The Mythic Reality of the Autonomous Individual

with John A. Teske, "Editorial Overview"; Edwin C. Laurenson, "Agency, Freedom, and the Blessings of Opacity"; Phillip Cary, "Philosophical and Religious Origins of the Private Inner Self"; Anindita N. Balslev, "The Enigma of I-Consciousness"; Lene Arnett Jensen, "The Cultural Development of Three Fundamental Moral Ethics"; Amy Banks, "Developing the Capacity to Connect"; John A. Teske, "Externalism, Relational Selves, and Redemptive Relationships"; Kenneth J. Gergen, "From Moral Autonomy to Relational Responsibility"; Steven L. Winter, "Reimagining Democratic Theory for Social Individuals"

THE CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT OF THREE FUNDAMENTAL MORAL ETHICS: AUTONOMY, COMMUNITY, AND DIVINITY

by Lene Arnett Jensen

Abstract. In this essay, I describe my Cultural-Developmental Template Approach to moral psychology. This theory draws on my research with the Three Ethics of Autonomy, Community, and Divinity, and the work of many other scholars. The cultural-developmental synthesis suggests that the Ethic of Autonomy emerges early in people's psychological lives, and continues to hold some importance across the lifespan. But Autonomy is not alone. The Ethic of Community too emerges early and appears to increase in importance across the life course. Then, it also seems that in most places and at most times, the Ethic of Divinity has found a voice— and in some traditions this ethic may become audible in adolescence. Ethics of Autonomy, Community, and Divinity, then, may have universal roots in the human condition. However, they are also clearly culturally and historically situated. Cultural communities—whether defined by religious, national, or other boundaries—vary in how they prioritize the three ethics and the extent to which they reinforce their development.

Keywords: autonomy; collectivity; community; culture; cultural-developmental template; cultural psychology; developmental psychology; divinity; ethics; individuals; moral reasoning; plurality; religious conservatives; religious liberals; universality

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In this essay, I provide an expanded version of the plenary lecture that I presented at the 2009 Conference on "The Mythic Reality of the Autonomous Individual," hosted by the Institute on Religion in an Age of Science (IRAS) in Chautauqua, NY. The conference statement put forward a set of broad and deep questions about autonomy. These included:

(1)   How does autonomy emerge and develop in people's psychological lives?
(2)   What are historical and cultural roots of autonomy?
(3)   To what extent do we think that autonomy is valuable?
(4)   To what extent are there other fundamental virtues, goods, or morals that we value?

I come to these questions as a psychologist. My research addresses moral reasoning, emotions, and behaviors. I am particularly interested in how people's ethics develop over the life course, and the extent to which moral development is similar and different across cultures. In terms of organization, I will begin with a quick sketch of the history of moral developmental psychology. This will provide the backdrop for a description of contemporary work, including a focus on work with what my colleagues and I call the Three Ethics of Autonomy, Community, and Divinity. Then, I will propose what I call a Cultural-Developmental Template Approach to moral psychology. This theory draws on my research with the Three Ethics and the work of many other scholars, past and present. Finally, I will briefly discuss my ongoing research that aims to test my theoretical approach.

It is useful to be clear on key definitions at the outset. By development, I mean psychological change that occurs in human beings as they age. Developmental change may involve increase or decrease; it may be quantitative or qualitative; and it may be gradual or stage-like. By culture, I mean symbolic and behavioral inheritances (Shweder et al. 2006) shared and co-constructed by members of a community. Symbolic inheritances are conceptions of divinity, nature, society, and persons. Behavioral inheritances consist of common or habitual familial and social practices. Culture, then, is *not* synonymous with country or ethnicity but rather describes communities whose members share key beliefs and behaviors. In my work, for example, I have focused extensively on religiously liberal and conservative communities in different countries. It is worth noting that cultural communities include heterogeneity among subgroups and individuals. Variation also exists between cultural communities in their degree of heterogeneity.

AN HISTORICAL SKETCH

Developmental psychologists (and other kinds of psychologists, too) addressing moral values and reasoning have been very focused on autonomy. Of course, psychologists are not alone in this focus. It is a pervasive focus in American society (e.g., Bellah et al. 1985), from the solemn Declaration of Independence statement that "men. . .are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, That among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness" to lighthearted, present-day personalized t-shirt that declare: "DAVE (or your name). The Man. The Myth. The Legend" (Catalog Favorites 2010). For a mere $24.95, you can "let the world know how special you are," as the advertisement for the t-shirt states.

To a lot of psychologists, autonomy has not been a myth but rather a reality and a desirable developmental outcome. In 1932, in his book *The Moral Judgment of the Child*, Jean Piaget argued that early childhood is characterized by a "heteronomous" stage. At this age, children parrot the moral rules of their parents and other authority figures. Then starting in middle childhood, children develop into what Piaget termed the "autonomous" stage. In this stage, children arrive at moral rules through a process that combines autonomy and a democracy. For instance when discussing rules of games, each child autonomously forms his moral point of view, and then children together debate these views in a democratic fashion. (Most excerpts from interviews in Piaget's books come from boys.) Piaget argued that it is desirable for children to reach the autonomous stage, but he also noted how children in what he called "primitive" societies will be unlikely to do so because they are too collectivist and beholden to authority.

Starting in the late 1950s, Lawrence Kohlberg (e.g., 1981; 1984) formulated a cognitive-developmental approach to moral reasoning that has influenced much of the subsequent research on morality. Inspired by Piaget ([1932] 1965) among others, Kohlberg hypothesized that moral development occurs in a sequence of three levels. Everyone starts at the first level, and then you may or may not develop into the subsequent levels. At the first level, people reason in terms of their fear of punishment and desire for rewards. At the second, people reason in terms of the norms and expectations of their community. At the third, people arrive at moral principles through autonomous reasoning, and according to Kohlberg these principles will center on rights and justice. Kohlberg held that his levels describe how people in fact develop everywhere (even if not everyone reaches the highest levels), as well as how they ought to develop everywhere. In other words, to Kohlberg, autonomy was a desirable destiny.

During the last three decades or so, scholars have pointed out that Kohlberg's theory does not travel very well. The approach does not take into account a host of diverse moral conceptions. Some researchers

working with girls and women have argued that we need to pay more attention to interpersonal relationships and moral concepts focused on care (e.g., Gilligan 1982). Also, researchers working in highly diverse cultures across the world have called for more attention to concepts pertaining to community and collectivity (e.g., Dien 1982; Edwards 1987; Ma 1988). Furthermore, researchers have observed that religion, spirituality, and divinity often play a role in people's moral lives (e.g., Colby and Damon 1992; Jensen 1995; 1997a; 1997b; 1998a; 1998b; 2000; 2006; 2008; 2009b; 2011a; Shweder, Mahapatra, and Miller 1990; Walker et al. 1995).

The Three Ethics Approach

In the context of this turn toward plurality, Richard Shweder and I have developed a new approach for analyzing people's moral reasoning and values that distinguishes three kinds of ethics (Jensen 1991; 1996; 2004; Shweder 1990; Shweder et al. 1997). These three ethics of Autonomy, Community, and Divinity involve different notions of what is at the heart of personhood, and different moral reasons and values.

The Ethic of Autonomy involves a focus on people as individuals who have needs, desires, and preferences. The moral goal is to recognize the right to the fulfillment of these needs and desires and to strive to make available the means to satisfy them. Whereas an autonomous self is free to make many choices, the self is restricted by concerns with inflicting harm on other individuals, encroaching on their rights, and consideration for their needs. Thus, in terms of moral reasoning, the Ethic of Autonomy centers on moral concepts that address the interests, well-being, and rights of individuals (self or other), and equality between individuals. It also includes the notion of taking responsibility for oneself and autonomy-oriented virtues, such as self-esteem, self-expression, and independence. As described above, moral psychology has paid a lot of attention to Ethic of Autonomy reasoning. Our argument is that there are two other prominent kinds of ethics.

The Ethic of Community centers on how people are members of social groups, such as family, school, and nation, and how they occupy various roles and positions within these groups. The moral goal of this social self is the fulfillment of role-based duties to others, and the protections and positive functioning of social groups. Accordingly, the Ethic of Community includes moral concepts pertaining to persons' duties to others, and concern with the customs, interests, and welfare of groups. This ethic also addresses community-oriented virtues such as self-moderation and loyalty toward social groups and their members.

Within the Ethic of Divinity, persons are conceptualized in spiritual or religious ways. Here, the moral goal is for the self to become increasingly

connected to or part of that which is pure or divine. This goal may include either this-worldly or other-worldly considerations. The central moral conceptions of the Ethic of Divinity pertain to divine and natural law, injunctions and lessons found in sacred texts, and the striving to avoid spiritual degradation, and come closer to moral purity. This ethic also taps divinity-oriented virtues such as awe, faithfulness, and humility.

In research using the three ethics, each moral value or reason that a person invokes is coded into one of the three ethics. It is, however, perfectly possible for a person to have multiple reasons in regards to an issue and for these reasons to tap two or all three ethics. Furthermore, much of the research that has analyzed people's moral reasoning in terms of the three ethics has used a coding manual developed by Jensen (1991; 1996; 2004). In this manual, each of a person's moral reasons is coded into one ethic (i.e., Autonomy, Community, or Divinity), allowing for an assessment of the *degree* to which a person uses each of the three ethics. Furthermore, each moral reason is coded into one of numerous subcategories (each ethic includes 13–16 subcategories, e.g., "Self's Psychological Well-Being" and "Rights" for Autonomy, "Duty to Others" and "Social Order or Harmony Goals" for Community, and "Scriptural Authority" and "God-Given Conscience" for Divinity), allowing for an assessment of the specific *type* of moral concept used within an ethic. Distinguishing not only among the three ethics but also among types of moral concepts within each ethic means that highly diverse concepts can be taken into account, and complexities in people's moral compass can better be gauged.

Research with the Three Ethics

Next, I will describe some of the research that has been carried out with the three ethics, and what we have learned from that. One of my research projects examined the moral reasoning of groups in India and the United States who were differentiated on the extent to which they were religiously conservative or religiously liberal (Jensen 1998a). A variety of scholars in diverse disciplines have discussed the ways in which divisions have emerged in many countries between tendencies toward religious conservatism and liberalism. While different scholars use different names (e.g., orthodox versus progressivist, fundamentalist versus modernist; tight-bounded versus loose-bounded), they are describing the same kind of phenomenon (Bellah 1987; Hunter 1991; Marty and Appleby 1993; Merelman 1984; Wuthnow 1989).

In India and the United States, 80 religiously liberal and conservative adults took part in in-depth interviews about moral issues that they had experienced as well as preselected general moral issues (e.g., divorce, suicide in the case of terminal illness). One key result from the study was that
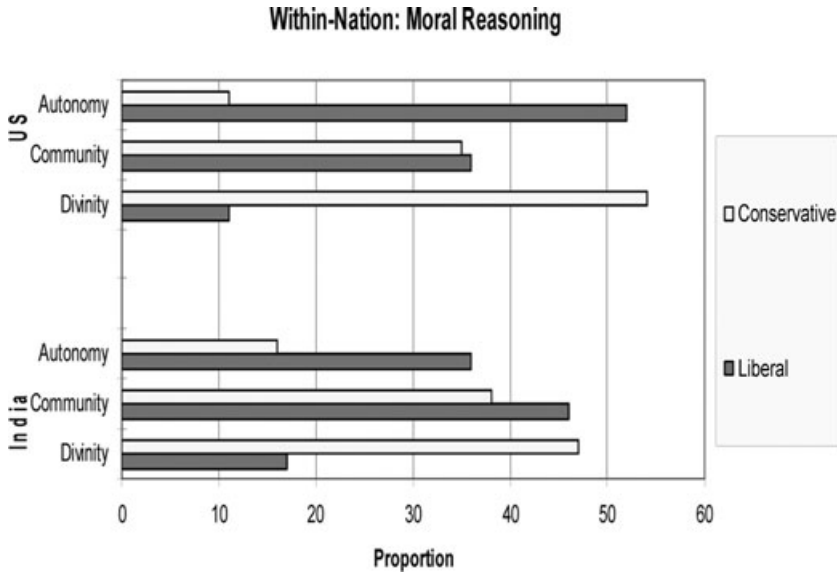
Within-Nation: Moral Reasoning

Figure 1. Use of the Three Ethics by Liberals and Conservatives within India and the U.S.

the differences between the liberal and conservative groups mirrored each other to a remarkable extent in the two countries. Figure 1 illustrates how in both India and the United States, religious liberals reasoned significantly more in terms of the Ethic of Autonomy than did religious conservatives participants. Conservative participants reasoned more in terms of the Ethic of Divinity than did liberals. Liberal and conservative groups, however, did not differ in their use of the Ethic of Community.

To extend the quantitative results, it is illuminating to have a qualitative sense of how participants spoke. In response to the issue of suicide in the case of terminal illness, for example, religiously conservative Indians and Americans often stressed the Ethic of Divinity view that decisions about life and death should be made by God, not humans. One conservative Indian argued:

Who are you to do it? You are sent here by some great power. God has created us, given us life. One day He will take it back. So why should we interfere in God's plans and destroy our souls at our will? . . . In our Hindu religion, it is written that man, in this case, will have no reincarnation.

Similarly, a conservative American responded in terms of the Ethic of Divinity:

I leave that in God's hands. . . . He gave us life, He can take the life when he wants to, and He can give us grace to go through difficulties in life while we're here. . . .

It does have an effect on [a person's] eternal state in the sense that he does not have the reward that he could have had [if] he had continued [living].

In contrast to the conservatives, many religious liberals invoked the Ethic of Autonomy justification that a terminally ill person should not have to experience pain. A liberal American explained:

It is just laying the worst pain and agony upon that individual, and I don't think that's the way we really were supposed to play out life. Clearly all degrees of pain and agony are experienced by humans, but we should not presume that someone can bear the pain.

A religiously liberal Indian concurred:

The pain—it's just too much. Suppose some people they're having this cancer or something, they cannot bear the pain. . . . They can tell the doctor to give them some medicine so they can slip away. They know they will not survive anyhow. One way or another they have to die. And the pain—they should not have to tolerate it.

Somewhat surprisingly, cross-national comparisons between the American and Indian liberal groups and between the American and Indian conservative groups showed few differences. Only for a few issues did American liberals invoke the Ethic of Autonomy more than their Indian counterparts.

A couple of key conclusions follow from this research. First, the research indicates that the three ethics are helpful in understanding religious conservatism and liberalism. Conservatives and liberals alike are committed to family, community, and society. However, they differ notably on the extent to which to frame communal and moral life in terms of Ethics of Divinity or Autonomy.

Second, the present work along with additional research shows that diverse people in diverse countries use all three ethics. This includes not only India and the United States, but also countries such as Brazil, Finland, and the Philippines (e.g., Arnett, Ramos, and Jensen 2001; Buchanan 2003; Haidt, Koller, and Dias 1993; Jensen 1995; 1997b; 1998a; 1998b; 2008; 2009a; Kulkarni 2007; Pandya 2009; Rozin et al. 1999; Vainio 2003; Vasquez et al. 2001). Different groups do not use the three ethics to equal extents, but different groups do appear to recognize and invoke all three. Autonomy, then, is not simply a myth, constructed and reified in some cultures, but rather a widely recognizable moral ethic. At the same time, however, autonomy is not the sole moral foundation of human development. Community and divinity, too, are widely used moral ethics.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF AUTONOMY, COMMUNITY, AND DIVINITY

Given the widespread presence of Autonomy, Community, and Divinity, a next question becomes: how does each of the three ethics develop?
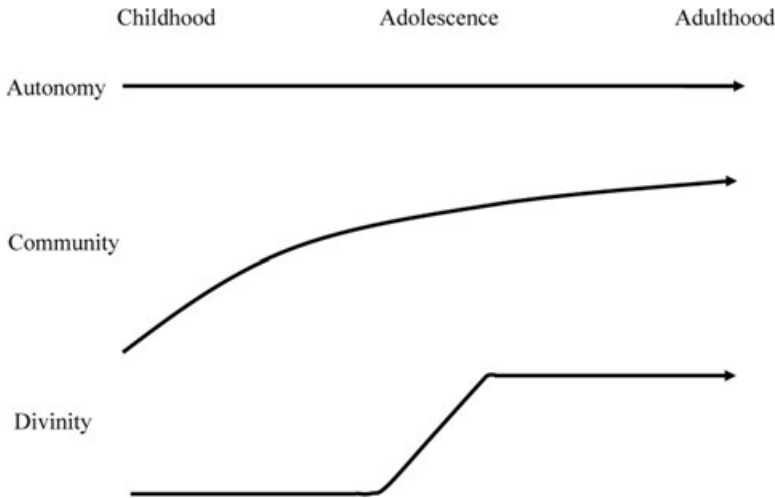
Figure 2. Cultural-Developmental Template.

Note. Each of the lines shows developmental patterns across the lifespan, from childhood to adulthood. The positions of the lines do *not* indicate their relative frequency—in relation to one another (e.g., use of Autonomy being more frequent than use of Community and Divinity).

Furthermore, how can we capture the way that the three ethics are common across cultures, as well as the fact that their salience varies among cultures?

In considering how the three ethics vary developmentally, it is necessary to address two issues: (1) the *degree* to which an ethic is used at different ages (e.g., Does the overall use of the Ethic of Community go down, remain stable, or go up with age?); and (2) the specific *types* of moral concepts that persons of various ages use within an ethic (e.g., Does a child reason in terms of different kinds of Ethic of Community concepts as compared to an adolescent or an adult?).

I have proposed a model (Figure 2) for how degree and type of use of the three ethics is related to age (Jensen 2008, 2011a). The model as a whole is based on extensive empirical work that I describe below. For some of its elements, however, the available evidence is more limited, and below I will note when this is the case. A description of the model will be followed by an explanation of how the intent is for it to be used as a *cultural-developmental template* for research with different age groups within diverse cultures. The model, then, is not a simple one-size-fits-all, but rather accommodates the prevailing ethics of diverse peoples. In other words, the template model aims to capture both what are fundamental ethics to all humans, and how those ethics develop in varied ways among different peoples.

My model for how the three ethics are used across childhood, adolescence, and adulthood is shown in Figure 2. The three lines show a developmental pattern for the Ethics of Autonomy, Community, and

Divinity. The positions of the lines, however, do *not* indicate their relative frequency in relation to one another (e.g., use of Autonomy being more frequent than use of Community and Divinity).

With respect to the Ethic of Autonomy, my proposal is that reasons within this ethic emerge early and that the *degree* to which persons use this ethic stays *relatively* stable across adolescence and into adulthood. However, the *types* of Autonomy concepts that persons use are likely to some extent to change with age. Support for the proposal comes from the consistent finding across different research approaches that children in different cultures speak early about harm to the self and the interests of the self (Colby et al. 1983; Gilligan 1982; Kohlberg 1984; Turiel 2002; Walker 1989; see also Eisenberg et al. 1995). Furthermore, children in quite diverse cultures are also capable of reasoning about harm to other individuals and the needs or interests of other individuals (Gilligan 1982; Haidt et al. 1993; Miller 1994; Turiel 2002).

As persons in different cultures grow into adolescence and adulthood, research with different approaches has also shown that some reasoning pertaining to the welfare of the self and other individuals remains (Eisenberg et al. 1995; Gilligan 1982; Haidt et al. 1993; Jensen 1995; 1998a; Turiel 2002; Vasquez et al. 2001; Walker et al. 1995; Zimba 1994). Adolescents and adults continue to reason in terms of these concepts for diverse issues and perhaps especially for issues of relevance to their own lives (Buchanan 2003; Walker et al. 1995). And it is likely that many or even most of the moral issues that people contemplate (outside of a research setting) are indeed of personal relevance.

In adolescence and adulthood, other types of Ethic of Autonomy reasoning may also become increasingly used, even if they are unlikely to become the most common types of Autonomy reasoning. Research with European and American participants, including Piaget's original work, has indicated that adolescents and adults are more likely than children to speak of concepts such as individual rights and equity in a consistent and in-depth manner (Killen 2002, Piaget [1932] 1965; Walker 1989). Even if these concepts do not prevail in the reasoning of adults across cultures, research in different cultures suggests that adolescents and adults give some consideration to equity and justice (Miller and Luthar 1989; Zimba 1994).

The present proposal, then, is that a common pattern is for the degree of Autonomy reasoning to stay relatively stable across the lifespan but with some changes in types of Autonomy reasoning. However, it also needs to be noted that in cultures where there is a very strong push for collectivity or submission to divinity, there may be somewhat of a decline over time in Autonomy reasoning. In such cultures, considerations of the needs, desires, and interests of individuals (especially the self) would be seen as

either irrelevant or even morally objectionable, and hence by adulthood these considerations might go down.

Turning to the Ethic of Community, the proposal is that both the *degree* of usage and the diversity of *types* of concepts rise throughout childhood and into adolescence and adulthood. As shown in developmental research by Kohlberg and his colleagues (e.g., Kohlberg 1984) as well as cultural research by Shweder and his colleagues (1990), younger children in diverse cultures are likely to invoke some Community concepts, such as those relating to the interests of one's family and familial customs. Moral reasoning related to the family is likely to find continued expression past childhood and probably even more so in the course of adolescence and adulthood as a person's awareness of diverse types of family considerations increases (e.g., duty to family in addition to family interests and customs; e.g., Miller, Bersoff, and Harwood 1990). Also, in the course of adolescence and with the transition into adulthood, people take on an increasing number of adult family roles and responsibilities.

By late childhood and adolescence, a person is likely to also add community concepts that pertain to social groups other than the family. Thus, research across many cultures has found that children's social circle widens as they reach late childhood and grow into adolescence (Whiting and Edwards 1988). For example, by late childhood and early adolescence, the salience of friends and peers rises (Chen 2011; Hurrelmann 1996; Rubin, Bukowski, and Parker 1998; Schlegel and Barry 1991; Youniss and Smollar 1985). Other collective contexts, too, gain in importance across cultures, including school, civic organizations, and workplace (Flanagan, Martínez, and Cumsille, 2011; Schlegel, 2011). Thus, compared to younger children, the expectation reflected in Figure 2 is that older children and adolescents use more Community concepts pertaining to nonfamilial groups.

By the time a person reaches late adolescence or adulthood, moral concepts that pertain to even broader social entities such as society as a whole are likely to become used in a more frequent and consistent manner. Longitudinal research has shown how persons in their late teens and adulthood reason more about matters pertaining to societal organization, as compared to children and younger adolescents (Eisenberg et al. 1995; Walker 1989). While this longitudinal research has been carried out in North America, the findings are likely to generalize. A variety of cultural research with adults has shown how they reason in terms of broad social entities (Jensen 1998a; Nisan 1987; Zimba 1994).

With respect to the Ethic of Divinity, there is less research available and hence the proposal here has a more restricted empirical basis. In cultures that emphasize scriptural authority or where people conceive of supernatural entities (e.g., God) as largely distinct from humans (e.g., omniscient and omnipotent), the present suggestion is that the *degree* of

use of the Ethic of Divinity will be low among children but will then rise in adolescence and become similar to adult use of this ethic. The reason is that in such communities, the culturally articulated concepts pertaining to supernatural entities are of such an abstract nature that they may be readily translated into moral reasoning only by adolescents whose cognitive skills allow for more abstraction than those of younger children (Adelson 1971; Keating 1990; Kohlberg 1976; Piaget 1972). It should be noted that research indicates that children growing up in cultures with a predominance of abstract conceptions of the supernatural can express conceptions of these supernatural entities (Jensen 2009b; Oser, Scarlett, and Bucher 2005). The suggestion here is that these conceptions do not get applied to moral reasoning until adolescence. In addition, the suggestion is that the *types* of Divinity concepts used by older adolescents will be largely similar to those used by adults. Older adolescents are likely to be as capable as adults of using diverse Divinity concepts, such as those referencing scriptural authority, God's authority, and spiritual virtues.

Support for the pattern is also suggested by the fact that a number of religious traditions have ceremonies and celebrations in early- or mid-adolescence that explicitly confer moral responsibility on the adolescents and link that responsibility to knowledge of religious teachings (Mahoney et al. 2003; Sita 1999). Within Catholicism, for example, adolescents who take part in the Confirmation ceremony promise to live by the teachings of the Catholic Church, and they show that they are ready to be responsible for their actions. Within Judaism, when an adolescent boy becomes Bar Mitzvah or an adolescent girl becomes Bat Mitzvah, they assume responsibility for obeying the laws of Judaism and the Jewish people. Thus, Bar Mitzvah and Bat Mitzvah are Hebrew for "son of the commandments" and "daughter of the commandments," respectively. The presence of these rituals in diverse religions begins to point to adolescence as a key time for the explicit expression of moral reasons within an Ethic of Divinity.

The age pattern for the Ethic of Divinity proposed above, however, may only apply to some cultures. In cultures where scriptural accounts of supernatural or transcendent entities are less salient or where people regard such entities as less distinct from humans, it is possible that Divinity concepts are more accessible to and hence used more by children in their moral reasoning (Saraswathi 2005). In some Hindu communities, for example, religious devotion finds expression in tangible and recurrent activities (e.g., bathing, dressing, and feeding the gods); there are many places within and outside the home for worship (e.g., household shrines, temples, roadside shrines); and there are a variety of persons seen to have god-like status or special connections with the gods (e.g., gurus, sadhus [renouncers], temple priests) (Jensen 1998a; Shweder et al. 1990). In such cultures, children may reason about moral issues in terms of Ethic of

Divinity concepts from fairly early on because these concepts are tied repeatedly to specific everyday activities and objects. Then in the course of adolescence and adulthood, additional Divinity concepts may become part of a person's moral reasoning.

THE CULTURAL-DEVELOPMENTAL TEMPLATE

As mentioned above, the intent is for Figure 2 to serve as a *cultural-developmental template* for research with different age groups within diverse cultures. This means that the developmental patterns in Figure 2 are accommodated to the constellation of ethics that prevail within different cultures.

To return to the research with religiously liberal and conservative groups described above. As we saw, religiously liberal adults frequently use the Ethics of Autonomy and Community, and quite rarely use the Ethic of Divinity (Buchanan 2003; Jensen 1997a; 1997b; 1998a; 1998b; 2000; 2006; 2008; 2009b; Vainio 2003). Given this finding, it is possible to make predictions for the expression of the cultural-developmental template in these kinds of religiously liberal cultures. As seen in Figure 3, the expectation would be that children, adolescents, and adults will make frequent use of Autonomy concepts, although as described above the type used may well change with age. Community concepts will be rarer among younger children but will then become quite common among adolescents and adults. (It is possible that the Ethic of Community will rise more quickly among religiously liberal children in relatively interdependence-oriented societies, such as India, as compared to children growing up in religiously liberal communities in relatively independence-oriented
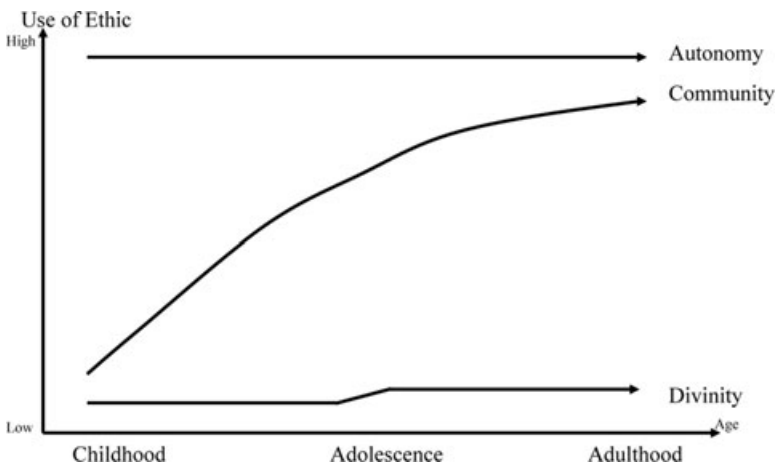

Figure 3. Expression of the Template among Religious Liberals.
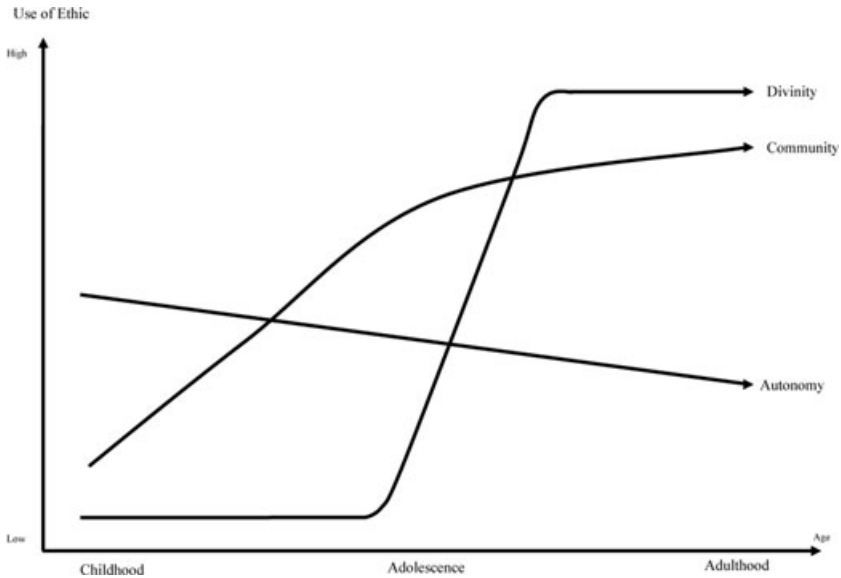
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Figure 4. Expression of the Template among Religious Conservatives.

societies, such as the United States; see also Phinney and Baldelomar 2011). With respect to the Ethic of Divinity, the expectation is that it will be used infrequently at all ages and if it emerges, this will only occur in the course of adolescence.

As also described above, religiously conservative adults frequently reason in terms of the Ethics of Community and Divinity and in-frequently in terms of the Ethic of Autonomy. Accommodating the cultural-developmental template to this finding, Figure 4 shows the pre-dicted cultural-developmental patterns for religiously conservative groups. Here, children, adolescents, and adults will infrequently use the Ethic of Autonomy. In fact, as noted above, there may even be some decrease in this ethic over the lifespan because of the emphasis on renouncing self-interest that characterizes some religiously conservative communities. With respect to the Ethic of Community, the expectation would be that its prevalence will be fairly low among younger children, higher among children in late childhood and early adolescence, and high among late adolescents and adults. Use of the Ethic of Divinity will be low among children (at least for religiously conservative communities with abstract conceptions of the supernatural, as explained above), but will then rise markedly in adolescence and remain high throughout adulthood.

In summary, the *cultural-developmental template* allows for a way to understand the moral development of children, adolescents, and adults

Table 1.   Mean Use of the Three Ethics by Liberals and Conservatives across the Lifespan

	Conservative			Liberal		
	Aut.	Com.	Div.	Aut.	Com.	Div.
Children	1.2	0.6	0.3	1.5	0.6	0
Adolescents	1.0	1.1	0.9	1.5	1.0	0.1
Adults	0.7	1.5	1.3	1.2	0.9	0.2

who form part of diverse cultural communities. The template strikes a middle ground between having a single model for people everywhere and the prospect of having one model for every culture. It captures ethics that appear to be fundamental to people everywhere, and how those ethics nevertheless develop in varied ways among people in diverse places.

A Current Cultural-Developmental Study

At this time, I am in the process of analyzing the results of a study testing the cultural-developmental model. For this study, graduate students and I interviewed 120 children, adolescents, and adults. Half of the participants in each of the three age groups were American evangelical Presbyterians (i.e., on the conservative end of the religious spectrum) and the other half was American mainline Presbyterians (i.e., on the liberal end of the religious spectrum).

All participants took part in interviews answering questions about six different moral issues. Five of the issues were general issues, such as divorce and giving money to a panhandler. The sixth issue was a personal experience that the participant considered to be moral.

Table 1 shows preliminary findings for the use of the three ethics averaged across the five general issues. With respect to cultural or religious groups, statistical analyses indicate that religious liberals used more ethic of autonomy than religious conservatives. However, conservatives used more ethic of divinity than liberals. These findings replicate those from previous studies.

With respect to age, adolescents and adults combined used more ethic of community than children. This fits with the cultural-developmental template model. Also, there was an interaction of religious culture and age with conservative adolescents and adults using more ethic of divinity than conservative children, whereas there was no difference among the liberal age groups on use of ethic of divinity. In fact, as the table shows, there was almost no use of the ethic of divinity among religious liberals of any age. Again, this fits well with the model.

CONCLUSION

Let me conclude by returning to the questions that the IRAS conference organizers had posed and that I set forth at the outset. To repeat: (1) How does autonomy emerge and develop in people's psychological lives? (2) What are historical and cultural roots of autonomy? (3) To what extent do we think that autonomy is valuable? (4) To what extent are there other fundamental virtues, goods, or morals that we value?

The cultural-developmental synthesis suggests that the Ethic of Autonomy emerges early in people's psychological lives, and continues to hold some importance across the lifespan. But Autonomy is not alone. The Ethic of Community too emerges early and appears to increase in importance across the life course. Then, it also seems that in most places and at most times, the Ethic of Divinity has found a voice—and in some traditions this voice may become audible in adolescence.

Ethics of Autonomy, Community, and Divinity, then, may have universal roots in the human condition. However, they are also clearly culturally and historically situated. Cultural communities—whether defined by religious, national, or other boundaries—clearly vary in how they prioritize the three ethics and the extent to which they reinforce their development.

The cultural-developmental synthesis, then, allows us to think about people's moral lives both in light of what is developmentally common and culturally distinctive. While the model may not offer clear-cut prescriptions as to what we should value, it does suggest that in a global world where highly diverse cultures come into contact, we might want to find prescriptive places between one-size-fits-all and one-for-every culture (Jensen 2003; 2010; 2011b; Jensen, Arnett, and McKenzie, in press).

NOTE

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