SOCIAL COGNITIVE THEORY OF MORAL THOUGHT AND ACTION

Albert Bandura

Stanford University

Bandura, A. (1991). Social cognitive theory of moral thought and action. In W. M. Kurtines & J. L. Gewirtz (Eds.), *Handbook of moral behavior and development* (Vol. 1, pp. 45-103). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Human morality is an issue of considerable import both individually and collectively. Internalization of a set of standards is integral to the achievement of self-directedness and a sense of continuity and purpose in one's everyday life. In the absence of personal standards and the exercise of self-regulatory influence, people would behave like weathervanes, constantly shifting direction to conform with whatever is expedient at a given moment. A shared morality, of course, is vital to the humane functioning of any society. Many forms of behavior are personally advantageous but are detrimental to others or infringe on their rights. Without some consensual moral codes people would disregard each others' rights and welfare whenever their desires come into social conflict. Societal codes and sanctions articulate collective moral imperatives as well as influence social conduct. However, external sanctions are relatively weak deterrents because most transgressive acts can go undetected. But people continuously preside over their own conduct in countless situations presenting little or no external threat. So the exercise of self-sanction must play a central role in the regulation of moral conduct. Self-regulatory mechanisms form an integral part of the conception of moral agency presented in this chapter.

Most of the recent psychological interest in the domain of morality has centered on analyses of moral thought. The conspicuous neglect of moral conduct reflects both the rationalistic bias of many theories of morality and the convenience of investigatory method. It is considerably easier to examine how people reason about hypothetical moral dilemmas than to study their actual moral conduct. People suffer from the wrongs done to them however perpetrators might justify their inhumane actions. The mechanisms governing the self-regulation of moral conduct involve much more than moral thought. Even the moral thought is not solely an intrapsychic affair. The way in which moral principles are .bp applied in coping with diverse moral dilemmas varies, depending on situational imperatives, activity domains and constellations of social influence. It is not uncommon for sophisticated moral justifications to subserve inhumane endeavors.

A comprehensive theory of morality must explain how moral reasoning, in conjunction with other psychosocial factors, governs moral conduct. Social cognitive theory adopts an interactionist perspective to moral phenomena. Within this conceptual framework, personal factors in the form of moral thought and affective self-reactions, moral conduct, and environmental factors all operate as interacting determinants that influence each other bidirectionally. Before presenting the social cognitive theory of morality, the cognitive structural conception will be analyzed briefly.

Stage Theories of Moral Reasoning

Stage theorists assume that different types of moral thinking appear in an invariant stage sequence from one uniform way of thinking to another. Piagetian theory (1948) favors a developmental sequence progressing from moral realism, in which rules are seen as unchangeable and conduct is judged in terms of damage done, to relativistic morality in which conduct is judged primarily by the performer's intentions. In the latter stage, well-intentioned acts that produce much harm are viewed as less reprehensible than ill-intentioned acts that cause little harm. Moral absolutism stems from unquestioning acceptance of adult prescripts and the egocentric outlook of young children; moral relativism develops from increasing personal experiences and reciprocal relationships with peers.

Following the lead of Piaget, Kohlberg developed an expanded cognitive structural theory of morality that revitalized and altered the direction of the field. Kohlberg (1969; 1976)

postulates a six-stage sequential typology of moral rules, beginning with punishment-based obedience, evolving through opportunistic self-interest, approval-seeking conformity, respect for authority, contractual legalistic observance, and culminating in principled morality based on standards of justice. Changes in the standards of moral reasoning are produced by cognitive conflict arising from exposure to higher levels of moral reasoning. Because the stages constitute a fixed developmental sequence, individuals cannot acquire a given form of moral reasoning without first acquiring each of the preceding modes of reasoning in order. The presumption is that exposures to moral reasoning that are too discrepant from one's dominant stage have little impact because they are insufficiently understood to activate any changes. Judgmental standards of lesser complexity are similarly rejected because they have already been displaced in attaining more advanced forms of thinking. Views that diverge moderately above one's stage presumably create the necessary cognitive perturbations which are reduced by adopting the higher stage of moral reasoning.

Hierarchical Moral Superiority

A universal, though not inborn, latent preference for higher modes of moral thinking is posited to explain why people do not preserve their cognitive equilibrium simply by adhering to their own opinions and rejecting conflicting ones (Rest, Turiel, & Kohlberg, 1969). What makes higher-stage reasoning morally superior is not entirely clear. In thoughtful reviews of the stage theory of morality, Locke (1979, 1980) identifies and refutes alternative bases of hierarchical superiority. It is not that higher stages of reasoning are cognitively superior because, in most of their judgments, people do not use the highest mode of thinking they understand. Such findings suggest that in many instances tests of maturity in moral reasoning may be measuring personal preferences more than level of competence in moral reasoning (Mischel & Mischel, 1976). On the matter of stage progression, if people are actuated by an inherent drive for higher ways of moral thinking it is puzzling why they rarely adopt the uppermost level as their dominant mode even though they comprehend it (Rest, 1973). It is similarly arguable that higher stage reasons are morally superior. By what logical reasoning is a morality rooted in law and order (stage 4) morally superior to one relying on social regard and concern for others (stage 3)? Minorities oppressed by a social order that benefits the majority and those subjected to the rule of apartheid would not think so. Nor would writers who argue that social responsibility and concern for others should be the guiding rule of morality (Gilligan, 1982).

Higher-stage reasoning cannot be functionally superior because stages provide the rationale for supporting either side of a moral issue but they do not prescribe particular solutions. Developmental stages determine the reasons given for actions, not what actions should be taken. Different types of moral thinking can justify stealing, cheating on income taxes, and military bombing of foes. Immorality can thus be served as well, or better, by sophisticated reasoning as by simpler reasoning. Indeed, the destructive social policies advocated by enlightened graduates of renowned academies is better explained by the social dynamics of group thinking than by the collective level of moral maturity (Janis, 1972). When people reason about moral conflicts they commonly face in their environment, Kohlberg and his associates find that moral reasoning is more a function of the social influences operating in the situation than of persons' stages of moral competence (Higgins, Power, & Kohlberg, 1984).

Kohlberg (1971a) underscores the point that his hierarchical stages of reasoning are behaviorally nonprescriptive because they are concerned with the "form" of reasoning not its "content." However, the end point of moral reasoning, which construes morality as justice,

carries a fixed behavioral mandate. Unlike the preceding stages, where it is acknowledged that a given type of moral thinking can support either the transgressive or the conforming side of a moral issue, at the end-point stage, thought is said to prescribe what courses of action are morally right. Because movement through the stages is said to be achieved naturally by the force of reasoning, empirical "is" thus becomes philosophical "ought." Rationality dictates morality. The ordering of moral priorities is presumably revealed by switching perspectives in impartial cognitive role taking of the position of each party in a moral conflict. However, as Bloom (1986) notes, simple perspective shifting in no way guarantees consensus on what aspects of a situation are morally relevant, the moral principles considered inherent in those aspects, and which principle should be granted priority unless there is already prior agreement on which principle should take precedence. It should also be noted that impartial role reversibility is imaginable in the abstract, but social experiences create too many human biases for impartiality of view and universalization of interests to be achievable in reality. For example, no amount of perspective shifting is likely to produce consensus among those who hold pro- and anti-abortion views. The principle of freedom--for women and personalized fetuses--provides justification for both moral stances. The consensus most likely to be achieved is agreeing to disagree.

The evidence for the cultural universality of the "is" has not gone uncontested (Locke, 1979; Simpson, 1974). Other theorists argue that the moral idealization in Kohlberg's theory reflects preference for Western views of moral adequacy rather than objective standards or the dictates of reason (Bloom, 1986; Shweder, 1982). Societies that are less inclined toward ethical abstractions and idealization of autonomy come out looking morally underdeveloped even though in their moral conduct they may exhibit fewer inhumanities than Western societies that are ranked as morally superior. Kohlberg's (1971b) prescriptive stance that moral education in the classroom should consist of moving children through the stages of moral reasoning, even regardless of parental wishes, draws understandable heavy fire (Aron, 1977; Wonderly & Kupfersmid, 1980) and belies the egalitarian characterization of the theory. The view of moral superiority as an autonomous self operating above communal norms and concerns does not sit well with many moral theorists.

Some moral philosophers, who hardly lack competence for principled reasoning, regard the principle of justice as only one among other moral principles that either compete for the role of chief yardstick of morality or share a pluralistic system of judgment (Carter, 1980; Codd, 1977). If, however, principled reasoning is defined as using justice as the supreme judgmental rule it becomes a conceptual truth incapable of empirical disproof (Peters, 1971). The common finding is that adults comprehend different moral principles but use them selectively or in a complementary way, depending on the interplay of circumstances and the domain of functioning. Moral development produces multiform moral thinking rather than follows a single developmental track.

Empirical analyses of Kohlberg's theory generally rely on a test that includes only a few moral dilemmas sampling a narrow range of moral conflicts. They are stripped of factors that can greatly complicate efforts to find moral solutions. To contend that a few sketchy items verify moral truths is to invest a simple assessment tool with extraordinary revelatory power. A test that can offer only a limited glimpse of moral predicaments lacking systematic variation of ingredients may provide a shaky empirical basis on which to found a theory of morality or to classify people into moral types. A person's propensity for principled moral reasoning will vary depending on the information included in the depicted moral conflicts. For example, the moral dilemmas devised by Kohlberg are ambiguous about the likely consequences of transgressive behavior. In the transactional realities of everyday life, people not only have to live with the

consequences of their moral choices, which they weigh anticipatorily in their moral reasoning, but experience of consequences is likely to affect their subsequent moral reasoning. Possible consequences are not taken lightly when moral decisions can alter the course of one's life. Indeed, when information about different types of consequences are added even to hypothetical moral dilemmas used to verify the stage theory, as the severity of personal consequences increases, people favor self-interest over principled reasoning (Sobesky, 1983). How often people offer principled solutions for moral conflicts may partly reflect the gravity of the consequences they happen to imagine for the sketchy portrayals rather than their competence for principled reasoning.

The way in which hypothetical moral dilemmas are structured can exert considerable influence on the priority given to different moral principles and the amount of agreement obtained in moral judgment. To pit petty theft against human life, as in the oft quoted conflict of the husband faced with stealing an overpriced drug to cure his wife's cancer, will draw consensual judgments from principled thinkers. Adding more substance to the moral dilemmas in the form of complicating elements will elicit disagreement among principled thinkers over which moral claims should take precedence (Bloom, 1986; Reed, 1987). The moral dilemmas over which people agonize and feud often involve abhorrent alternatives that do not lend themselves easily to moral solutions. We shall have occasion to review some of these later.

Prescriptive Ambiguity of Abstract Principles

Skeletonized abstract principles do not provide much guidance for judgment or action until they are fleshed out with relevant details of concrete situations that are inevitably laden with evaluative biases. For purposes of illustration, consider the example given by Peters (1971) on judging what is just payment for service rendered under a given set of circumstances. The abstract principle of justness does not yield a uniform answer. For instance, what is a just fee for a surgeon? Different people can arrive at different judgments from the same principle of justness, depending on what factors they consider relevant and how they weight them: such as the amount and expense of past training required, operating costs, the price of malpractice insurance, the effort and risks involved, the surgeon's financial needs, the benefits to patients, the patients' financial status, and the like. The judgmental thicket becomes even more ensnarled if social comparative information of remuneration for other occupations, such as poorly paid teachers and exorbitantly paid superstar singers, is considered.

Given the prescriptive ambiguity of abstract principles, it is not surprising that cognitively facile people can find ways to serve their self-interests under the cloak of justice or social contract. The advantaged members of a society have considerable say in how justice is defined at the operational level. Social systems that contain institutionalized inequities provide a set of social justifications that make inequitable practices appear just (Bandura, 1986). For example, people can be persuaded that inequitably high compensation is deserved for activities that carry substantial responsibility and risks, incur high personal costs, require specialized skills that are acquirable only through long arduous effort, and that produce widespread social benefits. An abstract principle of justness does not say much about where to set the boundary between just and unjust disparity in compensation. Clearly, theories of morality framed in terms of moral abstractions cannot remain divorced from the social realities of how people go about judging the moral dilemmas they confront in real life.

Sequential Typologies and Multifaceted Moral Judgment

Stage theories assume that, over the course of development, moral judgments change into a series of uniform types representing discontinuous stages. A major problem with typologies is that people hardly ever fit them. Because differing circumstances call for different judgments and actions, unvarying human judgment is a rarity. A person's moral judgments typically rely on reasoning from several different moral standards rather than being based on only one type of moral standard. So stage theorists have to create transitional categories and substages. Stage theories classify people into types according to their modal form of reasoning, although any given individual usually displays coexisting mixtures of reasoning that span several "stages." Most people get categorized as being in varying degrees of transition between stages.

People not only display substantial variability in their moral reasoning at any given period, but many years elapse from the time they first adopt a new standard of morality and when they come to use it as a preferred one (Colby, Kohlberg, Gibbs, & Lieberman, 1983). Fischer (1983) comments that such evidence is at variance with stage theory, which depicts changes in thinking as occurring by pervasive transformations of preceding modes of thought. Clearly, moral thought is not hamstrung by a single cognitive structure that undergoes disjunctive developmental change, nor does adoption of one standard pre-empt all others. Rather than exhibiting wholistic reorganization of their moral thinking, people gradually adopt new moral standards, eventually discard simpler ones, and draw from among a co-existing set of standards in judging different moral predicaments. The mature mode of thinking is characterized by sensitivity to the diverse factors that are morally relevant in any given situation. Choice of judgmental standards depends partly on which factors are most germane to a particular moral problem.

One might question the practice of treating reasoning that draws on more than one moral standard as evidence of moral immaturity evolving toward justness as the ultimate standard of morality. Different moral standards are not necessarily contradictory. Hence, adoption of a certain standard need not require jettisoning another. To judge the morality of conduct by a system of complementary standards, such as justness and compassion, reflects a high level of moral reasoning rather than transitional immaturity in thinking. Indeed, Peters (1966) argues that justice is necessary but not sufficient for a moral system. He points out that people can be brutal, but entirely impartial or just in their brutality. A society that subscribes to a morality that integrates standards of justness and compassion will be more humane than a society concerned solely with justness.

Developmental Changes in Moral Judgment

There are some culturally universal features to the developmental changes of standards of conduct and the locus of moral agency. These commonalities arise from basic uniformities in the types of biopsychosocial changes that occur with increasing age in all cultures. Growth of personal competencies and increasing autonomy alter the types of morally relevant situations with which the growing child must contend and the social structures within which these transactions take place. A broadening social reality changes the nature of the moral concerns as well as the social sanctions for transgressive conduct. Expanding moral choices require more generalized and complex moral standards. Change in reasoning from concrete to more abstract form with maturation and experience is also a natural order of development that all theories acknowledge. No one would contend that young children begin as sophisticated reasoners and

become progressively more simple minded as they mature. Nor do young children recognize the prescripts of the social system before they recognize the prescripts of their immediate caretakers or companions. Another obvious natural order of development involves a broadening of perspective from individual to institutional prescripts for promoting human well-being. Change from external regulation to increasing autonomy and self-regulation is still another natural order of development.

The major theoretical disputes center not on whether there are some universalities in the order of development, but on the validity of casting developmental changes in discrete lock-step stages. Preparation for adult roles in society requires adoption of standards appropriate to the new social realities and set of roles. The standards must serve as guides for conduct over an expanding range of moral domains in a variety of settings involving multiple sources of influence. Therefore, developmental change in moral standards is not simply a cumulative process. With increasing age, new standards are adopted rather than merely being appended to earlier ones. People vary in the standards they teach, model, and sanction with children of differing ages.

The development and exercise of moral self-sanctions are rooted in human relations and the way in which they are structured by the larger society. At first, guidance of behavior is necessarily external and physically oriented. To discourage hazardous conduct in children who do not understand speech, parents must rely on physical guidance. They structure situations physically to reduce the likelihood of problem behavior, such as injurious aggression and, should it arise, they try to check it by introducing competing activities or by disciplinary action. Sometimes they pair simple verbal prohibitions with physical intervention, so that eventually a "no" alone will suffice as a restrainer. At this earliest period of development, there is little that is asked of young children and there is little they can do that is transgressive. Their behavior is regulated and channeled mainly by physical sanctions and verbal proxies for them.

As children mature, they begin to pursue activities some of which inevitably come into conflict with others and with social norms. Such occasions elicit social reactions designed to promote culturally valued behavior. Social sanctions increasingly replace physical ones as influential guides for how to behave in different situations. Parents and other adults explain standards of conduct and the reasons for them. Social sanctions that disapprove transgressive acts and commend valued conduct add substance to the standards. It is not long before children learn to discriminate between approved and disapproved forms of conduct and to regulate their actions on the basis of anticipated social consequences (Bandura & Walters, 1959; Sears, Maccoby, & Levin, 1957; Walters & Grusec, 1977).

Studies of socialization practices show that social sanctions combined with reasoning foster self-restraints better than do sanctions alone (Parke, 1974; Sears, Maccoby, & Levin, 1957). The reasoning that is especially conducive to development of self-regulatory capabilities appeals to behavioral standards and to empathetic concern for the adverse effects that detrimental conduct inflicts on others (Bandura & Walters, 1959; Hoffman, 1977; Perry & Bussey, 1984). Discipline that is used as an occasion for explaining rules of conduct is more effective in instilling a generalized self-regulatory capability than if a specific act is simply punished (LaVoie, 1974). Coercive threat may extract situational compliance, but cognitive guides provide a basis for regulating future conduct under changing circumstances.

The social consequences that transgressors might bring on themselves through their actions do not materialize if they avoid detection. But the injury and suffering such actions cause others occur regardless of whether or not the wrongdoer is discovered. Thoughts of punishing consequences gain force through self-interest. However, if the punishment is seen as avoidable

or easily tolerable, it may be less restraining than concerns over possible injuries to others. There is some evidence that negative sanctions accompanied by reasons arousing empathy for the victims tend to promote stronger self-restraints than those that try to impress on wrongdoers that their conduct is likely to bring negative consequences to themselves (Walters & Grusec, 1977). The effectiveness of appeals to empathy increases with age (LaVoie, 1974). Qualitative differences in the use of reasoning are evident when comparing families of aggressively antisocial and prosocial adolescents (Bandura & Walters, 1959). The former families emphasize the punishments misconduct can bring one, the latter families stress the injury and suffering misconduct inflicts on others.

The extent to which the influence of social sanctions is enhanced by reasoning depends on its content and on a person's cognitive capabilities. Appealing to abstractions is likely to be lost on young children who lack the experience to comprehend them. They are swayed more by reasons centered on the tangible consequences of misdeeds than on abstract rules (Parke, 1974). As children gain social experience and knowledge about what is right, they become more responsive to abstract appeals to rules and moral directives (Cheyne & Walters, 1970; LaVoie, 1974).

Parents cannot always be present to guide their children's behavior. Successful socialization requires gradual substitution of symbolic and internal controls for external sanctions and demands. As moral standards are gradually internalized, they begin to serve as guides and deterrents to conduct by the self-approving and self-reprimanding consequences children produce for themselves. Not only do the sanctions change from a social to a personal locus, but with advancing age the range of moral considerations expands. As the nature and seriousness of possible transgressions change with age, parents and other significant adults in the child's life add new aspects to the moral persuasion. For example, they do not appeal to legal arguments when handling preschoolers' misconduct, but they do explain legal codes and penalties to preadolescents to influence future behavior that can have serious legal consequences. It is hardly surprising that adolescents are more likely than young children to consider legalities in their reasoning about transgressive acts.

People develop moral standards from a variety of influences. They form standards for judging their own behavior partly on the basis of how significant persons in their lives react to it. Parents and others are generally pleased when children meet or exceed valued standards and disappointed when their performances fall short of them. As a result of such differential evaluative reactions, children eventually come to respond to their own behavior in self-approving and self-critical ways, depending on how it compares with the evaluative standards set by others.

Standards can be acquired through direct instruction in the percepts of conduct as well as through the evaluative reactions of others toward one's actions (Liebert & Ora, 1968; Rosenhan, Frederick, & Burrowes, 1968). In this form of transmission, moral standards are drawn from the tutelage of persons in one's social environment or those prescribed in the writings of influential figures. The moral standards to which adults subscribe guide the type of morality they teach to children (Olejnik, 1980). As in other forms of influence, direct tuition is most effective in fostering development of standards when it is based on shared values and is supported by social feedback to conduct.

People not only prescribe self-evaluative standards for others, they also exemplify them in responding to their own behavior. The power of modeling in influencing standards of conduct is well documented (Bandura, 1986). Modeling is a dynamic constructive process. People do not passively absorb standards of conduct from whatever influences happen to impinge upon them.

Rather, they construct generic standards from the numerous evaluative rules that are prescribed, modeled, and taught. This process is complicated because those who serve as socialization influencers, whether designedly or unintentionally, often display inconsistencies between what they practice and what they preach. When these two sources of social influence conflict, example often outweighs the power of precept (Hildebrandt, Feldman, & Ditrichs, 1973; McMains & Liebert, 1968; Rosenhan, Frederick, & Burrowes, 1968). Moreover, people usually differ in the standards they model, and even the same person may model different standards in different social settings and domains of conduct (Allen & Liebert, 1969). Such discrepancies reduce the impact of modeling on the development of personal standards. Exemplified standards also carry more force when models possess social power and status (Akamatsu & Farudi, 1978; Grusec, 1971; Mischel & Liebert, 1967).

Parents' level of moral reasoning predicts the level of their children's moral reasoning (Holstein, 1973). Fine-grained analyses further reveal that children model the form of the rules their parents use to integrate information in judging the morality of transgressive conduct (Leon, 1984). Thus, if parents use simple moral rules so do their children, whereas if parents rely on more complex relativistic rules their children do likewise. Parents, of course, are not oblivious to their children's cognitive capabilities to grasp the moral implications of their conduct. Parents react differently to their children's misconduct at different ages (Denny & Duffy, 1974). They increase the complexity of their moral reasoning as their children get older. The more complex the parent's moral reasons in dealing with misconduct, the more elaborate is their children's moral reasoning. Variation in social influences contributes to developmental changes in what factors are considered to be morally relevant and the relative weight they are given.

Parents, of course, are not the exclusive source of children's standards of moral judgments and conduct. Other adults, peers, and symbolic models, who are by no means uniform in their moral perspectives, play influential roles as well. Children exposed to adult and peer models who exemplify conflicting standards adopt different standards of conduct than if adults alone set the standard, or if adults and peer models subscribe to the same standards (Bandura, Grusec, & Menlove, 1967; Brody & Henderson, 1977). As we have already seen, the power of modeling is attenuated by variation in modeled standards. Peers can also exert strong influence on the application of pre-existing moral standards by evaluative justifications that make transgressive behavior morally permissible. Even when the evaluative reactions of parents carry more weight than those of peers, peers can win out because they are the ones who are present in the behavioral situations to exert influence on moral choices (Dornbusch, 1987). The mechanisms governing the conditional application of moral standards well be analyzed in a later section of this chapter.

To the developing child televised modeling, which dramatizes a vast range of moral conflicts that transcend viewers' immediate social realities, constitutes another integral part of social learning. The values modeled in print can similarly impart moral standards for judging conduct (Walker & Richards, 1976). Symbolic modeling influences the development of moral judgments by what it portrays as acceptable or reprehensible conduct, and by the sanctions and justifications applied to it. Clearly, a varied array of interacting societal influences contribute to the development of moral perspectives.

Familial and Social Transmission Models

Psychological theories have traditionally assumed that values, standards and behavioral patterns are transmitted via parent-child relationships. In a provocative paper, Reiss (1965)

contrasts theories based on the familial transmission model to those emphasizing transmission by broader social systems. He offers several reasons why the familial transmission model cannot adequately explain socialization processes and outcomes. Assuming, at least, a 20-year procreation difference between generations, a long time intervenes between parents' imparting values and standards to their children and when they can, in turn, pass on those values to their own offspring. The long time lag between succeeding descendants would produce a very slow rate of social change, whereas, in fact, extensive society-wide shifts in standards and normative behavior often occur within a single generation. The marked changes in sexual standards and practices and cohabitation patterns within a relatively short time span are but one example. Reiss, therefore, argues that the parent-child relationship cannot be the major agency of cultural transmission. Rather, standards of behavior are primarily disseminated by institutionally organized systems (e.g., educational, mass media, religious, political, and legal agencies) and regulated by collectively enforced sanctions. In Reiss's view, psychosocial changes originate primarily at the social systems level, whereas changes emerging within the family are of lesser social impact. Thus, for example, racial segregation in public accommodations and infringement of voting rights were changed more rapidly by collective protest and Supreme Court decisions than by waiting for prejudiced parents to inculcate in their children more acceptant attitudes and values which they would display toward minority groups when they became restaurateurs and motel operators thirty or forty years later.

In accord with Reiss's main thesis, social cognitive theory assumes that values and standards of conduct arise from diverse sources of influence and are promoted by institutional backing. Because social agencies possess considerable rewarding and coercive power, collectively enforced sanctions can produce rapid and widespread societal changes. However, a social systems' theory alone is insufficient to explain why there is often substantial variation in values and standards, even within the same subcultures. Differences arise partly because institutional prescriptions for the youth of a society must be implemented by parents, teachers and community members. Those who, for whatever reason, do not subscribe to the institutional codes will undermine the broader social transmission effort. Barring strong sanctions, parents often find new values discordant and resist adopting them for some time. Families who are estranged from the mainstream social systems also pay little or no heed to institutional values.

A comprehensive theory of social transmission must also explain what produces and sustains the values, standards and behavioral norms promulgated by the cultural institutions. They are products of influences wielded by members of the society. Changes in social systems are often initiated by determined dissenters acting on values modeled largely from individuals who have opposed prevailing social practices (Bandura, 1973; Keniston, 1968; Rosenhan, 1970). Dissenters create their own subsystems to support their efforts to reform social systems (King, 1958).

In discussing the limitations of personality theories of socialization, Reiss states that, in such approaches, social change can arise only when there is a breakdown in transmission between generations. This type of criticism is applicable to theories assuming that parental values are introjected by children "in toto" and then are later passed on unmodified to their progeny. In social cognitive theory, the adoption of values, standards and attributes is governed by a much broader and more dynamic social reality. Social learning is a continuous process in which acquired standards are elaborated and modified, and new ones are adopted. As previously mentioned, internalization involves construction of standards from diverse sources of influences rather than mindless mimicry. Children repeatedly observe the standards and behavior patterns not only of parents, but also of siblings, peers, and other adults (Bandura, Grusec, & Menlove,

1967; Davidson & Smith, 1982). Moreover, the extensive symbolic modeling provided in the mass media serves as another prominent extrafamilial source of influence (Liebert, Sprafkin, & Davidson, 1982). Hence, children's values and attributes are likely to reflect amalgams of these diverse sources, rather than simply the unaltered familial heritage. Even if psychosocial patterns arose solely from familial sources, significant changes could emerge across generations through familial transmission. This is because the attributes and standards of the two parents are rarely identical and siblings add further variety to what is modeled in the familial environment. The attributes children develop are composites of different features of parental and sibling values at each generation. Thus, children within the same family can develop somewhat different composite systems of attributes and values that are neither solely those of the parents nor of the siblings (Bandura, Ross, & Ross, 1963).

Some of the criticisms levied by Reiss against the familial transmission model are debatable, but his contention that social institutions often play a heavier role in perpetuating and changing standards and psychosocial patterns than do familial influences is well taken. However, an interactional theory that treats human development as a product of both familial and social system influences holds greater promise of furthering our understanding of the process than does a dichotomized view that pits one system against the other. This broader transmission model provides the vehicle for cultural evolution and the transmission of cultural patterns both within generations and from one generation to the next (Boyd & Richerson, 1985).

Multifaceted Nature of Moral Judgment and Action

Adoption of internal standards does not necessarily encompass every domain of activity or completely supplant other forms of control. Even the most principled individuals may, in some domains of activity and under some circumstances, regulate their behavior mainly by anticipated social or legal consequences. Moreover, during the course of development, children learn how to get around moral consequences of culpable behavior that can gain them personal benefits. They discover that they can reduce the likelihood of reprimands by invoking extenuating circumstances for their misdeeds (Bandura & Walters, 1959). As a result, different types of vindications become salient factors in moral judgments. Even very young children are quite skilled in using mitigating factors to excuse wrongdoing (Darley, Klosson, & Zanna, 1978). Later they learn to weaken, if not completely avoid, self-censure for reprehensible conduct by invoking self-exonerating justifications. A theory of moral reasoning must, therefore, be concerned as well with how exonerative moral reasoning can make the immoral inconsequential or even moral. We shall return later to the forms that these mechanisms of moral disengagement take.

Stage theories attribute changes in moral judgment chiefly to internal reorganization of thought by stage-regulated mental perturbations for modifications channeled by latent preferences for higher moral stages. Such views make light of the prominent role social influences play in cultivating moral standards and commitments. It is not that stage theories take no notice of social factors. They do, but they grant social influences a narrow function--the views of others serve mainly as external perturbators for autoregulated change. In fact, they do much more. People impart moral standards and provide a great deal of social support for moral commitments.

Developmental trends obviously exist in moral reasoning and judgment, as they do in everything else. But the conditions of social learning are much too varied to produce uniform moral types. Even at the more advanced levels, some behaviors come under the rule of law,

others under social sanctions, and still others under personal sanctions (Bandura, 1986). When statistical controls for other causal factors are not applied, developmental changes, which have been attributed to stagelike unfolding of moral modes of thought, may reflect changes in general intelligence, information-processing skills, educational level, and socialization practices with which moral reasoning correlates (Kay, 1982). Evidence of age trends, which every theory predicts, is often accepted as validating stage theories of morality. The validity of stage propositions, however, demands much more than age trends: They assume (1) That there is uniformity of judgment when a person is at any given stage; (2) That a person cannot evaluate conduct in terms of a given moral principle without first adopting a series of preceding principles; and (3) That attainment of a given judgmental principle replaces preceding modes of thought by transforming them. These presumptions do not fare well when compared to empirical findings.

Social Change of the Moral Standards of Stage Theories

Moral reasoning involves interpreting available information in moral predicaments against personal standards and situational circumstances for evaluating the rightness or wrongness of conduct. The standards for moral reasoning, are much more amenable to social influence than stage theories would lead one to expect. Numerous studies have been conducted in which children with differing moral standards are exposed to opposing views of models who use either malevolent intentions or severity of harm as the standard for judging the reprehensibility of conduct. Such modeling influences alter how heavily children weigh intentions and harm when they judge transgressive acts: Children who had previously judged wrongdoing mainly by intentions judge conduct by the harm caused, and those who previously evaluated wrongdoing by the amount of harm caused adopt intentions as the principal indicant of reprehensibility (Bandura & McDonald, 1963; Cowan, Langer, Heavenrich, & Nathanson, 1969; Le Furgy & Woloshin, 1969). These altered moral perspectives are reflected in moral reasoning as well as in the judgments made, they generalize across transgressive situations and different patterns of intentions and damages, and they endure over time (Dorr & Fey, 1974; Schleifer & Douglas, 1973). Although the modeled perspectives of both adults and peers are persuasive, the moral reasoning of adults is usually the more influential (Brody & Henderson, 1977; Dorr & Fey, 1974).

Evidence that children apply their altered moral perspective to new moral predicaments and adhere to it over time attests to the significance of the achieved effects. Changes promoted by structured social influence are sometimes called into question by tautological arguments that cognitive change is a slow process, so if changes are achieved in a short time they must not be "genuine." One can, of course, point to instances where superficial influences produce circumscribed change. But it is studies that effect generalized, enduring changes by influences of some substance that speak most persuasively to the issue of whether moral reasoning skills can be socially cultivated.

Efforts aimed at altering moral reasoning have relied heavily on the influence of example. Exposure to others modeling an opposing view can alter moral judgments in several ways. Moral judgment involves two separable processes. Firstly, elements that are viewed as having moral relevance are selected from the configurations of information available in given predicaments. Secondly, the selected elements are weighted and integrated on the basis of moral rules for judging conduct. By singling out certain elements in their moral reasoning, models call attention to the factors the moral standards embody. The views models express also provide

supporting justifications for reweighing various factors in making decisions about the wrongness of certain acts. Things that were regarded as minor may become important, and visa versa. Evidence will be presented later that models convey the moral rules as well as invest particular elements with moral salience. In areas of morality, for which society places a premium on socially acceptable attitudes, public opinions may differ substantially from those that are privately held. Expression of moral convictions by models provides the social sanctions for others to voice similar opinions. Modeling of opposing viewpoints can thus effect changes in moral judgments through attentional, cognitive, and disinhibitory mechanisms.

As in other areas of functioning, modeling influences do not invariably alter moral reasoning. When lack of effects do occur, they can result from either comprehension deficits or performance preferences. People cannot be influenced much by modeled opinions if they do not understand them. Pre-existing knowledge and cognitive skills place limits on what can be learned from brief exposure to opposing opinions. There is substantial difference, however, between making social influence dependent on knowledge of cognitive-processing skills than on concatenated unitary thought. In social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986), cognitive development is analyzed in terms of the sets of cognitive competencies governing given domains of functioning rather than discrete uniform ways of thinking.

When models voice opinions they transmit their ideas and preferences. But modeling does not, itself, guarantee that the views so learned will be articulated by the learner. Where apparent uninfluenceability reflects performance preferences, modeled standards have been learned but are simply not expressed because they are personally or socially disfavored. The ease with which judgmental standards can be shifted in one direction or another depends on the conceptual skills they require and the social effects they have. In addition, judgmental standards vary in how easily they can be discerned, which affects the facility with which they can be learned. It is much easier to recognize damage than to infer the historical antecedents or intentions of actions. When information about intentions is provided in ways that aid its recall, young children use the intentions of wrongdoers to judge culpability (Austen, Ruble, & Trabasso, 1977). The claim, sometimes attributed to social learning theory, that different moral standards are equally modifiable has no foundation. Some judgmental changes are obviously more difficult to achieve than others. It might also be noted in passing that, contrary to what is sometimes alleged (Murray, 1983), social learning theory has never proposed the implausible assumption that erroneous reasoning in matters of fact is just as producible by social influence as is accurate reasoning. Once children have learned to reason in accord with evident fact (e.g., changing the shape of a clay ball does not change its mass), they will not revert to fallacious reasoning by exposure to arguments they know to be untrue.

Cognitive Conflict as the Automotivator for Change

A theory of morality must explain both the motivators for cognitive change in moral principles and the motivators for acting morally. Stage theorists address the motivation for cognitive change but largely ignore the motivation for pursuing moral courses of action, some of which are self-denying while others may bring adverse reactions from certain quarters. Standards alone do not drive action. Cognitive conflict is posited as the major motivator of cognitive change in stage theories. According to this equilibration mechanism (Piaget, 1960), discrepancies between the cognitive schemas that children already possess and perceived events create internal conflict that motivates exploration of the source of discrepancy until the internal schemas are altered to accommodate to the contradictory experiences. Events that differ

markedly from what one knows or expects are too bewildering and those that differ minimally are too familiar to arouse interest and exploration. It is moderately discrepant experiences that presumably arouse cognitive conflict that prompts cognitive reorganization. Piagetian theory thus proposes cognitive perturbations by moderately discrepant experiences as the basic automotivator for cognitive change.

Empirical tests of this type of automotivator reveal that discrepancy of experience alone does not guarantee cognitive change (Kupfersmid & Wonderly, 1982; Wachs, 1977). Indeed, if disparities between perceived events and mental structure were, in fact, automatically motivating, everyone should be highly knowledgeable about the world around them and continually progressing toward ever higher levels of reasoning. The evidence does not seem to bear this out. Although motivation presumably springs from cognitive conflict between beliefs held and the information conveyed by situations encountered, surprisingly little effort has been made to verify the causal links between discrepant influences, indicants of internal conflict, and the quest for new understanding. What little evidence there is on this point shows that discrepant influences foster cognitive changes but they seem unrelated to level of cognitive conflict (Zimmerman & Blom, 1983). This finding receives support from a study by Haan (1985) comparing the power of induced social and cognitive disequilibrium to change moral reasoning. Cognitive disequilibrium had little effect on moral reasoning. However, the experiences of coping with social discord around issues of morality produced changes in moral reasoning. The impact of divergent views seems to stem from how persuasive they are than from how cognitively conflictful they are. Role-playing higher levels of moral reasoning is no more effective in altering moral judgments than simply observing the same moral arguments being modeled (Matefy & Acksen, 1976).

Simply demonstrating that children are unmoved either by what they already know or by what they do not comprehend because it exceeds their cognitive capabilities is a mundane finding that can be explained without requiring an elaborate automotivating mismatch mechanism. Until objective criteria are specified for what level of disparity constitutes moderate discrepancy, the equilibration model of self-motivation does not lend itself readily to empirical test. Langer (1969) maintains that it is the cognitive perturbations children spontaneously produce by themselves rather than those externally activated by discrepant events that are the effective instigators of cognitive change. Moreover, the cognitive conflict is said to be often unconscious, which makes it even less accessible to study. Unless independent measures of unconscious self-perturbation are provided, the posited incongruity motivator is incapable of verification.

As a rule, people do not pursue most activities that differ moderately from what they know or can do. Indeed, if they were driven by every moderately discrepant event encountered in their daily lives they would be rapidly overwhelmed by innumerable imperatives for cognitive change. Effective functioning requires selective deployment of attention and inquiry. Self-motivation through cognitive comparison requires distinguishing between standards of what one knows and standards of what one desires to know. It is the latter standards that exert selective influence over which of many activities that create discrepant experiences will be actively pursued. A moderately discrepant experience, even in areas of high personal involvement, does not guarantee cognitive change. When faced with views that are discordant from their own conceptions, people often resolve the conflict by discounting or reinterpreting the discrepant information rather than by changing their way of thinking. It has been shown in other domains of cognitive functioning that the degree of cognitive change generated by exposure to discrepant information is better predicted from the credibility of those voicing discrepant views than from

the degree of disparity "per se." Sources of high credibility produce increasing cognitive change the more their views differ from those held by the person being influenced whereas, for sources of low credibility, the more discrepant their views, the more they are rejected (Bergin, 1962; McGuire, 1985). Social factors exert a powerful influence on how discrepant conceptions are cognitively processed and received.

Some efforts have been made to test the equilibration mechanism of developmental change within Kohlberg's framework by exposing children to moral arguments that increasingly diverge from the views children already hold. In the initial investigations of stage constraints on moral change, children were presented with a few hypothetical moral dilemmas and they were given conflicting moral advice by persons using reasons from different stages (Rest, Turiel, & Kohlberg, 1969; Turiel, 1966). The investigators report that children reject modeled opinions below their dominant mode of thinking, are unaffected by those that are too advanced, but are likely to adopt modeled views one stage above their own.

Subsequent research indicates that the restricted changeability of moral reasoning may lie more in how the modeling influence was used than in constraints of children's stages. It is unreasonable to expect entrenched moral perspectives to be markedly altered by a transitory influence, especially if presented in a weak form. Theories predicting null results should apply social influences in their most powerful form because one can easily fail to produce cognitive changes by using weak influences. Children do not remember the essential details of moral situations presented to them briefly, but they show good recall with greater exposure (Austen, Ruble, & Trabasso, 1977). Fleeting information that goes by unrecognized or unrecalled cannot affect moral thinking. In the studies conducted by Rest and Kohlberg, not only is the modeling influence unusually brief, but the models disagree in their views by advocating opposing solutions. Although results are not entirely uniform (Walker, 1983), models who are consistent in how they judge different moral predicaments generally have greater impact on children's moral reasoning than do models who disagree with each other (Brody & Henderson, 1977; Keasey, 1973). When the modeled views are consistent, children's moral perspectives are changed more by exposure to moral reasoning two stages above their own than by reasoning one stage more advanced (Arbuthnot, 1975; Matefy & Acksen, 1976). These findings are in accordance with substantial evidence in social psychology cited earlier that the more discrepant persuasive reasoning is from one's own views, the more one's attitudes change. Immaturity, of course, places some limits on the power of discrepant influences. Young children cannot be influenced by reasoning so advanced that it is completely incomprehensible to them.

Children also adopt modeled modes of reasoning labeled as more primitive in the stage hierarchy, but the findings are mixed on how well they adhere to them over time. Here, too, the variable adherence may reflect more how persuasively modeling is used than stage constraints. The views of a lone model, or one who disagrees, can be easily discounted as atypical. It is consensual multiple modeling that carries the strong persuasive impact necessary to override pre-existing orientations. Indeed, the propensity of children to pattern their preferences after models increases as the level of consensus among models increases (Perry & Bussey, 1979). Viewers are likely to conclude that if everyone firmly believes something, it must have merit.

It could be argued that judging by the intentionality of actions does not necessarily represent a higher level of reasoning than judging by the consequences that flow from the acts. In judging the morality of of nuclear strategies, for example, the awesome destructiveness of a nuclear attack should be the overriding consideration, rather than the intentions of the launchers of such attacks. To give utmost priority to the devastating consequences of a nuclear strike would hardly be considered "regressive" or "primitive" thinking. Rather, to judge as morally

well intended, nuclear strikes that can take a massive toll on human life and render much of the planet uninhabitable would reflect an unthinking reverence for intention and personal principle.

Results showing that there are some age trends in moral judgment, that children fail to adopt standards they do not fully comprehend or about which there is disagreement, and that they are disinclined to stick to views considered immature for their age can be adequately explained without requiring stage propositions. Evidence that moral reasoning can be changed by exposure to modes of thinking that invert or skip stages is at variance with the contention of stage theory that, to alter how one thinks about moral issues, one has to pass through an invariant sequence of stages, each displacing lower ones along the way from which there can be no return. Acknowledging the intraindividual diversity of moral reasoning, some stage theorists (Rest, 1975) have redefined stage progression as a shifting distribution of mixed modes of thinking that are affected by many environmental factors. Such a view reduces the mismatch between the theoretical conception and the actuality. But it raises the issue of what purpose is served by adhering to a stage doctrine stripped of its major defining properties of change by structural displacement, steplike discontinuity, uniformity of cognitive structure, and judgment unarbitrated by either the situational factors or the domain of activity? If stage progression is recast as a multiform gradualistic process cultivated by environmental influences, such a model differs little from developmental theories that do not invoke stages.

Apparent deficiencies in moral reasoning, often attributed to cognitive limitations or insensitivity to certain moral issues, have also been shown to depend partly on how moral thought is assessed (Chandler, Greenspan, & Barenboim, 1973; Gutkin, 1972; Hatano, 1970; Leming, 1978). The same individuals express different types of moral judgments depending on how morally relevant factors are presented, whether children judge verbal accounts or behavioral portrayals of transgressions, whether they judge common or outlandish moral conflicts, whether they reveal their moral orientations in abstract opinions or in the severity of the sanctions they apply to different acts, and whether they judge the transgressive acts of others or give moral reasons for how they would behave if faced with similar moral dilemmas. The view that stages constrain people to think in a uniform way receives little support in the notable variability of moral thinking even with small changes in how moral conflicts are presented and how judgments are rendered.

Moral Judgment as Application of Multidimensional Rules

In the social cognitive view, moral thinking is a process in which multidimensional rules or standards are used to judge conduct. Situations with moral implications contain many decisional ingredients that not only vary in importance but may be given lesser or greater weight, depending on the particular constellation of events in a given moral predicament. Among the many factors that enter into judging the reprehensibility of conduct are the nature of the transgression, its base rate of occurrence and degree of norm variation; the contexts in which it is performed and the perceived situational and personal motivators for it; the immediate and long-range consequences of the actions; whether it produces personal injury or property damage; whether it is directed at faceless agencies and corporations or at individuals; the characteristics of the wrongdoers, such as their age, sex, ethnic and social status; and the characteristics of the victims and their perceived blameworthiness. In dealing with moral dilemmas, people must extract, weigh, and integrate the morally relevant information in the situations confronting them.

We saw earlier that moral rules or standards of conduct are fashioned from varied social sources including precepts, evaluative social reactions, and models of moral commitments. From

such diverse experiences people learn which factors are morally relevant and how much weight to attach to them. With increasing experience and cognitive competence, moral judgments change from single-dimensional rules to multidimensional rules of conduct. The more complex rules involve configural or relativistic weighting of morally relevant information. This is, factors that are weighed heavily under some combinations of circumstances may be disregarded or considered of lesser import under a different set of conditions.

Researchers who approach moral thinking as a process of information integration have studied the rules by which children weigh and combine information about different factors in making moral judgments (Kaplan, 1989; Lane & Anderson, 1976; Surber, 1985). Much of this research has examined how children combine information about intentions and consequences in judging transgressive actions. When presented with situations varying in degree of maliciousness and harm, children do not reason dichotomously, that is, using harm when young and intention when older, as proposed by Piagetian theory. Rather, they apply varied integration rules in which the different factors are combined additively with the same absolute weight regardless of other information, or configurally in which the amount of weight given to a factor depends on the nature of another factor. However, additive rules seem to predominate (Leon, 1980; 1982). The form of the integration rule used varies more across individuals than ages. Parental modeling accounts for a large part of the individual differences in complexity of moral decision making (Leon, 1984). Parents differ in how they integrate information into moral judgments, ranging from a simple multidimensional rule based solely on damage done, to a composite linear rule combining intent and damage, to a more complicated configural rule that weighs damage differentially depending on intent. In their own cognitive processing of information regarding the morality of conduct, children model their parents' rules in form and complexity.

Children at all ages use both intention and harm in forming their judgments, with developmental changes in the weight given these factors being gradual rather than stagelike (Grueneich, 1982; Surber, 1977). Analyses that separate what judgmental factors are selected from constellations of events, what weight is given to the factors that are singled out, and the decision rule by which they are combined are especially well suited to clarify developmental changes in moral reasoning. Multifaced analyses of judgments of factorial combinations of different types of information are more informative than coding verbal protocols or selecting global attributions of whether outcomes are attributed to personal causation or to external circumstances.

Kaplan (1989) has examined the integrative rules of moral decision making with scenarios that include different combinations of factors characterizing the various stages of Kohlberg's theory. For example, a transgressive act may be portrayed as both fulfilling a social obligation and serving a moral principle, or as inflicting punishment but fulfilling a social obligation. People's judgments reveal how much weight they give to the different factors and the type of integration rule they use. The findings show that students combine factors from different stages in their moral decision making rather than reason in terms of a particular stage-constrained moral rule. Efforts to develop morality based on Kohlberg's framework rely on guided moral argumentation that provides exposure to more mature levels of reasoning. This form of moral training presumably improves cognitive skill in making decisions about moral problems rather than inculcates particular values. Kaplan found that such training is more likely to inculcate values than to increase the complexity of moral reasoning. However, students can learn to combine information in configural or relativistic moral rules through discussions of nonmoral problems in which they come to understand that particular factors may be given more or less weight depending on the configuration of other elements.

More work remains to be done on how people deal with large sets of morally relevant factors, how social influences alter the weight they give to different factors, what types of combinatorial rules they use, and how these different aspects of moral judgment change with development. Humans are not all that adept at integrating diverse information (Kahneman, Slovic, & Tversky, 1982). As in other judgmental domains, when faced with complexities most people probably fall back on judgmental heuristics that give too much weight to a few moral factors while ignoring other relevant ones. Consistent social feedback can produce lasting changes in the rules used to judge the morality of action (Schleifer & Douglas, 1973). However, in everyday life social consensus on morality is difficult to come by, thus creating ambiguity about the correctness of judgment. In the absence of consistent feedback, reliance on convenient heuristics may become routinized to the point where moral judgments are rendered without giving much thought to individuating features of moral situations. The susceptibility of moral judgment to change depends in part on the effects of the actions it fosters. Over time, people alter what they think by experiencing the social effects of their actions.

Relation Between Moral Reasoning and Conduct

An issue that has received surprisingly little attention is the relationship between moral reasoning and moral conduct. The relationship between thought and conduct is mediated through the exercise of moral agency (Bandura, 1986; Rottschaefer, 1986). The nature of moral agency will be examined shortly. The study of moral reasoning would be of limited interest if people's moral codes and thoughts had no effect on how they behaved. In the stage theory of moral maturity the form of moral thought is not linked to particular conduct. This is because each level of moral reasoning can be used to support or to disavow transgressive conduct. People may act prosocially or transgressively out of mutual obligation, for social approval, for duty to the social order, or for reasons of principle. A person's level of moral development may indicate the types of reasons likely to be most persuasive to that person, but it does not ensure any particular kind of conduct.

The implications for human conduct of the stage theory of moral maturity are difficult to test empirically because conflicting claims are made about how moral reasoning is linked to behavior. On the one hand, it is contended that the level of moral reasoning does not sponsor a particular kind of behavior (Kohlberg, 1971a). The theory is concerned with the form of the reasoning not with the moralness of the conduct. Hence, in studies designed to alter moral perspectives through exposure to moral argument, the same level of reasoning is used, for example, for and against stealing (Rest, Turiel, & Kohlberg, 1969). On the other hand, a positive relationship is claimed between level of moral reasoning and moral conduct--the higher the moral reasoning, the more likely is moral conduct, and the greater is the consistency between moral judgment and conduct (Kohlberg & Candee, 1984).

Studies on whether stages of moral reasoning are linked to characteristic types of conduct are inconsistent in their findings (Blasi, 1980; Kurtines & Greif, 1974). Some researchers report that moral conduct is related to the level of moral reasoning, but others have failed to find strong evidence of such a relationship. Some of the studies routinely cited as corroborating such a link have not withstood replication. Others are seen under close scrutiny as contradicting it or as uninterpretable because of methodological deficiencies (Kupfersmid & Wonderly, 1980). Moreover, relationships may disappear when controls are applied for other differences between persons at varying levels of moral reasoning, such as general intelligence (Rushton, 1975).

Efforts to verify the link between moral thought and action have raised disputes about the designation of moral conduct. Kohlberg and Candee (1984) argue that it is performers' intentions that define their actions as moral or immoral. If the morality of conduct is defined by the intentions voiced by transgressors, then most behavior that violates the moral codes of society will come out laundered as righteous. People can easily find moral reasons to redefine their misdeeds as really well-intentioned acts. They become more adept at self-serving justifications as they gain cognitive facility. Presumed intent always enters in as one factor in the social labeling of behavior (Bandura, 1973), but intention is never used as the decisive definer of conduct. A robber who had a good intent would not thereby transform robbery into nonrobbery. A theory of morality must explain the determinants and the mechanisms governing transgressive conduct, not only how perpetrators justify it. This requires a broader conception of morality than is provided by a rationalistic approach cast in terms of skill in abstract reasoning. Affective factors play a vital regulative role in moral conduct.

Conception of Moral Agency in Terms of Self-Regulatory Mechanisms

Moral self-regulation is not achieved by disembodied moral thought or by a feat of willpower. Explanation of the relation between moral reasoning and conduct must specify the psychological mechanisms by which moral standards get translated into actions. In social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986), transgressive conduct is regulated by two major sources of sanctions--social sanctions and internalized self-sanctions. Both control mechanisms operate anticipatorily. In fear control, people refrain from transgressing because they fear that such conduct will bring them social censure and other adverse consequences. In self-control, they behave prosocially because it produces self-satisfaction and self-respect and they refrain from transgressing because such conduct will give rise to self-reproof.

For reasons given earlier, moral conduct is motivated and regulated mainly by the ongoing exercise of self-reactive influence. The major self-regulatory mechanism, which is developed and mobilized in concert with situational factors, operates through three major subfunctions. These include self-monitoring of conduct; judgment of conduct in relation to personal standards and environmental circumstances; and affective self-reaction. To exercise self-influence, people have to monitor their behavior and the situational circumstances in which they find themselves enmeshed. The process of self-monitoring is not simply a mechanical audit of one's performances and social instigators. Pre-existing conceptions and affective states can bias how one's actions and the instigators for it are perceived and cognitively processed.

Self-monitoring is the first step toward exercising influence over one's conduct but, in itself, such information provides little basis for self-directed reactions. Actions give use to self-reactions through a judgmental function in which conduct is evaluated against moral standards and environmental circumstances. We saw earlier that situations with moral implications contain many judgmental ingredients that not only vary in importance but may be given lesser or greater weight depending upon the particular constellation of events in a given moral predicament. In dealing with moral dilemmas people must, therefore, extract, weigh, and integrate the morally relevant information in the situations confronting them. Factors that are weighed heavily under some combinations of circumstances may be disregarded or considered of lesser import under a different set of conditions. This process of moral reasoning is guided by multidimensional rules for judging conduct.

Self-regulation of moral conduct involves more than moral thought. Moral judgment sets the occasion for self-reactive influence. Affective self-reactions provide the mechanism by

which standards regulate conduct. The anticipatory self-respect and self-censure for actions that correspond with, or violate personal standards serve as the regulatory influences. People do things that give them self-satisfaction and a sense of self-worth. They ordinarily refrain from behaving in ways that violate their moral standards because it will bring self-condemnation. There is no greater punishment than self-contempt. Anticipatory self-sanctions thus keep conduct in line with internal standards.

There is a difference between possessing self-regulatory capabilities and being able to apply them effectively and consistently under the pressure of contravening influences. Effective self-regulation of conduct requires not only self-regulatory skills but also strong self-belief in one's capabilities to effect personal control. Therefore, people's belief in their efficacy to exercise control over their own motivation, thought patterns and actions also plays an important role in the exercise of human agency (Bandura, 1986). The stronger the perceived self-regulatory efficacy, the more perseverant people are in their self-controlling efforts and the greater is their success in resisting social pressures to behave in ways that violate their standards. A low sense of self-regulatory efficacy heightens vulnerability to social pressures for transgressive conduct.

If people encounter essentially similar constellations of events time and again, they do not have to go through the same moral judgmental process of weighting and integrating moral factors each time before they act. Nor do they have to conjure up self-sanctions anticipatorily on each repeated occasion. They routinize their judgment and action to the point when they execute their behavior with little accompanying thought. However, significant changes in morally relevant factors reactivate evaluative processes for how to behave under the altered circumstances.

In social cognitive theory, the self is not disembodied from social reality. People make causal contribution to their actions and the nature of their environment by exercising self-influence. However, in accord with the model of reciprocal causation, social influences affect the operation of the self system in at least three major ways. They contribute importantly to the development of self-regulatory competence. Analyses of regulation of moral action through affective self-reaction distinguish between two sources of incentive motivation operating in the process. There are the conditional self-generated incentives that provide guides and proximal motivators for moral courses of action. Then there are the more distal social incentives for holding to a moral system. Thus, the second way in which social influences contribute to morality is by providing collective support for adherence to moral standards. The third way in which social realities affect moral functioning is by facilitating selective activation and disengagement of moral self-regulation. The forms that the various psychosocial mechanisms of moral disengagement take are analyzed in the sections that follow. It might be noted in passing that the wealth of particularized knowledge on how self-regulatory competence is acquired and exercised (Bandura, 1986) stands in stark contrast to the ill-defined internalization processes commonly invoked in theories of morality. A complete theory of morality, whatever its theoretical allegiance, must include these verified mechanisms of self-regulation.

Interplay Between Personal and Social Sanctions

The self-regulation of conduct is not entirely an intrapsychic affair as the more radical forms of cognitivism might lead one to believe. Nor do people operate an autonomous moral agents impervious to the social realities in which they are enmeshed. Social cognitive theory favors a causal model involving triadic reciprocal causation (Bandura, 1986). The three constituent sources of influence--"behavior, cognition and other personal factors," and

"environmental influences"--all operate as interacting determinants of each other. From this interactionist perspective, moral conduct is similarly regulated by a reciprocity of influence between thought and self-sanctions, conduct, and a network of social influences. After standards and self-reactive functions are developed, behavior usually produces two sets of consequences: self-evaluative reactions and social effects. These two sources of consequences may operate as complementary or opposing influences on behavior.

Conduct is most congruent with moral standards when transgressive behavior is not easily self-excusable and the evaluative reactions of significant others are compatible with personal standards. Under conditions of shared moral standards, socially approvable acts are a source of self-pride and socially punishable ones are self-censured. To enhance the compatibility between personal and social influences, people generally select associates who share similar standards of conduct and thus ensure social support for their own system of self-evaluation (Bandura & Walters, 1959; Elkin & Westley, 1955; Emmons & Diener, 1986). Diversity of standards in a society, therefore, does not necessarily create personal conflict. Selective association can forge consistency out of diversity.

Behavior is especially susceptible to external influences in the absence of strong countervailing internal standards. People who are not much committed to personal standards adopt a pragmatic orientation, tailoring their behavior to fit whatever the situation seems to call for (Snyder & Campbell, 1982). They become adept at reading social situations and guiding their actions by expediency.

One type of conflict between social and self-produced consequences arises when individuals are socially punished for behavior they highly value. Principled dissenters and nonconformists often find themselves in this predicament. Here, the relative strength of self-approval and social censure determine whether the behavior will be restrained or expressed. Should the threatened social consequences be severe, people hold in check self-praiseworthy acts in risky situations but perform them readily in relatively safe settings. There are individuals, however, whose sense of self-worth is so strongly invested in certain convictions that they will submit to prolonged maltreatment, rather than accede to what they regard as unjust or immoral.

People commonly experience conflicts in which they are socially pressured to engage in behavior that violates their moral standards. When self-devaluative consequences outweigh the benefits for socially accommodating behavior, the social influences do not have much sway. However, the self-regulation of conduct operates through conditional application of moral standards. Self-sanctions can be weakened or nullified by exonerative moral reasoning and social circumstances. People display different levels of detrimental behavior and offer different types of moral reasons for it, depending on whether they find themselves in social situations that are conducive to humane or to hurtful conduct (Bandura, Underwood, & Fromson, 1975). Because almost any conduct can be morally justified, the same moral principles can support different actions, and the same actions can be championed on the basis of different moral principles. However, moral justification is only one of many mechanisms that affect the operation of moral standards in the regulation of conduct.

SELECTIVE ACTIVATION AND DISENGAGEMENT OF MORAL CONTROL

Development of self-regulatory capabilities does not create an invariant control mechanism within a person, as implied by theories of internalization that incorporate entities such as conscience or superego as continuous internal overseers of conduct. Self-reactive influences do not operate unless they are activated, and there are many processes by which self-

sanctions can be disengaged from inhumane conduct (Bandura, 1986, 1989a). Selective activation and disengagement of internal control permits different types of conduct with the same moral standards. Figure 1 shows the four major points in the self-regulatory process at which internal moral control can be disengaged from detrimental conduct. Self-sanctions can be disengaged by reconstruing conduct, obscuring causal agency, disregarding or misrepresenting injurious consequences, and blaming and devaluating the victims.

These mechanisms of moral disengagement have been examined most extensively in the expression of violent conduct. But selective disengagement of moral self-sanctions is by no means confined to extraordinary inducements to violence. People often experience conflicts in which behavior they themselves devalue can serve as the means for securing valued benefits. As long as self-sanctions override the force of external inducements behavior is kept in line with personal standards. However, in the face of strong external inducements such conflicts are often resolved by selective disengagement of self-sanctions. This enables otherwise considerate people to perform self-serving activities that have detrimental social effects. The processes by which self-regulatory capabilities are acquired have been examined in some detail. However, the selective activation and disengagement of internal control, which have considerable theoretical and social import, have only recently received systematic study.

Moral Justification

One set of disengagement practices operates on the construal of the behavior itself. People do not ordinarily engage in reprehensible conduct until they have justified to themselves the morality of their actions. What is culpable can be made righteous through cognitive reconstrual. In this process, detrimental conduct is made personally and socially acceptable by portraying it in the service of moral purposes. People then act on a moral imperative.

Radical shifts in destructive behavior through moral justification is most strikingly revealed in military conduct. People who have been socialized to deplore killing as morally condemnable can be transformed rapidly into skilled combatants, who may feel little compunction and even a sense of pride in taking human life. Moral reconstrual of killing is dramatic

The conversion of socialized people into dedicated combatants is achieved not by altering their personality structures, aggressive drives, or moral standards. Rather, it is accomplished by cognitively restructuring the moral value of killing, so that it can be done free from self-censuring restraints (Kelman, 1973; Sanford & Comstock, 1971). Through moral sanction of violent means, people see themselves as fighting ruthless oppressors who have an unquenchable appetite for conquest, protecting their cherished values and way of life, preserving world peace, saving humanity from subjugation to an evil ideology, and honoring their country's international commitments. The task of making violence morally defensible is facilitated when nonviolent options are judged to have been ineffective, and utilitarian justifications portray the suffering caused by violent counterattacks as greatly outweighed by the human suffering inflicted by the foe.

Over the years, much reprehensible and destructive conduct has been perpetrated by ordinary, decent people in the name of religious principles, righteous ideologies, and nationalistic imperatives. Individuals espousing high moral principles are inclined to resist arbitrary social demands to behave punitively, but they will aggress against people who violate their personal principles (Keniston, 1970). Throughout history countless people have suffered at the hands of self-righteous crusaders bent on stamping out what they consider evil. Rapoport and

Alexander (1982) document the lengthy blood-stained history of holy terror wrought by religious justifications. Acting on moral or ideological imperatives reflects a conscious offense mechanism not an unconscious defense mechanism.

Although moral cognitive restructuring can be easily used to support self-serving and destructive purposes, it can also serve militant action aimed at changing inhumane social conditions. By appealing to morality, social reformers are able to use coercive, and even violent, tactics to force social change. Vigorous disputes arise over the morality of aggressive action directed against institutional practices. Powerholders often resist, by forcible means if necessary, making needed social changes that jeopardize their own self-interests. Resistance to warranted changes invites social activism. Challengers define their militant actions as morally justifiable means to eradicate harmful social practices. Powerholders, in turn, condemn such activism as representing impatient resort to violent solutions or efforts to coerce changes that lack popular support.

There are those who argue for a high moral threshold as a criterion of coercive activism (Bickel, 1974). In this view, unlawful conduct is justified only if traditional means have failed and those who break the law do so publicly and then willingly accept the consequences of their transgressive behavior. In this way, specific unjust practices can be challenged while maintaining respect for the judicial process itself. It is presumably the suffering endured by the aggrieved protesters that shakes the moral complacency of compassionate citizens and, thereby, mobilizes the widespread support required to force warranted reforms. If challengers demand amnesty for unlawful conduct, it not only defeats the purpose of conscientious disobedience, but it is morally wrong. If individuals do not have to accept responsibility for their actions, violent tactics and threats of force will be quickly used whenever grievances arise. It is further argued that illegal defiance of the rules in a representative society fosters contempt for the principle of democratic authority. Anarchy would flourish in a climate in which individuals acted on private moral principles and considered coercive tactics acceptable when ever they disliked particular social practices or policies representing majority decisions.

Challengers refute such moral arguments by appeal to what they regard as a higher level of morality, derived from communal concerns. Their constituencies are expanded to include all people, both at home and abroad, victimized either directly or indirectly by injurious social practices. Challengers argue that when many people benefit from a system that is deleterious to disfavored segments of the society the harmful social practices secure widespread public support. From the challengers' perspective, they are acting under a moral imperative to stop the maltreatment of people who have no way of modifying injurious social policies because they are either outside the victimizing system, or they lack the social power to effect changes from within by peaceable means. Some are disenfranchised, most feel they have no voice in decision making, and legal efforts to remedy their grievances are repeatedly thwarted. Even if the judicial procedures were impartially administered, few could afford the heavy expenses and the protracted time required to exhaust legal remedies. Not only is one not obligated to obey authorities who preside over inequitable systems that protect them with layers of bureaucratic barriers and coercive power, so the reasoning goes, but one is morally right to disobey them. When leaders secure widespread support from a populace that benefits from exploitive policies, the social activism of an aggrieved minority is more likely to arouse demands for coercive social control rather than sympathy for them. Indeed, people in advantaged positions excuse high levels of violence for social control, but they are quick to condemn dissent and protest for social change as acts of violence (Blumenthal, Kahn, Andrews, & Head, 1972). Submitting to the punitive consequences of their disruptive protest, challengers argue, places institutional

procedures above the welfare of human beings and simply allows the system to perpetuate its exploitation of the disadvantaged.

As the preceding discussion shows, adversaries can easily marshal moral reasons for aggressive actions for social control or for social change. When viewed from divergent perspectives, violent acts are different things to different people. In conflicts of power, one person's violence is another person's selfless benevolence. It is often proclaimed that one group's criminal terroristic activity is another group's liberation movement fought by heroic freedom fighters. This is why moral appeals against violence usually fall on deaf ears. Adversaries sanctify their own militant actions but condemn those of their antagonists as barbarity masquerading under a mask of outrageous moral reasoning.

Terrorists invoke moral principles to justify human atrocities. Moral justification is also brought into play in selecting counterterrorist measures. This poses more troublesome problems for democratic societies than for totalitarian ones. Totalitarian regimes have fewer constraints against using institutional power to control media coverage of terrorist events, to restrict individual rights, to sacrifice individuals for the benefit of the state rather than make concessions to terrorists, and to combat threats with lethal means. Terrorists can wield greater power over nations that place high value on human life and are thereby constrained in the ways they can act. Hostage taking has become a common terroristic strategy for wielding control over governments. If nations make the release of hostages a dominant national concern they place themselves in a highly manipulatable position. Tightly concealed captivity thwarts rescue action. Heightened national attention along with an inability to free hostages independently conveys a sense of weakness and invests terrorists with considerable importance and coercive power to extract concessions. Overreactions in which nations render themselves hostage to a small band of terrorists inspires and invites further terroristic acts. Hostage taking is stripped of functional value if it is treated as a criminal act that gains terrorists neither any coercive concessionary power nor much media attention.

Democratic societies face the dilemma of how to morally justify countermeasures to stop terrorists' atrocities without violating the societies' own fundamental principles and standards of civilized conduct (Carmichael, 1982). It is hard to find any inherent moral rightness in violent acts designed to kill assailants or to deter them from future assaults but that sacrifice the lives of some innocent people in the process as well. Because of many uncertain factors, the toll that counterterrorist assaults will take on innocent life is neither easily controllable nor accurately calculable in advance. Therefore, the use of violent countermeasures is typically justified on utilitarian grounds in terms of the benefits to humanity and the social order that curbing terrorist attacks will bring. It is generally considered legitimate to resort to violent defense in response to grave threats that inflict extensive human suffering or that endanger the very survival of the society. The gravity criterion is fine in principle but slippery in specific application. Like most human judgments, gauging the gravity of threats involves some subjectivity. Moreover, violence is often used as a weapon against threats of lesser magnitude on the grounds that, if left unchecked, they will escalate in severity to the point where they will eventually extract a high toll on human liberties and suffering. Gauging potential gravity involves even greater subjectivity and fallibility of judgment than does assessment of present danger. Construal of gravity prescribes choice of options, but it is also often true that choice of violent options shapes construal of gravity. Thus, projected grave dangers to the society are commonly invoked to morally justify violent means to squelch limited present threats.

The mass media, especially television, provide the best access to the public through their strong drawing power. For this reason, television is increasingly used as the principal vehicle of

justification. Struggles to legitimize and gain support for one's causes and to discredit those of one's opponents are now waged more and more through the electronic media (Ball-Rokeach, 1972; Bassiouni, 1981).

The nuclear age has ushered in new magnitudes of risk that create major moral imperatives and paradoxes. Major disputes revolve around the morality of the development of nuclear weaponry and on nuclear retaliatory policies (Churchill, 1983; Johnson, 1984; Lackey, 1984). Proponents of the deterrence doctrine justify threat of nuclear retaliation as a necessary means to protect against a nuclear attack by rival powers. The moral justifications take the following form: Self-defense against grave dangers is morally obligatory. Threats to strike back in kind if attacked with nuclear weapons not only safeguards the populous from adversaries with nuclear arsenals, but deters them from nonnuclear assaults against vulnerable allies as well. Unilateral disarmament is untenable because it leaves a nation open to coercive control by adversaries through extortive nuclear threats.

Threats of nuclear retaliation have no deterrent effect unless the feuding nations believe that their adversary has every intention to use such weapons in the event of a nuclear attack. But virtually everyone concedes that it would be suicidal to use them. A nuclear deterrence doctrine paradoxically seeks to achieve a deterrent effect with threats that no one in their right mind could conceive of ever using. Hence, in efforts to add credibility to deterrence policies, nuclear weapons are menacingly deployed and nuclear systems are said to be preprogrammed so that a launch of offensive missiles will trigger a massive nuclear counterstrike semiautomatically. The intent is to strengthen the deterrent threat by creating the mind-set that retaliatory reactions cannot be checked by a loss of retaliatory nerve. In the justificatory arguments of proponents, national security is ensured by maintaining a balance of nuclear destructiveness that will be mutually deterring. They remain suspect of treaties aimed at limiting or reducing ballistic arsenals on the grounds that agreements are unlikely to be honored and verification procedures are inadequate to safeguard against cheating.

Opponents of nuclear deterrence policies consider the development of nuclear weaponry and threats to use it, even in retaliation, as morally wrong. They regard a retaliatory strike that would inevitably produce vast human and ecological devastation as a ghastly act of vengeance that is irrational as well as immoral. A counterstrike to a failed deterrence would most likely achieve only massive mutual destruction through a series of nuclear exchanges with surviving missiles dispersed on land, in aircraft, and in submarines. In the aftermath, survivors would find themselves in a largely uninhabitable environment. Drifting radioactive fallout would spread the devastating human and ecological toll both within and across nations. These are unique indiscriminate consequences of nuclear weapons that limit the value of deterrence models developed for conventional armed conflicts. In short, the moral logic of counterstrike threat is undermined by its self-destructive consequences. Nuclear deterrence thus rests on a retaliatory threat that paradoxically is too self-destructively irrational and too immoral in innocent human toll to carry out. What is immoral to do is immoral to threaten (Kavka, 1988). Deterrent credibility must depend on perception of one's adversary as sufficiently irrational and immoral to be able to launch nuclear missiles that can destroy each other's societies. Opponents call into question other aspects of deterrent effects. The heavy military involvements of superpowers with nuclear stockpiles (e.g., in Korea, Eastern Europe, Vietnam, Afghanistan) dispute the argument that the existence of a nuclear threat deters nonnuclear military venturesomeness (Lackey, 1984). Nations are understandably unwilling to risk self-destruction to repulse invaders abroad.

Development and deployment of nuclear weapons consume huge financial, technical and creative resources. To justify and gain public support for continual investment of a large share of

national resources in nuclear bombs, proponents usually portray their adversaries as possessing nuclear superiority. Mutual disadvantageous comparison has fostered spiraling escalation of ever deadlier arsenals. Any advancement in either offensive or defensive missile technology is likely to create a destabilizing effect that sparks a new escalation of destructive potential. Proponents contend that a powerful deterrent threat must be maintained until such time as a space-based impenetrable defensive system is developed against ballistic missiles. Critics argue that any defensive shield will be porous and orbiting battle stations would be highly vulnerable to countermeasures, thus requiring continued reliance on deterrence by retaliatory nuclear threat to bolster the partial defense (Long, Hafner, & Boutwell, 1986). Rather than shifting the effort from retaliatory deterrence to defensive self-protection, adding a new defensive system to offensive retaliatory forces will only create more sophisticated nuclear systems poised for mutual destruction. Erecting new defensive systems undercuts efforts to reduce offensive nuclear forces.

No technical system is ever foolproof. As long as nuclear weapons exist there is always a risk that some day they may be fired accidentally through malfunction of missile-monitoring systems or human error, or launched intentionally in an extreme crisis by an enraged, panic-stricken, or suicidal leadership. On four occasions the United States went into a state of nuclear war alert and only last-minute efforts revealed malfunctions or effors in the computer warning system (Falk, 1983). Nuclear proliferation and swifter missile systems that cut short the time for decisions raise the level of risk. To seek security in a fallible system that can produce massive nuclear annihilation is to invite human calamity of appalling proportions. Because of the vast scope and magnitude of indiscriminate nuclear devastation, the traditional just-war tenets that sanction self-defense to avert grave harm affords little guidance in the use of nuclear weapons. For opponents of nuclear systems, their indiscriminate destructiveness challenges the moral permissibility of nuclear powers inflicting the catastrophic risks of nuclear deterrence on the people of innocent nations who are granted no say in the matter (Lackey, 1985). What is immoral to do is also immoral to risk.

It is generally acknowledged that human security is advanced by multilateral nuclear disarmament. However, control of behavior by mutual threat has become deeply entrenched in the political rhetoric and military doctrines and practices of nations. They seek to gain nuclear advantage as a bargaining chip and, in so doing, spur reciprocal escalation of destructive power. Human survival in the nuclear age requires nations to develop and learn de-escalative modes of thinking and behaving in regard to nuclear weapons. Some models of graduated de-escalative reciprocation have been proposed (Osgood, 1980) and occasionally tried successfully (Scoville, 1985). In this approach to reversing the nuclear arms race, a nation initiates a calculated de-escalation designed to prompt a reciprocating action by an opponent. For example, President Kennedy announced that the United States would cease nuclear tests in the atmosphere as long as the Soviets exercised similar restraint. This publicized initiative quickly produced an international agreement barring atmospheric nuclear tests. De-escalative initiatives are thus gradually introduced within security limits to prod reciprocation. If concertedly applied, such initiatives might achieve drastic multilateral reductions in nuclear arsenals. Proliferation of nuclear weapons among nations that distrust and fear each other makes this task more difficult. As long as some nations refuse to part with their bombs, others insist on remaining nuclearly armed to deter nuclear threats. Graduated de-escalative strategies that are exercisable when nuclear weapons are in the hands of only a few nations encounter greater obstacles when many nations with chronic animosities are nuclearly armed. Therefore, to add social and moral force to de-escalative modes of change, social mechanisms need to be created whereby societies collectively applaud reciprocation to initiatives and reprove failures to reciprocate.

Euphemistic Labeling

Language shapes people's thought patterns on which they base many of their actions. Activities can take on a very different appearance depending on what they are called. Euphemistic language thus provides a convenient device for masking reprehensible activities or even conferring a respectable status upon them. Through convoluted verbiage, destructive conduct is made benign and those who engage in it are relieved of a sense of personal agency. Laboratory studies reveal the disinhibitory power of euphemistic language (Diener et al., 1975). Adults behave much more aggressively when assaulting a person is given a sanitized label than when it is called aggression.

In an insightful analysis of the language of nonresponsibility, Gambino (1973) identifies the different varieties of euphemisms. One form, palliative expressions, is widely used to make the reprehensible respectable. Through the power of hygienic words, even killing a human being loses much of its repugnancy. Soldiers "waste" people rather than kill them, intelligence operatives "terminate (them) with extreme prejudice" (Safire, 1979). When mercenaries speak of "fulfilling a contract," murder is transformed by admirable words into the honorable discharge of duty. Terrorists label themselves as "freedom fighters." Bombing attacks become "clean, surgical strikes," invoking imagery of the restorative handicrafts of the operating room, and the civilians they kill are linguistically converted to "collateral damage" (Hilgartner, Bell, & O'Connor, 1982).

Sanitizing euphemisms, of course, perform heavy duty in less loathsome but unpleasant activities that people are called upon to do from time to time. In the language of some government agencies, people are not fired, they are "selected out," as though they were receiving preferential treatment. A corporate memo speaks not of laying people off work, but of "resizing our operations to the level of profitable market opportunities." In teaching business students how to lie in competitive transactions, the instructor speaks euphemistically of "strategic misrepresentation" (Safire, 1979). The television industry produces and markets some of the most brutal forms of human cruelty under the sanitized labels of "action and adventure" programming (Baldwin & Lewis, 1972). The acid rain that is killing our lakes and forests loses much of its acidity in its euphemistic form as "atmospheric deposition of anthropogenically derived acidic substances" (Hechinger, 1985). The nuclear power industry has created its own specialized set of euphemisms for the injurious effects of nuclear mishaps; an explosion becomes an "energetic disassembly," a reactor accident is a "normal aberration," and plutonium contamination is merely "infiltration" (San Francisco Chronicle, 1979a).

The agentless passive form serves as a linguistic device for creating the appearance that culpable acts are the work of nameless forces, rather than people (Bolinger, 1982). It is as though people are moved mechanically but are not really the agents of their own acts. Even inanimate objects are sometimes invested with agentive properties: "The telephone pole was approaching. I was attempting to swerve out of its way when it struck my front end" (San Francisco Chronicle," 1979b). Gambino further documents how the specialized jargon of a legitimate enterprise can be misused to lend an aura of respectability to an illegitimate one. In the Watergate vocabulary criminal conspiracy became a "game plan," and the conspirators were "team players" calling for the qualities and behavior befitting the best sportsmen. The disinhibitory power of language can be boosted further by colorful metaphors that change the nature of culpable activities.

Advantageous Comparison

Whenever events occur or are presented contiguously, the first one colors how the second one is perceived and judged. By exploiting the contrast principle, moral judgments of conduct can be influenced by expedient structuring of what it is compared against. Thus, self-deplored acts can be made righteous by contrasting them with flagrant inhumanities. The more outrageous the comparison practices, the more likely it is that one's own destructive conduct will appear trifling or even benevolent. Promoters of the Vietnamese war and their supporters, for example, minimized the slaying of countless people as a way of checking massive communist enslavement. Given the trifling comparison, perpetrators of warfare remained unperturbed by the fact that the intended beneficiaries were being killed at an alarming rate. Domestic protesters, on the other hand, characterized their own violence against educational and political institutions as trifling, or even laudable, by comparing it with the carnage perpetrated by their country's military forces in foreign lands. Terrorists minimize their slayings as the only defensive weapon they have to curb the widespread cruelties inflicted on their people. In the eyes of their supporters, risky attacks directed at the apparatus of oppression are acts of selflessness and martyrdom. Those who are the objects of terrorist attacks, in turn, characterize their retaliatory violence as trifling, or even laudable, by comparing them with carnage and terror perpetrated by terrorists. In social conflicts, injurious behavior usually escalates with each side lauding its own behavior but morally condemning that of their adversaries as heinous.

Historical advantageous comparisons are also invoked as justifications of violence. Advocates of terrorist tactics are quick to note that the democracies of England, France, and the United States were born of violence against oppressive rule. A former director of the CIA effectively deflected, by favorable comparison, embarrassing questions about the morality and legality of CIA-directed covert operations designed to overthrow of an authoritarian regime. He explained that French covert operations and military supplies greatly aided the overthrow of oppressive British rule during the War of Independence, thereby creating the modern model of democracy for other subjugated people to emulate.

Social comparison is similarly used to show that the social labeling of acts may depend more on the ideological allegiances of the labelers than on the acts themselves. Airline hijackings were applauded as heroic deeds when East Europeans and Cubans initiated this practice, but condemned as terrorist acts when the airlines of Western nations and friendly countries were commandeered. The degree of psychopathology ascribed to hijackers varied depending on the direction of the rerouted flights. Moral condemnations of politically motivated terrorism are easily blunted by social comparison because, in international contests for political power, it is hard to find nations that categorically condemn terrorism. Rather, they usually back some terrorists and oppose others.

Cognitive restructuring of behavior through moral justifications and palliative characterizations is the most effective psychological mechanism for disengagement of moral self-sanctions. This is because moral restructuring not only eliminates self-deterrents but engages self-approval in the service of destructive exploits. What was once morally condemnable becomes a source of self-valuation. After destructive means become invested with high moral purpose, functionaries work hard to become proficient at them and take pride in their destructive accomplishments.

Displacement of Responsibility

Self-sanctions are activated most strongly when personal agency for detrimental effects is unambiguous. Another set of dissociative practices operates by obscuring or distorting the relationship between actions and the effects they cause. People will behave in ways they normally repudiate if a legitimate authority accepts responsibility for the consequences of the conduct (Diener et al., 1975; Milgram, 1974). Under conditions of displaced responsibility, people view their actions as springing from the dictates of authorities rather than their being personally responsible for them. Since they are not the actual agent of their actions, they are spared self-prohibiting reactions. Displacement of responsibility not only weakens restraints over one's own detrimental actions but diminishes social concern over the well-being of those mistreated by others (Tilker, 1970).

Most of the research on attributional analysis of moral judgment is concerned with whether people view their behavior as determined by external circumstances or hold themselves responsible for it (Ross & DiTecco, 1975; Rule & Nesdale, 1976). Perceptions of causal responsibility are reduced if the harmful consequences of actions are viewed as unintended, unforeseeable, or the actions arose from the dictates of the situation. Within the attributional framework, these factors are usually studied as mitigators of moral judgment rather than as disengagers of moral self-sanctions.

Exemption from self-devaluation for heinous deeds by displacement of responsibility has been most gruesomely revealed in socially sanctioned mass executions. Nazi prison commandants and their staffs divested themselves of personal responsibility for their unprecedented inhumanities (Andrus, 1969). They were simply carrying out orders. Impersonal obedience to horrific orders was similarly evident in military atrocities, such as the My Lai massacre (Kelman, 1973). In an effort to deter institutionally sanctioned atrocities, the Nuremberg Accords were established declaring that obedience to inhumane orders, even from the highest authorities, does not relieve subordinates of the responsibility of their actions. However, since victors are disinclined to try themselves as criminals, such decrees have limited deterrence without an international judiciary system empowered to impose penalties on victors and losers alike.

In formal studies of disengagement of self-sanctions through displacement of responsibility, authorities explicitly authorize injurious actions and hold themselves fully accountable for the harm caused by the activity. However, in the sanctioning practices of everyday life responsibility for detrimental conduct is rarely assumed so explicitly, because only obtuse authorities would leave themselves accusable of authorizing heinous acts. They are concerned not only with adverse social consequences to themselves should advocated courses of action miscarry, but with the loss of self-regard for sanctioning human atrocities in ways that leave blood on their hands. Therefore, authorities usually invite and support detrimental conduct in insidious ways that minimize personal responsibility for what is happening. Moreover, the intended purpose of sanctioned destructiveness is usually disguised so that neither issuers nor perpetrators regard their actions as censurable. When reproachful practices are publicized, they are officially dismissed as only isolated incidents arising through misunderstanding of what, in fact, had been authorized.

Kramer (1989) describes the great lengths to which Shi'ite clerics go to provide moral justifications for violent acts that seem to breach Islamic law, such as suicidal bombings and hostage-taking. These efforts are designed not only to persuade themselves of the morality of their actions but to preserve their integrity in the eyes of other nations. The religious code

permits neither suicide nor terrorizing innocent people. On the one hand, the clerics justify such acts by invoking situational imperatives and utilitarian reasons, namely that tyrannical circumstances drive oppressed people to unconventional means to route aggressors who wield massive destructive power. On the other hand, they reconstrue terrorist acts as conventional means in which dying in a suicidal bombing for a moral cause is no different than dying at the hands of an enemy soldier. Hostages simply get relabelled as spies. When the linguistic solution defies credibility, personal moral responsibility is disengaged by construing terroristic acts as dictated by their foe's tyranny. Because of the shaky moral logic and disputable reconstruals, clerics sanction terrorism by indirection, they vindicate successful ventures retrospectively, and they disclaim endorsing terroristic operations beforehand.

States sponsor terrorist operations through disguised roundabout routes that make it difficult to pin the blame on them. Moreover, the intended purpose of sanctioned destructiveness is usually linguistically disguised so that neither issuers nor perpetrators regard the activity as censurable. When culpable practices gain public attention, they are officially dismissed as only isolated incidents arising through misunderstanding of what, in fact, had been authorized. Efforts are made to limit the blame to subordinates who are portrayed as misguided or overzealous. Displacement of responsibility also operates in situations in which hostages are taken. Terrorists warn officials of targeted regimes that if they take retaliatory action they will be held accountable for the lives of the hostages. At different steps in negotiations for their release, terrorists continue to displace the responsibility for the safety of hostages on the reactions of the regime. If the captivity drags on, terrorists blame the suffering and injuries they inflict on the hostages on the regime for failing to make what they regard as warranted concessions to right social wrongs.

A number of social factors affect the ease with which responsibility for one's actions can be surrendered to others. High justification and social consensus about the morality of an enterprise aid in the relinquishment of personal control. The legitimacy of the authorizers is another important determinant. As can be seen in Figure 2, the greater the legitimation and closeness of the authority issuing injurious commands, the higher is the level of obedience. The higher the authorities, the more legitimacy, respect, and coercive power they command, and the more amenable are people to defer to them. Modeled disobedience, which challenges the legitimacy of the activities, if not the authorizers themselves, reduces the willingness of observers to carry out the actions called for by the orders of a superior (Meeus & Raaijmakers, 1986; Milgram, 1974; Powers & Geen, 1972). It is difficult to continue to disown personal agency in the face of evident harm following directly from one's actions. People are, therefore, less willing to obey authoritarian orders for injurious behavior when they see firsthand how they are hurting others (Milgram, 1974; Tilker, 1970).

Obedient functionaries do not cast off all responsibility for their behavior as though they were mindless extensions of others. If this were the case, they would act like automatons, only when told to. In fact, they are much more conscientious and self-directed in the performance of their duties. It requires a strong sense of responsibility to be a good functionary. In situations involving obedience to authority, people carry out orders partly to honor the obligations they have undertaken (Mantell & Panzarella, 1976). One must, therefore, distinguish between two levels of responsibility--duty to one's superiors and accountability for the effects of one's actions. The self system operates most efficiently in the service of authority when followers assume personal responsibility for being dutiful executors while relinquishing personal responsibility for the harm caused by their behavior. Followers who disowned responsibility without being bound by a sense of duty would be quite unreliable.

Diffusion of Responsibility

The deterrent power of self-sanctions is weakened when the link between conduct and its consequences is obscured by diffusing responsibility for culpable behavior. This is achieved in several ways. Responsibility can be diffused by division of labor. Most enterprises require the services of many people, each performing fragmentary jobs that seem harmless in themselves. The fractional contribution is easily isolated from the eventual function, especially when participants exercise little personal judgment in carrying out a subfunction that is related by remote, complex links to the end result. After activities become routinized into programmed subfunctions, attention shifts from the import of what one is doing to the details of one's fractional job (Kelman, 1973).

Group decision making is another common bureaucratic practice that enables otherwise considerate people to behave inhumanely, because no single individual feels responsible for policies arrived at collectively. Where everyone is responsible no one is really responsible. Social organizations go to great lengths to devise sophisticated mechanisms for obscuring responsibility for decisions that will affect others adversely. Collective action is still another diffusion expedient for weakening self-restraints. Any harm done by a group can always be ascribed, in large part, to the behavior of other members. People, therefore, act more harshly when responsibility is obfuscated by a collective instrumentality than when they hold themselves personally accountable for what they do (Bandura, Underwood, & Fromson, 1975; Diener, 1977; Zimbardo, 1969). Figure 3 shows the level of punitiveness of individuals given punitive power over others under conditions in which the severity of their sanctions was determined personally or jointly by a group (Bandura, Underwood, & Fromson, 1975).

This is not to say that shared responsibility has no legitimate purpose. In efforts to serve diverse constituencies, actions beneficial to one group may be detrimental to another. Because differences are not always reconcilable, someone will inevitably be hurt, whatever is done. Those who must make tough decisions and perform society's nasty duties are at least spared some personal distress by sharing the accountability. They could not function for long if they had to bear the full load alone.

People often behave in harmful ways, not because responsibility is diffused by formal organizational arrangements, but because they all routinely engage in activities that contribute to negative effects. They pollute the air they breathe with their automobiles and degrade their environment to produce the vast amounts of energy and products they consume. As a result of collective action, good environmentalists can also be good polluters by blaming others for degrading the environment. The more detrimental the collectively produced effects, the less people feel personally responsible for them (Shippee & Christian, 1978).

Disregard or Distortion of Consequences

Additional ways of weakening self-deterring reactions operate through disregard or misrepresentation of the consequences of action. When people choose to pursue activities harmful to others for personal gain, or because of social inducements, they avoid facing the harm they cause or they minimize it. They readily recall prior information given them about the potential benefits of the behavior but are less able to remember its harmful effects (Brock & Buss, 1962, 1964). People are especially prone to minimize injurious effects when they act alone and, thus, cannot easily escape responsibility (Mynatt & Herman, 1975). In addition to selective inattention and cognitive distortion of effects, the misrepresentation may involve active efforts to

discredit evidence of the harm they cause. As long as the detrimental results of one's conduct are ignored, minimized, distorted, or disbelieved, there is little reason for self-censure to be activated.

It is relatively easy to hurt others when their suffering is not visible and when causal actions are physically and temporally remote from their effects. Our death technologies have become highly lethal and depersonalized. Mechanized weapon systems and explosive devices in which many people can be put to death by destructive forces unleashed remotely, illustrates such depersonalized action. Even high personal responsibility is a weak restrainer when aggressors do not know the harm they inflict on their victims (Tilker, 1970). In contrast, when people can see and hear the suffering they cause, vicariously aroused distress and self-censure serve as self-restraining influences. For example, in his studies of commanded aggression, Milgram (1974) obtained diminishing obedience as the victims' pain became more evident and personalized (Figure 4).

Most organizations involve hierarchical chains of command in which superiors formulate plans and intermediaries transmit them to executors, who then carry them out. The farther removed individuals are from the end results, the weaker is the restraining power of the foreseeable destructive effects. Kilham and Mann (1974) set forth the view that the disengagement of personal control is easiest for the intermediaries in a hierarchical system--they neither bear responsibility for major decisions nor are they a party to their execution. In performing the transmitter role they model dutiful behavior and further legitimize their superiors and their social policies and practices. Consistent with these speculations, intermediaries are much more obedient to destructive commands than are those who have to carry them out and face the results (Kilham & Mann, 1974).

Dehumanization

The final set of disengagement practices operates on the recipients of detrimental acts. The strength of self-evaluative reactions to injurious conduct partly depends on how the perpetrators view the people toward whom the behavior is directed. To perceive another as human activates empathetic or vicarious emotional reactions through perceived similarity (Bandura, 1989b). The joys and suffering of similar persons are more vicariously arousing than are those of strangers or individuals who have been divested of human qualities. Personalizing the injurious effects experienced by others also makes their suffering much more salient. It is difficult to mistreat humanized persons without risking personal distress and self-censure. Vicarious emotional activation is cognitively mediated rather than automatically elicited by the experiences of others. Ascriptions of insensateness to victims weakens vicarious self-arousal of distress to their suffering. People are unmoved by "unfeeling" recipients of maltreatment. Subhumans are not only regarded as lacking sensitivities, but as being influenceable only by severe methods.

Self-sanctions against cruel conduct can be disengaged or blunted by divesting people of human qualities. Once dehumanized, they are no longer viewed as persons with feelings, hopes, and concerns but as subhuman objects. They are portrayed as mindless "savages," "gooks," "satanic fiends," and the other despicable wretches. If dispossessing antagonists of humanness does not blunt self-reproof, it can be eliminated by attributing bestial qualities to them. They become "degenerates," "pigs," and other bestial creatures. It is easier to brutalize victims when they are referred to as "worms" (Gibson & Haritos-Fatouros, 1986). The process of dehumanization is an essential ingredient in the perpetration of inhumanities. A Nazi camp

commandant chillingly explained that the extreme lengths to which they went to degrade victims they were going to kill anyway was not a matter of purposeless cruelty (Levi, 1987). Rather, the victims had to be degraded to the point of subhuman objects so that those who operated the gas chambers would be less burdened by distress. Over the years slaves, women, manual laborers, and religious and racial minorities have been treated as chattel or as subhuman objects (Ball-Rokeach, 1972).

When persons are given punitive power, they treat dehumanized individuals much more punitively than those who have been invested with human qualities (Figure 5). Dehumanization fosters different self-exonerative patterns of thought (Bandura, Underwood, & Fromson, 1975). People seldom condemn punitive conduct and they create justifications for it when they direct it toward individuals who have been deprived of their humanness. However, people strongly disapprove of punitive actions and rarely excuse their use toward individuals depicted in humanized terms.

When several disengagement factors are combined, they potentiate each other rather than simply produce additive effects. Thus, combining diffused responsibility with dehumanization greatly escalates the level of punitiveness, whereas personalization of responsibility, along with humanization, have a powerful self-deterring effect (Figure 6).

Many conditions of contemporary life are conducive to impersonalization and dehumanization (Bernard, Ottenberg, & Redl, 1965). Bureaucratization, automation, urbanization, and high geographical mobility lead people to relate to each other in anonymous, impersonal ways. In addition, social practices that divide people into ingroup and outgroup members produce human estrangement that fosters dehumanization. Strangers can be more easily cast as insensate than can personal acquaintances.

Under certain conditions, the exercise of institutional power changes the users in ways that are conducive to dehumanization. This happens most often when persons in positions of authority have coercive power over others and adequate safeguards for constraining the behavior of powerholders are lacking. Powerholders come to devalue those over whom they wield control (Kipnis, 1974). In a simulated prison experiment (Haney, Banks, & Zimbardo, 1973), even college students, who had been randomly chosen to serve as either inmates or guards given unilateral power, began to treat their charges in degrading, tyrannical ways as guards. Thus, role assignment that authorizes use of coercive power overrode personal characteristics in promoting punitive conduct. Systematic tests of relative influences similarly show that social influences conducive to punitiveness exert considerably greater sway over aggressive conduct than do people's personal characteristics (Larsen, Coleman, Forges, & Johnson, 1971).

The overall findings from research on the different mechanisms of moral disengagement corroborate the historical chronicle of human atrocities: It requires conducive social conditions rather than monstrous people to produce heinous deeds. Given appropriate social conditions, decent, ordinary people can be led to do extraordinarily cruel things.

Power of Humanization

Psychological research tends to focus extensively on how easy it is to bring out the worst in people through dehumanization and other self-exonerative means. The sensational negative findings receive the greatest attention. Thus, for example, the aspect of Milgram's research on obedient aggression that is widely cited is the evidence that good people can be talked into performing cruel deeds. However, to get people to carry out punitive acts, the overseer had to be physically present, repeatedly ordering them to act cruelly as they voiced their concerns and

objections. Orders to escalate punitiveness to more intense levels are largely ignored or subverted when remotely issued by verbal command. As Helm and Morelli (1979) note, this is hardly an example of blind obedience triggered by an authoritative mandate. Moreover, what is rarely noted, is the equally striking evidence that most people steadfastly refuse to behave punitively, even in response to strong authoritarian commands, if the situation is personalized by having them see the victim or requiring them to inflict pain directly rather than remotely.

The emphasis on obedient aggression is understandable considering the prevalence and harmfulness of people's inhumanities to one another. However, of considerable theoretical and social significance is the power of humanization to counteract cruel conduct. Studies examining this process reveal that it is difficult for individuals to behave cruelly toward others when they are humanized or even personalized a bit (Bandura, Underwood, & Fromson, 1975). Even under conditions in which punitive sanctions are the only means available and they are highly functional in producing desired results, those exercising that power cannot get themselves to behave punitively toward humanized individuals (Figure 7). The affirmation of common humanity can bring out the best in others. In contrast, when punitive sanctions are dysfunctional because they usually fail to produce results, punitiveness is precipitously escalated toward dehumanized individuals. The failure of degraded individuals to change in response to punitive treatment is taken as further evidence of their culpability that justifies intensified punitiveness toward them.

The moderating influence of humanization is strikingly revealed in situations involving great threat of violence. Most abductors find it difficult to harm their hostages after they have gotten to know them personally. With growing acquaintance, it becomes increasingly difficult to take a human life cold-bloodedly. Humanization, of course, is a two-way process. Captives may also develop some sympathy for their captors as they get to know them. This phenomenon is graphically illustrated in a Stockholm incident in which people who were held hostage for six days by bank robbers began to sympathize with their criminal captors and sided with them against the police (Lang, 1974). This hostage incident included several features that are especially conducive to development of human affinity (Bandura, 1989a). Most people support the death penalty in the abstract, but the more they know about particular cases, the less they favor executing them (Ellsworth, 1978). As Ellsworth explains it, in the absence of personal information people conjure up an image of the most heinous criminal, an image that disposes them to favor punishment by death.

Attribution of Blame

Imputing blame to one's antagonists or to environmental circumstances is still another expedient that can serve self-exonerative purposes. In this process, people view themselves as faultless victims and their detrimental conduct as compelled by forcible provocation. Detrimental interactions usually involve a series of reciprocally escalative actions, in which the antagonists are rarely faultless. One can always select from the chain of events an instance of the adversary's defensive behavior and consider it as the original instigation. Injurious conduct thus becomes a justifiable defensive reaction to belligerent provocations. Those who are victimized are not entirely faultless because, by their behavior, they usually contribute at least partly to their own plight. Victims can, therefore, be blamed for bringing suffering on themselves. Self-exoneration is similarly achievable by viewing one's destructive conduct as forced by circumstances rather than as a personal decision. By blaming others or circumstances, not only are one's own actions excusable but one can even feel self-righteous in the process.

Observers of victimization can be disinhibited in much the same way as perpetrators are by the tendency to infer culpability from misfortune. Seeing victims suffer maltreatment for which they are held partly responsible leads observers to derogate them (Lerner & Miller, 1978). The devaluation and indignation aroused by ascribed culpability, in turn, provides moral justification for even greater maltreatment. That attribution of blame can give rise to devaluation and moral justification illustrates how the various disengagement mechanisms are often interrelated and work together in weakening internal control.

Imputing blame operates as a prominent disengagement mechanism in sexually assaultive behavior toward women. Rapists and males who acknowledge a proclivity to rape subscribe to myths about rape embodying the various mechanisms by which moral self-censure can be disengaged (Feild, 1978; Malamuth, 1981). These beliefs hold rape victims responsible for their own victimization because they have supposedly invited rape by sexually provocative appearance and behavior and by resisting sexual assault only weakly. Men blame rape victims more than women do. Trivialization and distortion of consequences to rape victims is another disengagement mechanism that comes into play. Men who are inclined to assault sexually believe that women secretly enjoy being raped. Anticipatory self-censure is eliminated when the traumatic effects of sexual assault are twisted into pleasurable ones for the victim. Such self-disinhibiting patterns of thinking predict proclivity to rape, whereas sexual attitudes, frustration, and quality of sex life do not (Briere & Malamuth, 1983).

Cross-cultural studies reveal that aggressive sexuality is an expression of the cultural ideology of male dominancy (Sanday, 1981). Rape is prevalent in societies where violence is a way of life, male supremacy reigns, aggressive sexuality is valued as a sign of manliness, and women are treated as property. Rape is rare in societies that repudiate interpersonal aggression, endorse sexual equality, and treat women respectfully. Cultural ideologies that attach prestige to male dominance and aggressive sexuality weaken self-censure for sexual abuse of women. Cultural practices that belittle the role of women and a flourishing pornography industry that dehumanizes them contribute further to the self-disinhibition of aggression toward women (Malamuth & Donnerstein, 1984; Zillman & Bryant, 1984).

Justified abuse can have more devastating human consequences than acknowledged cruelty. Maltreatment that is not clothed in righteousness makes the perpetrator rather than the victim blameworthy. But when blame is convincingly ascribed to victims they may eventually come to believe the degrading characterizations of themselves (Hallie, 1971). Moreover, ascriptions of blame are usually accompanied by discriminatory social practices that create the very failings that serve as excuses for maltreatment. Vindicated inhumanity is, thus, more likely to instill self-contempt in victims than inhumanity that does not attempt to justify itself.

Gradualistic Moral Disengagment

The aforementioned disengagement devices will not instantaneously transform a considerate person into an unprincipled, callous one. Rather, the change is usually achieved through gradual diminution of self-sanctions in which people may not fully recognize the changes they are undergoing. Initially, individuals are prompted to perform questionable acts that they can tolerate with little self-censure. After their discomfort and self-reproof have been diminished through repeated performances, the level of reprehensibility progressively increases until eventually acts originally regarded as abhorrent can be performed without much distress. Escalative self-disinhibition is accelerated if inhumane behavior is construed as serving moral

purposes and the people being subjected to maltreatment are divested of human qualities (Bandura, Underwood, & Fromson, 1975; Gibson & Haritos-Fatouros, 1986).

Analyses of moral disengagement mechanisms usually draw heavily on examples from military and political violence. This tends to convey the impression that selective disengagement of self-sanctions occurs only under extraordinary circumstances. Quite the contrary. Such mechanisms operate in everyday situations in which decent people routinely perform activities having injurious human effects to further their own interests or for profit. Self-exonerations are needed to neutralize self-sanctions and to preserve self-esteem. For example, institutionalized discrimination, a practice which takes a heavy toll on its victims, requires social justification, attributions of blame, dehumanization, impersonalized agencies to carry it out, and inattention to the injurious effects it causes. Different industries, each with its public-spirited vindications, may cause harmful effects on a large scale, either by the nature of their products or the environmental contaminants they produce.

Disengagement of Self-Sanctions and Self-Deception

The issue arises as to whether disengagement of self-sanctions involves self-deception. Because of the incompatibility of being simultaneously a deceiver and the one deceived, literal self-deception cannot exist (Bok, 1980; Champlin, 1977; Haight, 1980). It is logically impossible to deceive oneself into believing something, while simultaneously knowing it to be false. Efforts to resolve the paradox of how one can be the agent and the object of deception at the same time have met with little success (Bandura, 1986). These attempts usually involve creating split selves and rendering one of them unconscious. However, the self-splitting solution annihilates such a phenomenon rather than explains it. The split-self conceptions fail to specify how a conscious self can lie to an unconscious self without some awareness of what the other self believes. The deceiving self has to be aware of what the deceived self believes in order to know how to concoct the deceptions. Different levels of awareness are sometimes proposed as another possible solution to the paradox. It is said that "deep down" people really know what they believe. This attempt to reacquaint the split selves only reinstates the paradox of how one can be the deceiver and the one deceived at the same time. People, of course, often misconstrue events, they lead themselves astray by their biases and misbeliefs, and they act uninformedly. However, to be misdirected by one's beliefs or ignorance does not mean that one is lying to oneself.

People's values and beliefs affect what information they seek and how they interpret what they see and hear. Most strive to maintain or enhance their positive self-regard. Therefore, they do not go looking for evidence of their culpability or adverse effects of their actions. Selective self-exposure and distorted interpretations of events, which confirm and strengthen preexisting beliefs, reflect biased self-persuasion, not a case of self-deception. To be misdirected by one's preconceptions does not mean that one is lying to oneself.

Self-deception is often invoked when people choose to ignore possibly countervailing evidence. It could be argued that they must believe its validity in order to avoid it, otherwise they would not know what to shun. This is not necessarily so. Staunch believers often choose not to waste their time scrutinizing opposing arguments or evidence because they are already convinced of their fallacy. When confronted with evidence that disputes their beliefs, they question its credibility, dismiss its relevance, or twist it to fit their views. However, if the evidence is compellingly persuasive, they alter their original beliefs to accommodate the discrepant evidence.

People may harbor some doubts concerning their beliefs but avoid seeking certain evidence because they have an inkling the evidence might disconfirm what they wish to believe. Indeed, they may engage in all kinds of maneuvers, both in thought and in action, to avoid finding out the actual state of affairs. Suspecting something is not the same as knowing it to be true. Inklings can always be discounted as possibly being ill-founded. As long as one does not find out the truth, what one believes is not personally known to be false. Both Haight (1980) and Fingarette (1969) give considerable attention to processes whereby people avoid painful or incriminating truth by either not taking actions that would reveal it or not spelling out fully what they are doing or undergoing that would make it known. They act in ways that keep themselves intentionally uninformed. They do not go looking for evidence of their culpability or the harmful effects of their actions. Obvious questions that would reveal unwelcome information remain unasked so they do not find out what they do not want to know. Implicit agreements and social arrangements are created that leave the foreseeable unforeseen and the knowable unknown.

In addition to contending with their own self-censure, people are concerned about how they appear in the eyes of others when they engage in conduct that is morally suspect. This adds a social evaluative factor to the process. Haight (1980) argues that, in much of what is called self-deception, persons are aware of the reality they are trying to deny, but they create the public appearance that they are deceiving themselves. Others are thus left uncertain about how to judge and treat persons who seem to be sincerely deluding themselves in efforts to avoid an unpleasant truth. The public pretense is designed to head off social reproof. When people are caught up in the same painful predicament, the result may be a lot of collective public pretense.

The mechanisms of moral disengagement involve cognitive and social machinations but not literal self-deception. In moral justification, for example, people may be misled by those they trust into believing that destructive means are morally right because the means will check the human suffering of tyranny. The persuasive depictions of the perils and benefits may be accurate, exaggerated, or just pious rhetoric masking less honorable purposes. The same persuasory process applies to weakening of self-censure by dehumanizing and blaming adversaries. In the rhetoric of conflict, opinion shapers ascribe to their foes irrationalities, barbarities, and culpabilities that color public beliefs (Ivie, 1980). In these different instances, those who have been persuaded are not lying to themselves. The misleaders and the misled are different persons. When the misleaders are themselves operating under erroneous beliefs, the views they voice are not intentional deceptions. They seek to persuade others into believing what they themselves believe. In social deception, public declarations by others may belie their private beliefs, which are concealed from those being deceived.

In reduction of self-censure by ignoring, minimizing, or misconstruing the deleterious effects of their actions, people lack the evidence to disbelieve what they already believe. The issue of self-dishonesty does not arise as long as one remains uninformed or misinformed about the outcomes of one's actions. When disengagement of self-censure is promoted by diffused and displaced responsibility, functionaries carry out the orders of superiors and often perform only a small subfunction, at that. Such arrangements enable people to think of themselves merely as subordinate instruments, rather than as agents, of the entire enterprise. If they regard themselves as cogs in the intricate social machinery, they have little reason to believe otherwise concerning their initiatory power. This is not to say that disengagement of self-censure operates flawlessly. If serious disbeliefs arise, especially at the point of moral justification, people cannot get themselves to behave inhumanely, and if they do, they pay the price of self-contempt.

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Figure Captions

Figure 1. Mechanisms through which internal control is selectively activated or disengaged from reprehensible conduct at different points in the regulatory process (Bandura, 1986).

Figure 2. Percentage of people fully obedient to injurious commands as a function of the legitimation and closeness of the authority issuing the commands (plotted from data by Milgram, 1974).

Figure 3. Level of punitiveness by individuals under conditions in which severity of their punitiveness was determined personally or jointly by a group. Occasions represent successive times at which punitive sanctions could be applied (Bandura, Underwood, & Fromson, 1975).

Figure 4. Percentage of people fully obedient to injurious commands issued by an authority as the victim's suffering becomes more evident and personalized (plotted from data by Milgram, 1974).

Figure 5. Level of punitiveness on repeated occasions toward people characterized in humanized terms, not personalized with any characterization (neutral), or portrayed in dehumanized terms (Bandura, Underwood, & Fromson, 1975).

Figure 6. Level of punitiveness as a function of diffusion of responsibility and dehumanization of the recipients (Bandura, Underwood, & Fromson, 1975).

Figure 7. Level of punitiveness on repeated occasions as a result of dehumanization and the effectiveness of punitive actions. Under the functional condition, punishment consistently produced good results; under the dysfunctional condition, punishment usually failed to achieve desired results (Bandura, Underwood, & Fromson, 1975).

Footnote

Preparation of this chapter was facilitated by Public Health Research Grant MH-5162-25 from the National Institute of Mental Health. Some sections of this article include revised and expanded material from the book, *Social Foundations of Thought and Action: A Social Cognitive Theory*, 1986, Prentice-Hall.