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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA IN HUNTSVILLE

Honors Program

HONORS SENIOR PROJECT APPROVAL FORM

(To be submitted by the student to the Honors Program with a copy of the Honors Project suitable for binding. All signatures must be obtained.)

Name of Candidate: CHERYL LEATHERWOOD

Department: Psychology

Degree: Psychology

Full Title of Project: Moral Reasoning: A Study of  
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Approved by:

[Signature] July 12, 1993  
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Attachment 3

HONORS PROJECT ABSTRACT  
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**Moral Reasoning: A Study of Gender, Dilemma Content,  
and Moral Orientation**

**with**

**Implications for Criminal Justice Systems**

**Cheryl L. Leatherwood**

**The University of Alabama in Huntsville**

## INTRODUCTION

When faced with a moral dilemma, many of us yearn for simple black and white answers. Unfortunately, we live in a world comprised of shades of gray. Because there are no simple answers, it is critical to examine how we arrive at solutions to our moral dilemmas. There are two approaches to the study of morality and moral reasoning. The first is the philosophical study of ethics, or the nature of morality and moral acts and what we *ought* do in any given situation. Second is the use of social and behavioral scientific methodology to uncover how people actually behave and to probe into their beliefs about moral reasoning (Rich & DeVitis, 1985). This research project was designed using the latter to examine current theories of moral development and moral reasoning.

As far back as Aristotle morality has been viewed not as merely a spiritual or mental state, but also as activity and function. Aristotle further declared that the action and function of any moral perspective must be voluntary. Involuntary moral action carries no virtue in its execution (Aristotle, 1962). Thus, critical to any solution for a moral dilemma is the element of choice, for morality lies in the intent of the action as well as the execution of the action. Therefore, the individual must determine “why” the action is deemed morally appropriate. Leaving us with a perspective of morality as a voluntary system of conduct based

on moral principles determined after some degree of reflection on the part of the moral actor. But just where do these “moral principles” come from?

Many use religious doctrine and tenets to establish moral “rules” for behavior and action. This might work well if everyone subscribed to the same religious beliefs. However, when competing religions as well as secular standards come into conflict, some consensus must be achieved for the stability of the society. Some contend that the principles of right conduct in behavior are such that the behavior complies with “accepted principles of what is considered right, virtuous, or just”(Rich & DeVitis, 1985, p.6), and that these principles are derived as a response to the “essential competing demands for individual autonomy and social stability” (p.4), and the compromise between self-interest and altruism.

This reasoning leaves us with an ever changing set of moral principles determined and accepted by individuals who are influenced by social, political, and economic structures which impact the competition between the individual and society. In The Rights of Nature, Roderick Nash (1989) supports the concept of an ever changing morality when he relates Charles Darwin’s presentation of moral sensibilities as a product of evolution from “social instincts” which are then extended by education and emulation and eventually become incorporated in public opinion and established laws which regulate behavior (p.44). The philosopher Nietzsche agrees that morality is determined and communicated through

socialization when he says, "it is therefore not the voice of God in the heart of man, but the voice of some men in man"(Nietzsche, 1977, p.85).

If morality is socially and culturally influenced, it seems that it may or may not, depending upon temporal and spatial determinants, agree with philosophical ethics. Durkheim's comments on moral development (Rich & DeVitis, 1985) contend that we internalize the moral values of our particular community because we respond to a spirit of authority and discipline due to our attachment to groups (interestingly corresponding with Freud's superego), thus mediating any self-determination (corresponding with Freud's id) that might threaten social stability. Freud (1961) goes so far as to say that the first requisite of civilization is the assurance that once a law is made it will not be broken in favor of any individual, which implies nothing as to the ethical value of such a law, merely that justice demands that no one shall escape those restrictions.

Unfortunately, established guidelines are not always appropriate or adequate. This was evident in a recent ruling by a judge in small claims court in Huntsville when he took the time to explain to the plaintiff that while his ruling might not be "fair" or "just," it was consistent with, and required by, the law.

This would seem to make moral decisions simple. We just look up the appropriate rule and take the appropriate action. Fortunately or unfortunately, it is not that simple. We must frequently look not only to social, cultural, legal, and religious standards but to some internal

reasoning perspective to help resolve moral dilemmas. How we formulate our moral reasoning and which perspective we use has been the subject of considerable psychological research over the years. Durkheim's work has described two competing perspectives which strongly resemble the two most prevalent in today's theories of moral reasoning perspectives.

The first, more dominant, type is characterized as being "sensitive to the rule," i.e. those persons in society who are predisposed to authority and discipline. . . happiest when duty, couched in reality, can be executed properly, and the other extreme which is more apt to be recognized for its propensity to "spend" itself by an "outward expansiveness." More bound by emotions, these individuals like to help others and do not act strictly by reason or logic. (Rich and DeVitis, 1985, p.14).

These two perspectives are well represented in today's accepted definitions of "justice" perspective and "care" perspective, even though they are no longer seen as two extremes on a linear scale, but as perspectives which might be used exclusively or in combination with each other to determine appropriate moral action.

But is moral reasoning ever that simple? Or are there other considerations and other perspectives represented in moral perspectives today? The following research project was designed to evaluate the extent to which either of these, some combination of these, or an alternative perspective is used by individuals in determining their own moral position and solutions for particular moral dilemmas.



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**Moral Reasoning: A Study of Gender, Dilemma Content, and Moral  
Orientation**

**Karen Bowles, Laura DeHaye, Sue Kirkpatrick, Cheryl Leatherwood,  
and David Mattox**

**The University of Alabama in Huntsville**

**Running Head: MORAL REASONING: DILEMMA CONTENT**

### Abstract

Two studies were conducted to examine the effect of gender and dilemma content on moral orientation of college students. The Preliminary Study resulted in the selection of four fables, each with a particular contextual slant: 1) care, 2) justice, 3) both care and justice, 4) neither care nor justice. The Main Study utilized these fables to generate moral reasoning, specifically first and best solutions, based on the problems occurring in each fable. Males and females did not significantly differ in moral orientation, but contextual slant of the fables did have a significant effect on participants' reasoning, though not always as intended. Changes in first and best solutions were significantly less than expected by chance. Appropriateness of fable use for eliciting moral reasoning, reliability of the study's particular fables and coding method, and alternate definitions of the "neither" category are discussed.

### Moral Reasoning: A Study of Gender, Dilemma Content, and Moral Orientation

Since Gilligan (1982) leveled her charge of sex bias against Kohlberg's scheme of moral development and reasoning, much controversy has arisen concerning gender-specific moral orientations. Gilligan, Ward, Taylor and Bardige (1988) propounded that a justice/rights dimension for judging moral dilemmas cannot accurately depict the moral reasoning of women who judge from a predominantly care context. They cited Kohlberg's adherence to male subjects in experimentation and allowed that males predominantly judge from a justice context. These accepted gender-specific moral orientations (justice and care) have sparked a vast amount of research in the moral domain. However, mounting evidence indicates that the previous conclusions may not be the case, that is, men may not be relegated to justice orientations and women to care orientations. In addition some studies suggest no strict adherence to an orientation determined by sex or orientations that are combinations of justice and care.

Although incorporating Gilligan's theory for both females and males, results of some research have demonstrated that solutions are not dichotomized by gender. In a study by Walker, DeVries, and Trevethan (1987), predominant responses of both genders reflected a combination of justice and care orientations. Other researchers (Galotti, Kozberg, and Farmer, 1991; Walker, 1989) indicate minimal or no differences according

to gender. Walker (1989) drew from the Kohlbergian schemata and used four orientations for classifying responses. These four include the normative (duty and rightness/rules and roles), fairness (liberty, equity, equality, reciprocity, and contract), utilitarianism (welfare and happiness consequences for self and others), and perfectionism (dignity, autonomy, good conscience and motives, peace) orientations, and found no gender differences, even though he had predicted the contrary. Galotti et al. (1991) found that out of 11 essay themes, nine did not reveal gender differences. They suggested that the two remaining themes in which differences were found may have resulted from the participants responses being "contaminated by the immediate previous exposure to the three specific DIT [Defining Issues Test, an objective procedure for scoring moral reasoning] dilemmas" (p. 27).

The prevailing attitude seems to indicate that the gender-specific interpretation of moral reasoning is unnecessarily limiting and perhaps inappropriate for deciphering such a broad realm of cognition (Galotti et al., 1991; Mennuti and Creamer, 1991). Investigations conducted by Galotti et al. (1991) utilized a factor analysis on theme and concluded that "classification of moral reasoning into two categories . . . may be too simplistic" (p. 28). Adding to the accepted binary vision of this realm, Mennuti and Creamer (1991) proposed a third orientation, that of "self-orientation" (p. 246), to interpret the diversity of moral reasoning responses. They reported, "There is insufficient evidence to claim definitively that the self-orientation operates discretely from the justice

and care orientations" (p. 246). Rather, self-orientation tends to join with one or both of the other orientations. In Walker's (1984) metaanalysis of moral reasoning experimentation results, the overall pattern is one of an absence of significant sex differences in moral reasoning.

A consideration must be made for the possible effect that dilemma content might have upon moral reasoning. Perhaps gender differences in orientation used in moral reasoning can be attributed to gender specific dilemmas. Colby and Damon (1983) surmised, perhaps "men and women emphasize different aspects of morality and frame spontaneously-chosen dilemmas somewhat differently" (p. 479). In a similar vent, Galotti et al. (1991) reported that others have found evidence for gender differences due to "types of issues and concerns typically focused upon" (Bussey and Maughan, 1982; Gilligan et al., 1988; Hanson and Mullis, 1985, Lyons, 1983, Scheidel and Marcia, 1985, Yussen, 1977, as cited in Galotti et al., 1991, p. 15). Pratt, Golding, Hunter, and Sampson (1988) reported that gender differences in orientation used were "linked to differences in the dilemma content presented by men and women" (p. 373). When Walker (1989) held dilemma content constant, he reported no sex differences, with a strong effect of dilemma content, submitting that the content "better predicts moral orientation than does individuals' sex" (p. 161). Colby and Damon (1983) further suggested that the "type of dilemma being discussed is as influential in determining a person's orientation as is the person's gender" (p. 479).

There is some concern as to what constitutes an appropriate methodology for the testing of moral reasoning orientation. Standardized moral dilemmas were used by Kohlberg and open-ended interviews during which participants generated their own dilemmas by Gilligan. Walker (1989) found that when standard dilemmas were employed, there was an absence of sex differences, but added that the hypothetical dilemmas encouraged a justice/rights orientation and that real-life dilemmas encouraged a care/response orientations. The study was inconclusive concerning whether the type of dilemma affects the moral orientation used in solving a particular dilemma, or if the individual's moral orientation determines the interpretation of the dilemma in question. Mennuti and Creamer (1991) reported that though they did not find any important differences in regard to dilemma content, the dilemmas themselves were generated by the participants in which they were the central character. Ford and Lowery (1986) identified a need for "standardized dilemmas that are equated or balanced for the extent to which the content is embedded in justice or care contexts" (p. 782). Pratt et al. (1988) indicated results reminiscent of those already expressed, that is, differences in sex and orientation attributable to the content presented by women and men.

Johnston (1988) employed fables and her own coding method for the exploration of moral reasoning. She noted that fables present a dilemma that engages participants much like real-life dilemmas, but differ in three ways. As a testing model, fables offer a "constant context which is specific

and consistent" (p. 51), thus lending ease in evaluating subject responses. Also, because fables are not a reconstruction of dilemmas the subjects have encountered, probing will not prove as strenuous on both the interviewer and interviewee. In addition, the subject devises her/his own concept of what the dilemma is in the context of the fable and provides the solution to the problem interpreted. Thus, the present study utilizes fables because they represent a viable alternative to the real-life and hypothetical dilemmas as a depersonalized query for discerning moral reasoning. Through manipulation of the dilemmas, gender influences within the context, which have been cited as responsible for gender bias, can be controlled (Bussey and Maughan, 1982).

There are also methodological concerns surrounding the appropriate coding method for judging responses of moral reasoning studies. Johnston's coding method examines the response and codes it as a whole unit. This differs from Lyons' (1988), which separates ideas within the subject's response, types each concept as a certain orientation, and codes the response according to the orientation used most frequently within that response. Johnston also examined the first (or "spontaneous" (p. 52)) and best (or "preferred" (p. 52)) response to the dilemmas posited by the subjects. Johnston's addition of categories for uncodable and combined justice-care orientations provides for the diversity of responses generated.

Rothbart, Hanley, and Albert (1986) recognized the implications of a dilemma contextual slant (i.e., a proclivity towards solving a particular dilemma according to its content) that might better account for subject



responses than gender. Their study found a significant effect for the dilemma content on moral reasoning. Yet the results of Rothbart et al. may be argued as inconclusive on several grounds. Rothbart et al. used the Kohlbergian Heinz dilemma for testing the effect of a justice-oriented dilemma on response. Here, stereotypical roles are used and male characters as the protagonists predominate, thus gender was not controlled and may have been confounding. The hypothetical dilemma used to elicit a care response is vaguely described as dealing with "physical intimacy" (p. 648) and "interpersonal relationships" (p. 648), and is not reprinted for scrutiny. The small sample size ( $n=50$ ) was not sufficient for ecologically sound conclusions, so further research is warranted. Responses considered as an equal care-justice orientation were disregarded in part of the analysis. The report does not allow the reader to determine if the hypotheses have been accurately addressed by the statistical analysis, and some question surrounds whether a Chi-square test was the most appropriate type of analysis for the data, leaving the reader somewhat unclear concerning the exact effect of dilemma content upon the orientation of moral reasoning used by the interviewees. However, the basic claims seem substantiated, and the present study sought to elaborate upon the implications of Rothbart, et al.

Few studies have explored the possibility of a third or more orientations. Yet substantial percentages of responses have been judged uncodable or simply discarded. According to Lyon's observations, six percent of females and seven percent of males expressed an equal

orientation; but 19% of females and 14% of males used no relational component (care/response orientation) in moral decisions. In another study of modes of self-definition in resolving moral dilemmas, Lyons found that 21% (of which 66% were female) of participants used equal or no relational characterizations. In Johnston's fable dilemma studies, 11.25% used what could be considered both rights and response orientations. Even more relevant, perhaps, is the finding that 2.9% of the sample yielded uncodable responses; that is, they did not fit into an accepted rubric of moral orientation. In addition, Johnston noted these orientations are strategies that conceivably are used in accordance with certain situations the individual encounters. As mentioned earlier, Mennuti and Creamer (1991) proposed a self orientation, though it is most often an accouterment to the justice and care perspectives. Galotti (1989) uses an elaborate coding scheme that utilizes up to 13 orientations for coding moral reasoning. It seems more than plausible that another modality for moral reasoning remains yet unnamed.

Consequently, this study poses that gender has no significant effects on moral reasoning, and that orientations are at least in part situationally-specific, and therefore the dilemma type will have a significant effect on the orientation used in response. More specifically, this study postulates that gender will have no significant effect on either first or best responses, that the contextual slant of the fable will have a significant effect on both first and best responses, and that there will be no difference between first and best responses.

## Preliminary Study

### Purpose

The selection of fables was based upon the concept that a particular dilemma may be predisposed to elicit a solution that represents one of the four suggested moral orientations, namely care, justice, neither, or both. The researchers reviewed Aesop's fables and selected 16 fables that appeared to have a contextual slant which would result in responses falling predominantly into one orientation. Four of the 16 fables were eventually selected for the main study. Fables for which 60% of the respondents agreed upon the contextual slant were to be used in the main study.

### Subjects

Forty-one students enrolled in upper level psychology courses at The University of Alabama in Huntsville participated in the study. Some volunteered for the study, and others received research participation credits. The APA ethical guidelines for research with human subjects were followed. Ages and gender of subjects were not recorded.

### Materials

Fables. Sixteen fables were chosen from Aesop's collection (see Appendix). Each fable was adapted to include only gender neutral characters which controlled for the possible effect of the protagonist's gender on the classification of the fable (Bussey & Maughan, 1982). Characters which were associated with gender were excluded. This process was based upon results of an unpublished study conducted by

Sandra Carpenter (1990) in which 102 introductory psychology students rated roles, occupations, and animals on a seven point masculinity and femininity scale. The 16 fables as well as the choices available for classification of the fables were compiled in random order in booklet form.

Contextual Slants. Descriptions of four orientations of moral reasoning (care, justice, both, and neither, labeled "Perspective A, B, C, and D" respectively) accompanied each booklet. The definitions of the care and justice orientations to moral reasoning were developed by Ford and Lowery, cited in Galotti et al. (1991). The definition of the neither orientation is derived from Johnston's category of uncodable, modifying it to a "neither justice or care" category to allow for the possibility of the discovery of a common thread in the responses coded in this category indicative of another or more orientations. "Perspective A", or the care orientation, was defined as follows:

One way to approach thinking about a moral conflict is to see the characters involved in relationships with others. This means the characters have certain responsibilities to be concerned for others and to consider how what they do will help or hurt those involved. Conflicts are considered in the context of their effect on relationships between people, and whether those relationships will be maintained, restored, or damaged. The characters seek a way to respond that will minimize the hurt to all involved (p. 18).

"Perspective B", or the justice orientation was defined as follows:

One way to approach thinking about a moral conflict is to see the characters involved in a process of judging. This includes standing back from the problem at hand to consider the most fair way to resolve the dilemma. It often means thinking of certain rules or laws which govern the way people behave. The problem involves competing sets of values. What is most just is sought by considering the rights of all involved (p.18).

"Perspective C", or both justice and care orientations, was defined as follows:

The approach to thinking about a moral conflict may involve a balanced mixture of both "Perspective A" and "Perspective B". The problem could be solved by synthesizing the ideas behind a principle that would meet the needs of all those involved in the problem.

"Perspective D", or neither justice or care orientations, was defined as follows:

The approach to thinking about a moral conflict may not lend itself to either "Perspective A" or "Perspective B". In other words, the problem could be solved in a way that is not clearly defined by any of the other perspectives (A, B, or C).

The definitions of each perspective were presented on a single page in the same order as above.

### Procedure

Following a brief explanation of the material, subjects were presented individual fable booklets. They were asked to read and classify each fable into one contextual slant. The classification process was group-administered in a classroom.

### Results

Percentages of the responses for each category (care, justice, both, and neither) were calculated for each fable (see Table 1). None of the fables

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Insert Table 1 about here.

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reached the 60% criterion. Based on the modal response, eight fables were assigned a care contextual slant, four a justice contextual slant, one a both contextual slant, and three a neither contextual slant (see Table 2). Three

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Insert Table 2 about here.

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chi-squares were calculated for each fable to determine if the assignment of contextual slant differed among: 1) care - justice - both - neither categories; 2) care - justice - both categories; 3) care - justice categories.

To say that a fable has a single perspective of either care or justice, all three chi-squares should reflect a significant difference. For the modal

response category of care, the fable with the highest significance across all three chi-square values was "Mice". For the modal response category of justice, the fable with the highest significance across all three chi-square values was "Flutist".

Chi-square supported the selection of "Wagoner" for the neither category as indicated by the highly significant chi-square value when all four categories are included in the analysis and accompanying high non-significant chi-square values for the other two analyses.

Support for "Bees" as representative of the both category was not as strong as was the support for the other three fable selections. Ideally, the fable best suited for a contextual slant of both (an equal balance of justice and care) would have non-significant chi-square values from analysis 2 and analysis 3, as well as no responses falling in the neither category. While non-significant values were obtained for analysis 2 and analysis 3, responses did occur within the category of neither. However, the "Bees" fable remained the best choice for the both category.

The representative fables are as follows:

The Care Contextual Slant - "Mice"

Long ago, the mice held a general council to consider what measures they could take to outwit their common enemy, the Cat. Some said this, and some said that; but at last a young mouse got up and proposed a solution. "You will all agree," said the mouse, "that our chief danger consists in the sly and treacherous manner in which the

enemy approaches us. Now, if we could receive some signal of the approach, we could easily escape. I venture, therefore, to propose that a small bell be procured, and attached by a ribbon round the neck of the Cat. By this means we should always know when the Cat was about, and could easily retire while it was in the neighborhood."

This proposal met with general applause, until an old mouse got up and said: "That is all very well, but who is to bell the cat?" The mice looked at one another, and nobody spoke.

#### The Justice Contextual Slant - "Flutist"

A flutist during a battle ventured too near the enemy, and was captured by them. They were about to proceed with the execution when the flutist begged them to hear a plea for mercy. "I do not fight," the flutist said, "and indeed carry no weapon; I only play this flute, and surely that cannot harm you; then why should you kill me?"

"You may not fight yourself," said the captors, "but you encourage and guide the others to fight".

#### The Both Contextual Slant - "Bees"

The Bees and the Partridges, overcome with thirst, came to a Gardener and besought some water to drink. They promised amply to repay the Gardener the favor which they asked. The Partridges declared that they would dig around



the vines and make them produce finer grapes. The Bees said that they would keep guard and drive off thieves with their stings. But the Gardener interrupted them, saying: "I have already two oxen, who, without making any promises, do all these things. It is surely better for me to give the water to them than to you."

#### The Neither Contextual Slant - "Wagoner"

A Wagoner was driving along a country lane when the wagon wheels suddenly sank into a deep rut. The Wagoner climbed down and stood looking helplessly at the wagon. Without attempting to lift the wagon out of the rut, the Wagoner began to pray to the Spirit of the Road for aid.

The Spirit heard the Wagoner's cries for help and said "Put your shoulder to the wheel, before you pray to me for help".

#### Discussion

Subjects expressed difficulty coding fables into a particular contextual slant. Researchers suggest three possibilities for this problem. First, it is possible that fables depersonalize the conflict to such an extent that individuals do not see a moral dilemma within the conflict. Perhaps, the difficulty was confounded by the fact that individuals do not see moral dilemmas in relationship to animals. As Durkheim reports, morality doesn't exist unless there is interaction between individuals, and possibly

subjects found it difficult to regard animals in social contexts (Rich & DeVitis, 1985).

Secondly, individuals may project their own internal schemata for solving moral dilemmas into the conflicts they observed in the fables. That is, individuals may not be able to separate content of a moral dilemma from personal considerations. This would argue against the concept presented by Johnston (1988) that fables offer a "constant context which is specific and consistent" (p. 51).

Third, the categorical definitions of care, justice, both and neither, might not be specific enough, or are convoluted to such a degree, that the determination of the contextual slant of each fable might not have been accurate. Perhaps more specific concrete definitions would facilitate identification of contextual slant.

## Main Study

### Subjects

Seventy-two students, 26 males and 42 females, enrolled in lower level psychology courses at The University of Alabama in Huntsville participated in the study. Each received one participation point in the psychology course in which she/he was enrolled. An informed consent form was reviewed and signed by each subject prior to the interview session.

### Materials and Setting

The four fables determined by the preliminary study were utilized.

Each of the fables were representative of each of the four contextual slants ("Mice" for care, "Flutist" for justice, "Bees" for both, and "Wagoner" for neither ). Audio cassette tape recorders were used to record the subjects' responses. Interviews were conducted in small windowless rooms with ample reading light.

### Procedure

The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed by a third party at a later time in order to assure anonymity of the subject. Subjects were presented a fable and allowed a maximum of two minutes to read it. When finished reading, subjects were asked to return the fable to the interviewer, thus signaling the beginning of the interview. These steps were repeated three more times, using the remaining fables. Fables were presented in counterbalanced order. The interviews were conducted by all four researchers of this study. The following series of questions was a guideline for the interview:

1. Is there a dilemma in the story you just read?
2. Can you describe it?
3. How would you solve this dilemma?
4. Why is that a good solution?
5. Is there another way to solve the dilemma?
6. What lead you to that solution?
7. Repeat questions (5) and (6).
8. Of all the solutions discussed, which is the best?

Following the interview, subjects were debriefed.

### Coding

Four researchers independently coded the transcripts, but no researcher coded an interview which she/he conducted (i.e., only three researchers coded any one interview). This study utilized a technique modeled after Johnston's (1988) four-category coding procedure. The category definitions of care, justice, neither, and both are defined in the preliminary study as "Perspective A, B, C, and D" respectively. The first solution offered by the subject in response to the question, "How would you solve this dilemma?", and the best solution offered by the subject in response to the question, "Of all the solutions described, which is the best?", were analyzed and coded as entire entities according to the predominant orientation detected. The coders were blind to the subjects' gender. The percent of agreement figures were calculated for two and three person agreements. The percentages were 91.5% and 50.7% respectively. When three person agreement was not initially achieved, the coders collaborated to arrive at a consensus.

### Results

Gender. The median test was selected to evaluate the null hypothesis that gender will have no effect on orientation of first or best response. Eight separate median tests were calculated on total responses for each moral orientation (care, justice, both, and neither) for first solutions and best solutions. Due to the high frequency of responses falling at the median, the data were divided into two groups, those which exceeded the

median and those that did not. The median tests yielded no significant differences for either first or best responses (see Table 3). Differences between females and males were extremely small, as indicated by the mean, median, and standard deviation of responses for each moral orientation

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Insert Table 3 about here.

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(see Table 4). Thus, the research hypotheses that gender will have no effect on orientation of first or best response was supported.

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Insert Table 4 about here.

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Contextual Slant. The Cochran-Q test was selected to evaluate the null hypotheses that the contextual slant of the fable will have no effect on orientation of first or best response. Data were dichotomized into intended (e.g., care response elicited by care contextual slant) and non-intended (e.g., a justice, both, or neither response elicited by a care contextual slant) responses. When all four contextual slants for both first and best solutions were evaluated, significant differences between intended and non-intended responses were found (see Table 5). A high

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Insert Table 5 about here.

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frequency of intended responses (61/67 for first, and 62/65 for best solutions) occurred in the neither category demonstrating that the fable representing the neither slant elicited neither responses. Therefore, additional Cochran- $Q$  tests were conducted comparing only three contextual slants, excluding the neither category, to determine whether the contextual finding would remain valid. While these results also showed significant differences, the low frequency of responses for the both category (11/68 for first, and 12/65 for best responses) may have been solely responsible for the high  $Q$  value. This led to analysis of the remaining two contextual slants, care and justice, which showed no significant differences. Fables with contextual slants of care, justice, and both did not elicit intended responses as strongly as did the fable having a neither slant (see Table 6). Examination of non-intended responses

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Insert Table 6 about here.

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revealed that the fable representing the both contextual slant elicited a high percentage of justice responses (43% for first response and 47% for best responses [see Table 7]).

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Insert Table 7 about here.

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When testing all four contextual slants or the three contextual slants of care, justice, and both, the null hypothesis was rejected, and thus the

research hypothesis that the contextual slant of the fable will have an effect on orientation of first and best response was supported. However, the results of the Cochran-Q conducted on the care and justice contextual slants indicated that the null hypothesis be retained.

First and Best Responses. The z-test of proportion was selected to evaluate the third null hypothesis that changes would not differ from that expected by chance in the orientations of the first and best responses. A z-test of proportions was performed on the percentage of change from the first response orientation to the best response orientation for each of the four fables. Results of all z-tests reflected percentages of change significantly less than due to chance (see Table 8). Percentage of change

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Insert Table 8 about here.

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was the lowest for the "Wagoner" fable (7%), and the "Bees" fable exhibited the highest percentage of change at 38%. Not only did the "Wagoner" fable elicit a high frequency of intended responses, but subjects were also least likely to change orientations when responding to the "Wagoner" fable. In summation, because the null hypothesis was rejected and changes were less than expected by chance, the research hypothesis regarding stability of orientation is supported.

### Discussion

Gender. While some of the research that has been done suggests gender differences in moral reasoning (Kohlberg, 1981; Gilligan 1988;

Lyons, 1988; and Johnston, 1988), results from the present study provide support for conclusions made by Galotti et. al (1991), Walker et. al (1987), as well as the metaanalysis done by Walker (1984), indicating no gender differences in regard to moral reasoning. While females were thought to predominately evaluate moral dilemmas from a care context and males were thought to predominately evaluate moral dilemmas from a justice context, results of this study reject this simplified approach to understanding moral reasoning. Care responses were as likely to be selected by males as by females, and justice responses were equally as likely to be selected by females as by males. The high frequency of responses for both males and females in the neither contextual slant suggest that the orientations of care and justice may be too limiting for interpreting moral orientations.

In addition, because gender does not seem to predispose an individual to a specific moral orientation, it is appropriate that further research be conducted, seeking alternate explanations for the diversity of existing modalities. It is time to abandon theories of gender differences in moral reasoning that has guided and limited research in this area for much too long.

Contextual Slant. One of the most important findings of the present study may be the indication that fables are not best suited for examining moral reasoning. Garrod, Beal, and Shin (1990) argued that "fables used . . . [in] previous research had shown that they could be solved from either a justice or a care orientation, and that fables appear[ed] to be an



appropriate way to elicit moral reasoning in children and adolescents, since the problems that beset the animal characters in the fables are immediately intelligible to the child" (p. 13). The difficulty experienced in coding the contextual slant of the fables indicate it may be possible that the appropriateness of fables for eliciting responses to moral dilemmas from children may not extend to individuals past childhood and adolescence.

While many studies address the question of content within a moral dilemma (Walker, et. al, 1987; Pratt, et. al, 1988), most only allowed for the two areas identified by Kohlberg and Gilligan of justice and care. While it is true that responses of care and justice are elicited from moral dilemmas that appear to have a specific contextual slant, the high frequency of responses obtained in the neither orientation implies that fables can also be used to elicit responses from more than just a care or justice orientation. Not only was it difficult to procure solutions to the dilemmas, but it was also difficult to elicit sufficient discussion to discern a moral orientation in the solution. These problems cast suspicion on the assumption that fables are able to hold the subject to a particular moral orientation regardless of the subject's own moral reasoning perspective.

Johnston (1988) says the participant devises her/his own concept of what the dilemma is in the context of the fable and provides the solution to the problem interpreted. In a later study, Johnston, Brown, and Christopherson (1990) offer that "the same 'conflict' may have very different bottom-line 'contents' for different people (p. 617). If this is true,

it is possible that participants construct the nature of the problem according to their own moral reasoning perspective, invalidating the influence of a contextual slant embedded within a dilemma. Another possibility expressed by Pratt et. al (1988) speculates that "variations in the content of dilemmas discussed can be confounded with variations in the reasoning orientations elicited" (p. 388).

An examination of the responses coded into the neither moral orientation indicate support for a category identified by Johnston et. al (1990) and Mennuti & Creamer (1991) as "self". Mennuti & Creamer defined the "self" modality as "a consideration of the primacy of self-respect in judgments of moral value . . . form[ing] the basis of concern for others" (p. 245). While the methodology used in this study did not provide a means of evaluating this orientation specifically, the results of this study support Johnston et. al (1990) in the isolation of "self" as a moral orientation separate and distinct from the orientations of justice or care. Because research on moral reasoning has been restricted by the acceptance of the two major designations of care and justice orientations, it is important that future research provide for the possibility of new and as yet unidentified moral orientations which may be at least as prevalent as care and justice.

Further examination of the responses coded into the neither orientation revealed a recurring theme of "avoidance". This was especially evident in responses to the "Mice" fable and the "Bees" fable, where participants

frequently suggested that the mice move to avoid the conflict with the cat and that the bees and partridges go elsewhere to look for water. This may be indicative of the difficulty and amorphousness surrounding the examination of moral reasoning. If individuals elect to avoid conflict rather than confront the moral dilemma, it is not surprising so much controversy is indelibly tied to questions of moral reasoning.

Another possible explanation for the low frequency of intended responses in the justice, care, and both orientations is that the contextual slant was not adequately discernible within the fables selected (see discussion section of Preliminary Study). Researchers speculate that the "Wagoner" fable may have had such a high percentage of intended response for the neither category because many participants were unable to identify a moral dilemma in the story. This is evidenced by responses offering pragmatic solutions by those who saw practical problems and not moral dilemmas in this fable. Solutions offered included: placing boards under the wheels, hitching horses to pull the wagon out, and unloading the contents of the wagon to reduce the weight.

In summary, even though contextual slant may influence the moral reasoning of an adult, fables may cause a high degree of depersonalization and ambiguity making the identification of the dilemma difficult. The identifiable categories of "self" and "avoidance" indicate a need for further research, utilizing a methodology with either better suited fables or a different dilemma type (e.g., self-generated or standardized), inclusive of these new modalities.

First and Best Responses. If contextual slant prompts a participant to respond consistently with a particular moral orientation, then a participant's response to the fable's problem should not differ from first to best. However, Johnston (1988), who studied moral reasoning in response to fables, found significant changes from the spontaneous to the best response. The tendency to change orientation may be characteristic of the adolescent population from which she drew her participants. It is plausible that the age difference of participants contributed to these differences, or they may suggest developmental shifts in consistency. Also the researchers of the present study manipulated the contextual slant to elicit specific responses, whereas Johnston analyzed the context post hoc. Furthermore, Johnston provided solutions to the dilemmas she presented but the researchers of this study did not. These postulations may account for the changes in first and best response and certainly warrant further investigation.

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## Appendix

### List of Sixteen of Aesop's Fables and Corresponding Modified Names

<u>Modified</u>	<u>Aesop's Titles</u>
Kangaroo	The Lion and the Boar
Pigs	The Cattle and the Cook
Grasshopper	The Ant and the Grasshopper
W. Traveler	The Fisher and Muddy Waters
Mice	The Mice
Thief	The Thief and His Mother
Frogs	The Frog and the Children
Fox	The Farmer and Fox Fire
Bather	The Child and the Traveler
Viper	The Chicken and the Serpent Eggs
Bees	The Gardener, the Bees and The Partridges
Traveler	The Traveler and The Horse
Porcupine	The Porcupine and the Mole
Flute	The Trumpeter and the Enemy
Stable	The Groom and the Horse
Wagoner	The Wagoner



Table 1

Percentages of Responses by Orientations Chosen for the 16 Fables

	Care	Justice	Both	Neither	No Response
Kangaroo	44%	12%	29%	15%	
Pigs	34%	27%	29%	10%	
Grasshopper	34%	27%	22%	15%	2%
W. Traveler	25%	29%	24%	22%	
Mice	51%	10%	17%	22%	
Thief	15%	34%	27%	22%	2%
Frogs	39%	27%	27%	5%	2%
Fox	15%	29%	15%	41%	
Bather	46%	20%	22%	12%	
Viper	22%	27%	17%	29%	5%
Bees	20%	27%	29%	24%	
Traveler	22%	34%	32%	12%	
Porcupine	46%	12%	32%	10%	
Flute	10%	46%	27%	17%	
Stable	39%	17%	22%	22%	
Wagoner	12%	15%	12%	56%	5%

Table 2

Modal Contextual Slant: Percentages of Responses, Modal Response, and p Values

	%	Frequency	p, df=3	p, df=2	p, df=1
<u>Care</u>					
Mice	51	21	.001	.001	.001
Porcupine	46	19	.01	.02	.01
Bather	46	19	.02	.05	.05
Kang.	44	18	.01	.05	.01
Stable	39	16	.30	.20	.10
Frog	39	16	.05	.70	.50
Butchers	34	14	.10	.70	.70
Grasshopper	34	14	.50	.70	.70
<u>Justice</u>					
Flute	46	19	.01	.02	.01
Thief	34	14	.50	.02	.10
Traveler	34	14	.20	.50	.30
W. Traveler	29	12	.95	.90	.70
<u>Both</u>					
Bees	29	12	.90	.70	.50
<u>Neither</u>					
Wagoner	56	23	.001	.95	.80
Fox	41	17	.02	.30	.20
Viper	29	12	.90	.70	.70

Note: Two degrees of freedom excludes the neither category. One degree of freedom excludes the neither and the both categories.

Table 3

Median Test Results for All Responses, First Responses, and Best Responses

	Slant	Median Score	df	
All Responses	Care	0.641	df=1	Not Significant
	Justice	1.557	df=1	Not Significant
	Both	0.374	df=1	Not Significant
	Neither	2.664	df=1	Not Significant
First Responses	Care	0.210	df=1	Not Significant
	Justice	0.139	df=1	Not Significant
	Both	0.631	df=1	Not Significant
	Neither	0.906	df=1	Not Significant
Best Responses	Care	0.113	df=1	Not Significant
	Justice	0.122	df=1	Not Significant
	Both	0.641	df=1	Not Significant
	Neither	0.906	df=1	Not Significant

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics for Each Contextual Slant by All Participants,  
Females, and Males

	Contextual Slant			
	Care	Justice	Both	Neither
Mean				
All Participants	1.338	2.118	0.721	3.754
Females	1.405	2.000	0.619	3.786
Males	1.231	2.308	0.885	3.231
Median				
All Participants	1.000	2.000	0.000	3.500
Females	1.000	2.000	0.000	4.000
Males	1.000	2.000	1.000	3.000
Standard Deviation				
All Participants	1.334	1.616	0.878	1.863
Females	1.326	1.638	0.882	1.907
Males	1.366	1.594	0.864	1.773

Note: The possible number of responses equal to eight.

Table 5

Cochran-Q Analyses of All Responses, Three Slants, and Two Slants

<u>Contextual Slant</u>	<u>Cochran-Q value</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>p</u>
Care, Justice, Both, and Neither			
First Response	90.31	df=3	p < .001
Best Response	93.66	df=3	p < .001
Care, Justice, and Both			
First Response	13.00	df=2	p < .01
Best Response	6.22	df=2	p < .05
Care and Justice			
First Response	1.75	df=1	Not Significant
Best Response	0.55	df=1	Not Significant

Table 6

Frequency and Percentage of Intended Responses

<u>Contextual Slant</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
First Response		
Care (Mice)	22/68	32%
Justice (Flute)	29/59	49%
Both (Bees)	11/68	16%
Neither (Wagoner)	61/67	91%
Best Response		
Care (Mice)	24/65	37%
Justice (Flute)	20/64	31%
Both (Bees)	12/65	18%
Neither (Wagoner)	62/68	91%

Table 7

Frequency of Non-Intended Responses

<u>Contextual Slant of Fable</u>		<u>Percentage</u>			
First Response	Care	Justice	Both	Neither	
Care (Mice)	--	24	3	38	
Justice (Flute)	10	--	12	32	
Both (Bees)	18	43	--	21	
Neither (Wagoner)	1	7	0	--	
Best Response					
Care (Mice)	--	29	19	28	
Justice (Flute)	35	--	3	41	
Both (Bees)	15	47	--	16	
Neither (Wagoner)	4	3	1	--	

Table 8

Z-Test Results on Proportions of Change Between First and Best Response

<u>Fable/Contextual Slant</u>	<u>z-scores</u>	<u>Percentage of Change</u>	<u>p</u>
Mice/Care	-3.647	28%	$p < .001$
Flute/Justice	-2.933	32%	$p < .01$
Bees/Both	-1.967	38%	$p < .05$
Wagoner/Neither	-7.100	7%	$p < .001$



## CONCLUSION

While all of the theories and research on moral reasoning is interesting, what effect does it have on us in everyday life? The dominate moral perspective used by individuals acting alone or collectively through community service, legislative and judicial management, government agencies, or other organizations can influence the solutions deemed appropriate for problems and conflicts which arise at personal, local, national, and global levels. Societies might select very different types of solutions dependent upon whether they seek to protect the "rights" of the individuals or groups involved, or whether they are searching for a solution which will facilitate "restoration" of relationships while minimizing the hurt to all parties. Still another type of solution might be selected if society seeks to avoid the dilemma and hope it will either correct itself, or someone else will find a solution and take action.

To illustrate the impact which the dominate moral reasoning perspective of a society might have on a social structure, various perspectives will be applied to a criminal justice system. This will allow examination of how it might work depending on the perspective used.

A recent letter to the editor in The Huntsville Times (May 28, 1993) took the position that America was founded on individualism, not "shared sacrifice," and argued that "The day America fully accepts sacrifice as a virtue is the day the greatest nation that has ever existed dies." If it is true that America is founded on individualism rather than shared sacrifice, one might argue that the structure is based upon a justice model focusing on rights of those involved, rules or laws of behavior, and competing sets of values rather than a care perspective concentrating on responsibility to be concerned for others and seeking to minimize the hurt to all involved.

Some solutions are not so easily classified until you examine the moral

reasoning perspective, intent, or motive behind the solution. It is possible to begin from a completely different perspective and arrive at the same solution for a moral dilemma. This parallax can be seen in our criminal justice system. When struggling with ways to protect victims of crime while effectively admonishing, censuring and rehabilitating the criminal we might choose one of many approaches.

The search for a solution to the question of method of treatment for criminals and deviants within society has left us with a legal and penal system that appears to provide an excellent example of the justice perspective applied to a moral dilemma faced by society. In our penal system, not only are those found guilty of violation of our laws punished, they are "condemn(ed) and denounce(d)" (Sterba, 1991, p.475) along with the behavior. Volumes of laws and regulations are established which assign specific guidelines for determination of guilt and attempt to regulate behavior by deterrence through threat of punishment. This approach in our legal system requires peering into the mind and motive of the suspected criminal to determine intent--and thus guilt. Investigation of the suspect seeks to evaluate his or her knowledge of conditions, foresight of the consequences of the crime, thus incorporating Aristotelian prerequisites for culpability. Many argue that the punishment is justified because it deters crime. Yet, rates of recidivism indicate otherwise.

Unsubstantiated  
Claim in  
recidivism -  
Need source

Interestingly enough, the avoidance perspective could also be applied to the current system. In "The Crime of Punishment," Karl Menninger (1991) argues that criminal offenders must have assurance that a life lived within the bounds of the legal system will provide them with opportunities for living a good life. Menninger contends that motivation for many criminals is real or perceived injustice within the society which prevents them from achieving what is considered by the majority of society to be a "good life." If injustice exists and society punishes the "wronged" party through punishment of acts which seek to achieve the equal opportunity for a good life, society

might be avoiding the fact that there is injustice within the system. Treatment of the symptom and not the "disease" serves to avoid the real immorality. Many citizens living in poverty in inner city ghettos believe their only avenue to financial success is through illegal methods such as sale and distribution of controlled substances. Because addiction to *illegal* drugs and controlled substances has traditionally been seen by this society as immoral rather than a disease explained by a medical model, criminalization of possession as well as sale and distribution of controlled substances has been deemed appropriate. However, if this is the best available solution to economic injustice available to the criminal, Menninger would contend that the economic and social barriers to achieving equality of life actually serve as morally correct "reason(s) to resist any attempt to turn them (criminals) into law-abiding citizens" (p.476). Society's avoidance of the true moral dilemma and its refusal to address the economic and social injustices, leaves few options other than criminal behavior to address the inequity.

Not only can the same solution be achieved through different moral reasoning perspectives, but the same arguments may be used to arrive at different solutions, based upon the perspective from which we begin. Using Menninger's argument that the criminal is morally justified in resisting society's attempts to modify their actions, society could begin to view deviant behavior not as immoral but merely as deviating from the norms of society. This can occur in spite of internalization of the moral values of the society--especially when life circumstances make it difficult or impossible to achieve personal balance between social stability and individual autonomy. If individual autonomy cannot be achieved through socially sanctioned behaviors, the individual is likely to threaten social stability with deviant behavior.

If the moral question is approached from a care perspective, society might focus more on rehabilitation of the criminal in order to restore the relationship of the criminal with society so that, in the future, harm to all parties could be minimized. While many

of the arguments presented by Menninger support the avoidance model of moral reasoning, these same arguments can also be used in a care model of moral reasoning with different results.

When the economic and social injustice is addressed rather than avoided, programs might be created to provide greater opportunities for individuals to achieve success within the structure of society. This would reflect a focus on restored relationships and minimization of harm to all involved. This perspective might foster a solution that focuses on treatment and rehabilitation of addicts rather than criminalization of the disease of addiction, reducing the demand for controlled substances and using the controls inherent to a capitalist society that operates on principles of supply and demand. The care perspective might also lend itself to decriminalization of the use of some controlled substances, much as have been done with nicotine and alcohol, effectively reducing the number of "immoral" individuals and criminals within our society.

When structures created by society seeking to effectively manage conflict are examined, it becomes evident that a society's dominate moral reasoning perspective can greatly impact the solutions deemed best suited for a particular problem. Unfortunately, it is not always easy to focus exclusively on one moral reasoning perspective. Rather, it appears to be a dynamic relationship with the focus shifting from one perspective to another. These sometimes competing perspectives allow the system to proceed, with adjustments, moving from one perspective to another, sometimes blending the perspectives, and sometimes returning to previous remedies in an attempt to achieve the best possible solution.

All of these perspectives play a part in structural attempts to achieve a solution to many of the dilemmas facing society today. Space exploration, foreign policy, social services, environmental policy and defense strategies are all subject to influence from moral reasoning perspectives of individuals and society. Society, as well the

individual, may blend these seemingly distinct perspectives rather than apply exclusively one model. When the implications of dominant moral reasoning perspective are examined, it seems clear that not only is research in moral reasoning perspective critical to understanding an individual's attempts to resolve conflict, it can provide greater understanding of social problems and aid in positive resolution of the conflicts between individuals and society.

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