# The Moral Reasoning of U.S. Evangelical and Mainline Protestant Children, Adolescents, and Adults: A Cultural–Developmental Study

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This cultural–developmental interview study examined moral reasoning in relation to religious culture (evangelical, mainline Protestants), age (children, adolescents, adults), and moral issue (public, private; $N = 120$). Compared to adolescents and adults, children used more Ethic of Autonomy and less Ethic of Community reasoning. With age, differences between religious cultures became pronounced. Mainline adults invoked an Ethic of Divinity for private issues. Evangelical adolescents and adults used this ethic frequently, but more for public than private issues. These and other findings indicate that evangelical and mainline Protestants diverge on what should be society's moral lingua franca, and cast new and nuanced light on America's "culture wars." Results furthermore highlight comodulation of development and culture that requires life course research on moral reasoning.

The area of moral development has in recent decades seen recurrent calls for the inclusion of more than one kind of moral reasoning (e.g., Colby & Damon, 1992; Edwards, 1997; Gilligan, 1982; Miller, Bersoff, & Harwood, 1990; Padilla-Walker & Carlo, 2014; Shweder, 1990; Trommsdorff, 2012), in order to move beyond earlier conceptualizations of morality as a unitary structure (Kohlberg, 1958, 1984) or domain (Turiel, 1975, 1983). The argument for plurality has also been put forth for other fundamental aspects of human psychology, including intelligence (Sternberg, 1985), creativity (Mourgues, Barbot, Tan, & Grigorenko, 2015), and self (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Typically, the arguments have been inspired by consideration of culturally diverse individuals and groups. What has so far received less attention is the development, from childhood into adulthood, of these psychological phenomena, and how developmental patterns may vary among cultures. This is because it takes time to build knowledge about new constructs, such as "naturalistic intelligence," "interdependent self," and "Ethic of Divinity." It also takes new ways of thinking to theoretically capture the development of a pluralistic phenomenon.

Nonetheless, an emerging focus in moral psychology research is how the development of diverse kinds of reasoning occurs across the life course, and the extent to which such developmental trajectories vary across cultures. Obtaining this knowledge is important in order to describe, explain, and predict moral development in a manner that is valid both across and within cultures. The cultural–developmental approach to moral psychology has been proposed as a way to conceptualize the development of three kinds of moral reasoning—Ethics of Autonomy, Community, and Divinity—across different cultures (Jensen, 2008, 2011, 2015a).

The aim of this study was to test this approach. The study included children, adolescents, and adults from evangelical and mainline Protestant communities in the United States. The study extended previous research in three ways. First, research on religious communities divided along so-called "culture wars" lines has only included adults, whereas the present study added a developmental perspective by also including children and adolescents. Second, the study expanded on previous work by addressing not only *public* moral issues where judgments are applied to people in general, but also *private* issues where judgments are made for oneself about one's moral experiences. Third, the main focus of analyses was on the degree to which participants

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reasoned in terms of each of the three Ethics of Autonomy, Community, and Divinity. Unlike other studies, however, this one also examined use of specific types of reasons within each ethic (such as rights, self's psychological well-being, and fairness within the Ethic of Autonomy).

We start with a review of the cultural–developmental approach. This is followed by a description of America's culture wars, and the differentiation between public and private spheres of morality. Throughout, we list religious communities and cultural groups in alphabetical order when possible in order to avoid any suggestion of a preference on our part or the presumption of a power differential. There is a tendency for more powerful cultural groups to be mentioned first (Jensen, 2015b).

### The Cultural–Developmental Approach

Based on a synthesis of findings from different research traditions, the cultural–developmental approach lays out developmental trajectories for the three Ethics of Autonomy, Community, and Divinity (Jensen, 2008). In turn, as explained below, these trajectories are conceptualized as "templates" that accommodate cultural differences. The trajectories are flexible rather than fixed.

The three ethics involve different, albeit not incompatible, conceptions of a moral agent. The Ethic of Autonomy involves a focus on the moral agent as an individual. Accordingly, specific types of moral reasons within this ethic include the interests, well-being, and rights of individuals (self or other), and fairness between individuals. The Ethic of Community focuses on persons as members of social groups, with attendant reasons such as duty to others, and concern with the customs, interests, and welfare of groups. The Ethic of Divinity focuses on moral agents as spiritual or religious entities, and reasons encompass god's authority, natural law, and spiritual purity (Shweder, 1990; Shweder, Much, Mahapatra, & Park, 1997).

Research has shown the presence of the three ethics among notably diverse age and cultural groups (e.g., Arnett, Ramos, & Jensen, 2001; Jensen, 1998; Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2015; Rozin, Lowery, Imada, & Haidt, 1999; Vainio, 2015; Vasquez, Keltner, Ebenbach, & Banaszynski, 2001). Surveys have also confirmed that moral reasons provided by a nationally representative sample of American adults (Padilla-Walker & Jensen, 2015), and by convenience samples of different ages from Brazil, Israel, Japan, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States differentiate into factors that fit the three ethics (Guerra & Giner-Sorolla, 2010, 2015).

The cultural–developmental approach describes moral development in terms of changes and consistencies in the *degree* of use of the three ethics over the life course. It also speaks to the specific *types* of moral reasons used within an ethic (examples of types of reasons within each ethic can be seen in the first column of Table 3). Figure 1 shows the developmental trajectory templates for degree of use of each ethic (Jensen, 2008, p. 290).

The argument is that Ethic of Autonomy reasoning emerges early in childhood and the degree to which persons use this ethic stays relatively stable across adolescence and into adulthood. The specific types of Autonomy reasons that persons use are likely, however, to change with age. A substantial body of findings from diverse research traditions has shown that from early on, children in different cultures focus on harm to the self and the interests of the self (Colby, Kohlberg, Gibbs, & Lieberman, 1983; Walker, 1989), as well as the needs and interests of other individuals (Carlo, 2006; Gilligan, 1982; Warneken & Tomasello, 2006). As persons in different cultures grow into adolescence and adulthood, some consideration of the welfare of the self and other individuals remains (Eisenberg, Carlo, Murphy, & Van Court, 1995; Gilligan, 1982; Vasquez et al., 2001; Walker, Pitts, Hennig, & Matsuba, 1995). Adolescents and adults, however, also begin to speak of reasons such as individual rights and equity in a consistent manner—even if these do not prevail across cultures (Killen, 2002; Miller & Luthar, 1989; Walker, 1989; Zimba, 1994). As mentioned at the outset, the primary focus of this study is on the degree of use of the three ethics. Nonetheless, the above developmental findings from different research programs pertaining to specific types of Autonomy reasons will be tested with the present groups.
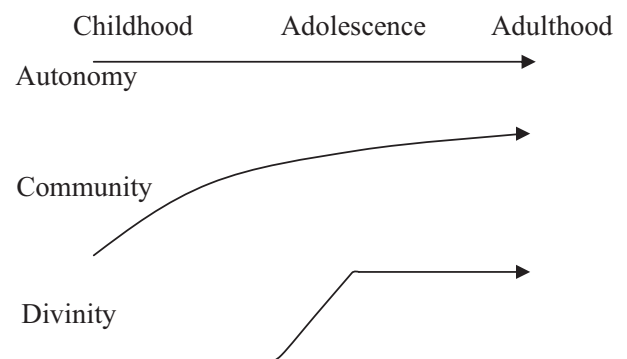


*Figure 1.* The Cultural–Developmental Template of Moral Reasoning.

The Ethic of Community, according to the cultural–developmental approach, rises throughout childhood and into adolescence and adulthood, both in degree of usage and the diversity of types of reasons. Findings across different research programs have consistently indicated that younger children in diverse cultures invoke Community reasons such as family interests and customs (Kohlberg, 1984; Miller et al., 1990; Olson & Spelke, 2008; Thompson, 2012). By late childhood and adolescence, Community reasons that pertain to social groups other than the family are added (Carlo, 2006; Whiting & Edwards, 1988), including friends and peers (Rubin, Bowker, McDonald, & Menzer, 2013), and authority figures in places such as school and work (Schlegel, 2011). Cross-sectional and longitudinal findings have shown that by late adolescence or adulthood even more Community reasons are added, such as considerations of societal organization and harmony (Eisenberg et al., 1995; Walker, 1989; Zimba, 1994). These developmental findings pertaining to types of Community reasons will also be tested here.

Turning to the Ethic of Divinity, for which less research on moral reasoning is available, the proposal is that its use will often be low among children but will rise in adolescence and become similar to adult use. Diverse religions have ceremonies in early or midadolescence that confer moral responsibility on adolescents and link that responsibility to knowledge of religious teachings. Research has also indicated that adults often explain their moral behaviors in terms of divinity concepts (Colby & Damon, 1992), including adults from relatively secular communities (McAdams et al., 2008). As yet, there has been insufficient research to speak to developmental changes in specific types of Divinity reasons used across the life course.

The cultural–developmental approach is not a one-size-fits-all model. Instead, the developmental trajectories in Figure 1 are proposed as templates that accommodate the different constellations of ethics held by culturally diverse peoples. For example, the model predicts a particularly early and strong emergence of the Ethic of Community within collectivistic cultures, as has been found among Taiwanese toddlers (Miller, Fung, Lin, Chen, & Boldt, 2012). It also predicts a temporary upsurge in Ethic of Autonomy reasoning among young people in their 20s who live in cultures that afford a prolonged period of individual identity explorations, and this cultural–developmental pattern has been found in research with diverse American emerging

adults (Arnett et al., 2001; Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2015). In sum, the point of emergence of each trajectory and their slopes of development depend on the prevalence of the three ethics within a culture and the hierarchy among them. Thus, the cultural–developmental approach provides developmental templates that need to be merged with knowledge of a culture in order to generate precise hypotheses.

It is important to note that within this approach "culture" is defined as symbolic and behavioral inheritances constructed and institutionalized by members of a community (Goodnow, 2010). Symbolic inheritances involve conceptions of persons, society, nature, and divinity. Behavioral inheritances consist of habitual familial and social practices. As scholars have long observed, cultural communities include heterogeneity among groups and individuals. Variation also exists between cultural communities, including on their degree of heterogeneity, intergroup contest, and change over time (Whiting & Edwards, 1988). Culture, then, is not synonymous with country or ethnicity but rather describes communities whose members share key beliefs and behaviors. This brings us to what the cultural–developmental approach predicts for moral development among evangelical and mainline Protestants in the United States, the two religious cultures examined here.

## America's Culture Wars: History and Moral Psychology

This study focused on members of Presbyterian congregations who self-identified as evangelical and mainline Protestants. Presbyterians have a history and organization that to some extent is distinct from other Protestant denominations. For example, they trace their founding to the work of John Calvin and John Knox in the 16th century, and their church governments include congregational sessions, regional Presbyteries, and the General Assembly. The selection of the two groups, however, was based on a long-standing division that has occurred between American evangelical and mainline Protestants across denominations. Furthermore, this split overlaps with a more recent and more general realignment of religious and secular groups within the United States that has become known as the "culture wars." We now turn to a description of the history and nature of these religious and cultural divisions, and how they guided hypotheses for the moral reasoning of the present groups.

A historical analysis found that the kind of bifurcation that has occurred between evangelical and

mainline Presbyterians is paradigmatic of what has happened within many other American Protestant denominations (Wuthnow, 1989). A variety of historical accounts indicate that signs of this split can be traced back to the 18th century in the United States, but that the rupture between the so-called "fundamentalist" and "modernist" movements in the late 19th and early 20th centuries was crucial in shaping the present division (Hunter, 1991; Marsden, 1980; Wuthnow, 1989). The fundamentalist movement involved, for example, the affirmation of the Bible as the inerrant word of God. The modernist movement, in contrast, called for a reinterpretation of Christianity based on scientific findings on matters such as evolution, and social problems arising from industrialization and urbanization.

The term "mainline Protestant," in fact, came into use in the 1920s in the context of debates between fundamentalists and modernists (Walsh, 2000). Mainline Protestant refers to churches such as the American Baptist Churches, the Episcopal Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Presbyterian Church (USA), and the United Methodist Church. These and other churches often collaborate on social and political issues through ecumenical organizations, such as the National Council of Churches (2014). On the basis of a nationwide survey of mainline Presbyterians, researchers in the early 1990s concluded that

> the fact that most modern Presbyterians would feel comfortable in Methodist, Lutheran, or United Church of Christ churches reflects a breakdown of denominational loyalty and identity, but it also reflects the realistic perception that most aspects of Presbyterian religious culture have become virtually indistinguishable from the culture of Methodism or the United Church of Christ. (Hoge, Johnson, & Luidens, 1994, p. 120)

Mainline Protestant denominations, in the course of the 20th century, have become differentiated from charismatic, evangelical, and fundamentalist Protestant denominations. Some churches within this latter grouping remain separatist, but here too there is parachurch collaboration (Hunter, 1991). For example, the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), the denominational affiliation of the present evangelical participants, is a member of the National Association of Evangelicals. This association includes such denominations as the Baptist General Conference, Churches of Christ in Christian Union, the Conservative Congregational Christian Conference, the Free Methodist Church of North America, and the Open Bible Church (National Association of Evangelicals, 2014). Thus, contemporary evangelical Presbyterians have in many ways become similar to other evangelical Protestants (Wuthnow, 1989).

According to numerous scholars, the modern bifurcation experienced by Protestant churches in the United States echoes tendencies also seen among Catholics and Jews, and even in American culture more broadly (e.g., Bellah, 1987; Fleishman, 1988; Jones, Cox, Navarro-Rivera, Dionne, & Galston, 2012; Merelman, 1984; Wuthnow, 1989). Scholars vary on what they name the two sides. One side has been described with terms such as fundamentalist, orthodox, and religiously conservative. Modernist, progressivism, and religiously liberal are examples of designations applied to the other side. The bifurcation often finds passionate expression in public debates, in fact, to the point where it was coined the American "culture wars" in the early 1990s (Hunter, 1991)—a term that has remained in common use (e.g., Martin, 2014; The New York Times Editorial, 2014). As might be expected, scholars addressing this division recognize complex overlap between the two sides.

Briefly, those who are fundamentalist, orthodox, or religious conservative share a commitment to a transcendent authority—an authority that is regarded as independent of, prior to, and more powerful than human experience. In their view, this transcendent authority originated a definitive moral code and revealed it to human beings. Different religious traditions have different conceptions of the sources through which transcendence communicates its authority (e.g., Jews look to the Torah and the community that upholds it and Protestants look to the Old and New Testaments). Contemporary society, in this view, is rapidly drifting away from God's truth, as individuals are allowed excessive freedoms to follow their desires. This contemporary waywardness is manifest, for example, in decreased emphasis on parental authority over children, and blurring of roles and statuses for women and men. In contrast, modernists, progressivisms, and religious liberals tend to regard moral truth as subject to change and progress. In their view, moral precepts are not revealed once and for all by a transcendent authority, but may be altered as human and individual understandings unfold, and as society changes. Thus, they are more accepting of some measure of moral pluralism compared to those who are fundamentalist, orthodox, and religiously conservative. They are also more accepting of individual choices (e.g., Bellah, 1987; Hunter, 1991; Wuthnow, 1989).

"Culture wars," translated by Hunter (1991, p. xii) from the German *Kulturkampf*, is a striking term. It is also rather muscular. There is after all not an armed conflict in the United States, and divisive public debates may obscure more subtle and complex individual convictions and psychologies. Most of the sociological and historical analyses described above have focused on organizations and their leaders. Here, in contrast, the focus was specifically on the moral reasoning of lay believers. Research has shown that adult American members of evangelical Protestant, fundamentalist Baptist, and Mormon congregations frequently reason in terms of the Ethics of Community and Divinity and infrequently in terms of the Ethic of Autonomy. In contrast, mainline Protestant adults of diverse denominational affiliations frequently use the Ethics of Autonomy and Community, and quite rarely the Ethic of Divinity (Arnett et al., 2001; Hickman & Fasoli, 2015; Jensen, 1997a, 1997b, 1998, 2008; Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2015). These results have been found in both interview and questionnaire research.

Based on this knowledge, predictions can be made for the expression of the cultural–developmental templates for children, adolescents, and adults within each of the present religious cultures. Figure 2 shows predictions for evangelical Protestants. The hypothesis is that these children, adolescents, and adults will use Autonomy infrequently. There may be some decrease over the life course because of the strong emphasis on renouncing self-interest within this religious culture. With respect to Community, the expectation is that its prevalence will rise steadily from childhood to reach a high level in adulthood. The Ethic of Divinity will be low among children, but will then rise markedly in adolescence and remain high throughout adulthood. Turning to mainline Protestants, Figure 3 illustrates the
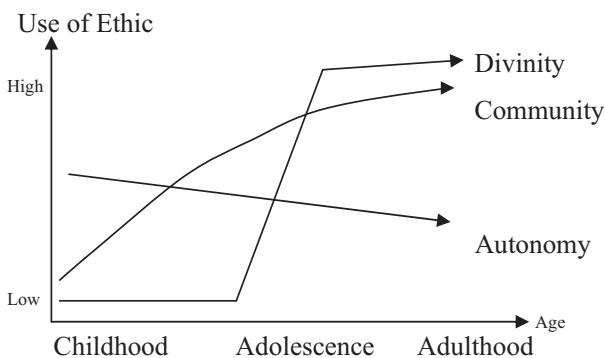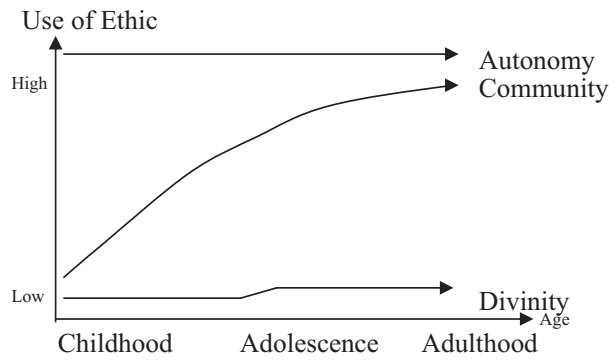


Figure 3. *Hypothesized Expression of Templates among Mainline Protestants*

expectation that children, adolescents, and adults frequently will use the Ethic of Autonomy. Community reasons will be rarer among children but will then become common among adolescents and adults. Divinity will be uncommon at all ages and if it emerges, this will only occur in the course of adolescence.

### Public and Private Spheres of Morality

The present study also differentiated among the spheres of the moral issues under consideration. Moral development researchers have emphasized that in order to fully capture people's moral lives, we need to inquire about diverse kinds of issues, including not only social issues and hypothetical moral dilemmas but people's own experiences (Colby & Damon, 1992)—or what we here will term "private experiences."

With respect to the culture wars, research has examined the moral statements put forth by religious organizations and their leaders in public forums (Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009; Hunter, 1991; Lakoff, 1996), or it has presented lay persons with public issues (e.g., suicide in the case of terminal illness) where they discussed the extent to which these issues are morally right or wrong for people in general (Jensen, 1998, 2008). Findings have indicated that mainline Protestant lay believers rarely invoke divinity reasons when rendering judgments for people in general (Jensen, 2008). Some have even claimed that "liberals"—as evinced, for example, through analyses of church sermons—do not have a language of divinity at all (Graham et al., 2009).

Yet, ethnographic and interview findings suggest that religion and spirituality are of importance to mainline Protestants in their moral lives. Mainline congregations and their parishioners engage in



Figure 2. *Hypothesized Expression of Templates among Evangelical Protestants.*

community projects that are framed in religious terms (Jensen, 2015c). Also, when asked to describe God in interviews, mainline Protestants provide extensive and detailed descriptions. Many of these descriptions are connected to morality, including the notion that a belief in God clarifies the extent of human free will, and the nature of right and wrong (Jensen, 2009).

Interestingly, it is findings from studies that have focused on people's private moral experiences that have helped draw attention to divinity reasoning. In a study of American moral exemplars, almost 80% based their moral behaviors on religious faith even though they had not been selected on the basis of criteria pertaining to religion (Colby & Damon, 1992). Another study that probed the moral experiences and ideals of a broad sample of Canadian adults also found a surprising degree of references to religiosity and spirituality (Walker et al., 1995). Based on these findings, we hypothesized that mainline Protestant adults would use Divinity more for private than public issues. Given the absence of both developmental research and research with evangelicals in this regard, we did not venture additional predictions.

## Method

### Participants

The study included 60 evangelical and 60 mainline Presbyterians ($N = 120$), divided evenly into three age groups ($n = 20$): children (ages 7–12, $M = 10.03$, $SD = 1.38$), adolescents (ages 13–18, $M = 15.03$, $SD = 1.60$), and adults (ages 36–57, $M = 45.88$, $SD = 4.65$). There were no significant differences in age between the religious groups.

Participants resided in a large metropolitan area on the East Coast of the United States. The mainline Presbyterians attended a church affiliated with the Presbyterian Church (USA). PC (USA) is the largest Presbyterian denomination in the United States, with over 1.7 million members (Presbyterian Church [USA], 2014). Evangelical participants attended a church that is affiliated with the PCA. PCA is second largest, with over 350,000 members (Presbyterian Church in America, 2014). Validating the classification of participants, the two samples differed significantly on religious self-identifications. In response to a common American survey question about their current religious orientation, participants from the PC (USA) church rated themselves as significantly more liberal than participants from the PCA church, $F(1, 118) = 77.64$, $p < .001$,

$\eta^2 = .42$ (mainline: $M = 3.55$, $SD = 0.90$; evangelical: $M = 2.22$, $SD = 0.74$, where 1 = *very conservative* and 5 = *very liberal*). Also, among various options, 100% of participants from the PC (USA) church described themselves as "Mainline Protestant" and 98% of participants from the PCA church described themselves as "Evangelical Protestant," $\chi^2(1, 84) = 80.09$, $p < .001$. As background information, it is useful to note that about 15% of American adults self-identify as mainline Protestants and 25% as evangelical Protestants (Pew Research Center, 2015).

There was an equal distribution of female and male participants in the evangelical and mainline groups. The evangelical group was more ethnically diverse, $\chi^2(1, 119) = 13.57$, $p < .01$. The evangelical sample was 17% African American and 80% European American, whereas all mainline participants were European American. Evangelicals were more often married (88%) than mainline adults (78%), $\chi^2(1, 119) = 13.57$, $p < .01$. Evangelicals also had more children ($M = 3.17$, $SD = 1.24$) compared to mainline adults ($M = 2.25$, $SD = 0.99$), $F(1, 119) = 20.16$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .15$. The groups did not differ significantly on education and work status. Nevertheless, mainline participants had a higher mean family income ($M = 5.72$, $SD = 0.86$) than evangelicals ($M = 4.55$, $SD = 1.11$), $F(1, 119) = 39.59$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .26$ (6-point scale with 1 = < *$19,999* and 6 = > *$100,000*). The Results section describes how statistical analyses controlled for demographic differences.

For recruitment, lists of active church congregants were obtained, along with letters from ministers indicating their support for the study while also stating that participation was voluntary. The ministers' letters and a letter from the research team explaining the project were mailed out. Congregants then received follow-up phone calls. The participation rate was 87%.

### Procedure

Participants took part in one-on-one, semistructured interviews addressing moral judgments and reasoning. At the outset, written informed consent was obtained from adult participants, and from parents or guardians on behalf of children and adolescents. Children and adolescents provided oral assent. Interviews ranged in total length from 30 to 180 min, with an average of 63 ($SD = 22$) for children, 68 ($SD = 20$) for adolescents, and 89 ($SD = 29$) for adults. At the conclusion, participants received compensation in the form of $10 for children, $15

for adolescents, and $20 for adults. The audio-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Interviews (95%) took place in participants' homes in order to help them feel at ease. This may be particularly important for children who were free to take breaks during the interview. Every participant was interviewed without being overseen or overheard by others. For children and adolescents, a parent or guardian was present in the household. The collection of data and verification of its codability were concluded in 2004.

### Materials

Participants were interviewed about six moral issues: five public issues and one private issue. The process of selecting issues and formulating questions included pilot interviews with persons representing each age and religious group. The public issues (presented in random order) were giving money to panhandlers, parental use of physical discipline of children, divorce, interracial marriage, and capital punishment. In analyses (described below), these five issues were averaged into one public issues score. Several issues were sampled for the public issues score because research has shown that evangelical and mainline Protestants sometimes reason somewhat differently depending on the public issue in question (e.g., Jensen, 1997a, 2008; Vainio, 2015). An issue that becomes a focus of intense political debate may elicit somewhat distinctive reasoning. For example, evangelicals have been found to use a higher degree of Ethic of Autonomy reasoning in response to the issue of abortion as compared to other public issues, perhaps as a way to appeal to a broader cross-section of Americans with the popular language of individualism (Jensen, 1997b). The present five issues were selected to represent diverse moral evaluations (e.g., right, wrong, or depends), and diverse topics of societal interest and discussion. Their scope encompassed family relations and roles, individual freedom, and the role and power of the state.

The private issue was one that the participants had experienced and regarded as a moral issue. Participants were only asked about one private issue for two reasons. First, interviewing people about their private moral issues is quite delicate. It requires considerable time and effort to put people at ease and have them open up to a discussion of the many facets of their experience, including those that they might be reluctant initially to divulge. Second, previous research has not found variation among people's private issues on either content or reasoning. In a comparison of "recent" and "difficult" private moral issues, Walker et al. (1995) found them to be similar on domain of relationship (e.g., interpersonal, intrapsychic), frame of relationship (e.g., attached, unequal), and moral reasoning (assessed with Kohlberg's stages). Another study that compared "recent" and "most memorable" moral experiences also did not show differences on moral reasoning (assessed with the three ethics; Jensen, 2015c). Although a content analysis of participants' private issues was not within the present scope, it is worth noting that participants brought up a wide range of topics including drug use, friendship, losing one's temper, lying, parenting, racism, sexual behaviors, theft, and volunteering.

For private issues, participants started by providing a description of the decision they had faced and its context. The introductory question asked,

> Can you tell me about a time when you had an important experience that you think involved a moral issue? It could be a time when you did something that you think was morally right, or it could be a time when you did something that you think was morally wrong.

Participants evaluated the extent to which they regarded their behavior as morally right or wrong by answering the question, "Do you think you behaved in a morally right or morally wrong way?" Next, participants provided reasons for their evaluation. For public issues, they were asked to evaluate and reason about other people's behavior. The first question in regard to use of physical discipline, for example, asked, "Do you think that it is morally right or morally wrong for parents to physically discipline their children? By physical discipline, I mean things like slapping, hitting, and spanking." The interview included follow-up questions aimed at obtaining all of a participant's moral reasons ("Do you have any other reasons that you would like to mention?"), and clarifying all moral concepts (e.g., "When you say that it is harmful, can you say more about what kind of harm and who is being harmed?").

## Results

### Coding

Moral reasons were coded with the standard manual for the three Ethics of Autonomy, Community, and Divinity (Jensen, 2015a). The manual con-

sists of three major codes or ethics. It also consists of 44 subcodes: 15 for Autonomy, 13 for Community, and 16 for Divinity. The subcodes are the equivalent of specific *types* of moral reasons. The first column of Table 3 shows types (subcodes) within each ethic that were common in the present study. The coding manual provides a definition for each ethic and type of reason. Additionally, examples are provided for each type of reason. Classifying every moral reason both in terms of an ethic and a type aids in (a) ensuring that all stated reasons are coded, (b) differentiating among reasons, and (c) determining that a reason is sufficiently well elaborated to decide which one of the three ethics is invoked. For the sake of clarity, we refer to types of reasons in the remainder rather than using the coding manual terminology of subcodes.

The transcribed interviews amounted to an average of 32 single-spaced pages per participant, for a total of 3,840 pages of text to code. A total of 1,817 reasons were identified and coded. Interrater reliability was assessed for two independent coders on 20% of randomly selected interviews. For the three ethics, Cohen's kappa was .84. For types, there was 80% agreement. Differences between coders were resolved through subsequent discussion.

In the presentation of results, we will move from broader to progressively more specific analyses. We start by analyzing degree of use of each ethic, then use of combinations of types of reasons within each ethic, and finally use of individual types. The first two kinds of analyses were based on the hypotheses described in the Introduction, whereas the last was exploratory and descriptive.

### Analysis Plan for Degree of Use of Three Ethics

In order to test the hypotheses regarding the degree of use of each ethic, $3 \times 2 \times 2$ multivariate analyses of covariance were conducted with age (child, adolescent, adult) and religious culture (evangelical, mainline) as between-subject variables and issue (public, private) as a within-subject variable. The five public issues were averaged into one public issues score. With respect to age, a priori repeated contrasts were conducted (children vs. adolescents, adolescents vs. adults). The use of each of the three ethics constituted the dependent variables.

There were two covariates. Income was entered to control for the significant demographic difference between the evangelical and mainline groups. Income was significant in only one of the analyses. The second covariate was total number of reasons

provided by participants. An a priori analysis of variance had indicated significant group differences. There was a main effect for age (children: $M = 12.58$, $SD = 0.71$; adolescents: $M = 16.50$, $SD = 0.71$; and adults: $M = 16.84$, $SD = 0.72$), $F(2, 113) = 11.11$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .16$. There was a main effect for religious culture (mainline: $M = 14.07$, $SD = 0.58$; evangelical: $M = 16.54$, $SD = 0.58$), $F(1, 113) = 9.06$, $p = .003$, $\eta^2 = .07$. There was also an interaction (evangelical children: $M = 12.50$, $SD = 1.00$; mainline children: $M = 12.65$, $SD = 1.00$; evangelical adolescents: $M = 17.60$, $SD = 1.00$; mainline adolescents: $M = 15.40$, $SD = 1.00$; evangelical adults: $M = 19.53$, $SD = 1.03$; mainline adults: $M = 14.14$, $SD = 1.00$), $F(2, 113) = 3.77$, $p = .026$, $\eta^2 = .06$. Total number of reasons was entered as a covariate to ensure that any differences in use of each ethic could not be accounted for by some groups providing more reasons than others. It was a significant covariate in all but one of the analyses.

### Degree of Ethic of Autonomy Reasoning

For the following results on use of each ethic, Table 1 shows means and standard deviations and Table 2 indicates multivariate analysis of covariance outcomes. Contrary to the hypothesis that the Ethic of Autonomy would be stable across age groups among mainline participants but decline across age among evangelicals, there was a main effect for age but no interaction with religious culture. Repeated contrasts indicated that children ($M = 1.34$, $SD = 0.51$) significantly exceeded adolescents ($M = 1.27$, $SD = 0.32$), and adolescents significantly exceeded adults ($M = 0.95$, $SD = 0.39$). As hypothesized, there was a main effect for religious culture, with mainline participants ($M = 1.38$, $SD = 0.37$) using Autonomy significantly more than evangelicals ($M = 0.98$, $SD = 0.44$).

### Degree of Ethic of Community Reasoning

As hypothesized, the Ethic of Community showed a main effect for age. Repeated contrasts indicated that children ($M = 0.56$, $SD = 0.38$) invoked Community significantly less than adolescents ($M = 1.05$, $SD = 0.51$). There was also a main effect for religious culture, with mainline participants ($M = 0.86$, $SD = 0.43$) reasoning significantly less in terms of Community than evangelicals ($M = 1.00$, $SD = 0.47$). However, as seen in Figure 4, an unexpected crossover interaction between religious culture and issue indicated that evangelicals used Community more for public ($M = 1.05$,

Table 1
*Degree of Use of Three Ethics*

| | Children | | | | Adolescents | | | | Adults | | | |
| | Evangelical | | Mainline | | Evangelical | | Mainline | | Evangelical | | Mainline | |
| Ethics | Priv | Publ | Priv | Pub | Priv | Publ | Priv | Publ | Priv | Publ | Priv | Publ |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Autonomy | 1.20 (1.06) | 1.20 (0.56) | 1.35 (0.99) | 1.49 (0.47) | 1.00 (1.00) | 1.02 (0.35) | 1.59 (1.18) | 1.49 (0.33) | 1.00 (1.03) | 0.68 (0.41) | .90 (0.79) | 1.21 (0.45) |
| Community | 0.15 (0.37) | 0.61 (0.36) | 0.65 (0.88) | 0.57 (0.53) | 1.00 (0.94) | 1.08 (0.58) | 1.18 (1.07) | 0.99 (0.44) | 0.89 (1.02) | 1.50 (0.57) | 1.45 (1.00) | 0.88 (0.39) |
| Divinity | 0.50 (0.69) | 0.32 (0.33) | 0 (0) | 0.07 (0.16) | 0.47 (0.70) | 0.96 (0.48) | 0.06 (0.24) | 0.11 (0.17) | 0.78 (0.94) | 1.19 (0.61) | 0.38 (0.49) | 0.20 (0.26) |

*Note.* Values are given as means (standard deviations). Priv = private issue; Publ = public issue.

$SD = 0.62$) than private ($M = 0.67$, $SD = 0.89$) issues, whereas mainline participants used Community more for private ($M = 1.09$, $SD = 1.02$) than public ($M = 0.80$, $SD = 0.48$) issues.

### Degree of Ethic of Divinity Reasoning

For the Ethic of Divinity, there were main effects for age and religious culture. Repeated contracts indicated that adolescents ($M = 0.49$, $SD = 0.30$) used this ethic significantly less than adults ($M = 0.67$, $SD = 0.44$). Mainline participants ($M = 0.13$, $SD = 0.19$) were significantly below evangelicals in use ($M = 0.78$, $SD = 0.46$).

Adding further complexity, two- and three-way interactions were significant. A two-way interaction between religious culture and issue indicated that evangelicals used Divinity more when talking about public ($M = 0.82$, $SD = 0.47$) than private ($M = 0.58$, $SD = 0.78$) issues, whereas mainline participants used Divinity reasoning almost equally for public ($M = 0.13$, $SD = 0.20$) and private ($M = 0.14$, $SD = 0.24$) issues. As seen in Figure 5A, the three-way interaction clarified that mainline children and adolescents in fact used Divinity infrequently for both kinds of issues. It was the mainline adults, as hypothesized, who used this Ethic more for private than public issues. Among evangelicals, as seen in Figure 5B, adolescents and adults used Divinity more for public than private issues (see Appendix S1 in the online Supporting Information for verification of results using a different analytic approach).

### Combinations of Types of Reasons Within Each Ethic

The above analyses address the cultural–developmental hypotheses pertaining to degree of use of the three ethics. The cultural–developmental approach also speaks to the types of reasons used within each ethic. As described in the Introduction, the moral development literature as a whole suggests that Autonomy reasons pertaining specifically to the well-being and interest of self and other individuals emerge early and remain into adulthood. To examine whether this was so for the present sample and the extent to which religious culture and the sphere of the moral issue would have an effect, an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) with the same independent variables and covariates as above was carried out. The dependent variable combined 8 of the 15 types of reasons within the Ethic of Autonomy. These pertained to the "Physical Well-Being," "Psychological

Table 2

*Degree of Use of Three Ethics: Main Effects, Age Group Contrasts, and Interaction Effects*

| Effects and contrasts | Ethic of Autonomy | | | Ethic of Community | | | Ethic of Divinity | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | $F$ | $\eta^2$ | Contrast | $F$ | $\eta^2$ | Contrast | $F$ | $\eta^2$ | Contrast |
| Age | | | | | | | | | |
|   Child versus adolescent | 13.45*** | .20 | 0.29* | 6.17** | .10 | −0.26* | 5.37** | .09 | −0.07 |
|   Adolescent versus adult | | | 0.34** | | | −0.12 | | | −0.23* |
| Religious culture:<br>  Evangelical versus mainline | 13.35*** | .11 | | 8.97** | .08 | | 35.42*** | .25 | |
| Issue: Public versus private | 0.67 | .01 | | 0.03 | .000 | | 1.62 | .02 | |
| Age × Religious Culture | 1.63 | .03 | | 0.30 | .01 | | 0.84 | .02 | |
| Age × Issue | 0.03 | .001 | | 1.03 | .02 | | 1.62 | .03 | |
| Religious Culture × Issue | 1.30 | .01 | | 7.65** | .07 | | 4.39* | .04 | |
| Age × Religious Culture × Issue | 0.90 | .02 | | 1.90 | .04 | | 4.87** | .08 | |

*Note.* $N = 114$. *F* values are indicated for main effects of age, religious culture, and issue and for interaction effects. Contrast estimate values are indicated for comparisons of children and adolescents, and adolescents and adults. *df* = 2 for all analyses including age group, and *df* = 1 for all remaining analyses.
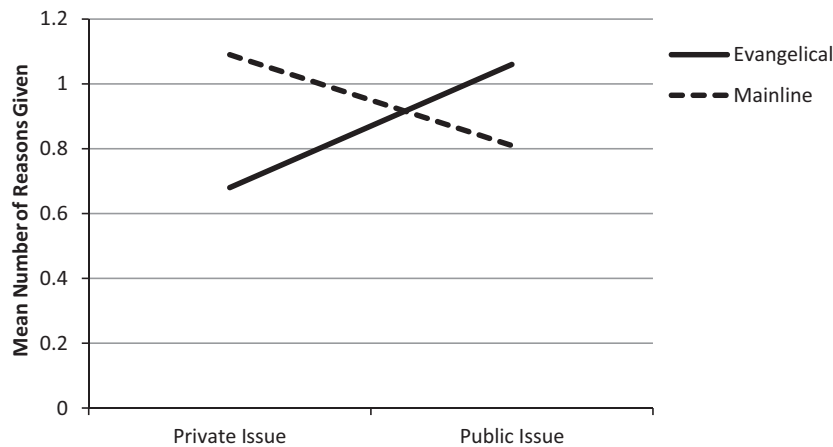*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.



*Figure 4.* Ethic of Community: Religious Culture × Moral Issue interaction.

Well-Being," and "Interests" of self and of other individuals (six types), as well as "Reward Seeking" and "Punishment Avoidance" on the part of the self (two types). There was a main effect for age (children: $M = 0.86$, $SD = 0.40$; adolescents: $M = 0.69$, $SD = 0.33$; adults: $M = 0.52$, $SD = 0.33$), $F(2, 113) = 11.88$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .18$. Repeated contrasts indicated that these types of reasons were used significantly more by children than adolescents (contrast estimate = 0.31, $p = .007$), and more by adolescents than adults (contrast estimate = 0.29, $p = .033$). There was also a main effect for religious culture, $F(1, 113) = 13.32$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .11$, with mainline participants ($M = 0.80$, $SD = 0.39$) using these types of Autonomy reasons more than evangelicals ($M = 0.58$, $SD = 0.33$).

With respect to Autonomy considerations pertaining to rights and equity, the cultural–developmental approach draws on the developmental literature to predict that these become used in a notable manner only by adolescence. To test this, an ANCOVA comparable to the one above was conducted but with the dependent variable combining the two Ethic of Autonomy types of reasons that pertain to "Rights" and "Fairness and Reciprocity." There was a main effect for age (children: $M = 0.33$, $SD = 0.21$; adolescents: $M = 0.43$, $SD = 0.27$; adults: $M = 0.26$, $SD = 0.23$), $F(2, 113) = 5.06$, $p = .008$, $\eta^2 = .09$. Repeated contrast showed that adolescents spoke more of these considerations than adults (contrast estimate = 0.17, $p = .002$). There was also an interaction effect of religious culture and issue, $F(1, 113) =$
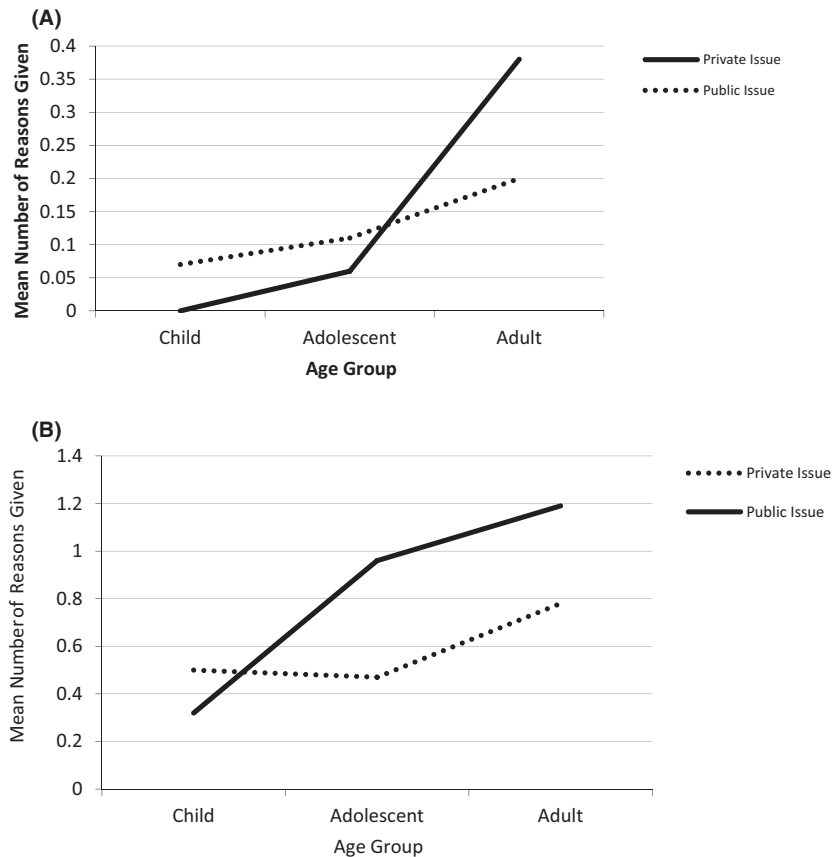
**(A)**



**(B)**



*Figure 5.* Ethic of Divinity among (A) mainline and (B) evangelical Protestants (Age × Moral Issue interaction).

6.18, $p$ = .015, $\eta^2$ = .06. Evangelicals used these types of reasons about evenly for public ($M$ = 0.25, $SD$ = 0.24) and private ($M$ = 0.19, $SD$ = 0.43) issues, whereas mainline participants used them more for public ($M$ = 0.48, $SD$ = 0.27) than private ($M$ = 0.21, $SD$ = 0.41) issues.

With respect to the Ethic of Community, the cultural–developmental approach predicts that there will be a rise in the diversity of types of reasons from childhood into adulthood. To test this, a dependent variable was created that assessed how many different types of Community reasons a participant used (out of possible total of 13). An ANCOVA similar to the ones above was run, with income but not total number of reasons as a covariate. There was a main effect for age (children: $M$ = 0.45, $SD$ = 0.28; adolescents: $M$ = 0.78, $SD$ = 0.33; adults: $M$ = 0.91, $SD$ = 0.30), $F(2, 113)$ = 15.36, $p$ = < .001, $\eta^2$ = .22. As predicted, children used significantly fewer types of Community reasons than adolescents (contrast estimate = −0.47, $p$ < .001). There was also an interaction between religious culture and issue, $F(1, 113)$ = 5.64, $p$ = .019, $\eta^2$ = .05. Here too evangelicals

used these considerations about evenly for private ($M$ = 0.68, $SD$ = 0.86) and public ($M$ = 0.76, $SD$ = 0.36) issues, but in this case mainline participants used them more for private ($M$ = 1.02, $SD$ = 0.93) than public ($M$ = 0.61, $SD$ = 0.33) issues.

### Use of Individual Types of Reasons

Finally, in order to delve further into the extent to which participants used diverse types of reasons and the nature of the most common types, we turned to usage of individual types of reasons. First, the frequency with which each age and religious group (e.g., mainline adults) used each type of reason was calculated for private and public issues. Next, the types with the highest frequencies were added up until a threshold of 50% was reached. We refer to these as the "majority types." The cutoff was set at 50% because this captured the majority of types used, and because the remaining types were infrequent. Table 3 shows use of majority types (see Appendix S2 in the online Supporting Information for an example of the calculation of majority types).

Table 3
*Majority Use of Types of Reasons (%)*

| Types | Children Evangelical | | Children Mainline | | Adolescents Evangelical | | Adolescents Mainline | | Adults Evangelical | | Adults Mainline | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Priv | Publ | Priv | Publ | Priv | Publ | Priv | Publ | Priv | Publ | Priv | Publ |
| A: Avoiding punishment to self | 8.1 | | | | | | 5.5 | | | | | |
| A: Conscience | 8.1 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| A: Another's physical well-being | | 7.3 | 7.5 | 8.9 | | | | | | | | |
| A: Self's interest | 10.8 | 6.4 | | 12.7 | 6.1 | | 5.5 | | | | | |
| A: Other individual's interest | | 7.3 | | 8.0 | 10.2 | | 12.7 | 7.1 | 11.5 | | 5.6 | |
| A: Self's psychological well-being | 13.5 | | 12.5 | 8.0 | | | 9.1 | | | | 5.6 | 7.4 |
| A: Another's psychological well-being | 8.1 | | 22.5 | 6.6 | | | 5.5 | 6.7 | | | 5.6 | |
| A: Responsibility for self | | | | | | | | | 5.8 | | | |
| A: Means to autonomy goal | | 7.3 | | | | | | | | | | |
| A: Fairness and reciprocity | 8.1 | 8.7 | 7.5 | 11.3 | 6.1 | | | 12.3 | | | | 10.0 |
| A: Rights | | 6.4 | | 6.6 | | 5.6 | 7.3 | 10.7 | | | | 10.9 |
| A: Autonomy-oriented virtue | | | | | | | | | | | 5.6 | |
| C: Avoiding social sanctions | | | | | | | | | 5.8 | | | |
| C: Collective interest | | | | | 8.2 | 7.3 | | 9.1 | 11.5 | 8.1 | | 7.0 |
| C: Collective mental well-being | | 6.9 | | | | 6.9 | | 7.1 | | | | 6.1 |
| C: Important person's authority | | | 7.5 | | | | | | | | | |
| C: Social order | | | | | | | 9.1 | | | | 5.6 | |
| C: Means to community goal | | | | | | | | | | 10.3 | 7.4 | 6.6 |
| C: Community-oriented virtues | | | | | 10.2 | 7.6 | 7.3 | 6.7 | | 6.5 | 14.8 | 6.1 |
| C: Social duty | | | | | 8.2 | | | | | | 11.1 | |
| D: God's authority | 13.5 | 7.3 | | | 8.2 | 8.9 | | | 7.4 | 11.8 | 9.3 | |
| D: Scriptural authority | 10.8 | | | | 6.1 | 15.2 | | | 11.5 | 16.2 | | |
| D: Religious/spiritual duty | | | | | | | | | 7.4 | | | |

*Note.* Priv = private issue; Publ = public issue; A = Ethic of Autonomy; C = Ethic of Community; D = Ethic of Divinity.

As to overarching patterns, our first observation is that a sizable number of different types of reasons were commonly used by the entire sample, namely, a total of 23. Of all majority types used, there were 12 for Autonomy, 8 for Community, and only 3 for Divinity. This number, however, was pared down when looking at each age group within a religious culture. Here, the total number of majority types used ranged from 8 (mainline children) to 13 (evangelical children, mainline adults).

Delving deeper to unearth information about the specific majority types, Autonomy reasoning in terms of another individual's physical well-being occurred with some regularity among children (for the private issue among mainline children, and for the public issue among mainline and evangelical children). This type was never a majority type among adolescents or adults. Only two types of Community reasons reached majority usage among children: the collective mental well-being of others and an important person's authority. Among adolescents and adults, five and seven Community types reached majority usage, respectively. These included social order, community-oriented virtues, and social duty. With respect to common types of Divinity reasons, evangelicals of all ages reasoned in terms of God's authority and scriptural authority, with the evangelical adults also having religious or spiritual duty as a majority type. Mainline adults relied on one type pertaining to God's authority.

## Discussion

The present findings indicate that members of the evangelical and mainline Protestant communities share important developmental features. At the same time, however, children growing up within each of the religious cultures already displayed moral reasoning that was distinctive. For adolescents and adults, the differences in moral reasoning were even more pronounced, including their

approaches to public and private moral reasoning. In our view, these results suggest a new and nuanced way to understand moral development in the societal context of the so-called "culture wars." We also regard the findings as having implications for future research. We discuss two key directions that in many ways are alternatives to the thrust of current moral psychology research. In discussing quantitative results, we provide occasional representative participant quotations in order to add authenticity through their voices.

### Morality Among Evangelical and Mainline Protestants: From Commonality to Diversity

Evangelical and mainline children shared a way of reasoning about moral issues that in many ways set them apart from adolescents and adults. Children used the lowest *degree* of Ethic of Community reasoning, and the fewest different *types* of Community reasons. These results fit well with the low degree of reasoning in terms of community considerations that cognitive developmental (Kohlberg, 1984) and domain research (Turiel, 1983) also has documented for children. The two types of Ethic of Community reasons that children primarily used pertained to an important person's authority and concern for collective mental well-being—again reasoning that fits with cognitive developmental findings (Kohlberg, 1984) and recent findings on young children's care for others (Vaish & Tomasello, 2014; Warneken & Tomasello, 2006).

Children, evangelical and mainline alike, were also the most likely to invoke Ethic of Autonomy considerations, including those pertaining to the well-being and interests of self and other individuals. These results are consistent with previous developmental findings (Colby et al., 1983; Walker, 1989; Whiting & Edwards, 1988). Furthermore, children were quite distinctive in commonly giving consideration to the physical well-being of individuals—a result that resonates with long-standing cognitive findings that children focus a fair amount on the concrete and physical features of the world (Damon, 1977). An evangelical child, for example, thought it best not to give money to a panhandler, "because they could go out to the store and buy like cigarettes or something that's not good for them. So it would be better to just give them some kind of food" (P#010-06). A mainline child sounded similarly concerned, "If you give them food and water . . . and stuff they'll be able to live for a longer amount of time" (P#105-10).

But, as the present results indicate, there is much more to moral development than age or common maturation alone. Differences between the two religious cultures were already evident by about age 10, the mean age of the present children. Evangelical children reasoned in terms of the Ethic of Divinity, whereas mainline children did not. A 9-year-old boy from the evangelical community supported giving money to a panhandler "because God tells us to give things" (P#023-10). In contrast, a 10-year-old girl from the mainline Protestant community emphasized fairness, a type of Autonomy reason that was popular among mainline children. She explained that a panhandler is just as deserving as anyone else, "just like if you took all [of] Queen Elizabeth's stuff away, she'd be just as poor as the panhandler. It's just they don't have enough stuff to get as far as Queen Elizabeth" (P#112-12). Fairness—a concept of frequent focus in the moral development literature—was also commonly invoked by mainline adolescents and adults in response to public issues, while not registering at all among evangelical adults (see Table 3).

The role of culture in the development of moral reasoning becomes even more evident when taking into account whether a moral issue is in the public or private sphere. As compared to evangelical children, not only did evangelical adolescents and adults reason more in terms of Divinity, but they also showed a bifurcation where they spoke more of Divinity for public than private issues. In other words, they not only thought of their own moral behaviors in terms of considerations pertaining to God and scriptures, but they also emphasized these considerations in terms of how they believed everyone ought to think and behave. Their moral approach as expressed in the interviews turns out to align very well with the mission statement of the church to which they belonged, which in part asks its members, "To be a community of Christ . . . impacting their families, communities, city, nation, and world with the gospel of Jesus Christ and the glory of God." Evangelicalism, of course, is historically at the heart of Christianity. And indeed to these contemporary evangelical adolescents and adults, the Ethic of Divinity belongs not only in the private sphere but also decidedly in the public one.

Among mainline Protestants, age intersected differently with spheres of morality for Divinity. Whereas mainline children and adolescents scarcely invoked Divinity, adults did. In contrast to some claims, it was not simply the case that they lacked

this moral language (Graham et al., 2009). Mainline adults, instead, primarily spoke of Divinity when contemplating their private issues. To give one example of many, a mainline woman recounted her decision to find her adoptive mother against the advice of friends, "I thought it was something that in the eyes of God it was right for me to do" (P#175-21). Mainline adults had privatized the Ethic of Divinity.

The differentiation between spheres of morality turned out also to be significant in regard to the Ethic of Community and, to some extent, the Ethic of Autonomy. Akin to previous findings, the present ones indicated that Community reasoning was common among both evangelical and mainline adults (Jensen, 2011). The results, however, extend previous work by revealing a crossover interaction with the sphere of morality. Evangelicals of all ages were particularly likely to invoke Community reasons for public issues, whereas all mainline participants were particularly likely to invoke these reasons when speaking of private issues. The reverse was the case for Autonomy considerations pertaining specifically to rights, and fairness and reciprocity. Mainline participants stressed these reasons for the public issues, whereas evangelicals did not. From an Enlightenment perspective, rights, reciprocity, and fairness constitute a moral alternative to Christianity and evangelicalism, and supersede a communitarian emphasis on duties. At the end of the 18th century, Kant (1797/1991, pp. 276–277) wrote, "All moral relations of rational beings . . . can be reduced to . . . another's end . . . and another's right." This Enlightenment view is one that the mainline Protestants are representing in the public sphere.

Thus, moral development among the present religious cultures appears to occur in the context of a societal debate with a lengthy history. As described in the Introduction, this history can be traced back to the 18th century in the United States, through the debates on fundamentalism and modernism about a century ago, and up to the current "culture wars." The present cultural–developmental results also cast new light on the nature of the culture wars. It is not simply that the two sides do not understand each other because they speak different moral languages. Instead, it is a considerably more complex matter of when and where languages are used. Specifically, the present religious communities have come to differ on what should be the moral lingua franca of society. This difference was evident in childhood for Ethics of Autonomy and Community reasoning, and in adolescence and adulthood for Divinity reasoning.

## One Key Implication for Future Research: Consideration of the Life Course

Turning now to what we regard as two key implications of the present findings for future research, one is that moral development must be examined across the life course. The findings point to the comodulation of development and culture, with culture becoming increasingly prominent over the course of development. Certainly, development channels culture. Children live within more circumscribed community boundaries than adolescents and adults, undoubtedly for reasons having to do with their physical and mental capacities—and indeed the Ethic of Community outlook of all of the present children was narrower than it likely will be later on. To grow and thrive, children require considerable physical and emotional resources and care—and indeed the present children gave considerable attention to Ethic of Autonomy considerations pertaining to the needs and interests of self and other individuals. These Autonomy considerations did not go away among adolescents and adults, but other considerations also came to the fore.

While development channels culture, culture also shapes development. As observed, the evangelical and mainline groups were different in many ways, and some of these differences were evident in children. Let us go back for a moment to the 9-year-old evangelical boy quoted above who reasoned that God wants us to help panhandlers. Like other children, evangelical and mainline, he spoke in detail about physical and concrete considerations. Here is an exchange between the interviewer (Q) and the boy (A): "Q: What do you think are good ways that you can help poor people? A: Give them food. Q: Any other good ways? A: A house to live in." In answering the next question, he suddenly sounded distinctly like a child growing up in an evangelical community. "Q: Right, anything else that people who are well off . . . can do to help people who are poor? A: [Give] a Bible." Not a single mainline child—or mainline participant of any age— suggested giving a Bible to a panhandler. With regard to moral reasoning, as results indicated, scriptural authority was not a majority type among mainline Protestants of any age. In contrast, it was a majority type among evangelicals of every age. Our ethnographic records show that researchers observed a Bible in nearly every evangelical household. In contrast, religious items were rarely on display in mainline households. Socialization starts early and has a clear and cumulative impact on the development of moral reasoning.

Recent theory on moral development and psychology has been characterized by a search for cognitions and emotions that constitute foundations of moral behavior. This search has often focused on biological foundations through evolutionary and neuroscience research, and on early developmental foundations through research with infants and young children (for reviews, see Bloom, 2013; Thompson, 2012). The present findings, however, suggest that the cultural modulation of moral reasoning becomes more pronounced with age. This means that conclusions about moral development on the basis of research with children are insufficient. Life course research among different cultures is necessary to know the extent to which early moral reasons remain, change, or disappear, and to know the extent to which new reasons emerge later in life.

### A Second Key Implication for Future Research: Rethinking Moral Reasoning

A second notable implication of the present findings is to return to serious consideration of the role of reasoning in morality. Moral psychology has witnessed a virtual "fall of reason" to the "current trend in psychology and neuroscience . . . in favor of gut feelings" (Bloom, 2013, p. 207). But as Tomasello, Carpenter, Call, Behne, and Moll (2005) have eloquently stated, the ability of humans among primates to use cognition is unique, "[it] sticks out like an elephant's trunk, a giraffe's neck, a peacock's tail" (p. 689). The present participants contemplated moral issues in terms of a total of 23 different types of reasons. Such a scope of reasoning begins to speak to its importance as something more than a mere epiphenomenon or afterthought to gut feelings.

Tomasello et al. (2005) further argue that "dialogic cognitive representations" are what pave the way for human infants and toddlers to become full-fledged contributors to collective cultural beliefs, practices, and institutions over time. This study introduced a differentiation between private and public spheres of morality, and findings indicated the significance of the distinction in the moral reasoning of all groups. In our view, the results suggest that the development of moral reasoning in humans involves intra- and interpersonal dialogical processes. Morality in part is a process where we have internal dialogues with some distinct private moral reasons for weighing our behaviors. Morality is also a social process where we dialogue, debate, and argue with others. We do this person to person. We also do this at the level of groups—and here the present religious communities vary on the

ethics that they bring to the public sphere and wish for future generations to carry on.

A fuller understanding that moral development involves intra- and interpersonal reasoning will require more research. But it has the potential to revive moral reasoning as paramount to the human condition and fundamental to human development in cultural context. This is because it makes for a much richer account of moral reasoning as both a process that takes place inside the mind and a kind of behavior that takes place in myriad interpersonal interactions—where there may be a meeting of the minds, or not.

Furthermore, the present differentiation between public and private moral reasoning may offer a venue to improve research on individual moral behavior. The field of moral development has reams of publications where individuals reason about "public" issues, such as vignettes or hypothetical dilemmas where moral judgments are applied to people in general. Predictions about individual behaviors from such public moral reasoning have been hard to establish. Perhaps ironically, the recent moral psychology focus on moral intuitions in order better to understand individual moral behavior has pushed the field even more toward the use of highly hypothetical issues, such as eating one's pet dog or pushing a heavy man onto trolley tracks. But such scenarios, removed as they are from most people's everyday lives and experiences, seem unlikely venues for in-depth knowledge or predictions about individual moral behavior. The findings here suggest that if we want to know about individual moral behavior, we will do better to focus on private moral reasoning since it turns out to differ from public moral reasoning.

### Limitations

The present study has limitations. With respect to sample selection, it focused on Protestants who belonged to Presbyterian congregations. While mainline denominations have become similar, there is also interdenominational variation. For example, PC (USA) recently voted to sanction same-sex marriage. Among mainline Protestant churches, only the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (which is no longer evangelical in the sense use here) and the United Church of Christ have also reached this decision (Masci, 2014). Similarly, there is variation among evangelical Protestant denominations. Furthermore, Protestants are not equivalent to other religious traditions, even if the split that has occurred among evangelical and mainline Protes-

tants has parallels among Catholics and Jews, for example. Also notable is the growth and sheer number of American adults who are religiously unaffiliated, rising from 15% in 2007 to 23% in 2014 (Pew Research Center, 2015). One might reasonably ask if these adults use any Ethic of Divinity reasoning, even for private issues, the way that the present mainline adults did. The answer is not clear, as a majority of the unaffiliated appear to be religious or spiritual in some way. For example, about 68% say they believe in God. It would be fruitful for future research addressing the present kinds of religious and cultural divisions to include other religious and secular groups.

This study was cross-sectional and hence age and generation are conflated, although the children and adolescents probably do not constitute different cohorts. Future studies could also make more fine-tuned differentiations among adults (Jensen, 2015d). Also, the study involved a selection of public issues, and future work might sample others. Furthermore, the inclusion of only one private issue was based on previous findings, but more than one might be sampled. This would require a substantial investment of time per participant. Research might also increase the sample size to enhance statistical power. Although this study detected many significant differences, research with larger samples might point to additional ones. Ideally, a future study would be sequential, as this could capture changes in both the individual and culture.

*Conclusion*

To conclude, the present analysis indicates that peoples' moral reasons are many and multifaceted. In this respect, moral reasoning is akin to other fundamental features of the human experience, such as intelligence, creativity, and self. But rarely, if ever, would any one individual reason in terms of all available moral reasons. Instead, as individuals develop their reasoning becomes patterned, in part, through intra- and interpersonal dialogues. The interpersonal dialogues involve socialization of younger generations by older members of a culture, and they also often involve different religious and cultural groups negotiating and contesting the public moral space. In our view, developmental and cultural vantage points on moral reasoning each provides important insights, but their synthesis yields new and more complete knowledge. Our ability to provide valid descriptions, explanations, and predictions of how people think and behave will be enhanced through theory and research that capture individual and collective moral dialogues as they occur in cultural spaces over time.

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## Supporting Information

Additional supporting information may be found in the online version of this article at the publisher's website:

**Appendix S1:** Verification of Results

**Appendix S2:** Example of Calculation of Majority Types