many other Christian sects. It is through their lifestyle itself that they bear witness. Through their distinctiveness, they hope to draw attention to the Christian gospel, as well as protect themselves from the temptations of the "world." The reasons provided by Amish/Mennonite children for not generalizing their nonmoral rules include an assumption that such rules are subject to interpretation, and that members of other religions might simply be ignorant of God's law. Both justifications are concordant with two other values held by this denomination: (1) one should not sit in judgment of others, and (2) one can make a distinction between those who are "saved" (chosen) and those who are not. Thus the ignorant may be excused and the deviant tolerated, but they are nonetheless not part of the community (i.e., Mennonites) closest to God. In this latter attitude, the Amish/Mennonites and the Jewish children we studied would seem to be of similar minds. What is interesting in this context is that in contrast to the relative tolerance shown regarding nonmoral issues, the Amish/Mennonite, Conservative and Orthodox Jews we interviewed, like the Catholics in our questionnaire study, viewed it as wrong for members of other religions to engage in actions (e.g., slander) constituting transgressions in the moral domain. Instead of evoking God's law as a basis for such judgments, the majority of our Amish/Mennonite and Jewish subjects were expecting even the non believer to view such actions as wrong because of their intrinsic effects upon the rights and welfare of others.

The last set of questions in this part of the interview was intended to examine directly whether or not the children viewed morality as dependent on God's word. Children's responses to the "God's word" questions are summarized in Table 2. As can be seen in the table, few children at any age and of any denomination felt it would be wrong to engage in any of the nonmoral behaviors if God (as indicated in scripture) had not provided any prescription or statement governing the act. These judgments were mirrored in the justifications they provided. In nearly all cases the children explained that such actions would be all right essentially because there was no longer any law from God regulating the acts. The only exceptions to this predominant trend were in relation to sexual and gender based issues in which some prudential (personal safety/risk) and natural order justifications (e.g., women are not suited

by nature to lead a congregation) were provided. Prudence and natural order reasons were also offered by some Orthodox children as a basis for maintaining Kosher dietary laws.

In contrast, between 80 and 100 percent of children across denominations stated that engagement in any of the acts entailing a moral transgression would continue to be wrong even if there were no biblical prescription or statement by God concerning the act. The justifications children provided in support of such judgments all dealt with the intrinsic features of the acts as hurtful or unjust. This last set of findings suggests that even for deeply religious children from fundamentalist or orthodox backgrounds, morality stems from criteria independent of God's word.

The following excerpts (edited for length) from our interviews with Amish/Conservative Mennonite, Conservative and Orthodox Jewish children illustrate the thinking of these children regarding the relationship between religious prescription and the regulation of moral and nonmoral(conventional) behavior. The first is from an interview with an 11-year-old Amish boy, Sam (a pseudonym). The first portion of the interview deals with the Amish convention that women wear head coverings. The Biblical source of this convention is Paul's letter to the Corinthians (I:11). The boy's responses are given in the context of a story which tells of a Conservative Mennonite girl who attends a local public junior high school where none of the other girls wears a head covering. In order not to be different, the Mennonite girl, Mary, decides not to wear her head covering to school.

The second excerpt presents this same child's responses to questions regarding a moral issue, stealing. The excerpts are as follows:

SAM, Conservative Mennonite boy (11 years, 11 months)

Religious Convention: Women wearing head coverings.

I: Was Mary right or wrong not to wear a head covering at school?

S: Wrong, because the Bible says you should, the women should have their hair long and have it covered with a covering and the men should have their hair short.

I: Do you think it really matters whether or not a Mennonite girl wears a head covering?

S: It depends on if you are baptized or not. If you are baptized, you should.

I: How come?

S: Because that's the way God wants it.

I: Can that rule about head coverings be changed?

S: Yes, I suppose it could.

I: Would it be all right for the ministers to remove the rule about women wearing head coverings?

S: No.

I: Why not?

S: Because God said that's how he wants it, and that's how he wants it.

I: If the ministers did remove the rule about head coverings, then would it be all right for girls not to wear the head coverings?

S: If they were obeying the minister and not God, it would be, but if they were obeying God and not the ministers, then it wouldn't.

I: Suppose it wasn't written in the Bible that women are supposed to wear head coverings, God hadn't said anything about head coverings one way or the other. Would it be all right for women not to wear head coverings then?

S: Yeah, it would be okay then, because if God didn't say so, it wouldn't matter.

I: The other girls at Mary's school belong to religions that don't have the rule about head coverings. Is it okay that those religions don't have the rule?

S: It's all right if that's the way their church is believes.

I: Well, then is it okay for those girls not to wear head coverings?

S: Yeah.

I: Why is it okay for them but not for Mary?

S: Because she goes to a Mennonite Christian Church, she should obey the Mennonite Christian laws.

I: Could a woman still be a good Christian and not wear a head covering?

S: It depends on her, it depends on if she is really a good Christian and has accepted Christ.

I: Well, then, why wear a head covering?

S: Because if you are around people more often, like if one person doesn't have one and the other one does and they are both good Christians, and they are both walking and a guy comes up and says, man, I can tell which one's a Christian out of them. This one over here has a covering and I can tell she is, but over here I don't know for sure because she doesn't wear one. I would have to do some questioning before I know for sure.

Moral Issue: Stealing

I: Is it okay to steal?

S: No.

I: Why not?

S: Because that is one of the Ten Commandments that God put in the law and gave to Moses and he expects us to obey these laws and if we don't obey these laws, we can know for sure that we will not go to heaven, we will absolutely go to hell.

I: What's wrong with stealing?

S: Having something that does not belong to us and taking it from someone else, it would just irritate you. Like, one time my sister stole my radio batteries. I didn't know that they were and then I found out that she had them in her tape recorder and I thought that these were the exact ones so I took them back. Actually, she had them in her drawer and she saw these were missing so she came back four hours later while I was in bed sleeping and she just grabbed them right out of there and put mine back in. By this time, she had worn mine down and they weren't working so I thought for sure that she had just wore hers out and so I went and stole mine back which were really hers. My conscience just bothered me until I returned them and took the other ones and I found out that these were the correct ones to be having anyway.

I: Should the rule about stealing be followed?

S: Yes, or else we will go to hell. And all of those will know, and those who are on earth already know that hell is a bad place. There's fire and brimstone and you could die down there! And everybody that goes there, they know that they are a sinful person.

I: Suppose all the ministers decided to drop the rule about stealing so that there was no rule about stealing. would that be all right?

S: No.

I: Why not?)

S: Because God said that it wouldn't be expected of us and he expects us to obey him.

I: Would it be all right for a Christian to steal if the ministers dropped the rule?

S: No, because you still wouldn't be able to go to heaven, you'd have to go to hell.

I: Suppose the people of another religion don't have a rule about stealing. Is that all right?)

S: No.

I: Why not?

S: Because if they have their Bible, then they know about the law.

I: Suppose they don't use our Bible, they have a different religion and it doesn't have a rule about stealing. Is that all right?

S: No, because God said that thou shalt not steal and that goes for everybody.

I: If they didn't know about the rule, would it be okay for them to steal?

S: No, because it would still make everybody unhappy.

I: If God hadn't said anything about stealing one way or the other, would it be okay to steal then?

S: No.

I: WHY NOT?

S: Because if people would steal, then the world wouldn't be very happy.

I: Could you say more about that?

S: Like when my sister stole my batteries, it really irritated me. If everybody's stuff kept getting stolen, everyone would be mad and say, "Hey, where's my stuff?" It would be terrible; nobody could keep anything that was theirs. I wouldn't like it.

As we have seen, Sam makes a distinction between issues of morality (i.e., stealing) and matters of religious convention. Now, let's place Sam's interview into context with the following excerpts from an interview with a nine-year-old Conservative Jewish girl we will call Marsha. Marsha was also interviewed about stealing, and the Jewish norm which requires boys to wear head coverings (Kippah).

MARSHA, Conservative Jewish girl (9 years, 7 months)

Religious Convention: Men wearing head coverings.

I: Was Jonathan right or wrong not to wear his kippah to the public school?

M: It was wrong because he's not showing his, uh, his, like his religion. You should always show how good your religion is, and you should always keep the mitzvah. And also, he's probably disobeying his parents.

I: Okay. do you think it matters whether or not Jewish boys wear kippot?

M: I think it matters. For one thing, you can never tell if it's a Jewish man or not a Jewish man and you could say, "Can I, uh, can I have, can you give charity to the people, to the poor people?" And they would say, "No, I'm not Jewish." How would I know? Like you'd get really embarrassed, because you don't really know, and also like, when you are trying to do something really good and you find out he's not wearing a Kippah and also it shows that he doesn't like, go in the laws of HaShem(God).

I: But why do Jewish boys dress differently? Why do they wear kippot?

M: Because it's a law of HaShem, and they're just supposed to.

I: Suppose that the rabbis got together and removed the rule about wearing kippot. Would that be all right?

M: No.

I: Why not?

M: Because it's been that way and that's a rule.

I: Well, if they did agree and removed the rule, then would it be all right for Jewish boys not to wear kippot?

M: No.

I: Why not?

M: Because the rule is there and it was meant to stay there.

I: The Christians don't require boys to wear kippot, is that all right?

M: Yeah.

I: WHY?

M: Because, well, because that's not one of their rules. They don't respect God in the same way.

I: Is it okay that they respect god in a different way?) **M:** Yes. The religion is different. What they do is not our business, and if they want to do that they can.

I: Suppose that it never said in the Talmud or anywhere else in scripture anything about wearing kippot, then would it be all right for Jewish boys to read the Torah or pray without wearing a kippah?

M: Yeah. I mean why would anybody need to it if it wasn't there? How would anybody know?

Moral Issue: Stealing.

I: Is it okay to steal?

M: No, because its a law in the Torah, and it's also one of the ten commandments.

I: Does that rule have to be followed?

M: Yeah.

I: Why?

M: Because HaShem said so in the Torah, and, uh, you should follow all the mitzvahs of HaShem. The Torah has 613 mitzvahs.

I: Suppose all the rabbis got together and decided not to have a rule about stealing. would that be okay?

M: No.

I: Why?

M: Because like I said before in some of the other questions, it's a rule of HaShem. They can't like change it 'cause like once when Moishe was walking his sons wanted, there was a law and they wanted to change it, and they changed it and their punishment was to die.

I: Suppose that people of another religion do not have a rule about stealing. Is that all right?

M: Probably yes - but no. So, it's like half yes and half no.

I: Could you explain that to me?

M: Well, like if they don't have a rule they might think that it's okay to steal, and no because it still wouldn't be.

I: Why would it still be wrong?

M: Because you're taking something from another person. And the other person - let's say it was a real gold pen or something and you really love it, like it was a present or something from your bar mitzvah or something, or bat mitzvah, and it would be really wrong for the other people. Because it's like a treasure to them. Like on a peanuts show, Linus can't live without his blanket. It's like a beautiful present to him and he really needs it. It's like a treasure. Without it he probably can't live. And another thing is because, say there's one person and he steals from another person who steals from the first person who stole things. Well, he would feel, both, like one that got stealed from would get real angry and the one that already stole with the first stealer also would get angry because his stuff was stolen. That he already stole, probably.

I: Suppose that there was never a law in the Torah. God never made it one of the ten commandments or one of the 613. He just didn't say anything about stealing. Would it be okay to steal then?

M: No. Still I don't think it's right because you're taking something from somebody else. But to some people probably yes, because they think it's fair because, well, they might say, "Finders keepers, losers weepers."

I: I see. Is it right to say that?

M: No, because they really took it and they didn't just find it, and the other people didn't lose it. It's not fair. And besides, it's also a lie. So there are two wrong things in that then.

What is evident in the excerpts of both of these Christian and Jewish children is that they acknowledge that the rule about head coverings is based on the word of authority (God), that it is relative to a particular interpretation or view of that authority's norms, and that it serves the concrete social organizational function of distinguishing girls from boys and members of their particular religious community from others. In contrast with their views about head coverings, both children treated stealing as universally wrong, and wrong even if God did not have a rule about it. The wrongness of stealing, according to both children, is that it leads to hurtful and unjust consequences. According to both children, engagement in such actions has a tendency to generate acts of retaliation which themselves tend to evolve into a vicious circle of self-perpetuating harm and injustice. Each child employed evidence from their own personal experience as a touchstone from which to evaluate these moral transgressions. As I suggested in the previous chapter, children construct their initial understandings of morality out of their experiences as victims, observers, or perpetrators of unjust or hurtful actions. Those experiences provide children with an understanding of the intrinsic elements of morality; elements that exist as a part of human relations apart from the particulars of their religious faith.

A few of the Jewish children made an effort in their interviews to articulate the connection between these inherent, rational features of morality and the distinction drawn in

Jewish theology between the norms that express particular obligations for Jews, and moral obligations that hold for all people. In the following excerpt, David, a 14-year-old Orthodox Jewish boy employs the distinction made in Judaism between the laws between man and man, and those between man and God to address the distinction he made between breaking the rules of the Sabbath and engaging in slander.

DAVID, Orthodox Jewish boy (14 years, 6 months)

I: David, is it okay to slander someone?

D: No.

I: Why not?

D: The definition of slander means that you are damaging someone else's reputation. That's probably one of the worst things that you can do.

I: Suppose that the rabbis got together and agreed that there should be no rule about slander, would that be all right?

D: No. That's like saying what's wrong with ruining this man's life?

I: Is it like breaking the Sabbath?

D: No. It's not like breaking Sabbath. Sabbath is a law between man and God, and this is a law between man and man. It would be more like stealing. Okay - It is a law clearly stated in the Torah - and besides that, I mean, just because of what it does to other people.

I: Suppose nothing was written in the Torah about slander, God hadn't said anything about it. Would it be right to slander in that case?

D: Well I suppose some people might do it then, but I wouldn't. It still wouldn't be right. All the laws between man and man are rules that are just necessary for society to exist. If you know what an act does to other people then you wouldn't do that.

I: You wouldn't or shouldn't?

D: Shouldn't.

I: So, you differentiate between laws between God and man, and man and man?

D: Yes. When you ask the questions if God hadn't said anything about it, then would it be all right. The way I answered that was if it was a commandment between God and man, then if He had not said anything it would be fine. Because, uh, the only purpose of it was because God said so. Well, he might of had some ulterior motive, but we don't know what it is. But, between man and man, those are rules that, um, that you need to live a healthy life and not run around anything like wild animals.

I: So, now with the laws between man and man, do you think that they are wrong because they were forbidden by God, or were they forbidden, because they are wrong?

D: I guess both are true. I mean having it forbidden makes it officially wrong, but being morally wrong was the cause for the prohibition.

In David's interview, he made a distinction between actions in the moral domain that have an inherent moral basis, and rules established by religious authority that appear to be arbitrary. As children become older, their understandings of the purposes of the nonmoral norms of their religion deepens as they are better able to comprehend the symbolic or organizational functions of such norms. We can see some of these changes within the following excerpt from an interview with a 17-year-old Amish youth who I will refer to as Joseph. He is responding to the same vignette regarding head coverings as the previous children.

JOSEPH, Amish (17 years, 10 months)

Religious Convention: Women wearing head coverings.

I: Was Mary right or wrong not to wear a head covering at school?

J: She was wrong.

I: How come?

J: Because a head covering, usually, symbolizes that she is a member of the church and she is to wear it all the time.

I: Do you think it really matters whether or not Mennonite girls wear head coverings?

J: I think it matters.

I: And why is that?

J: I guess it is a symbol of what God has done for them and they are then under submission. I guess, to be honest, as a boy, I don't know about that in detail, but I know one thing, that it is a sign of submission.

I: Why does a head covering mean that?

J: Well, in the Bible it says that the woman is supposed to keep her head covered and I think that if a girl is going by the standards of the Bible, then she should wear it.

I: What do you mean by submission in this case?

J: For a married lady, it means that she is under submission to her husband and to God. For a girl, I guess it would be under her parents' submission and to God also.

[At another point in the interview, Joseph had this to say.]

I: When you say identifying with the world, what do you mean?

J: Well, like, you want to look like them, you don't want to be different.

I: Why should a Mennonite look different?

J: I don't know that she would have to, she is really considered different. And, she would dress different, of course.

I: Why should they dress different?

J: So that people can see that they are not associated with the world. It is a witness to the power of God, rather than identifying with the world.

In this excerpt from the interview with Joseph, we can see that many of the nonmoral norms prescribed by religion serve similar functions in terms of structuring worship patterns and community that are served by secular conventions. This suggests that a part of children's religious development rests upon their developing conceptions of convention, custom, and tradition. In Joseph's interview regarding women's head coverings, he goes well beyond the concrete understanding that head coverings distinguish members of one's own group from others,

evidenced in the interviews with Sarah and Sam, to explain how such rules regarding head coverings function as a symbol of the hierarchical, sex-typed order of Amish and Conservative Mennonite society, and the subordinate relationship of that society to God. Joseph extends his interpretation of head coverings to address the more general symbolic function of Amish dress to express the fundamental perspective of his religious community and as a way of discharging its obligation to serve witness to God's authority and majesty. What became clear from these interviews, however, was that children and adolescents do not base their interpretation of the importance of such religious norms on the same criteria as their views about morality. The force of such nonmoral norms rests ultimately in their connection to religious authority, while the force of moral norms derives from their connection to the impact which moral transgressions have upon human welfare.

Morality and God's word. The relation between morality and religious authority as understood by Jewish and Christian children was made even more clear in a subsequent set of questions we asked which looked more specifically at the role of God's commands in determining the person's moral concepts. Our use of these questions emerged serendipitously out of an interview done early on in our conversations with Jewish children. The event occurred in the context of an interview done with an eleven-year-old Conservative Jewish émigré, from the then Soviet Union, who we referred to as Michael. In responding to questions regarding whether it would be all right for Jews to hit and hurt others if God had no rule regarding such behavior, Michael spontaneously brought up the Biblical story of Abraham and Isaac. In Michael's version of the Biblical account, an angel of God conveyed a message to Abraham that he should kill his son, Isaac. Abraham, recognizing the command as a test of his faith, reluctantly prepared to sacrifice his son. As Abraham was about to slay Isaac, an angel of the Lord took hold of Abraham's arm to prevent him from cutting his son's throat. When asked what he thought about this, Michael's reply was, "Had to." When asked what he meant, Michael explained, "Look, God is perfect, he couldn't allow Abraham to kill his son. Killing is wrong. It

was only a test." At this point, the interviewer began to pursue further the general issue of the relation between God's commands and morality:

I: Michael, how do we know that what is written in the Torah is really the right thing to do?

M: He doesn't harm us, do bad for us. We believe in God. We think God wrote the Torah, and we think God likes us if we do those things and we think we are giving presents to God, by praying and by following his rules.

I: Okay, but how can we be sure that what God is telling us is really the right thing?

M: We've tried it. We've tried every rule in the Torah and we know.

I: Suppose god had written in the Torah that Jews should steal, would it then be right for Jews to steal?

M: No.

I: Why not?

M: Even if God says it, we know he can't mean it, because we know it is a very bad thing to steal. We know He can't mean it. Maybe it's a test, but we just know He can't mean it.

I: Why wouldn't God mean it?

M: Because we think of God as very good-absolutely perfect person.

I: And because He's perfect, He wouldn't say to steal? Why not?

M: Well-because we people are not perfect, but we still understand. We are not dumb either. We still understand that stealing is a bad thing.

Michael's spontaneous comments captured features of a centuries old philosophical debate. Beginning with Plato's account of Socrates' dialogue with Euthyphro, philosophical arguments suggesting that God's commands cannot in and of themselves determine what is moral have turned on what is known as the "open question." Put simply, the open question asks the following: "God commands X, but is X right?" To answer, one must invoke criteria for the good that are independent of God's word. In Nielsen's (1973) treatment of this issue, the case is made that in order for God's commands to be moral, it must at least be the case that God is good. From

this premise, Nielsen argues that Judeo-Christian conceptions of God presuppose prior, independent conceptions of goodness which serve as criteria for differentiating God from Satan or other preternatural forces.

Though it was not our purpose to analyze or test those philosophical positions, our research on religious conceptions of the relations between morality and God's word were informed by such discussions of the open question. Michael's interview had suggested to us that such questions were ones that children would find interesting and well within their conceptual abilities. Following our interview with Michael we added a section of questions in which children were asked whether God's commands could make right something which most children treated as morally wrong. These questions were asked of all of the Jewish participants in the research. The Amish religious authorities, however, found these questions to be ones which they thought might cause their children to question their faith. Therefore, we asked these questions of a second group of 32 Christian children who were members of the Dutch Reform Calvinist community in the Chicago metropolitan area.

These children all attended a parochial school that emphasized religious teaching. This group, like the Amish and Mennonites, has its origins in the Swiss reformation. Unlike the Amish and Conservative Mennonites, the Dutch Reform Calvinists do not take a literal view of the Bible and have an organized church structure and theology to help guide their interpretation of scripture. Like the Amish and Conservative Mennonites, however, the Dutch Reform Calvinist community, from which our study participants were drawn, hold the word of God to be compelling. We chose to interview children from this community because of their strong belief in the compelling nature of God's commands, stemming from an acceptance of God's perfection, and omniscience, which extends to a belief in predestination.

Children were asked: "Suppose God had commanded (written in the Bible) that Christians/Jews *should* steal. Would it then be right for a Christian/Jew to steal?" We also asked children whether they thought God would make a command, and if so, why or why not? It was our hypothesis, informed by Michael's' interview and results from our other questions, that

children's answers would reflect their efforts to coordinate conceptions of moral issues in terms of the intrinsic effects of such actions on others with their conceptions of God as omniscient, omnipotent, and perfect. In particular, we expected that children would: (1) reject the notion that God's command to steal would make stealing morally right and (2) reject the notion that God would command Christians or Jews to steal as a normative behavior.

Our analyses of the children's responses revealed that the majority of children from each denomination and at each age rejected the notion that God's command to steal would make it right to steal. Seventy-five percent of the Dutch Reform Calvinists, 86 percent of the Conservative, and 84 percent of the Orthodox Jewish children responded this way. The apparent overall difference between the Christian and Jewish groups was due to the responses of younger children within the Christian community. Sixty-nine percent of Dutch Reform Calvinist children under the age of thirteen rejected the notion that God's command would make it right to steal, while 81 percent of the children above age thirteen responded that way. The following excerpts from an interview with a 15-year-old Dutch Reform Calvinist girl (Margaret), and from an interview with a 9-year-old Conservative Jewish girl (Marsha) are typical of responses provided by children who rejected the notion that God's command to steal would make stealing right.

MARGARET, Dutch Reform Calvinist Female (15 years, 7 months)

I: Suppose that God had written in the Bible that Christians should steal. would it then be right for Christians to steal?

M: Probably, I think people would maybe do it. Because if it was written in the Bible and that's what God said that we should do, then people would probably do it. I mean more often. 'Cause that's what God said, and it's easier to do than to go against God.

I: So, if God said it, people would do it. But would they be right to do it?

M: No. It still wouldn't be right.

I: Why not?

M: 'Cause you're taking from somebody else, and it still wouldn't be right. After all, who would want this to happen to them?

I: Do you think God would command us to steal?

M: No.

I: Why not?

M: Because it's not the right thing to do, and He's perfect, and if He's stealing, He can't be perfect.

MARSHA, Conservative Jewish female (9 years, 7 months)

I: When we were talking before, you said that God had provided 613 rules in the Torah, but I have a question. How do we know that what is written in the Torah is really the right thing to do?

M: Because HaShem (God) chooses the right things.

I: How do you know that HaShem chooses the right things for us to do?

M: That's a hard question. I guess I trust Him. I'm afraid of Him, that means I trust Him, probably. Probably 'cause He helps me. He helps me do my stuff. I mean like He takes care of me sort of. Whenever I should deserve a punishment, He gives to me.

I: Suppose that God had written in the Torah that Jews should steal; God commanded all Jews to steal. Would it be okay then for Jews to steal?

M: No.

I: Why not?

M: Because they know, they have a brain. They know it's really bothering the person they take it from.

I: Do you think God would ever command us to steal?

M: No.

I: Why not?

M: Because He's good. Like He's strict as a teacher, and He's nice as a, what's the nicest person in the world? I don't know what the nicest person in the world is. He's as nice as the nicest person in the world, or animal.

In the responses of these two children, we see that although there is both fear and awe of God's power, neither child accepts the notion that God's command to steal would make it right to do so. According to both children, such action would continue to be morally wrong because of its effects upon the victim. The Conservative Jewish girl, Marsha, like her counterpart, Michael, points to the irrationality of such a norm, and the assumption that rational beings "Because they know, they have a brain" would recognize a norm condoning theft as inherently counter to the needs and interests of people. Furthermore, in a manner matching Michael's responses to similar questions, both girls coordinated their moral positions with an assumption of God's goodness. In the case of the 15-year-old Dutch Reform Calvinist girl, Margaret, this extends to the conclusion that if God were to make such a command, it would negate his status as a perfect being. In the following excerpts we see evidence that such thinking for some of the children we interviewed constitutes the very criteria for worshipping God.

MARK, Dutch Reform Calvinist Male (15 years, 4 months)

I: Do you think God would say that we should steal?

M: No.

I: Why not?

M: Because He's good in every way, and He wouldn't encourage people to do wrong.

I: But if God said to steal, would it make it right?) **M:** Well I'd still have doubts about it. If you knew it was from God, then you might think it was right. But, I really-I probably wouldn't-ah-worship God-if He said-if He encouraged us to do bad things.

I: How do we know that what is written in the Bible is the word of God and not the word of the devil?

M: Well, because we realize that many parts of the Bible are just good common sense, and that they are things that we would normally think. Like the Ten Commandments, that's right to you even before you understand the Ten Commandments. So, if a person told you to do what was right, you'd realize that this was a person who was good.

I: I see, and does God have to be good?)

M: Well, yes. because worshipping an evil being would not be a very intelligent thing to do.

NORM, Dutch Reform Calvinist male (16 years, 6 months)

I: Suppose that God had written in the Bible that Christians should steal. would it then be right for Christians to steal?)

N: No, then He wouldn't be a just God. And there are, I'm sure there are people who would go against Him, then, if He were an unjust God, even though He had absolute power.

We see in the thinking of these two adolescents a rejection of the Nietzschean dictum that might makes right, as well as Euthyphro's position that morality is determined by God's commands. Instead, what appears to be evidenced in these interviews is an attempt by children to coordinate their notion of the just Judeo-Christian God with what the *know to be morally right*.

While such was the case among the majority of children, a significant minority (between 15 and 20 percent) stated that God's command to steal *would* make stealing morally right. Such responses were of two types. The first type provided by three of the Christian and three Jewish children under the age of thirteen, reflected a failure to coordinate conceptions of God's perfection with conceptions of God as omnipotent. The following set of excerpts from a Dutch Reform Calvinist girl, Cathy, serves as an illustrative example.

CATHY, Dutch Reform Calvinist (10 years, 8 months).

I: How do we know that what the Bible tells us to do is really the right thing?

C: You have to believe.

I: Suppose God had made a commandment that we should steal. Would it then be morally right to steal?

C: Yes.

I: So, who would be the better people then, the ones who stole or the ones who didn't steal?

C: The ones who stole.

I: Why would they be the better people?

C: Because they were obeying God's law.

I: Why should people obey God's law?

C: Because God is the only God. He made us, and He made the world, and He rules the world, and we are supposed to do what He says.

In this first portion of the interview, Cathy focused on God's power and authority as the criterion for her judgment of the right or wrong of stealing. In the very next section of the interview, however, her focus shifted to God's goodness and an evaluation of moral actions in terms of their consequences.

I: Do you think that god would tell us to steal?

C: No.

I: Why not?

C: Because God is - He's supposed to be good.

I: Is stealing good?

C: No.

I: Why not?

C: 'Cause - it's bad. It's not right. You're taking another person's stuff and they would probably get upset. I don't want my stuff stolen.

In this transcript we see two seemingly contradictory positions coexisting in the thinking of this 10-year-old girl. On the one hand, she evaluated the wrongness of stealing on the basis of its effects on the victim and coordinated that evaluation with her expectation that God would not condone stealing since God is good. On the other hand, she evaluated the right or wrong of stealing in terms of God's commands. She did not conjoin her notion of God's goodness with his omnipotence, but simply focused on the latter criterion to the exclusion of the former when evaluating the morality of actions commanded by God. This mode of thinking was continued in the remaining portion of her interview.

I: Do you think it would be right if the children at school hit and hurt each other?

C: No.

I: Why not?

C: Because hitting hurts!

I: Suppose that God said that children should hit one another. Do you think it would be right then for children to do that?

C: Yes.

I: How come?

C: Because God said.

I: But wouldn't it still hurt to hit?

C: Yes.

I: Then would it be right or wrong to hit?

C: It would be right.

I: How come?

C: Like I told you, because God said.

The thinking of this 10-year-old girl was not seen in the interviews of any of our participants over age thirteen. However, since only three Christian and three Conservative Jewish children provided responses of the form just described, we cannot conclude whether such reasoning is a function of developmental level or if it simply reflects an alternative mode of conceptualizing the relationship between morality and God's word.

A second, and more sophisticated type of reasoning provided by adolescents who felt that God's command to steal would make stealing morally right resulted from efforts to coordinate notions of God's perfection with conceptions of God's omniscience. In this form of reasoning the assumption is maintained that God is good, and that his command to steal (or to engage in some other apparently hurtful or unjust act) would reflect good intentions and an ultimately good outcome. Since God is all-knowing, only He can anticipate and comprehend an outcome that may simply be beyond the grasp of temporal consciousness. In reasoning of this type, one sustains faith in the goodness of God without requiring that His ends be comprehensible to the faithful. Such thinking is provided in the following excerpt from an interview with a 17-year-old Dutch Reform Calvinist girl we refer to as Faith.

FAITH, Dutch Reform Calvinist female (17 years, 6 months)

I: Faith, how do we know that what is in the bible is really the right thing to do?

F: I believe that the Bible is the word of God and that God knows everything and God made us, so what He said must be true.

I: It may be true, but how do we know that what God is saying is really morally right, if He says act a certain way that that's the morally right way to act?

F: He created us, so He knows what's best for us, so whatever He says must be the best thing to do.

I: Suppose that God had written in the Bible that Christians should steal. would it then be right for Christians to steal?

F: If God said so, I guess it would be, yes.

I: How come. What would make it right?

F: Because God is the author of everything and He's holy, and whatever He would say has to be right.

I: Suppose God had said that Christians should murder. would it then be right for Christians to murder?

F: It would be the same as with stealing. If He said it, it would be all right because He's God and He knows everything. He knows the end of everything, and if He said that it was all right [Faith sighs and laughs nervously], I guess it would be.

I: You seem a little bit conflicted.

F: Well, I mean, I know it would be hard for me to be able to handle it, because there's things in His word that I already don't understand. But, you just have to take it by faith and believe that He is God and He knows what He is saying.

Faith's thinking nicely illustrates how a deep conviction and faith in god's goodness coordinated with a belief in God's omniscience can lead a person to accept conclusions about the moral rectitude of actions commanded by God which run counter to the person's own intuitions about the actions. The reasoning of such individuals, however, is not structured by an unreflective acceptance of God's authority. On the contrary, the notions of God's moral authority, held by the participants in this study, stemmed from their assumptions about the inherent goodness of the Judeo-Christian God. Should that assumption be challenged, then God's authority in moral matters would be called into question. This reasoning is reflected in the remainder of faith's interview.

FAITH (continued)

I: How do we know that when we are "hearing the word of God" that we are hearing God's word and not the devil?

F: Well, the Bible is the only test you could give it, and the holy spirit inside you.

I: What do you mean, the holy spirit inside you? How does that help?

F: I believe the Holy Spirit leads me and convicts me. If I don't believe some thing is - goes along with, or is part of God's character, then I'll check it out in the Bible and pray about it, and ask for guidance.

I: Do you think murder is part of God's character?

F: No, but if it said in His word that it was all right to kill, then God must be a different kind of God.

I: So, if He were a different kind of God, would it be all right to do it - to kill?

F: Well, I don't know. That changes the whole thing. So, I don't know.

In summary, there was clear evidence in this study that Christian and Jewish children evaluate moral issues on the basis of criteria independent of the word of God. Consonant with research done in secular contexts, the children's concepts of morality focused on the intrinsic justice and welfare outcomes of actions. On the basis of such "objective" criteria, the children established a moral position from which they apprehended the moral aspect of the just and compassionate Judeo-Christian God. In each of the interviews (with the exception of six with young children), we saw evidence that religiously engaged children attempted to bring together their notions of God as perfect with their own conceptions of the morally good. Thus, for these children, concepts of God, the word of God, and morality are not one and the same thing.

Conclusions

The studies described in this chapter indicate that children's moral understandings are independent of specific religious rules, and that morality is conceptually distinct from one's religious concepts. These studies also mean that morality for the secular child as well as for the

devout Christian or Jew focuses on the same set of interpersonal issues: those pertaining to justice, human welfare and compassion. While we did not report on the beliefs of children from other specific religions, findings discussed in chapter 2 from cross-cultural studies are consistent with the assumption that such basic moral concerns are shared across the range of human societies and groups. For the public schools, this means that there can be moral education compatible with, and yet independent from, religious moral doctrine. There is then, considerable common ground on which deeply religious people from different religious perspectives, along with non-religious people can come to terms regarding the central concerns of their children's moral development. That common ground, however, requires a more constrained use of moral language to refer to the domain of issues that pertain to the inherent and universal features of human social interaction. By focusing on this moral core, public schools can forthrightly meet their obligations rather than hide behind a smoke screen of value relativism.

At the same time, these findings point to the wisdom of keeping the teaching of particular doctrinal values out of the hands of public schools, and in the families, churches, synagogues, mosques, and temples where the particularistic values of different faiths can be celebrated without conflict. It was clear, that in the minds of the religious children we interviewed, those particularistic values (e.g., day of worship, whether women may lead worship services) stem from their relation to religious rather than temporal authority. Their connection to a particular faith community means that such values and norms are likely to be incommensurate across faiths. This is a source of tension that exists within all pluralist societies. As such, an attitude of tolerance based on the moral principles of mutual respect and fairness must prevail. Those principles of fairness, mutual respect, and concern for the welfare of others are the content of the moral domain, and as such, should be the core values fostered through moral education.
