**Shifting Interactions between the Personal and the Moral Domains
through Development**
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Discussant's Comments
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My thanks to the symposium participants and authors for a stimulating and genuinely interesting set of papers; and my thanks too for asking me to serve as discussant. I learned from Dan Hart yesterday as I listened to his masterful discussion of a symposium on moral exemplars that the role of the discussant was to draw out integrative or common themes from symposium papers. Dan's task seemed a bit easier because all of the papers tended to pull in the same direction and so were variations on a theme. The task before me is a bit different, because the dominant impression from this symposium is not one of common theme or broad agreement but rather of disjunction and disagreement. This also makes it more fun whatever the challenge for me and for us to pull it together. And in truth we should all be grateful for interesting symposia such as this one.

At the heart of the symposium is an important question: "What is to be made of the personal domain"? One paper claims that the construction of a personal zone of privacy and discretion establishes the boundary between agency and communion, between self and group; and that claims to personal freedom and attempts to defend these boundaries helps generate moral concepts of rights-as-freedom. Put differently, moral development—understood as concepts of interpersonal obligation --- depends importantly on children's construction of the personal sphere. The personal and moral are co-constructed; domain conflicts are coordinated.

Another paper claims that the personal domain is an epiphenomenon, that while individuals might well privatize their choices, they socialize the consequences. Personal choices are not so exclusively personal after all; instead we exercise personal discretion but worry about how it plays out in the lives of others. That our personal agency has communal implications is thought to count against a strong reading of the personal domain. The personal domain is not a refuge from other-oriented moral considerations.

A third paper takes up a somewhat different issue concerning the developmental origins of the domain distinction, and does not find that it emerges in the first year. I don't think this finding poses any particular difficulty for domain theory---it would have been more interesting, indeed, stupendous, if infants were found to make something like domain distinctions, then we'd really have an issue on our hands. That said, I think the developmental origins issue is an important one for the personal domain; and that the paradigm utilized by Kiley Hamlin and Paul Bloom and their colleagues is forcing many of us to reconsider the status of our moral capacities as developmental achievements. I hope to circle back to this in a moment.

So let me begin by offering a few reflections about domain theory if only to contextualize what I think is at stake in the present symposium.

I bet many of you in this room who teach developmental psychology courses would have had the same experiences as me when social domain theory comes up in class. It seems to have deep resonance with students. The prototype examples of domain theory have the ring of truth that find fast assent among undergraduates. Now I know that the affirming nodding heads of undergraduates is the weakest form of evidence, and I only mention it to underscore at least the face validity of domain distinctions.

I usually draw explicit attention to two of Larry's studies in particular: One that showed that middle school and high school teachers ruin their legitimacy as socialization agents when they don't keep domain distinctions in mind in their disciplinary practices; another that showed that Catholic high school students draw domain boundaries around church

authority---the Pope and all the bishops can change the rules about some things but not others. I teach at a Catholic university so this latter point is discussed with particular interest, but usually the following caveat emerges: that while some issues might get grouped within a personal domain or conventional domain does not mean that it *ought* to be or that it is right to do so.

Judi Smetana's work that pushes domain theory into family life and parenting is also of deep interest and is one of my favorite topics. My students have no difficulty multiplying examples of moral, conventional and personal domain issues in family life. When parents and adolescents come into conflict, it is often because they have different ideas about how to sort an issue: parents probably have a wider and deeper moral or conventional domain than teens can live with; teens have a wide and deep personal domain than parents think reasonable. Parents want to over-moralize, teens want to over-personalize. A useful rule of thumb for parents might be: hold true and firm and be an advocate for the moral, negotiate the conventional and give wide latitude to the personal. But this would be hard if parents over-moralize and teens over-personalize, and what parents and adolescents could both use is the sort of domain coordination skills that Larry presents in the research discussed here.

But I wade in to this to make another point: that the domain boundary is sometimes unguarded; the boundaries are elastic, porous, open to framing and disagreement and negotiation and interpretation; are subjective, developmentally variable and contextually sensitive. Although prototype cases are more easily sorted, even at very young ages, wide swaths of our social life are not so easily sorted into one domain or the other. How individuals understand ambiguous cases is what makes the research presented here so interesting. Of course there are hard cases, ambiguous cases; of course there is domain overlap---examples of these are easy to multiply and are sometimes thought to undermine the utility of domain theory. The research that Larry presents here clarifies quite well the sorting and rendering and coordinating that is required to disambiguate the hard cases and to make a decision for the moral domain; and I imagine an analogous process is required to sort out domain overlap across domains.

But if domains boundaries are poorly guarded, elastic and porous or context-sensitive, then I wonder if social domain theory is indeed a theory of natural kinds with respect to its domain distinctions. Does domain theory posit natural kinds? Frimer & Walker think it does, but I am not so sure.

For one thing, there are different ways of understanding natural kind theories. There are essentialist and anti-essentialist theories and those that make and don't make ontological claims. Which theory of kinds is most like domain theory if domain theory posits natural kinds? I don't think it is advocating essentialist natural kinds, as this would entail viewing domain distinctions as static and immutable. I don't think domain theory is making an ontological claim—if so I should have trouble with it---for to make an ontological claim is to suggest that domain distinctions are somehow basic, irreducible or *sui generis*,. I do not believe that morality is *sui generis*, and certainly conventions and personal decisions are not.

Kinds in the social sciences are problematic because changing norms and practices of individuals and societies may also constitute factors in kind membership; this is troublesome because, intuitively, there is some tension between existence of kinds and the mutability of the particulars which are supposed to fall under them---the more dynamic the particular, the less compelling the argument for kinds.

Do mental states form natural kinds? There is a debate about this, but for some the strongest argument for mental kinds is if there is a straightforward link of mental to neurophysical kinds---but this evidence is currently unavailing. So I think it is safest to say that the kinds posited by psychological theories are heuristic devices to make description or explanation possible---that is, they are not real natural kinds. I'm not entirely sure the sense in which Frimer and Walker understand domain theory as making natural kind distinctions, but it shifts the discussion to a whole other level that will perhaps bear more examination.

On a somewhat different tact, and to make another point: We sometimes forget just how Piagetian domain theory is. The boundaries of domains are partial structures that are constructed on the basis of certain behavioral experiences. This is precisely the way Piaget described the

emergence of domains of conservation, for example. Cognitive groupings are based on overt actions that have become interiorized, made part of mental cognitive activity---but groupings always retain an element of content specificity just because they are based on different kinds of overt actions.

For example, the conservation of physical quantity derives from interiorized actions of manipulating objects---putting objects together, taking them apart, and transforming their shape, and so on. But the mental operations in the conservation of weight are very different because they pertain to overt acts of a different sort, in this case, weighing. Each grouping of operations is adaptive for its particular content, and some actions are easier to group than others. I have always understood the construction of social domains to follow the logic of the construction of, say, conservation domains. Piaget was also a domain theorist, and it was Eliot Turiel's inspiration to push this Piagetian cognitive developmental insight into social cognitive development. Domains arise as interiorized cognitive constructions of behavioral experiences of certain kinds.

But if I am right about this, then social domain theory is just about the last Piagetian theory still standing. Certainly Kohlberg's moral stage theory has run out of gas; and Piaget's own theory has been whittled away to caricature and parked on the historical margins of contemporary research in child development. Those of you who grew up academically during those times will remember how that came to pass---in fact this symposium is a good illustration of it: First, there were studies that altered, revised or improved Piaget's tasks, say, on the conservation problems, and showed that children performed on them at variance with Piagetian expectations. I still remember Michael Chandler's stiff defense of Piaget's theory on this score, that when you change the task in certain ways one is no longer testing a Piagetian theory, that certain so-called "demand characteristics" are not optional and that removing them is to miss the Piagetian point.

And the second kind of study was to search for younger and younger ages for when Piagetian concepts were thought to be in reach, even of infants, so that now there is a large literature that wants to show, for example, that infants understand causality and number and now

maybe moral concepts. Both approaches are evident in this symposium. Frimer and Walker have devised an interesting procedure that casts new light on the personal domain; Hamlin and her colleagues look for the precursors of morality in infant cognition. Both lines of work are innovative, interesting, pose new hypotheses and should clearly continue---hearing about them and discussing them is why we come to conferences.

I am rather Lakatosian in my understanding of how science works. As Lakatos argued, mere criticism never falsifies a theory. There can be no falsification until the emergence of a competitor theory that has certain properties. I think domain theory could use better competitors. In my 1996 book I did mention a possibility that many moral or domain relevant concepts are organized as cognitive prototypes with fuzzy boundaries, and that prototype theory could be exploited with profit to understand domain ambiguity or overlap. This notion has not gotten much traction (possibly because unread or unloved!), and perhaps someone can improve upon it if it has any promise at all.

I should like to conclude with brief comments on three additional matters and then stop.

First, something about Larry's account of the personal idea gave me an idea. So, for the personal domain it is not a matter of right and wrong but of preference and choice; how it involves decisions about one's own body, freedom of expression and association, and all the things one might group under "pursuit of happiness." You heard him say "The underpinnings of the rights to privacy, expression and association and what has been vaguely referred to as the 'pursuit of happiness" have their psychological origins in these claims to a personal domain."

Take this account of the personal domain and compare it to the moral domain. Of course the moral domain is all about deontic obligation. It is the language of Kantian agency. Now the Kantian tradition is not the totality of morality, and the moral domain is not morality *per se* or in its entirety but rather morality understood from a certain ethical tradition, which is Kantian. The Aristotelian virtue perspective is often contrasted with Kant's, and it has a different set of priorities.

But does not Larry's account of the personal domain give it a whiff of Aristotelian ethical theory or open the door for a way to moralize the personal domain along Aristotelian lines?

For Aristotle, too, the main question concerned the "pursuit of happiness." For Aristotle, the main question was what is a good and happy life for a human being? The personal domain choices that go in to defining self-identity are not ethically neutral from this perspective---for choices of vocation, friends to cultivate, books to read, whether to derange my senses with drugs or alcohol, all have bearing on the sort of self one claims the self to be---to such an extent that certain courses of action are prescribed given the particularities of our moral identity. For individual and personal choices, even those that we would not dream of universalizing, can be subjectively obligatory in ethically relevant ways given our conception of what it means to live well the life that is good for one to live.

I am fascinated by the prospect that Kant and Aristotle are found lurking in the shadows of the moral and personal domains, respectively, and wonder to what extent the personal domain has ethical significance after all.

Second, it is said that children begin to carve out personal prerogatives and a zone of privacy in early childhood, and that this is crucial for the establishment of selfhood, individuality and agency. I think the next integrative step might include how to accommodate this view to emerging literatures on early socio-personality development and the moral self. I think the next frontier in moral development is the years 0 to 3--- and the language used to describe the emerge of the moral self during this period, and the mechanisms thereby, are very different than what we have been accustomed to, e.g., the notion that moral agency is built on emotion understanding scaffolded through parent-child dialogue. How does the moral self that emerges from within an emotion-laden relational matrix align with the moral self that aims to protect its privacy and its zone of discretion?

Finally, I wonder if the next generation of social domain research might look not so much as further articulation and defense of domain distinctions but rather the possibilities for domain dependencies in the service of broader developmental achievements or developmental challenges. Larry hints at this in his brief: in the claim, for example, that progressive elaboration of a zone of personal discretion motivates a clearer notion of certain moral concepts, and I suppose this works the other way 'round, too.

I have something else in mind, which is the way social domain knowledge contributes to personal formation, for example to the development of personality or is influenced by these things. The personal domain *presumes a person*, and persons are more than the sum of domain coordinations. An interesting question may well be how dimensions of personality—moral identity, the moral self, the virtuous character— whichever term is congenial—influences the way domain knowledge is deployed or coordinated; or how the deployment of social domain knowledge folds back into one's changing conceptions of who I am and what my life means.

For what we see in the social landscape depends on *who we are.* Whether the landscape is moralized or personalized, whether the case is straightforward or ambiguous---depends on who we are, on the qualities of seeing that are afforded by the person we are or aspire to be, by the qualities of our character.

Linking moral development to other developmental achievements, to broader psychological constructs, including emotions, personality, selfhood, has been a discernible trend in recent years, and showing how personal domain knowledge relates to this things is an exciting prospect for the future.