

# Self and Values

## An Interactivist Foundation for Moral Development

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**ABSTRACT.** The standard research programs in moral development have been criticized for adopting a narrow and restrictive view of the moral domain. There has been a dearth of alternative theories that account for the diversity of mature moral viewpoints both within and outside Western culture. We present an interactivist framework that takes into account the plurality of moral perspectives. It does so by addressing fundamental issues of psychological ontology and providing an account of values and the self based on the interactivist conception of knowledge and the knowing-levels treatment of consciousness and developmental stages. We discuss foundational questions such as the nature of the self, how it develops and the relationship between the self and values or morals, with special attention to the nature and source of value conflicts.

**KEY WORDS:** interactivism, moral development, ontology, philosophies, psychosocial and personality development, self, theories

For over a generation, the study of moral development was dominated by post-Kantian conceptions of moral development, most notably Lawrence Kohlberg's. Over the past decade, the inadequacy of these conceptions has become increasingly apparent (Campbell & Christopher, 1996; Lapsley, 1992, 1996; Walker & Pitts, 1998a; Walker, Pitts, Hennig, & Matsuba, 1995). Many researchers are actively seeking to counterbalance the 'theoretical skew' in moral psychology (Walker & Pitts, 1998b). The long-dominant conceptions have failed to account for the development of mature moral viewpoints that do not define the moral domain as Kantians wish to do; they have ruled moral action, emotions and personality out of the purview of developmental psychology. Yet when we begin to look beyond reasoning about rights and justice, we open ourselves up to a potentially

overwhelming plurality of moral viewpoints, which not only conflict with one another but at times seem radically disparate. From the perspective being advocated here, developmentalists must acknowledge that each of these viewpoints can develop in human beings. Parents and educators must recognize them as possibilities even as they encourage children and adolescents to steer toward some of them and away from others.

To cope with the new demands that are being placed on moral development theory we must turn to basic questions: What are values and what is their role in development? What is the self and what kinds of changes does it undergo? Is morality ultimately foreign to the self? We will present an account of values and the self based on the interactivist conception of knowledge and the knowing-levels treatment of consciousness and developmental stages. Though considerable empirical inquiry will be needed to provide vital details for this account, we believe that it brings immediate clarity to such matters as the nature and sources of conflict among moral values within individuals.

### **Emerging from Kohlbergianism: The Task for Moral Psychology**

Moral psychology has caught the interest of relatively few psychologists during the past century; consequently, its history as a subdiscipline has been under the sway of unusually powerful contingencies. The study of moral development could have adopted a broad conception of the moral domain and taken on pluralistic responsibilities from the start, but that is not what happened. Instead, the study of moral development is emerging from a 30-year period during which post-Kantian conceptions held sway, and for some time to come nearly everything that is done within moral psychology will be framed as a response to them. Taking their cue explicitly or implicitly from the philosophy of Immanuel Kant (1785/1998, 1793/1996, 1797/1991), Lawrence Kohlberg and his followers defined the moral domain so narrowly that only issues of rights and interpersonal justice qualified for inclusion. Following the Kantian tradition, they restricted the scope of moral development to formulating moral rules or principles and reasoning with them. Moral emotions, actions and personality were ruled out as topics of inquiry; virtues were actively derided; moral personality was dismissed as incoherent (Helwig, Turiel, & Nucci, 1996; Kohlberg, 1971/1981; Kohlberg, Levine, & Hower, 1983; Turiel, 1983).

Such Kant-derived conceptions were extraordinarily strict about what constitutes a mature moral viewpoint. Morality had to be completely differentiated from personal goals and desires and from social conventions; genuine morality meant following systems of rules that could pass tests of universalizability and impersonality. Modern utilitarianism managed to meet

these qualifications, as did the systems of political ethics put forward by thinkers like Rawls (1971) or Habermas (1983/1990).

Yet a survey across time and cultures rapidly indicates that some people develop mature moral viewpoints based on codes of honor, concerns about improving their karma, or the desire to actualize their potentials as human beings (e.g. Harré, 1984; Huebner & Garrod, 1991; Vasudev & Hummel, 1987). These other viewpoints all define the moral domain more expansively; they may encompass within it issues like being honest with yourself, or keeping your life simple and unencumbered, or getting into the right relationship with the cosmic order, none of which can be accommodated within any Kantian treatment.

As Jürgen Habermas (1983/1990) has said, Kantianism made ‘razor-sharp cuts’ between values that are moral and values that are non-moral (p. 104). The moral was one world: it pertained to our relationships with others, at least insofar as they could be subjected to impersonal and universalizable rules. The prudential or non-moral was another, mutually exclusive world: it pertained to the manner in which we set our own goals and live our own lives.

Kantianism did not just divide the moral from the non-moral; it went so far as to split the self into moral and non-moral components. Kant called these the phenomenal self (the self as we experience it, or as we know it through science) and the noumenal self (the self as it is in itself, beyond our means of knowing it). The phenomenal self was run by its ‘inclinations’, what it felt like doing at the time; the supposedly rational noumenal self kept telling us what our duties were. While Kant’s conception was anti-developmental, forcing the noumenal self to be present from the start, Kohlberg’s theory was a story about how we might become purely noumenal selves (Lapsley, 1992). As a result, moral development had to be progress toward complete interchangeability with other people and completely impersonal moral principles at Kohlberg’s Stage 6 (Kohlberg et al., 1983). Consequently, no ordinary mortal was ever credited with functioning at Stage 6.

We do not believe that such diremptions—such artificial divides between moral and prudential considerations or between noumenal and phenomenal selves—can be sustained in the study of moral development.

### **The Challenge of Pluralism**

The challenge in front of us is how to make sense of the true variety of moral viewpoints. The first broadly influential step toward pluralism in moral development research was Gilligan’s (1982) introduction of an ethic of care alongside Kohlberg’s ethic of justice. Despite Gilligan’s work and other prominent developments toward acknowledging pluralism (e.g.

Lapsley, 1992; Shweder, Mahapatra, & Miller, 1987; Walker et al., 1995), Nancy Eisenberg (1996) could declare quite recently that the prospect of including the entire range of moral issues and viewpoints was 'bewildering'. It is indeed hard to describe mature thought, feeling and action as they develop within disparate moral viewpoints. It is also hard to explain how the same general processes and constraints could lead to vastly different outcomes: different ways of thinking about moral issues, different sorts of moral personalities. Yet moral development, for different individuals, may be movement toward being a dutiful Christian, a ritual-observing Confucian, a perfect gentleman, an all-around caring person, one who balances all of the competing goods by exercising practical wisdom—or even a staunch gang loyalist who never rats to the cops.

We regard such pluralism as a healthy challenge for theories of moral development (as do Walker and Pitts, 1998a, 1998b). Other researchers (e.g. Hart, 1998) seem to fear that embracing pluralism means abandoning theories of moral development. Peter Kahn (1995), for instance, is concerned about views like ours that encompass moral issues ranging far beyond rights and interpersonal justice, and admit the existence of serious disagreements among individuals and between cultures, even about these 'truly moral' issues. Like Brinton (1987), Lomasky (1987), Taylor (1989), Veatch (1980) and Williams (1985), we deny that morality is only about rights and justice. What's more, we deny that everyone agrees, deep down, about rights and justice. We acknowledge (to take up Kahn's example) that some people *think* that it is all right for Chinese prison guards to rape and torture Tibetan prisoners. But we do not conclude from this fact about some people's beliefs and attitudes that it is all right for Chinese prison guards to rape and torture Tibetan prisoners.

In the study of moral development, our goal is in large part to account for the values that human beings do acquire, with regard to their own lives and their relations with others. Thus it is part of the task of moral psychology to explain the program of Nazi moral education, including how a fervent Nazi came to believe that duty to Führer, *Volk* and Fatherland required him to exterminate non-Aryans. Acknowledging a plurality of moral conceptions does not mean endorsing all as equally right or good. It means undertaking to explain how human beings could arrive at such diverse endpoints through the normal processes of development.

### **Back to Basics**

To succeed at this daunting descriptive task, we contend that there is no choice but to return to the basics. Moral developmentalists and moral educators must confront the messy questions that so many thought they had circumvented (e.g. Eisenberg, 1996; Kohlberg et al., 1983; Turiel, 1983):

- What are values?
- How do they originate?
- What is their role in the course of human development?
- What is the self?
- What are its moral aspects?
- What changes does the self go through that are morally meaningful?

These are not questions that can be resolved by collecting more of the familiar kinds of data. They require us to address fundamental issues of psychological ontology. In this article we attempt to bring ontology into the foreground and begin to develop an interactivist answer to these questions.

### **Interactivism and Goal-Directed Action**

What we will sketch in the remainder of this paper is in the Piagetian spirit of concern with knowledge and its emergence out of action (e.g. Piaget, 1950, 1974/1976, 1977/2000). It turns out to be inconsistent with Piaget's (1918, 1932, 1977/1995) specific formulations about morality and moral development. Historical research shows that Piaget's personal allegiances in moral psychology were guided by a religious interpretation of Kant that equated the noumenal self with God, and reinforced by a distinct aversion to Social Darwinism (Campbell, 1999; Liengme Bessire & Béguelin, 1996; Thomann, 1996; Vidal, 1994).

Unlike the views of either Kohlberg or Piaget, our conception of the moral paints no bright line between concerns about how we treat others and concerns about making a good life for ourselves; it derives from the eudaimonistic tradition of much ancient moral thinking, most notably Aristotle's (trans. 1941). In the eudaimonistic tradition, human beings ought to develop virtues because these are conducive to *eudaimonia*, or human flourishing—which has both individual and social aspects. Moreover, there is no algorithm for achieving human flourishing; each individual must acquire and exercise a form of expertise called *phronesis*—practical wisdom or prudence—in striking a balance of competing goods in a particular context. In the past century, eudaimonism has undergone a significant revival among both philosophers (e.g. Den Uyl, 1991; Norton, 1976; Rand, 1964; Veatch, 1962) and psychologists (Branden, 1997; Csikszentmihályi, 1991; Maslow, 1968).

The ontological framework we will be using was developed over the past 30 years by Mark Bickhard (1973/1980a, 1980b, 1992a, 1993, 1998, 1999; Bickhard & Christopher, 1994; Bickhard & Terveen, 1995; Campbell & Bickhard, 1986; see also Christensen & Hooker, 2000). It is called interactivism because it is based on the deceptively simple idea that knowledge is interactive. Knowledge is an aspect of any goal-directed system that can interact competently with an environment. Goal-directed systems include

living organisms, of course, but they may also include artificial systems, such as robots. A desktop computer, however, is *not* an interactively competent system, even when it happens to be running an artificial intelligence program; it has no goals and engages in no interactions (Bickhard & Terveen 1995).

Interactivism seeks a fully naturalistic account of all mental phenomena. In too many quarters naturalism is still expected to exclude not just moral values but norms of any kind. By contrast, interactivism is committed to naturalistic normativity at every level in organisms—and in artificial systems that are able to interact with their environments. At the most basic level, biological functions and the goals of a goal-directed system are normative. Norms of different kinds are threaded through the entire macro-evolutionary sequence, whereby initially systems capable of interactive knowing emerge; then systems capable of modifying their interactive knowledge through learning; then systems capable of using emotions to guide their responses to situations in which there is inadequate basis for effective learning trials; and finally systems that can know certain properties of their own knowing, learning and emotions. Distinctly *moral* norms (which we will refer to as values, meta-values or judgments about entire moral systems) are made possible when knowing about knowing emerges.

But we need to start at the beginning of the macro-evolutionary sequence, with the simplest kinds of knowing system. From the most basic interactivist standpoint, goals and goal-pursuit and choice are aspects of the overall functioning of the organism. A goal-directed organism goes through a temporally coordinated flow of interaction with its environment. The state that the organism is currently in indicates something about the kind of environment it is in, in the following sense: when in that state the organism will try to do some action or carry out some strategy to reach a particular goal. A *goal* is, in the simplest case, some internal state that the organism gets closer to or further from when it acts; its strategies, if successfully applied, will move it toward that state (Bickhard, 1973/1980a, 1998, 1999; Christensen & Hooker, 2000).

To achieve its goal the organism may need to find a mate, or solve a closed-form equation, or eat an apple, and mates, equations and apples are all external to the system. It is normally easier for observers to identify goals by referring to these external objects. But every goal must be defined *within* the system; each is a way the system could be. This is a necessary condition for goals within interactivism; were we to define goals in an interactively competent system in terms of aspects of the environment to be known, we would be reintroducing a non-interactive or encoding-based treatment of knowledge (Bickhard, 1973/1980a, 1998, 1999). Internally, the goal of solving a closed-form equation could amount to an internal state that indicates that a whole series of internal processes have been run off and that internal steps to avoid error have been successfully negotiated. The goal of

eating an apple might include indicators of completed chewing and swallowing interactions, followed after some lapse of time by upward changes in an indicator of blood-sugar level. The internal characterization of finding a mate includes indicators of preparation for and completion of reproductive activity, and so on.

At higher levels of evolution (or higher levels of development), involving learning and emotions, goals within a system may come to involve specialized representations of something outside it. A human being’s goal of eating an apple would normally include an interactive representation of what he or she wants to eat—say, a multimodal image of a nice green Granny Smith apple that affords crispness when bitten into and tartness when tasted. Even so, the more basic goal of eating *something* would still take the form of an internal setpoint for blood-sugar level.

From the interactivist perspective, *values* are a special type of goal. They are *meta-goals*: goals about what kinds of goals to have (Campbell & Bickhard, 1986). To fully understand this meta-relation, we need to consider another component of interactivism: the hierarchy of levels of knowing (see Figure 1).

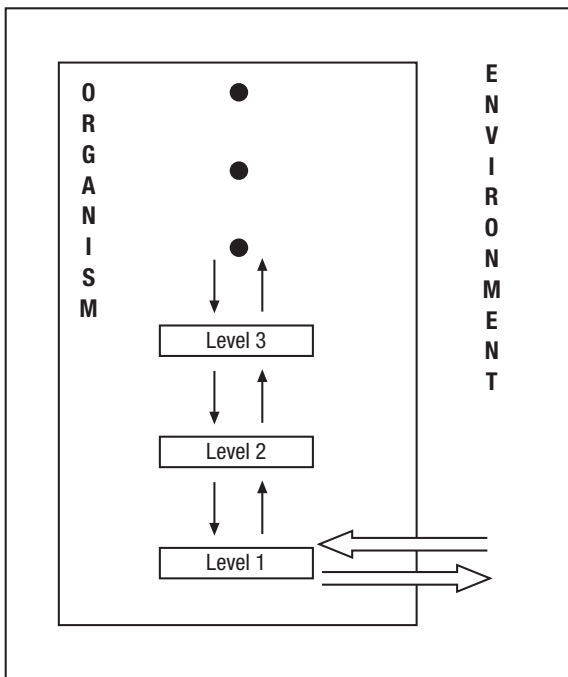


FIGURE 1. The knowing levels (Campbell & Bickhard, 1986)

## Being-in-the-World: Knowing Level 1

As infants and young children, we interact with the world, and learn in the course of our interactions. Our knowledge is knowledge *of* the external environment. However, infants and children (up to about age 4) know and learn without knowing that they know. In other words, their learning and their knowledge are fundamentally procedural: what they know takes the form of procedures for how to do or accomplish various things. Knowledge is initially procedural rather than declarative. At least we can say this to a first approximation, so long as we do not identify procedures with encoded rules or steps in a computer program. (For more about mainstream conceptions of procedural knowledge, see Bickhard & Campbell, 1989; Bickhard & Terveen, 1995.) Developmentally, it appears that enactive or procedural memory (memory for what to do in concrete situations) precedes semantic memory (memory for classifications and factual generalizations), which in turn precedes episodic memory (memory for what happened on specific occasions), and that all of these unfold during infancy and toddlerhood (Nelson, 1992; Tulving, 1983, 1985, 1987).

Early in life we have internal experiences that are part of the process of knowing the environment, but we do not, at these points in our development, know anything *about* our experiences or our internal processes; nor do we know that the experiences we are able to remember are part of our life story. Interactivism terms this broad stage of development *Knowing Level 1* (Campbell & Bickhard, 1986). Through semi-guided trial and error—through construction by variation and selection—we learn functional patterns for interacting with our environment, not just the physical world but also our family constellation. We end up learning ways of interacting in the physical and social worlds that generally work.

As Figure 1 indicates, all traffic in and out of the environment continues to take place at Knowing Level 1; this keeps on being the case after significant development has gone on at higher levels. The fact that interactions with the environment always take place at Level 1 imposes significant constraints on human development, as we will see.

Knowing Level 1 bears many similarities to what Heidegger (1927/1962) termed *being-in-the-world*. Heidegger shares with interactivism a project of breaking down many of the dualisms that have plagued Western thought, such as fact vs value, subject vs object and body vs mind. His notion of being-in-the-world is a way of addressing our most basic way of being without falling into the Cartesian trap of assuming that our agency derives most fundamentally from our conscious sense of 'I'. (In our terms, Descartes [1637/1985] assumed that knowing our own minds could somehow take precedence over knowing the environment—i.e. he presumed that Knowing Level 2 could somehow precede Level 1.) As Heidegger sees it, we are basically beings that are brought into and take over social practices and the



meanings implicit in them. From the interactivist perspective we are agents in the world who take over situation conventions (Bickhard, 1980b) or social practices in the life world with their attendant prescribed roles and actions, long before we develop the sense of 'I' that figures in the Cartesian worldview. In other words, our explicit sense of ourselves—our 'I'—is a developmental achievement. It is not our primary way of being; it is not at Level 1.

Heidegger's alternative to being-in-the-world is illustrated by his example of a worker hammering in a workshop. Heidegger is attempting to get at an understanding of the person as 'proximally and for the most part' engaged in interactions that are prior to any explicit distinction between subjects and objects or bodies and minds. More recently, Sampson (1996) examined psychology's relationship to the body and found it wanting. Sampson argues that the exclusion of the body from psychological discourse is typical of the field's ingrained exclusionary tendencies, which have also frequently been applied against culture, history and community. While Sampson has offered a powerful critique of many existent areas of psychology, he has overlooked the psychological ontology provided by interactivism.

One important property of all functional systems, including human beings, is that important qualities can be true of the system without being actually known, represented or even present in the system (Bickhard, 1992a, 1993, 1998; Bickhard & Campbell, 1989; Bickhard & Christopher, 1994). Interactivism refers to this property as *implicitness*. Implicitness is crucial to the way Knowing Level 1 works.

Let's consider an example of children pursuing certain goals in their interactions and having other evaluations and commitments presupposed by what they are doing. A toddler may have a goal, roughly, of getting Mommy to laugh. Successfully doing so is also a way of accomplishing a lot of other things: interacting positively with others, getting approval from authority figures, dissipating tension in the family system and affirming that she is a good person after all. But other than generating laughter, none of these things can be the child's goal. At Knowing Level 1, the child does not have cognitive access to such presuppositions—they are implicit. The child is immersed in them and has no higher-level perspective from which to view them. The toddler feels better when she makes Mommy laugh; that is all she is aware of.

Babies and young children learn about the world by interacting at Knowing Level 1. Implicit in the patterns of interaction that they develop at Knowing Level 1 are *presuppositions* about the self, others and the world (Bickhard & Christopher, 1994; Christopher & Bickhard, 1992). A crucial property of implicitness is that these representations of the self, others and the world can be functionally present in—presupposed by—the child's interactions without needing to be actually existent within the child.

Take, for instance, the case of an infant raised by parents who believe that feeding should occur on a strict schedule. Such an infant is likely to learn that expressing needs of hunger will be ineffective in changing his or her situation. In fact, crying will just make matters worse by amplifying the infant's physiological distress. Through variations in the parents' behavioral responses, such an infant might learn that the best response is one of quietude. Implicit in such a learned response are views of the world, others and the self. Learning quietude and passivity presupposes that the world is neutral or cold and indifferent to my needs (in contrast to being benign and responsive, or even actively hostile and threatening). Implicit in the interactive pattern around feeding routines is also a view that others are uncaring and unresponsive to my needs. Finally, implicit in the pattern of interaction is the notion that I am not worthy of being noticed, attended to and perhaps even loved. Additionally implicit in the passivity of the learned response may be a sense of my own ineffectiveness in being able to have an impact on the world.

In contrast to such an account that relies on implicitness, most personality and clinical theorizing easily lapses into untenable developmental assumptions. Whether we consider attachment theory with its notion of internal working models, various object relations theories with their commitments to internalized representations of the 'object', or cognitive-behavioral theories that rely on an ontology of beliefs, self-talk or thoughts, we are dealing with conceptions that require something actually to be present in the child's mind in order to exert influence on personality. Yet the child, at least initially, does not have these cognitive capacities—either in terms of representation or memory (Bickhard & Christopher, 1994).

Value is yet another aspect of what is implicit in the child's functional patterns. The choice of one particular behavioral response over others is an expression of what is valued. In Heidegger's (1927/1962) language, concern, care and signification are implicit in the Level 1 mode of being-in-the-world. Knowing Level 1 reveals a structure of 'care'. Heideggerian care, we should add, is a generalized orientation toward goals; it is far broader in purview than the explicitly valued caring for specific individuals that Gilligan (1982) emphasizes, or the more generalized commitment to making life better for others that figures in so many of Colby and Damon's (1992) moral biographies.

The patterns of interaction that infants and young children select and develop embody what is implicitly cared about. However, this caring is not simply the expression of the child alone—it is an interactive pattern that reflects the goals of the child combined with the goals of the culture mediated through the primary caretakers and the family. In this way each human being is an 'expression of culture' (Bruner, 1990); each person participates in social institutions and practices whose presuppositions he or

she does not currently know and may never grow to understand (Hayek, 1973; Shearmur, 1996). Functional patterns of interaction developed by the child implicitly rely on the two dimensions of culture that Geertz (1973) identifies: worldview and ethos. The example previously mentioned of the infant fed according to schedule is an instance of how the child is thrown into a social practice and participates in the cultural meanings implicit within it. The feeding routine presupposes a particular worldview about time, for instance that time is linear. It also presupposes an ethos in which time has such great value that it should govern human functioning (Christopher, 1996, 2001).

As is typical with Knowing Level 1, an observer might use all kinds of complicated rules and principles to describe the infant's interactive patterns or way of being-in-the-world. For instance, a family systems theorist might detail the family rules that the child has learned. But the first-level knower is not conscious of these rules. Indeed, the first-level knower is most likely not representing such rules in any way at all. As Taylor (1993) put it, 'much of our intelligent action in the world, sensitive as it usually is to our situation and goals, is carried on unformulated. It flows from an understanding which is largely inarticulate' (p. 50).

At Knowing Level 1, emotion, motivation and value are all intertwined; they function as different aspects of the same interactive pattern. What the organism tries to accomplish, how committed the organism is to accomplishing it, and how the organism responds to generic uncertainties surrounding gain or loss, or success or failure in accomplishing it, can be sorted out by observers seeking to explain how the system functions. For the organism they are normally indissociable aspects of experience and ongoing traffic with the world.

## **Goals about Goals: Knowing Level 2**

As children develop their knowledge of their environment, there is much about the first knowing level that could become an object of knowledge in its own right. But the first knowing level cannot know itself. With cognitive maturation, somewhat older children develop a second knowing level, and with it the capacity to be conscious of their own thinking, as well as the thinking of other people. Something is known about this transition now, because of efforts by Flavell (Flavell, Flavell, & Green, 1983), Perner (1991, 1992), Gopnik and Astington (1988), and many others who have investigated children's ability to understand that they and others can have false beliefs. There is reasonably strong evidence that children acquire this capacity, which we take to be a sign of the onset of Knowing Level 2,

around age 4. As Katherine Nelson (1992, 1994) has pointed out, there is also evidence that only around this time do children become capable of truly autobiographical, as opposed to merely episodic, memory (in other words, they become able to remember events that are explicitly referred to the self).

Some efforts have been directed toward understanding how the child progresses from cognition at Level 1 to knowledge about his or her own cognition, or other people's, at Level 2. For instance, Perner (1991) sought to explain the shift to the 'meta-representational' standpoint that is necessary to explain how children know about false beliefs, although this standpoint is not necessary to understand (in external terms, of course) what others are trying to accomplish. Moshman (1990) has discussed in some depth the shift from logic that is implicit in certain patterns of the child's reasoning to explicit rules of logic. Campbell (1992) and Bickhard (1992b) have undertaken to explain how children extract knowledge that was formerly just implicit in their ways of categorizing the world. Far less attention has been paid to goals so far.

At Level 2, the child develops the ability to know about goals at Level 1, and to have goals about what goals to have. Goals about goals are what we call *values*. A meta-goal of not doing anything that would make Daddy unhappy directs the formation or selection of goals at Level 1, like not playing with objects on Daddy's desk or not complaining out loud when Daddy tells you to do something you don't want to do.

At Knowing Level 1, a child will *be* a person, will be a self, but will not *have* a self and will not *know* that self. At Knowing Level 2, the child can begin explicitly to understand the self. This understanding may consist of beliefs articulable in sentences—which is still psychologists' standard view of our self-conception. More fundamentally, though, it consists of meta-strategies for managing the child's being in diverse kinds of life situations. So responses to an interview, one that asks who I am and how I am different from other people and what is most important to me, are instances of Level 2 thinking (when, of course, still higher levels are not yet implicated). But so are largely unarticulated strategies for managing encounters with other children, for example by seeking play with them, or by 'successfully' avoiding it. These are strategies for setting specific goals for specific interactions with others, or specific encounters with the physical world (Campbell & Bickhard, 1986).

Piaget (1950, 1974/1976, 1977/2000) called the process by which we become conscious of some aspect of our actions 'reflecting abstraction'. As usual in Piaget's thinking about developmental processes, reflecting abstraction was not fully disentangled from equilibration, which he always took be central to his account of development. Equilibration does not normally involve becoming conscious. At times Piaget (1977/2000) asserted that if

children need an assimilatory framework just to make observations and notice data patterns, then something more than ‘empirical abstraction’ must be going on. Reflecting abstraction must somehow be contributing, because equilibration is already happening. For instance, Piaget claimed that knowing how to push a board attached to a pivot in the ‘wrong’ direction, in order to bring a toy at the other end of the board within reach, already required reflecting abstraction. Yet he was definitely not attributing reflective, conscious strategies to the toddlers who learn to push the board the ‘wrong’ way. He did, however, acknowledge a higher form of ‘reflected’ abstraction—that is, reflection on reflection—and reflection to a higher power than that; all of these invariably involve consciousness. From the interactivist standpoint, *reflective abstraction* is fully distinct from learning, or from Piagetian equilibration. Reflective abstraction ‘is the relationship between adjacent levels of knowing—in which properties resident in a given level, implicit in the organization or functioning of that level, are explicitly known at the next higher level’ (Campbell & Bickhard, 1986, p. 85).

Robert Kegan’s (1982) theory of the self draws from a far less process-oriented understanding of Piaget than ours; it also clings firmly to Kohlberg in the moral domain. Still, his account of the transition from his Stage 1 (the ‘impulsive balance’) to Stage 2 (the ‘imperial balance’) captures the advent of Knowing Level 2 rather succinctly:

With the construction of the enduring disposition (which I call, for shorthand purposes, the ‘needs’ . . .), there comes the emergence of a self-concept, a more or less consistent notion of a me, *what* I am (as opposed to the earlier sense of self, *that* I am, and the later sense of self, *who* I am).

With the capacity to take command of one’s impulses (to have them, rather than to be them) can come a new sense of freedom, power, independence. Things no longer just happen in the world. . . . I now have something to do with what happens. (Kegan, 1982, pp. 89–90)

At Level 2, then, the child *has* goals, and has a self, as opposed to merely *being* that self.

In light of the powerful structuralist commitments still on view in Kegan and others, it is important to stress that knowing levels are not stage-wide, global cognitive structures; they are not stages as so many Piagetians, including Kohlberg, have preferred to interpret them. (Piaget himself always regarded stages as a way of classifying instances of thinking, not whole children—see Chapman, 1988.) We can easily function at Knowing Level 2 with regard to one issue and fail to do so with regard to another. Our capacity to engage in reflective abstraction is *only* a capacity. It may or may not be realized. We are able to know different aspects of ourselves, but we may not actually use this ability. It is always possible to examine more

aspects of our lives, as Socrates would have said; it is always possible to bring more consciousness to them, as Branden (1997) would say today.

### Values about Values: Knowing Level 3

As a cognitive process, reflective abstraction does not stop at Knowing Level 2, nor does it require further maturation of the central nervous system to move higher. Aspects of Level 2 can become known at Knowing Level 3. Aspects of Knowing Level 3 can, in turn, become known at Level 4. Interactivism, in fact, sees the knowing levels as potentially infinite (Bickhard, 1973/1980a; Campbell & Bickhard, 1986). At the same time, there will always be limits to how much of ourselves we can consciously know. As Heidegger (1927/1962) put it, we are 'proximally and for the most part' being-in-the-world; that is, Level 1 is always ontologically primary. Consequently, we can often best know ourselves 'not by inward turning and introspection' in the manner of Descartes, 'but by catching sight of ourselves as we are engaged and preoccupied in everyday contexts' (Guignon, 1984, p. 232).

We may have to move up to Level 4 to understand it, but, so far as we can tell, Knowing Level 3 is the highest one at which moral decisions are normally made. (Present-day moral psychology is often tempted to conflate moral decisions, which are normally made at Levels 2 and 3 and implemented at Level 1, with moral philosophizing, an activity that takes place all the way up at Level 4.) Just as Level 2 is the level of values, Level 3 is the level of values about which values to hold—it is the level of *meta-values*.

At Knowing Level 2, the child's 'metastrategies may presuppose various good and bad things to be true of the child, but will not in general explicitly believe them' (Campbell & Bickhard, 1986, p. 118). To keep with Kegan's idiom, the child at Level 2 *is* an identity, but does not *have* one. Having an identity requires knowing that identity, judging it explicitly and being able to try to revise it.

At the second level, the child knows [his or her] self, and thereby has an implicit representation of his or her self. At the third level, the child can know that self-representation, thereby making it explicit. Now the child can compare his or her self to a system of alternatives, judge it against values, and construct it in accordance with those judgments. (1982, p. 119)

Examining and reconstructing the self at Level 3 therefore entails what Erikson (1950) and his successors have called identity formation. At Level 3, the person is making value judgments about what kinds of values to have: explicit judgments about what kind of person he or she currently is and what kind of person he or she ought to be. Level 3 is the locus for most 'strong evaluations', as Taylor (1977/1985) calls them: evaluations about the kind of

person who would do such a thing, judgments that an action is admirable or contemptible, and so on (see also Frankfurt, 1993).

### **Evaluations of Full Moral Systems: Knowing Level 4**

While what is personally meaningful to most of us goes on at Levels 1, 2 and 3, the knowing-levels account has a little more to offer moral psychology. So far our psychological ontology has not come to terms with the activity of moral philosophizing. While meta-values at Level 3 enable us to articulate what we stand for, what kinds of people we want to be or avoid being, these will in general not be sufficient for analyzing different moral conceptions, comparing and criticizing them. (A rough-and-ready comparison: the reason why a person who functions at the identity or meta-value level cannot think explicitly about entire systems of ethics is the reason why a person who functions at Kohlberg's 'conventional' Stages 3 and 4 is not ready to examine the institutions and practices of his or her own society and compare them with the institutions and practices of other actual or possible societies.) As Moshman (1995) has shown, an explicit understanding of different moral systems, accompanied by attempts to justify the adoption of one instead of the others, requires an explicit understanding of what is still implicit at the meta-value level. A moral system, complete with hierarchies of importance for values and meta-values and relationships of justification, may well be implied by my life choices and my identity, but is not spelled out in them. Only by taking a higher-level perspective on meta-values can I come to recognize the system that they fit into and the apparent grounds for them; only from the higher level can I appreciate their relation to various religious or philosophical systems, ancient or modern. I may have established a meta-value of not overrating the depth or seriousness of inconveniences in life, thereby making it harder for them to overwhelm me. But recognizing that such a meta-value fits into a Buddhist or Stoic moral viewpoint (not to mention understanding the other components of those worldviews and how they fit together) is a Level 4 accomplishment.

Despite the importance of Knowing Level 4 in the present inquiry, many normal adults never operate at it with regard to their values. Yet Level 4 is chronically overstressed in those moral psychologies that stick too closely to a particular formulation in moral philosophy. The danger of a Level 4 fixation is not merely that egocentric failures to consider assumptions or alternatives are unavoidable at one's highest level of functioning (in this case, the moral development theorist's or researcher's highest level—Campbell & Bickhard, 1986). More deeply, it is that moral philosophizing is nearly always done at Level 4, whereas moral decisions are hardly ever made at that level.

Those in the grip of a particular moral philosophy may accord to considerations that loom large in grounding or justifying their moral conception a role in the development of the individual that they could never occupy. For instance, in the neo-eudaimonism of Ayn Rand (1964), the notion of a 'choice to live' (which is crucial meta-ethically, because for Rand goals or values can have no function except in the context of needing to maintain life) has sometimes been projected into the conscious moral decision-making of the average person (who rarely, if ever, makes a conscious decision to keep on living or to give up on living). Correspondingly, Rand offers a flat ontology of human goals, in which 'goal', 'value' and 'purpose' all mean nearly the same thing. The conceptions that are most important for Level 4 work— notions of basic virtues, or abstract principles, or other foundational considerations—will usually not be explicitly manifested at Level 1, 2 or 3. For instance, at any of these lower levels a 'choice to live' is normally just implied by other human goals or values (Campbell, 2002).

### **Departures from Existing Thinking about the Self**

We have shown how the interactivist account sharply distinguishes an implicit self at Level 1 from explicit selves at Level 2 and higher. This series of differentiations has a way to travel before it reaches universal acceptance in psychology. What we have said about the implicit self at Knowing Level 1 runs counter to some prominent schools of thought. For Augusto Blasi, reflection can play no special role in the development of the self, because knowing is already always reflective (Blasi & Hoeffel, 1974). For Andreas Demetriou and Smaragda Kazi (2001), 'hypercognition' (which in many respects resembles reflective abstraction) has to be present from birth. For Mihály Csikszentmihályi (1991), who explicitly regards the self as constituted by goals and who shares with us a broad commitment to a eudaimonistic moral psychology, genuine goals must be conscious and can therefore exist only at Level 2 or higher. Csikszentmihályi distrusts human functioning at Level 1, which he sees as largely in the grip of 'selfish genes' or successful manipulations of the individual actor by those who run social institutions. For William Damon, inquiry into the self and its development begins with 'self-statements' (Damon, 1984; Damon & Hart, 1988). Damon does not follow Blasi or Demetriou to the point of ruling out non-reflective knowledge. Yet his insistence on 'self-statements' as empirical data methodologically forces a reflective conception of the self, and a starting point at Knowing Level 2. Additional commitments of Damon's, such as his denial that self and personality could be coextensive, also direct attention away from the beginnings of the self at Knowing Level 1.



## Goals and Values in Conflict

Moving to higher knowing levels brings with it the capacity to consciously form goals, values and commitments, and to evaluate or criticize these from the standpoint of an even higher level. Higher-level goals and values may be straightforwardly instantiated in lower-level goals; or, to take a complementary perspective, goals at a lower level can unfold into compatible values and meta-values at higher levels. A good deal of the time, the unfolding works without complications, bringing harmony between goals at the different levels. For instance, if I adopt a value of carefully checking any used car that I am thinking of buying, my first-level goal of kicking the tires instantiates my value without difficulty. But consciously formed explicit values and meta-values may, of course, be in conflict within their level. Values and meta-values may also be in conflict with goals at lower knowing levels. Interactivism points out that in a system with many goals and sub-goals organized within knowing levels, as well as goals, values, meta-values and judgments of entire moral systems arranged by level, what artificial intelligence researchers call 'blame assignment' problems will arise ubiquitously: If I have failed to attain or satisfy this goal, should I change the goal? Or is the goal not at fault, just my efforts to satisfy it? Do I need, instead, to try harder (and, hopefully, smarter)?

Value conflict *within levels* is classically exemplified in the ubiquitous moral dilemmas used by Kohlberg and other moral psychologists. For instance, Kohlberg's Heinz dilemma is designed to elicit conflict between values or meta-values: the life of Heinz's wife, who is dying of cancer and needs the experimental treatment, vs the property rights of the druggist who invented the treatment; Heinz's desire to save his wife's life vs his reputation with those in the community who disapprove of his decision to steal doses of the experimental drug; and so on. The actual conflicts will not normally reside at Level 1. (The language in which the dilemmas are formulated and the requirement of articulating the reasons for one's responses tend to preclude this.) They will normally go on at the value level or the meta-value level. (Which of these levels it actually is may be inferable from some of the interview material, but this information resists easy recovery, because Kohlberg's theory always treated values as though they are at the same level of knowing.) When the respondent to the dilemma turns explicitly to issues of moral justification, there might even be conflicts at the moral system level, though we would expect these to be less common.

Of particular interest to interactivism is the prospect of conflict *between levels*. Our patterns of behavior and feeling at Knowing Level 1 may have presuppositions that are incompatible with the values we explicitly hold at Levels 2 and 3. When goals at Level 1 are unfolded into values at Level 2, or values at Level 2 are unfolded in turn into meta-values at Level 3, the process of making the implicit explicit is not guaranteed to be error-proof

(new kinds of errors become possible with each new knowing level). Of course, there is no guarantee either that the newly constructed values or meta-values will be consonant with everything that already exists at their level and below. Adopting a value at Level 2 may lead to attempts to change some goals or functional organization at Level 1; taking on a meta-value at Level 3 may drive attempts to change values at Level 2; accepting a moral framework at Level 4 may even stimulate the project of changing some meta-values at Level 3 (in other words, trying to become a different person).

With as many as four knowing levels in play, intricately knotty forms of conflict become possible, as Loren Lomasky (1987) illustrates:

Volition at one level may not be in harmony with volition at a higher level, and so one may be moved to do X and simultaneously value someone's preventing the doing of X. Indeed, the direction of desires can continue to oscillate at successively higher levels. Consider the prude who is troubled by his lascivious desires and wishes to quell them. Suppose that he becomes a recipient of the largesse of the Sexual Revolution such that he now wishes to put his prudery behind him, all the better to wallow in his instinctive desires. In such a case, a third-order desire attempts to countermand a second-order desire which itself wars against a first-order desire. It seems possible that the prude might then develop a fourth-order desire that goes against the third, and so on. Just how complicated this structure might become is limited only by the empirical facts of moral psychology and not by the logic of desire and valuation. (p. 59)

Value conflicts can arise fairly easily, then. Many are basically constructive, serving to drive further development. Such conflicts will be disequilibrating and may demand a resolution with some insistence, but they need not injure the person; in other words, they need not thwart the accomplishment of important goals or retard further development. Other value conflicts, for instance the kind that Blasi and Oresick (1986) call 'self-inconsistency', take the form, 'How could I have ever done that?' Such conflicts inflict great distress and can make further development seem pointless (to a person who may have come to feel unworthy of it). Self-inconsistencies can be especially painful because of the sense of self-alienation they can engender, and no resolution will normally be possible without acceptance of the apparently unacceptable as a starting point (Branden, 1971). Addictive behavior patterns often provoke self-inconsistency.

In either case, interactivism offers a way of addressing apparent splits in our psyche without reifying the self into antagonistic components, such as the appetites vs the will or the unconscious vs the conscious (Bickhard & Christopher, 1994). Shapiro (1981) adopted a similar approach by remodeling will-power in terms of a highly integrated hierarchy of goals and values instead of some type of energy that could be mobilized. From his per-

spective, will-power is the suspension of a lower-order goal for a higher-level value. At a practical level the type of remodeling offered by interactivism and by models like Shapiro's ought to facilitate efforts to bring about desired personality change. It is a much more daunting task to figure out how to generate more will-power than it is to determine the goals and values implied by an undesirable behavior pattern typically associated with the passions, desires or impulses.

What interactivism dispenses with, then, is the kind of psychological ontology that relies on permanently warring sub-agencies within the self. There is no need to posit a noumenal self that never stops sternly insisting that you do your duty—or a phenomenal self that craves whatever might titillate it for the next 10 minutes. There is no reason to hypothesize an ego desperately mediating between the seething, contradictory demands of multiple unconscious mindlets and rules and prohibitions that have been internalized from authority figures. Yet there is ample room for complex relationships between values and goals at different knowing levels: such values and goals may be consciously held, mentally represented but not consciously known, or wholly implicit and merely presupposed.

There is ample room, too, for value conflicts great and small: values at a higher level can contradict or undermine goals at a lower level, and vice versa. And the resolution of those conflicts can be a long and convoluted process. If I choose from my Knowing Level 3 perspective to change my way of approaching other people, or my style of dealing with threatening situations—in other words, to change the kind of person I am—clashes between the values I have adopted at the higher level and goals at the lower levels are inevitable. These clashes will not be resolved without changing my habits at lower levels, or my ways of being-in-the-world. Whatever decisions I make at a higher knowing level do not become fully effective until they work their way down through Level 1. (This is one reason why psychotherapy can be a lengthy endeavor.) And many further acts of reflective abstraction on my part are necessary if I am better to understand what my goals at the lower levels actually are, or what is presupposed by my ways of being-in-the-world.

None of this should be taken to mean that the higher knowing levels are *always* correct, appropriate or ultimately worth instantiating. Desirable changes will not always amount to a top-down reorganization guided by the values that we consciously desire and esteem. Sometimes there are important goals at Level 1 and values at Level 2 that are not being fully recognized and appreciated at Level 3. For example, people who diagnose themselves as co-dependents often come to therapy with a variety of Level 3 criticisms about themselves: they are selfless, they care too much for others, and are too dependent on what others think of them, and so on. Frequently in such cases, these Level 3 reflections on the self such as 'I shouldn't care what others think of me' or 'I shouldn't always think of others first' are over-generalizations.

Blanket generalizations fail to distinguish those conditions in which we genuinely do value another person's opinion or do want to give priority to another's welfare (conversely the same considerations may apply to blanket Level 3 judgments of selfishness and caring too little for others). It can be helpful with these clients to help them differentiate between patterns of behavior at Level 1 that are indeed problematic (for instance, those that allow them to be taken advantage of, often by individuals whose welfare is genuinely not of great importance to them) and their overly critical demands at Level 3, which may have been shaped through acceptance of an ideology of self vs other (Greenberg, 1994). Effective therapy with these clients may therefore consist of making explicit the goals manifest at Knowing Level 1 and helping to set these into dialogue with the values and meta-values at other levels of knowing.

Sometimes, then, it is the meta-insights available at higher levels that ought to prevail; in other cases, we need to recognize that our meta-conclusions are actually in error, and the richness of being at Level 1 is what should be allowed to prevail. Knowing consciously what our values are may help us to deal with conflicts between them, but it is not necessary for the pursuit of a goal or value to be good for us. In fact, error in our meta-judgments could result in fighting against or thinking ill of the very goals whose pursuit is beneficial to us. The relationship between knowing levels, in those who can function at two or more of them, is potentially dialogical, even dialectical.

### **Morality and the Self Revisited**

To conclude, we believe it necessary to reconsider the role of morality in the development of the self. Interactivism is disposed to find morality at the core of the self, not fenced off in its own little sub-agency or module. That is because goals and values are strongly constitutive of the human self, which emerges out of the individual's ways of being-in-the-world at Level 1. There may be goals, values or preferences that are of little moral import to the person, in the sense that they have no substantial bearing on his or her well-being, prospects for a good life for him or her or conduct toward others. But interactivism has chosen the heuristic of making the fewest possible exclusions in advance from the moral sphere. As Csikszentmihályi (1991) put it succinctly, 'If he changes goals, his self will change as a consequence—the self being the sum and organization of goals' (p. 178).

It appears that many people in our own culture regard the personality dimensions of Agreeableness and Conscientiousness as more central to moral character than Neuroticism; from their standpoint, kindness to others and keeping promises are more central to moral character than whether one has attained peace of mind (at least this is what Walker [1999] reports on the

basis of a Canadian sample). But unless *everyone* forms this conception of moral character, and everyone *has to* arrive at it, we would prefer to leave the door open for the development of moral conceptions that include the internal balance that the person has achieved. At the same time we recognize that some individuals may form values, meta-values or ethical systems that require them to separate sharply various kinds of personal or even social goals from the moral sphere. If our assumptions are correct, it is the major exclusions from the moral domain that arise in the development of some individuals that need special explanation, not the more expansive implicit definition of the moral that we find in the lives of others.

Similarly, we make no sharp distinction between personality and self. Goals and values are significantly constitutive of both. To the extent that a distinction is necessary, personality (as normally understood) already exists at Knowing Level 1, whereas the self is only implicit at that level, and becomes explicit for the first time at Level 2. We ask those who insist that these cannot be basically the same how personality can change over the course of development unless the self is changing—or vice versa. If Gary's personality changes, so that (for instance) he becomes more tolerant of people who advocate different philosophies from his own—a tolerance manifested in his way of talking to them and his usual emotional reactions to them, as well as in his conscious judgments about them—has Gary's self not also changed, and in the same way?

By contrast, interactivism harbors no sympathy for the tactic of attributing all moral value conflicts to opposition between moral and 'non-moral' considerations. While Kohlberg could not have formulated his well-known moral dilemmas without acknowledging significant moral value conflicts within a knowing level, other theorists in the Kantian tradition have gone to the extreme of denying the possibility of genuinely moral conflicts. If morality is perfectly consistent and 'rational', any conflicts that arise will have to be attributed to interloping 'non-moral' values. Thus, Turiel and his co-workers (Helwig et al., 1996; Turiel, 1983) prefer to cast what we and others would call moral value conflicts into conflicts between something moral and something 'non-moral'—be it social convention, personal convenience, beliefs about 'God's word', or something else. For Eisenberg (1986, 1996), the only grounds, under most circumstances, for not performing an altruistic act must be 'non-moral' ones. The belief that the moral is already perfectly rational and 'therefore' conflict-free is something that contemporary moral psychology proximately owes to Kant's doctrine of the noumenal self. But its origins are distinctly more ancient. In Plato's *Republic* we already find the nagging insistence that there cannot be conflict or contradiction within the rational soul. Any conflict that does arise must be between different *parts* of the soul—for instance, between reason and appetite (Plato, trans. 1992, 435e–445e, 602c–603b).

When morality is taken to be a matter of reasoning, and not of character, emotions or action, there seems to be only a weak connection between morality and self. When self-interest and morality are frankly defined as opposites, there is little hope for any connection at all. But if the moral domain is acknowledged to include concerns about the good life, and the self is no longer divided into warring repositories of moral and 'non-moral' values, then the whole vexed relationship between morality and the self can be re-evaluated.

Even as the development of the self is seeking a more central role in theories of moral development (Blasi, 1990; Giesbrecht & Walker, 2000; Matsuba & Walker, 1998), a lack of fit between morality and self is frequently taken for granted. If morality is primarily or exclusively concerned with the interests of others, then morality must start out foreign to the self and its interests. The 'prudential' or 'pragmatic' sphere of goals, values and meta-values that advance the interests of the self but are not guided by an overriding desire to promote the welfare of others must develop independently of 'truly moral' goals, values and meta-values (which supposedly are all other-regarding in their orientation, or impersonal in their scope). Morality can then be integrated into the self only quite late in development, through a drawn-out process that we can expect to be painful.

Thus, although Damon has rethought much of his heritage from Kant and Kohlberg—he explicitly rejects the idea that the moral life is a constant struggle against temptation—his writings consistently maintain that morality is essentially foreign to the self (Colby & Damon, 1992; Damon, 1984; Damon & Hart, 1988).

Most people connect self and moral goals to some degree—as when, for example, they act altruistically toward their children or other loved ones. But most people also experience some degree of conflict between what they most want to do and what they feel would be best to do from the moral point of view. Although they may want to do the right thing, they also want things that clash with their moral goals. Unity between self and morality is far from typical, although it can be approached. (Colby & Damon, 1992, p. 304)

We could call into question several things that Colby and Damon say on this score. Do my interests overlap with those of others to a considerable degree, or must we assume that what is good for me and what is good for others are mutually exclusive? Is what I do for my loved ones altruistic in any strict sense of the word (is it motivated by a desire to promote their welfare *to the great detriment of my own*)? Is there such a thing as 'the moral point of view' (a Kantian notion that presumes impersonality and must be exactly the same for everyone), or would it be better to say 'a moral point of view' (consistent with what is good for me)? Does the existence of goal conflict mean that non-moral values must be competing with moral values, or that my scheme of moral meta-values needs to be brought into better

alignment with the requirements of my life as best I understand them? Do my meta-values and overall belief in a moral system make it easy or hard for me to regard myself as a moral being? Do they encourage me to appreciate morality as integral to me, or as substantially alien to me—even standing against me?

In any event, it is clear that in the course of development we gain a greater appreciation of the consequences of our actions for ourselves and for others. We gain the ability to reflect on our goals, subsequently on our values, finally, perhaps, on our own moral system in relation to others. We conversely gain the ability to relate moral precepts and slogans we have learned to the reality of our ways of being-in-the-world. During the course of development, values at a higher knowing level can clash with goals at a lower knowing level; goals unfolding from a lower level can work against values at a higher level; goals, values or meta-values can conflict within a level. These tensions reveal the ‘diversity of goods’ that animate us (Den Uyl, 1991; Taylor, 1977/1985).

Whether we identify such clashes as conflicts between ‘moral’ values and ‘non-moral’ values, or conflicts between moral values, or conflicts between values plain and simple, has some effect on how we evaluate ourselves in the midst of them. If we invest too heavily in the moral–non-moral distinction, we may end up concluding that ‘moral’ values are essentially hostile to our self-interest, and attempt to define ourselves as something other than moral beings. The ontology of goals, values, meta-values and moral systems, and of the merely presupposed, the non-consciously known and the consciously known enables us to understand moral conflict and moral change without driving a wedge between the moral and the non-moral. It is our hope that the expanded ontology of implicit and explicit norms that interactivism affords will support substantial progress in moral psychology.

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