



# *New Direction for Moral Education: Reconsideration of Moral Pluralism and Christian-Secular Moral Dualism*

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## **Abstract**

*Christian-secular moral dualism, the idea that Christians and secular people hold different moral values, is prevalent in our social views and moral education. This belief, however, does not correspond with the findings of current studies on people's moral perceptions. This article presents an empirically defined welfare/harm-based morality that stands across different cultures and personal-social diversities including religious beliefs. This domain of morality differs from social conventions and rules as well as virtuous acts (e.g., honesty), both of which are often classified as a part of moral quality in other literature on moral perceptions and traditional character/moral education. The article describes the reasons why moral pluralism and Christian-Secular moral dualism have been prematurely, yet widely supported in societies, followed by pedagogical suggestions for a new direction for further understanding of welfare-based morality per se, as well as Christian morality in the context of the universal moral principle.*

**Keywords:** *morality; moral education; moral pluralism; Christianity; universal morality; domain theory*

## **Introduction**

**M**oral pluralism, a major theoretical framework of moral views in our current society, supports the idea that people's definition of morality varies among individuals of different backgrounds, beliefs, and values (MacIntyre, 1981; Cherry, 2008). Religion is one predominant factor believed to diversify individuals' moral codes (Crittenden, 1990). Along with this belief, widely supported is an idea that morality cannot be addressed independently of the aspects of religion. Consequently, the belief that Christians hold a different set of moral values from secular people is largely supported in our societies. As evidence, millions of American children and youth are educated via homeschooling or in private institutions, based on their parents' beliefs that public-school enrollment cannot ensure instruction in accordance with their religious convictions, particularly with reference to the aspects of morality (Lyman, 1998; Farris, 2013). This belief and educational trend, however, do not correspond with the findings of recent studies on people's moral judgments and reasoning (Nucci, 2009). This article presents an empirically supported universal moral notion found to stand across social-personal diversities such as culture and religions. The article then analyzes why moral pluralism/Christian-Secular moral dualism is prematurely, yet prevalently supported in our societies, followed by pedagogical suggestions for a new direction of moral education that applies the universal moral concept.

### Limitations of Current Moral Views and Pedagogies

Real-life examples demonstrate the prevalence of advocacy of moral pluralism. In my Psychology classes at a university, I ask my students what would be the criteria for determining a person to be moral. Their responses uniformly refer to a common phrase “*people who know what is right or wrong*.” Every time I ask the question, I sense that some students think that the statement “*knowing right or wrong*” sounds good in tone, yet intuitively feel that the dichotomous classification of social matters as right or wrong is somewhat inadequate in fully addressing the philosophical depth and complexity of human morality. However, they are not able to articulate exactly where the inadequacy stems from, and therefore rarely challenge the statement. The perceived inadequacy of the statement, however, precisely reflects the ongoing limitations in our current understanding of morality. As the class discussion continues, the students’ definition of morality, in reference to the ideas of right or wrong, naturally leads to another way of thinking: what is considered right versus wrong differs from person to person, and therefore, people hold a different set of moral values depending on their upbringings, personal experiences, and beliefs. Students then typically refer to religion, including atheistic beliefs, as one major element that shapes and diversifies a person’s moral codes.

The pluralistic moral view based on what is socially right or wrong has major limitations. First, it fails to provide a specific guideline as to exactly by what and whose standard certain actions are determined to be right, therefore *moral*, or wrong, therefore *amoral*. When we say a person has moral character or that we, as a group, pursue a moral community, there is no explicit, theoretical framework or guideline by which the person or society’s morality should be evaluated. This ambiguity leads to subjectivity and variation in defining morality wherein moral behaviors are inclusive of a variety of social-personal conducts that range from social rules and conventions (e.g., dress codes), or virtuous acts (e.g., honesty), to more philosophical ideas such as altruism. Accordingly, the term “moral education” was altered to “character (or virtue) education” that would serve “*as the generic, publicly accepted label for a range of approaches to moral education, without any clear conceptual framework for what the term character even refers to.*” (Nucci, 2001, p.128). In an assumption that a teacher’s individual moral views would naturally differ from the students’ moral views, character education then included morality as one of “character” traits and taught it, but using a teaching method that lessened the connotation of indoctrinating moral values to the students than it was for traditional moral education (Althof & Berkowitz, 2006). Consequently, character education teaches a variety of actions and beliefs that carry out an admirable connotation in one way or the other (e.g., kindness, respect, and fairness) as well as social conventions and rules culturally suitable and supported by social standards and expectations (e.g., etiquettes and religious rules). All of these elements of virtues, including morality, are classified under one category as *characters/virtues*, referred to as character/virtue education, or as *morality*, referred to as moral education as a whole, or the labels being interchangeably used with an unclear boundary between the two. I call this style of teaching “*all-in-one*” moral/character education.

Second, moral pluralism, and the pertinent moral/character education, contain an analogical error, a failure to recognize the definitive conceptual distinctions among different domains of conduct in a social life. Studies demonstrate that people systematically distinguish moral conduct from non-moral conduct (e.g., social rules/conventions and virtues) (Nucci, 1985). Here is a real-life example. The tragedy of the 9/11 Attack (2001) is still fresh in our memory. According to a media report, the U.S. passenger airplanes were hijacked by terrorists and purposely crashed into the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon. These incidents were reported to be

the deadliest attacks in the history of the United States, which resulted in the deaths of almost 3,000 people, many of whom were civilians. I asked my students what they thought of the terrorists' actions in terms of characteristics such as patriotism, diligence, loyalty, etc. Without exception, they agreed that the behaviors of the attacker could be considered in accordance with these specific characteristics. Then, I further asked whether they thought the attacker's actions were moral. In uniformity, they responded that the actions were not moral, followed by a welfare/harm-based reason that the attackers killed *innocent* people. What is striking in their responses is the way they *instinctively* distinguished virtuous characteristics (e.g., loyalty) from what they believed as moral. In addition, not only did they distinguish between the two, but they also justified their disapproval of the attackers' actions precisely in reference to the vice of *unprovoked harm* resultant of the attack. The way the students distinguished between the two implies that virtues and morality are not the same elements. Therefore, moral/character education that lumps them together may have an essential analogical flaw in the initial classification of what morality is about.

Third, what lies behind our advocacy of moral pluralism/Christian-secular moral dualism is a non-scientific conviction. The advocacy is based on a denial of a moral objectivity, which has never been empirically substantiated just as moral pluralism/subjectivity has never been empirically supported, either. In general, our society views moral subjectivity and pluralism positively as equivalent to *moral democracy* that suits the notion of our democratic society that celebrates individual differences and freedom of expression. Such subjectivity is also prevalent in the research field. Some researchers focus on the aspects of empathy and sympathy in interpersonal relationships as a key factor for a person's moral development (Weissberg & O'Brien 2004). Others focus on teaching virtuous traits as a way to educate children to be socially competent moral individuals (Wynne & Ryan, 1993), and the others focus on an individual's cognitive ability to rationalize the process of moral reflection (Kohlberg & Turiel, 1971). Despite the prevalence, advocacies, that are not empirically supported, could be based on speculations, feelings, thoughtless acceptance of social opinions, and researchers' remiss. This could be especially the case when studies have supported otherwise that contradicts the traditionally supported beliefs. People often hold a negative view of the idea of moral universality. People misperceive it as a form of authoritarian repression of people's individuality that attempts to mold forcefully people into the certain moral codes through a top-down indoctrination against their will. Nevertheless, the shared moral principle is, by no means, equivalent to moral indoctrination by external forces, but it could imply the existence of a cognizance of certain moral make-ups naturally shared among humanity.

### **Empirically-Identified Moral Universality: Moral Versus Non-Moral Distinction**

Provided these limitations, current moral views and education require a ground-up, systematic re-examination. Reconceptualization of what defines morality, based on scientific data is, by far, the most important prerequisite in this endeavor. In this section, I present a social domain theory (Turiel, 1978, 2011) established based on rigorous empirical data collected extensively in the United States as well as other countries. I begin with the general outline of three theoretical implications relevant to the moral universality, a direct counter to moral pluralism/Christian-secular moral dualism. I then extend each implication with the supporting data from domain-related studies.

First, the theory has *scientifically* specified the concept of morality. Morality pertains to the aspects of welfare and harm of others, involving relational fairness and social justice in the context of social-interpersonal relationships (Turiel, 1983, 2006). Morality is interpersonal and

welfare-related. Pertinent to the moral definition, domain theory specifies the concept of interpersonal unfairness and social injustice, otherwise ambiguous, from the context of harm, defined as deliberate acts that inflict gratuitous harm to others: simply put, “*hurting the innocent*.” Interpersonal welfare, together with the notion of anti-gratuitous harm, is the fundamental, inductive principle of morality. Examples of moral conduct are various forms of actions to attain welfare such as helping others. Examples of amoral conduct are acts of slander, rape, and unprovoked violence, embedded in all of which is significant gratuitous harm to others.

Second, the theory identifies *four* different domains of conduct regulated in people’s personal-social life. These are the *moral* domain (acts concerning welfare and anti-gratuitous harm to others), the *personal* domain (a person’s preference and discretion such as hairstyle or the content of a diary), the *prudential* domain (acts with consequential harm to the actor such as substance abuse), and the *social-conventional* domain (prototypical social rules such as etiquettes, courtesies, and religious rules) (Nucci, 2001; Turiel, 2006). Each domain is idiosyncratic in nature and functions with different meanings, roles, and objectives within the different aspects of people’s social-personal life, along with different developmental pathways in people’s perceptions. People do not treat all social matters in the same way. Studies have found a *systematic* difference in ways in which people view, judge and reason about the conduct of one domain from the other domains. The conceptual distinction of social-personal matters is not identified in other studies on moral perceptions, therefore, they fail to clarify a conceptual distinction between moral and non-moral conduct. On the other hand, the domain distinction model that separates among four domains of conducts concurrently distinguishes *morality* (welfare/harm) from *non-moral* aspects (i.e., social conventions, prudential and personal matters), which traditional moral view lumps together under one label as ‘morality’ or ‘characters’ *per se*. The welfare/anti-gratuitous harm principle is the essential axiom of the moral domain, but not for the other domains at the same degree. With such idiosyncrasy of moral domain, people do not judge and reason about non-moral matters in the same ways or the same welfare/harm context that people normally apply in the judgements of moral matters. (Term ‘morality’ hereafter refers to the domain theory’s welfare/harm-based morality, unless otherwise noted).

In addition to the moral-non-moral distinction, more recent studies have found that morality also differs from the acts of virtues (e.g., honesty), the separation of which had been a difficult task (Perkins & Turiel, 2007). As stated earlier, the acts of honesty and truth telling are generally viewed as a pristine *moral* quality. In our traditional moral/character education, honesty is often treated as a “hallmark” of the person’s *moral* character required to be a socially trust-worthy person. Nevertheless, studies have found that people generally do not judge the acts of dishonesty or honesty in the same, definitive manner by which they judge moral violation in reference to the up-front opposition to the deliberate gratuitous harm of moral violation. In particular, people judge the acts of dishonesty (virtuous transgression) in more relative and situational ways as opposed to the absolute and generalized ways in the events they judge moral transgressions (Perkins, at al., 2007). This moral-non-moral distinction model identifies a number of conducts, previously misclassified as morality, and methodically excludes these conducts out of the loop.

Third, domain theory has identified that the welfare/harm based moral principle is universal and objective (Helwig, Tisak, & Turiel, 1990; Turiel, 1983, 2015), which is an up-front contradiction to moral pluralism. Studies have found that the notion of anti-gratuitous harm is a shared moral axiom in people’s moral cognizance that stands in common regardless of social and personal diversities (e.g., culture, gender, and religions) (Turiel, 2015). In general, people invariably judge against the acts of moral transgression, deliberate unprovoked harm to another, typically followed by fairness reasons in reference to anti-gratuitous harm (“*it is wrong to hurt the innocent*”). This

pattern of moral judgement/reasoning stands across people with social-personal diversities including religious beliefs such that the ways in which religious youths (e.g., Christians) and their non-religious counterparts have perceived and judged moral matters versus non-moral matters were similar (Nucci, 2009). Both groups identified the same conducts as moral (e.g., helping others) or amoral (e.g., slander) based on the welfare-harm justifications. Both defined acts of moral transgressions in reference to the idea of deliberate gratuitous harm to others. Religious children/youth considered their religious rules (e.g., fasting before a service) as important but they judged moral imperatives as more important than religious rules in social interactions. The basic pattern of their convention-moral distinction, including their religious rules, was the same as the ways their non-religious counterparts differentiated moral matters from social conventions and virtuous expectations. Important to clarify here in reference to people's agreement or disagreement on moral views is that what is universal is the moral *concept*, not moral *decisions*. Moral concept is universal with consensus and objectivity, moral decisions and justifications are not. Decisions and justifications vary among individuals and by situations. Additionally note is that the domain distinction is valuable in specifying morality, and yet difference does exist between people's perceptions of 'ought to be' (idea) and what they actually 'do or would do' (actions) because people's assumption and interpretation of the "gratuitous harm" aspect of morality vary among individuals.<sup>1</sup> The next section expands these three implications along with the supporting data.

### **Five Criteria that Differentiate Morality from Social Conventions**

This section starts out with the description of simple, but profound data of the basic ways children distinguish between moral matters and non-moral conventions. One of the earlier studies examined children's reasoning about moral and conventional transgressions through interviewing children about their peers' social interactions and conflicts that took place in a free play setting (Nucci, Turiel, & Encarnacion-Gawrych, 1983). The following examples are the quotes from the study that illustrate a 4-year-old girl's distinction between morality and social conventions (Italicized sentences are the interviewer's statement):

#### **Moral issue:**

*Did you see what happened?*

Yes. They were playing and John hit him too hard.

*Is that something you are supposed to do or not supposed to do?*

Not so hard to hurt.

*Is there a rule about that?*

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1. Many factors lead to a variation in people's moral decisions. Moral matters are complex, intricate with multi-dimensional aspects. People make moral decisions by integrating the matters of different domains (e.g., conventional and personal matters). Social-personal diversities (e.g., culture) affect the ways people demarcate and balance out what they believe belongs to a person's rights versus violation of personal rights that, in turn, affects their judgements of notion of gratuitous harm. Additionally, moral decisions are not necessarily altruistic or the acts of total selflessness, but often involve reciprocity and mutuality. People weigh the advantages and disadvantages of their decisions for the self and others. People consider the availability of the resources they could provide for others as well as the closeness and meanings of the relationship for which moral decisions take place. The extreme opposite to the normative pattern of people's sense of moral obligation is individuals who portray little or no consideration to others' welfare. In which case, their views of gratuitous harm to others would be quite different from the normative pattern wherein such harm is normally viewed as wrong.

Yes.

*What is the rule?*

You are not to hit hard.

*What if there was no rule about hitting hard, would it be all right to do then?*

No.

*Why not?*

Because he could get hurt and start to cry.

### **Conventional Issue:**

*Did you see what happened?*

Yes. They were noisy.

*Is that something you are supposed to do or not supposed to do?*

Not do.

*Is there a rule about that?*

Yes. We are to be quiet.

*Is there a rule about it?*

Yes, we have to be quiet.

*What if there were no rule, would it be all right to do then?*

Yes.

*Why?*

Because there is no rule. (Nucci, 2009. p.9)

As is shown in the quotes, the child responded differently to moral and conventional transgressions. While the child generalized moral situations involving the welfare of others (e.g., “It would be wrong to hit”), she did not generalize their own conventions and rules (e.g., “It would be OK not to be quiet if there is no rule”). She also reasoned about moral matters in the context of interpersonal harm; the importance of authority dictated the enforcement of rules for conventional matters. The behavior could be acceptable if a rule does not exist. The child’s responses were consistent with the general pattern of moral and conventional distinction (Turiel, 1987) and with the responses of children in other observational studies in school settings (Much & Shweder, 1978; Nucci & Nucci 1982; Nucci & Turiel, 1978). Cultural differences exist in youth’s reasoning of conventions. Youth in Korea gave a greater credibility to societal roles and status than US counterparts, but this does not mean they did not distinguish morality from conventions. Substantial evidence confirms that this general pattern of a moral-conventional distinction is not affected by participants’ gender, country, age, or economic status (Turiel, 2006). The moral-conventional distinction of people’s conduct has been supported in various contexts, including the context of the parent-child relationships, children’s social interactions, and the observations of various groups of people, including those with criminal backgrounds or with different religious backgrounds (Nucci, 1985; Nucci & Turiel, 1993).

People differentiate moral conduct from conventional/religious rules based on the following *five* criteria: 1) *rule generalizability* (if the rule is applied to society in general or only to a local group), 2) *rule alterability* (if it is acceptable to change/drop the rules), 3) *rule contingency* (if the rule is contingent on authority or not), 4) *wrongness/seriousness of rule transgression* (the degree of negative consequence), and 5) *justification unique to each domain* (e.g., welfare reasons associated with moral conduct and functionality associated with conventions) (Nucci, 2001). People view non-moral conventional issues, social norms and customs (e.g., table manners) as subjective,

alterable and relative to context, location and culture, and therefore do not always apply conventional rules as an absolute standard for everyone if the society does not have the same rule for the action (Turiel, 1983, 2006). Contrarily, people view moral imperative as absolute, universal, objective, and non-contingent on contextual or authority variation. The moral principle of anti-gratuitous harm is generalizable to everybody and not limited to certain cultures and specific individuals (e.g., “the rule slander is wrong” applies to everywhere). People generally judge moral matters and obligations to be more important than conformity to conventional matters and obligations, and the moral violation as more serious, wrong, and punishable than violation of social-conventional rules (Helwig et al., 1990). Justifications people apply for each domain also qualitatively differ from one another. People apply welfare/harm justifications when analyzing moral matters (e.g., unprovoked hitting is not OK because it hurts), as opposed to justifications of social order, practicality, maintenance of social functions, and authority associated with conventional matters (e.g., calling a teacher by her first name is not OK, because that is the rule) (Nucci, 2001).

Commonly believed is an idea that religious beliefs (including atheism) diversify people’s moral codes. Both Christians and non-Christians generally believe that a given set of Judeo-Christian moral values essentially differ from secular moral values. Adherence to this religious set of values is based on “*an encounter with God as lawgiver*” (p. 284) or on some actual transcendental or mystical encounter with God himself, while adherence to secular moral values is based on humanist ideas about human emotion, intuition, and rationality (Cherry, 2008). Christian-Secular moral dualism, however, contradicts the empirical data such that the ways in which children and young adults from different religions (e.g., Christians and Jews) distinguished morality from social conventions (and acts of sexuality) were generally the same as those of their nonreligious counterparts in reference to those five criteria outlined above (Nucci & Nucci, 1985). In the study (Nucci, 1985), Catholic sophomores attending at a Catholic high school and a Chicago-area university reflected on if it would be wrong of the Pope and Cardinals to disregard conventional and moral rules (“rule-alterability”) and if it was wrong for non-Catholics to be engaged in “inappropriate” actions if there was no rule about the actions in their religion (“rule-generalizability” and “rule-contingency”). The moral issues involved situations that entailed gratuitous, deliberate harm to another (e.g., slander). The church conventions were actions prohibited under the rules of Catholic churches (e.g., not attending services on Sunday). Overall, the participants rated moral transgressions as more serious than the transgressions of the religious conventions. The majority of high school and university Catholics (average of 91.6% and 98% respectively) also responded that it would be wrong if the Pope removed rules governing moral transgressions (e.g., slandering), while removing church rules regarding non-moral, conventional religious issues (e.g., fasting prior to communion) was viewed as wrong by less than a half of them (40.8% of high school and 32.7% university Catholics). It appears that devout Catholic youth grant authority to the Pope and other religious leaders, in the non-moral domain, whereas moral issues appear to be treated as non-contingent on the mandates of authority. With regard to whether it would be acceptable or wrong if non-Catholics engaged in amoral acts (deliberate harm) if there was no rule, their response pattern was the same. A majority of high school and university Catholics (91% and 97% respectively) viewed it as wrong in the event members of other religions engaged in acts that transgress moral issues even if the other religions did not have a clearly stated rule. Contrary to moral issues, only one-third of high school students and fewer than one-fourth of Catholics university students viewed it wrong for those in other religions to engage or not engage in conventional acts if they did not have the same rules. In sum, Catholics viewed the expectations of religious conventions as more restricted to Catholics than to Non-Catholics. This pattern was, however, not the case with regard to the moral matters that entailed unprovoked harm and injustice to others. The Catholic

participants generalized the moral issues to both Catholics and non-Catholics. The ways non-religious youth and Catholic youth distinguished moral acts from social-religious conventions were identical.

The subsequent interview studies with fundamentalist Christians and Jews further confirmed the similarities between religious and nonreligious youths along with more details of their judgements and reasoning for the moral-religious rule differentiation (Nucci, 1985; Nucci & Turiel, 1993). The participants were conservative Mennonites/Amish from a rural area of Indiana (10-17 years), Conservative Jewish (10-17 years), and Orthodox Jewish children (14-17 years). With regard to the judgments of the rule alterability (that asked if it would be wrong or not for religious leaders to alter or dismiss rules regarding acts of moral transgression), a majority of the children, across denominations, viewed it as wrong to alter the rules and it would be also wrong for people outside the religion to do the act. Remarkably, a relatively large number of children also viewed altering conventional rules as wrong (83% of Orthodox Jewish children). This made it appear as if these children did not make a moral-non-moral distinction. The reasoning for these judgements was, however, different as it was from the context of an authoritative mandate, common for conventional rule alterability, versus a reference to harm and welfare, applied for moral violation. Religious children viewed moral transgressions as wrong even if there was no biblical prescription or God's words in reference to those acts ("rule contingency"). This further confirms the definitiveness in perceiving moral issues as wrong versus the *less than one percent* of the children across denominations, who viewed religious conventional transgressions as wrong (e.g., women preaching, premarital sex) if their God did not make any reference to the acts. Lastly, similar to Catholic children and non-religious children, these religious children (up to 95%) extended the moral obligation of the prohibition of unprovoked harm to outside their religious groups ("rule generalizability"), yet did not apply their religious conventions to people outside their religious groups.

### **Another Criterion: Personal Discretion Versus Socially-Regulated Domains**

The other criterion for domain distinction is whether the conducts are regulated socially or subject to a person's discretion (Nucci, 1981). People believe some aspects of their lives to be personal, therefore they should be able to decide how they choose to act. This is a legitimate expression of preferences, individuality, and a need for privacy in their lives. People also believe there are other areas of conduct that should be legitimately regulated by social laws and by those who possess a greater authority (e.g., parents, teachers, and lawmakers), and therefore, beyond the person's discretion. Domain-related studies have found that the areas people express freedom for, versus acceptance of social regulation or others' directives, is not random, but *domain-specific* (Nucci, 1981). People generally view conduct of their *personal* domain (e.g., clothes to wear) as subject to their own discretion; the decision is up to them and beyond authority's control. People, however, do not claim the same discretion for all four domains equally. People view their conduct within the *prudential* (e.g., substance abuse), *conventional* (e.g., table manners) and *moral* (e.g., unprovoked interpersonal harm) domains as matters that should be regulated under the guidance of authority figures and social rules and regulations. Morality is part of socially regulated matters. The distinction pattern stands across social/personal diversities and is confirmed by studies within a variety of relational contexts in different cultural settings. For instance, children and youth do not claim or expect the same degree of freedom over the matters of prudence, morality and social conventions as they do for personal domain (Hasebe, Nucci & Nucci, 2004). Youths raised in Japan, classified as a "collectivistic society" wherein parental authority is highly valued, claimed



personal freedom (e.g., for choice of friends) just as their US counterparts did. Youths in the US, “individualistic society” wherein personal rights and independence are valued, accepted parental control over what they consider socially-regulated matters (e.g., use of substance) as their Japanese counterparts did. Children’s needs for freedom versus parental control is not unilateral. Parents also view parental involvement and guidance as legitimate, for these three socially-regulated domains, and children’s discretion for the personal domain necessary for optimal development. Conformity for social laws/regulation is not limited to children whose freedom could literally depend on how much discretion a parent is willing to grant. Young adults who are not under restriction of such power dynamics like parent-child relationship also acknowledge what is legitimately up to social rules.

Morality is fairness-based. The distinction between the areas of self-entitlement versus social-obligation is essential for determining what is legitimately fair so that it is not a violation of personal rights, or unfair so that it is a violation of personal rights. In traditional moral views, wherein the distinction is not clear, judgments of what is fair or not fair are generally unclear. People’s personal preferences can override their moral obligations. Some individuals overextend a sense of discretion into the area normally considered up to others. Others under-claim personal rights even within the area normally viewed as purely personal. The theorized self-others distinction clarifies a psychological and behavioral boundary between the area of entitlement and social obligations in dealing with social matters. It could clarify that not all of personal desires that are unmet are always moral transgressions as some people claim, whereas prolonged intrusion to a person’s rights is no longer a personal issue, but becomes a moral issue.

### **Super-Ordinance of the Moral Domain**

Another point of interest is that people do not equally treat all three socially regulated domains. First, justifications for each domain differ. Parents justify parental control as an important parental obligation for the sake of their children’s social learning (conventional domain), children’s welfare (prudential domain) and the safety of others who interact with their children (moral domain). Second, the degrees of seriousness people view, for violation of each domain, differ. People generally view moral violations as most wrong, severe, or punitive (Tisak & Jancowski, 1996). Studies on parent-child interactions found that parents attempted to exert a higher degree of parental authority over children’s moral violations (e.g., unprovoked hitting of a friend) than conventional or prudential violations (Smetana & Gaines, 1999). These findings imply what conduct is prioritized in social interaction with the *super-ordinance* of the moral imperatives, along with compliance to conventional and prudential rules being subordinate to moral rules.

The following real-life episodes illustrate the legitimacy of parental authority over the social domains and the super-ordinance of moral obligation. The first episode of a mother-child dyad interaction was in a Metra train going north to Chicago. A common parent-child interaction is a parent directing a child who misbehaves on a train. As the Metra train slowed down to enter one of Chicago stations, a child, around four years old, saw, through the window, an ambulance approaching the station. Holding the child in her arms, the mother pointed at the ambulance and repeated the word “ambulance” to the child. The ambulance suddenly made a high-pitched noise of the siren, which excited the child, and the child started leaning on the window screaming along with the siren sound (etiquette problem). Immediately, the mother reacted to the child and nicely but firmly shushed the child in order to be considerate of the other passengers in the car. The mother’s action was in line with research findings that parents tend to exert parental authority over

children's transgression of socially regulated domains (Smetana & Daddis, 2002) and in this particular case, the mother's interaction was to teach etiquette in a social situation.

The second episode is an interaction of another mother-child dyad also in a Metra train. This dyad was slightly "unconventional" in that they were the only loud passengers in the quiet train car, which was half-filled. The mother let the girl, around 4 years old, scream and move around in the car as the child pleased. This mother appeared to view etiquette and mannerism in a train to be a personal choice. This behavior does not correspond to the normative pattern in which society treats the social convention domain, but studies support several factors (e.g., aggression) that affect a person's view of the boundary between what should be socially regulated and what should be under personal discretion (Tisak, et al., 1996). People with this propensity tend to have a sense of entitlement extended into the area others normally consider as non-personal. The next observation was that the girl carried over her unruliness as she was playing physically with her mother on the seat. The girl got upset and intentionally punched her mother in the face. The mother, who apparently took her child's conventional transgressions (of being noisy in the car) casually, did not take the hitting lightly. Being hit in the face by the child, the mother immediately yelled at the child, "*Never hit your mother!*" With a pause of a second or two, the mother added "*Or anybody...!*" ("Rule generalized to all"). It was quite interesting to see that the mother cared less about the child's conventional transgression but reacted immediately to her child's moral transgression (unprovoked hitting), which illustrates the super-ordinance of morality. Also interesting was that the mother extended her remarks of discipline not only within the interaction with her mother but included general others as well (moral generalizability).

### **Morality-Virtues Distinction**

Unanswered questions with respect to moral/non-moral distinction are whether people also differ morality from virtuous characteristics (e.g., honesty and kindness) similarly to the distinction pattern of moral-social convention, and if so, whether the pattern stands universal or differs by personal diversities such as religions. This section describes virtues with a focus on the acts of honesty because honesty has always been a hallmark item in *moral* teaching and in traditional research of moral development (e.g., Wynne & Ryan, 1993). The focus on honesty is also due to the scarceness of the empirical data, currently available on the other virtues (e.g., empathy and kindness), examined in relation to the aspects of welfare/harm-based universal morality.

Recent studies have shown that morality differs from virtues (Perkins, et al, 2007, Hasebe, Harbke & Sorkhabi, 2021). The opposition to gratuitous harm is universal, objective and non-situational; judgments on virtuous acts (e.g., being honest) are subjective, and situational and localized (i.e., judgements may differ among individuals/groups). The ways people differentiate virtuous obligations from moral obligations are systematic, similar to those of moral-conventional distinction. People judge moral transgressions (deliberate gratuitous harm) invariably wrong. As opposed to the definitive judgments against acts of gratuitous harm, people's judgments about honesty are situational because people do not consider all lies as invariably wrong and all truth telling to be right. Moral-virtues distinction is obvious in people's everyday behaviors. One example is, as described earlier, my students' responses to the question whether the actions of the attackers in the 9-11 incident were moral or not. In response, the students recognized virtuous values in the pilots' acts (e.g., loyalty, diligence and patriotism), and yet simultaneously rated their acts as amoral. They intuitively differentiated concepts of virtues from morality.

As two different elements, a person's moral perceptions and virtuous characteristics do not necessarily develop in a person at the same rate; neither do they always play out orthogonally in

people's actions. Moral and virtuous actions can be intricate and even contradictory in social interactions. For example, there are individuals known in our history as having fought for a moral purpose of human right against the systemic social-interpersonal injustice due to racial discrimination (e.g., Rosa Parks). They were, by no means, "nice" by the social standard. These individuals aimed for a society with a higher moral conscience and yet were deemed to be "rebellious" because they acted against the rules, traditions, and expectations of the societies of the time. Another historical example is a political treaty, at one point during World War II, which is said to have freed prisoners of Turkish descent from Nazi camps. Japanese and Turkish diplomats falsified the list of prisoners' names by including prisoners who were of non-Turkish descent. As a result, the lives of those who were non-Turkish were also saved, along with Turkish prisoners. Diplomats' dishonesty aimed to uphold the moral principle of saving the lives of the innocent. I call these acts 'morally-aimed virtuous transgression.' The opposite exists. If a person has highly virtuous traits, it does not guarantee that s/he also holds equally a high level of moral conscience and moral judgment. Stories about those classified as "political dictators" present their style of régime to be quite amoral (as reported to be causing gratuitous harm to many) and yet their propagandas demonstrate some virtuous characteristics (e.g., diligence and patriotism) at an exceeding level.

### Studies on Judgments of Honesty

Moral education, at both secular and religious schools, often fails to address the moral-virtue distinctions. The conceptual mix-up between morality and non-moral virtues, coupled with ambiguous moral definitions, causes instructional errors, what I call "*reversed*" priority teaching, in which educators attempt to teach virtuous characters (i.e., situational) as absolute fixed traits, and moral concept (i.e., non-contingent) as relative and situational. In our moral education, children are encouraged to be honest and truthful as a responsible and trustworthy individual. In this context, lying is considered *morally* wrong and telling the truth is *morally* right. This teaching based on the absolutism of honesty and the dichotomous view of honesty or dishonesty contradicts empirical data. Studies support that people, in both hypothetical and real-life situations, do not judge all lies as the same or invariably wrong. People appear to view lies in the certain circumstances (upholding moral aims) as acceptable and justifiable, while lies in other circumstances (aimed for personal gain and entailing gratuitous harm) are considered morally wrong (Perkins, et al, 2007).

Additional counter evidence to the absolute view of virtues is classical work by Hartshorne and May (1928) that studied the frequency of school-aged children's deceptions in a game that would test "eye-hand coordination." The results showed that a majority of the children in the game cheated a similar number of times and a few children never or rarely cheated. The number of falsehoods was not significantly different among the participants despite the diversities of their educational backgrounds, such as children regularly attending Sunday schools, secular schools, or religious schools. They cheated regardless of the secularity or religiousness of the education they received. Limitations exist in this study, such as that the validity of the experiment because the participants might not consider their occasional cheatings in the game as serious acts of dishonesty because the task was presented as a game. The results still suggest that honesty is not a "*fixed*" trait in a way a person is described as a "honest person" in the same notion that "*someone as being a blonde or having brown hair*" (Nucci, 2001, p.126). Power, Higgins & Kohlberg, (1989b, p.127) noted that Hartshorne and May (1928) concluded that virtuous characters are not *traits per se*.

Classifying a person as honest versus dishonest is like two extreme opposites of one pole. If honesty is not a trait, this dichotomous classification of honesty is not realistic. Equally unrealistic is a pedagogical approach that continues to teach children to be invariably honest.

People recognize the circumstantial variations of honesty. A study in the medical field supported that a majority of physicians judged a certain type of deception toward insurance companies as justifiable if its aim was to prevent harm (e.g., otherwise the patients would not receive medical treatments that were necessary) (Freeman, Rathore, Weinfurt, Schulman, & Sulmasy, 1999). Children, college-aged students, and adults also viewed lies that prevent harm and save the feelings of others as acceptable, while viewing lies for personal gain as wrong (Peterson, Peterson, & Seeto, 1983; Lindskold & Walters, 1983). This situational variability substantiated in studies further implies honesty prescriptively differs from morality. Domain-related studies support that acceptance of dishonesty and deception is domain-specific. People view dishonesty and lying as acceptable and justifiable, if not a necessity, in the event that telling the truth will impose a violation of personal right and gratuitous harm. Children and adolescents judge withholding information through non-disclosure to parents as more justifiable, particularly over matters of privacy, the personal domain, than the moral and prudential domains, which children and youth normally view as subject to parental authority (Smetana, Metzger, Gettman, & Campione-Barr, 2006). Adolescents avoid parental directives when the commands conflict with the moral principle (gratuitous harm to others) or are viewed to be imposing on their privacy and personal rights (Perkins et al., 2007). Variations existed that adolescents with aggression problem (i.e., peer bullies), compared to non-bullies, had a greater tendency to prioritize personal gain (e.g., monetary profit at the cost of others) over moral obligation of interpersonal welfare (e.g., disclosure of a potential harm to another that inhibits personal gain) (Hasebe, et al., 2021). Nevertheless, those adolescents as a group, like normative samples, still judged dishonesty for moral obligation as more acceptable than moral violations. These studies together confirm the super-ordinance of morality that people treat moral concerns more importantly than virtues of honesty and truth-telling in the order of what ought to be prioritized in accordance with social-interpersonal matters. People value honesty but do not supersede honesty with moral impingement. I presume subordination to moral imperatives is not limited to honesty, but applies to other virtuous characteristics (e.g., niceness) that hold the same propensities (e.g., situational variability).

Moral-virtue distinction is essential for moral education. We consider virtuous characteristics highly important and strive to educate children/youth in order to develop those characteristics as requisites of good and trustworthy social individuals. These characteristics are never to be denied. Yet, being nice alone is not sufficient in dealing with the complexity of moral issues. Character/moral education that contradicts what should be prioritized can cause an ironic contradiction to the education's purpose. Pursuits of virtuousness without first prioritizing moral imperatives can perpetuate the cycle of injustice. For instance, in a relationship involving acts entailing gratuitous harm, to whom are we to be nice? The perpetrator, the mistreated person, or both? Some people may decide to be nice to the perpetrator because they simply desire to be "virtuous" or fear of retaliation. Others may act nicely to the mistreated out of sympathy, and yet niceness alone would not adequately deal with the complexity and vice of interpersonal unfairness. Respect is another virtuous characteristic. Individuals can take advantage of the idea of respect and make unilateral moral rules instead of bilateral rules, wherein honesty is a duty of the subordinates but not required of the dominants, which creates and perpetuates the cycle of unfairness and injustice for these in subordinate positions. Countless incidents in societies delineate such 'virtue-based moral transgression,' wherein systemic forms of interpersonal unfairness and injustice are directed and justified through virtuous propagandas without prioritizing moral consideration.

One may argue that virtuous acts (e.g., kindness) become moral acts in an event the act of kindness succeeds in averting or correcting a harm to the one receiving the action. This hypothetical situation describes a contextual intricacy between two distinctive domains wherein the act of kindness takes place to uphold moral purposes. The act of kindness in the scenario serves as a *means* to achieve moral purposes; hence, the kindness does not transform itself to morality. Conducts of multiple domains often intertwine with one another in complex social matters, and yet the nature of the acts in one domain does not cross over or transform to another domain.

### Analyses of Misconceptions of Christian-Secular Moral Dualism

Evidence supports a moral objectivity, and yet, societies continue to advocate moral pluralism/Christian-secular moral dualism. The next section describes the reasons why the discrepancy continues to exist.

#### Definition Problem of Morality

One straightforward reason is a lack of literature that applies theory-based moral views. Consequently, people continue to define morality vaguely. The notion of fairness and justice, the essential aspect of morality, therefore, continues to be unspecific. For instance, Christians in different positions (e.g., laypeople, ministers, and theologians) point to the aspects of sexuality as a vital standard of Christian *moral* values<sup>2</sup>. Sexual immorality includes the issues of premarital sex, sexual promiscuity, and homosexuality. Christians claim that their practices and beliefs regarding sexuality, and objections to these sexual immoral practices, make Christian *morality* different from secular morality in contemporary societies wherein these sexual activities and experimentations are more and more acceptable (Cherry, 2008). Another example of moral standpoint is a dress code. Some Christians define a dress code, particularly of women, in reference to the context of morality. Clothing that is considered provocative and seductive because it shows too much bare skin is improper by their *moral* standard. This '*sexuality-morality equation*' is one ground Christians apply to rationalize and support Christian-secular moral distinction.

Nevertheless, this classification of sexuality contradicts research findings. Studies demonstrate that Christians do not view some conduct of sexuality (e.g., premarital sex between contented adults) or dress codes precisely as moral issues<sup>3</sup>, nor do they judge those acts from the context of welfare/harm in the same way they judge or reason out a breach of moral conduct (e.g., slandering) that deliberately inflicts gratuitous harm. Instead, both Christians and secular people view acts of sexuality, between consenting adults, as mainly under personal choice, and choice of clothes mainly as a personal matter, that yet situationally becomes a conventional matter in certain settings that require social appropriateness (e.g., funeral). Age affects the judgements that younger adolescents (13 years), compared to older adolescents (16 years), viewed sexuality issues (e.g., whether

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2. I recognize that Christianity is itself diverse with regard to moral questions. Moral definitions and decisions are not monolithic, but diverse within Christian groups and individuals. Therefore, term "Christians" in this paper refers to the *specific* individual Christians holding particular beliefs referenced in the given context, and not intended to generalize as "*all* Christians."

3. The problem of Christians' 'moral classification of sexuality' is not the classification itself, but the contextual incongruence between the classification and their rationale. They generally use *conventional* rationale (e.g., sexual abstinence is *God's "rules"*), but not *moral* rationale from the *welfare/harm* aspects of sexuality. In my view, sexuality is a moral matter. Understanding the moral meaning related to sexuality requires understanding the theory of welfare/harm from the deeper level of spiritual/supernatural realm, lacking in the current debates.

I start dating) as cross-domain matters, fitting partly within the conventional or prudential domain for consequential harm, and partly in the personal domain regarding their freedom to choose in action and preference (Hasebe, et al., 2004). Yet, they still did not equate sexual practices totally with morality. Discrepancy exists between Christians' actual views of sexual conduct and the ways in which some Christians have traditionally defined and taught sexuality. Which is true? Are sexual conducts a part of Christian morality, or matters of privacy? While the discrepancy still exists within Christians, a belief 'sexuality-equates-morality' is inadequate to validate Christian-secular moral dualism. The validity issue of classification exists beyond the area of sexuality. Further examination is necessary to investigate whether conducts, customarily classified as moral matters, would truly fit the welfare notion of moral domain, or they would better fit the notion of the other domains.

### **Methodological Flaw: Overlooked Reasons Behind Decisions**

Another reason for the continuous advocacy of moral pluralism is due to a methodological flaw in our moral reflections and debates. We tend to focus on the decisions and conduct ("*what*") in our debates, but overlook the reasons behind the decisions ("*why*"). Current advocacy for moral pluralism/dualism is premature because it is based on the differences of moral decisions. People's moral perceptions cannot be fully evaluated and determined solely by the decisions. For instance, Kohlberg's theory utilizes a scenario of Heinz's moral dilemma about choosing to steal the drugs or not stealing (Kohlberg & Turiel, 1971). To determine people's moral stages, the theory examines the respondents' decisions, whether Heinz should or should not have stolen the drug, and the reasoning behind the decisions. People in the pre-conventional moral stage (the lower stage) and those in the post-conventional stage (the higher stage) likely reach the same decisions in approval of Heinz's decision to steal the drug. Their reasoning for the decisions, however, differs, which is the key that determines the different developmental levels between the two groups. In sum, people of different moral levels can reach the same moral decisions, yet based on different justifications; in reverse, people can differ in decisions based on the same moral reasoning. Moral pluralism/dualism cannot be sufficiently validated solely by looking at the differences in people's moral decisions.

### **Theoretical Flaw: Moral Concept Versus Moral Decisions**

In the advocacy of moral pluralism/dualism, additionally overlooked is a fact that a moral concept and moral decisions are two different things. As stated earlier, the moral concept ("*It is wrong to hurt the innocent*") is a universal notion; people's moral decisions vary. This section repeats some aspects (b) described above, but further addresses the theoretical element of qualitative difference between concept ('ought to be') and actions ('do or would do') that is overlooked in *moral* debate. When people support moral pluralism based on outwardly differing moral decisions among people, they mistakenly presume such variation also suggests variation in people's moral concept. This is a fundamental theoretical error. People's moral decisions (whether the conduct is moral or not) naturally vary (see footnote 1). Yet, the variation in people's moral decisions is, by no means, to negate the presence of a universal moral principle; neither does the moral consensus guarantee people's decisions to be always the same. Christians and secular people may well differ in their moral decisions because of the fundamental differences in belief system. Yet, if you look closely at their reasoning, the differing decisions could be based on the same wel-

fare/anti-harm reasons. Current advocacy of Christian-secular moral distinction is premature because this theoretical distinction of concept versus decisions is not applied in the rationales and debates.

### **Overlooked *Domain-Inconsistent* Rationale**

Lastly, people support moral pluralism/dualism based on the flawed rationales that apply “*domain-inconsistent*” reasoning. As stated earlier, each domain stems from its own unique roles and functions of the different aspects of a social life. For the rationale to be valid, conduct of each domain, in debate, must be discussed and reasoned out from the context precisely corresponding to the nature of the domain. For instance, the primary roles of the social conventional domain are for the smooth and effective maintenance and organization of the desired social functions within the community. Welfare concern is not the primary concern of the domain as conventional violation is not primarily aimed to cause deliberate gratuitous harm. For valid discussion, conventional domain needs to be discussed from the context of effectiveness and maintenance of social functioning; the matter of personal domain from the context of an individual’s right and discretion and moral matters from the aspects of interpersonal welfare/harm. I call this method “*domain-concordant rationale*.” “Moral” debates wherein the topics in discussion are not addressed from the welfare/harm context are inadequate to be classified as moral debates. Decisions and advocacy resultant of such debates are equally invalid.

As stated earlier, Christians claim certain clothing is a *moral* violation. This statement is generally followed by a reasoning that the clothing is improper due to a sexual connotation determined by a social/religious standard of what is appropriate or not appropriate. In response, secular people, who generally view choice of clothing as a personal matter, simply accept the Christian statement, and both of them agree to conclude that *their morals differ*. In this context, however, neither of them addressed the issue of dress code in reference to a moral principle, yet both concluded to support Christian-secular moral dualism based on the inadequate, domain-inconsistent rationale. When we look closely at the reasoning behind their disagreement on dress codes, we see that the debate itself is not even a moral debate, but it is a debate of *conventional* versus *personal* matters. This is a major flaw in our “moral” debates. Domain-inconsistent rationales occur when the topic in discussion is indeed of a moral issue but we fail to recognize the deeper level of the moral nature, or the conduct initially classified as a moral matter is really a non-moral matter, therefore welfare/harm reasoning simply does not apply. Quite a number of what we consider “moral” debates/decisions are, therefore, not moral debates/decisions, hence, insufficient to substantiate Christian-secular moral dualism/moral pluralism.

Another example of domain-incongruent reasoning is the disagreement between pro-life (normally Christians) and pro-choice (normally secular people) groups on abortion of a pregnancy (refer to footnote 2). Although their disagreements are based on several principles, one disagreement between them is prominent; what age a baby or a fetus in the prenatal stage is considered a human. Pro-life Christian groups usually point out Bible references and claim that a life begins at conception; therefore, abortion of a fetus at any time during pregnancy is akin to killing a human. Pro-choice, secular groups do not deny that human life begins at conception. They, however, disagree with the interpretation of a personhood based on the reference of the Bible. They view that human life at conception is not equal to the concept of a personhood because of their views of the functional limitation of physical elements (e.g., zygotes). Zygotes or embryos before a certain trimester are not yet a human with a personhood, and abortion of the pregnancies before the certain trimester is not equivalent to murdering *humans*; therefore, it is not moral transgression. Pro-life

and pro-choice groups' decisions are outwardly opposite, and that makes it appear as if the groups disagree in moral codes. Two errors are noted in this debate. One error is the fact that people overlooked that they reached different decisions, and yet their decisions are based on the same welfare reason. Both agree with the importance of securing welfare for the unborn, through the means of avoiding gratuitous harm of murdering a human. Yet, with the disagreement in defining how old is old enough for the embryo to become a human being, they reach opposing decisions. Laying behind the opposing decisions is a shared moral concept of anti-gratuitous harm. The other error is that their debate is not precisely a moral debate. It is a *conventional* debate because the focus of their rationales is now individuals' interpretations about "what ages and physical functions define an embryo or a fetus to be a human." People's attempt to define a personhood by personal interpretation of the trimesters is essentially a *conventional* inquiry<sup>4</sup>, hence, takes their debate off the track of the initially intended moral debate.

### Conclusion

This article refutes moral pluralism and Christian-secular moral dualism based on the empirical findings of a universal moral principle. Studies demonstrate that Christian and secular people share the same moral concept. In our democratic society, "*everybody is different*" is a convincing phrase, commonly yet thoughtlessly recited like magic words. Students grew into the faith of moral pluralism as if it were the humanistic position that all individuals with a 'modern' mind in pursuit of a democratic society must take. People advocate moral pluralism as if moral diversity were a foundation for individuality and equality for democratic society. Christians, on the other hand, appear to take pride in their non-worldly morality reflective of their religious fundamentalism they consider is non-existent in secular morality. Christians appear rather resistant to the idea of moral universality possibly because they view it as a way to secularize God-inspired sacred morality, and is therefore an abomination to God. In my opinion, a moral universality is, by no means, disgraceful to Christianity, neither is authoritarian oppression towards moral democracy. A centrality of Christianity is morality<sup>5</sup>. "Being virtuous" is not the same as being moral, nor being a Christian, or vice versa. Theological morality is deep and requires the inquiries from the theoretical and pneumatological aspects. Whether it is Christian or secular moral education, pedagogies built upon a false philosophical basis or not coinciding with the make-ups of human cognitive structure cannot attain the desired goals. The pedagogies in our moral education built in harmony with and for the advancement of moral pluralism must be re-examined within the scopes of the

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4. Describing a personhood as "conventional" debate does not reduce the significance of a human life into "*mere*" convention. Although generally viewed as subjective and situational, some conventions/traditions (e.g., cultural festivals) are embedded in objective truths of spiritual realm and serve as powerful tools in a social life that affect human perspectives, minds and spirituality.

5. One may wonder whether Christian moral reasoning considers the role of religious insistence on 'righteousness' as preferable to, or it incorporates morality. My personal view is Christian concept of righteousness incorporates morality. More precisely, morality itself is the centrality of the righteousness. The righteousness refers to three types. First is righteousness of the God, an ultimate attribute of the God. Second is righteousness of men's acts and quality of being righteous, or attaining righteousness by obedience to the God's laws (e.g., the Ten Commandments). The last one is salvation, righteousness of humans attained by faith through Jesus. Commonly lays among the three forms of righteousness is the God's aim for the redemption of creations, that is, a restoration of all (welfare), otherwise continues to be in the states of struggle (harm). (For details, refer to "Redefining Christian Morality" and "Pneumatological Analysis of Christian Morality through Scientific Approach" Hasebe, 2021, in review).



theorized morality. A valid, theory-based reconceptualization of morality in general, is now readily available that, in turn, advances the understanding of Christian morality.

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