

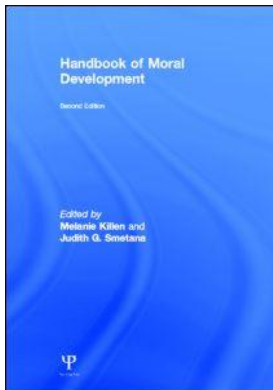
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### **Rights, Civil Liberties, and Democracy**

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# Rights, Civil Liberties, and Democracy

*Charles C. Helwig, Martin D. Ruck, and Michele Peterson-Badali*

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## Introduction

In his book, *The Idea of Justice*, the economist and Nobel Prize winner Amartya Sen identifies the paradoxical position that the idea of human rights seems to occupy in contemporary discourse (Sen, 2009). On the one hand, he says, there is “something very appealing in the idea that every person anywhere in the world, irrespective of citizenship, residence, race, class, caste or community, has some basic rights which others should respect” (p. 355). This idea has inspired a contemporary “Rights Revolution” (Ignatieff, 2000) and has been used to combat injustices of a variety of sorts (e.g., torture, arbitrary imprisonment, racial and gender discrimination, hunger and poverty) around the world (Chatterjee, 2008). Evidence of the universal appeal of human rights may be seen in the endorsement of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) by nations with different political and cultural systems. The recent demonstrations and revolutions throughout the Arab world, with a concomitant call for wider democratic reforms and guarantees of human rights in those societies, further attest to the widespread appeal of these ideas.

On the other hand, philosophical and legal scholars continue to debate whether the concept of human rights can be given a rational foundation (see Sen, 2009, for a discussion and defense of the idea of human rights against common criticisms). Some have even charged that human rights and democracy are “Western” cultural notions that are largely incompatible with other cultural traditions, values, or belief systems (Panikkar, 1982; Zakaria, 1994).<sup>1</sup> Questions about the universality and rational basis of human rights also are reflected in contemporary psychological theorizing about morality. Some theorists (e.g., Haidt, 2012; Shweder et al., 2006) have identified distinct moral codes believed to be given varying priority in different cultural contexts. The “ethics of autonomy,” on which concepts of human rights, freedom, and democracy rest, is believed to be dominant in the largely secular, “individualistic” societies of North America and Europe, in contrast to other moral codes (e.g., “collectivism”)—held in many societies in Asia and Africa—that give greater priority to hierarchical social role obligations, authority, or conformity to the requirements of a divine natural order (Jensen, 2008; Shweder et al., 2006). It is claimed

that from the perspective of other societies, “Western insistence that people should design their own lives and pursue their own goals seems selfish and dangerous—a sure way to weaken the social fabric and destroy the institutions and collective entities upon which everyone depends” (Haidt, 2012, p. 100). A proponent of a perspective known as “social intuitionism,” Haidt has expressed skepticism about the rational basis of moral concepts themselves—including rights and autonomy—holding the view that moral reasoning merely reflects after-the-fact arguments employed to support emotionally based and culturally determined moral conclusions.

Are rights and democracy uniquely Western notions, and therefore limited in their appeal, or do they, in at least some aspect, have validity and currency beyond Western cultural traditions and peoples? Commentators on both sides of the issue frequently claim to know what people think and believe without directly consulting the available empirical evidence. In this chapter, we will report the results of a body of research conducted over the last 20 years that challenges some of these criticisms of human rights and democracy. We will argue that concepts of rights and freedoms emerge in development and reflect children’s reflections on universal human needs and purposes and the structure of the social institutions within which they conduct their lives. We will draw on models of social development that propose that individuals develop distinct moral concepts of rights and democratic participation early in childhood, and coordinate their reasoning about these ideas with other features of social situations in increasingly sophisticated ways throughout development. Ideas about human rights and democracy arise in a variety of cultures and social contexts, and these notions are sometimes used to critically evaluate existing social practices that unduly restrict individual autonomy or how people may participate in the social institutions that affect them. Findings will be presented from recent research suggesting that concepts of rights, freedoms, and democratic participation are not only held as important by people from diverse cultures, but that their instantiation in social life and institutions has relevance for people’s psychological well-being around the globe.

### **The Development of Reasoning About Rights**

A large body of research has been conducted over the last 25 or more years investigating children’s, adolescents’, and adults’ conceptions of rights and freedoms. These concepts were explored by examining the general criteria by which children and adolescents reason about these concepts, such as their independence from authority or laws, and how concepts of rights and freedoms are applied to a variety of situations, including both conflicts of different types and in more straightforward situations (Helwig, 1995a; Helwig, Yang, Tan, Liu, & Shao, 2011; Lahat, Helwig, Yang, Tan, & Liu, 2009). Although a principle aim of this research has sought to determine whether children and adults understand rights as independent of authority, customs, or existing laws, this perspective also acknowledges that rights are applied in context and are not the only issue relevant to people’s social and moral judgments (Helwig, 1995a, 1995b; Turiel, Killen, & Helwig, 1987). Moral philosophers have argued that genuinely held concepts of rights may be legitimately overridden by other concerns in some circumstances (Dworkin, 1977; Meldon, 1977). Thus, rights are not absolute, and a complete picture of people’s understandings of rights must take into account both the conceptual basis of rights concepts (e.g., as universal, human, or “natural

rights,” or as contingent on social customs or laws) as well as how and when rights are applied when in potential conflict with other concerns, including other moral concepts such as issues of harm or fairness or community traditions and values.

One line of research, conducted within the “social domain” approach (see also Turiel and Smetana, Jambon, & Ball, this volume) has explored children’s understandings of *personal issues*, areas over which children are believed to have personal decision-making autonomy. Conceptions of rights as freedoms have been connected to the development of an area or domain of personal autonomy over which persons, including sometimes children, are judged to be free from the interference of other individuals or authorities (Gewirth, 1978; Nucci & Lee, 1993). The personal domain is postulated to reflect universal psychological processes involving needs for autonomy and the construction of a self or personal identity (Nucci, 2001; Ryan & Deci, 2001).

Studies with American children and adolescents (e.g., Nucci, 1981; Smetana, 1989) have found that rules by authorities restricting or prohibiting children from making their own decisions about matters such as choice of friends, recreational activities, and appearance (e.g., hairstyles or choices regarding clothing) are judged by even young children to be wrong or illegitimate. These judgments are typically justified by references to children’s desires or needs for personal choice or autonomy, or by explicit appeals to their rights. Children and adults are more likely to grant personal decision-making autonomy to children over a broader set of issues as they get older, reflecting the role of judgments about children’s developing competence to handle greater autonomy over wider areas of their lives. This process, however, is often characterized by disputes, disagreements, and conflict between children and adults, as children (especially in adolescence) often attempt to claim personal autonomy over issues that parents still view as within their discretion (Smetana, 1989).

The development of conceptions of personal autonomy would be expected to be a prerequisite for the formulation of more abstract concepts of freedoms or civil liberties, such as freedom of speech and religion. One line of research (Helwig, 1995a, 1997, 1998) has examined American and Canadian children’s and adolescents’ conceptions of freedom of speech and religion by presenting participants with a set of general questions about freedoms (along with their applications in a variety of different situations). As in the social domain research on personal issues, the general questions were meant to assess criterion aspects of concepts of freedoms, such as whether these rights would be seen as moral rights (Gewirth, 1978) and judged to be universal across cultures and, correspondingly, whether general legal restrictions placed on these rights by governments would be viewed as wrong. The findings of these studies indicate that, across a wide age range (6 years to early adulthood), concepts of freedom of speech and religion were held as moral or “natural” rights independent of authority and laws and generalized across cultural contexts (everyone should have freedom of speech or religion).

The kinds of rationales used to support freedom of speech and religion were diverse and showed developmental differences throughout early and late childhood (Helwig, 1995a, 1998). Younger children (6-year olds) tended to support civil liberties mostly by appeals to personal choice, suggesting that they link rights like freedom of speech and religion to their developing notions of a personal sphere at an early age. Both older and younger children also justified freedoms by explicit appeals to human nature—including needs for self-expression and autonomy—that were believed to be thwarted by undue restrictions

on these rights. However, beginning around 8 years of age, children also began to perceive broader societal, cultural, and democratic implications of these rights. For example, older children saw freedom of speech as fostering communication among individuals that could lead to societal innovations, or they perceived it as an important means by which societal injustices could be corrected through enabling individuals to voice their concerns in protests or petitions (Helwig, 1998). As children develop a more sophisticated concept of the political sphere and the possibilities of different types of political action, their understanding of the value and function of civil liberties is enhanced. Freedom of religion, by contrast, was seen by older children and adolescents not only as a matter of personal choice but also as a way in which people could express their diverse identities within a shared group tradition. However, at no age in these studies were children's conceptions of civil liberties found to be defined by authority, existing social rules or laws, or culturally specific forms of social organization.

Consistent with the proposition that general concepts of rights need to be distinguished from their applications in different types of situations, this research also has explored how rights are applied in context. For example, Helwig (1995a) investigated the reasoning of 7th and 11th graders and college students about a variety of situations that included straightforward applications of rights (e.g., an individual giving a public speech critical of the government's economic policy), as well as those that involved conflicts between civil liberties and other social and moral issues (e.g., a speech that contains racial slurs or advocates violence, or in religious rituals in which psychological or physical harm was inflicted on consenting participants). Participants at all ages in Helwig's study (1995a) applied these concepts to straightforward situations and rejected government laws or restrictions on exercising civil liberties as wrong, and they also applied freedoms in some, although not all, conflicts. They were especially inclined to argue that civil liberties should not be given priority in situations in which physical harm was seen as a likely consequence. There were also age differences in whether or not freedoms were seen to override certain conflicting issues. Younger adolescents were more likely than older adolescents to support restrictions on civil liberties when they conflicted with issues of equality, as in speech advocating exclusion of low-income people from political parties, or in the case of a religion that prohibits low-income people from holding important positions in the church. Younger adolescents also were more likely than older adolescents to judge that it was not acceptable to exercise civil liberties when this was prohibited by hypothetical laws—even though they judged these restrictive laws to be wrong and unjust. It appears that evaluations of laws restricting civil liberties and judgments of compliance to these unjust laws become better integrated and coordinated in individuals' reasoning with development (Helwig, 1995a).

The same general pattern of endorsement of rights and freedoms in some situations but subordination of rights to other social and moral issues in other situations has been found in other cross-national studies. Clemence, Doise, de Rosa, and Gonzalez (1995) investigated judgments of rights in Costa Rica, France, Italy, and Switzerland. Participants ranging in age from 13–20 years were presented with a set of situations and asked to judge whether each constituted a violation of human rights. Some situations, such as imprisoning individuals for protesting against the government or discrimination against ethnic minorities, were judged to be human rights violations by the majority of individuals in all countries. In other situations (e.g., government tapping of phone conversations,

capital punishment, or laws requiring that individuals with infectious diseases be admitted to hospitals), concern for community welfare or issues of law and order were judged to override individual rights and freedoms.

In sum, the above findings illustrate the importance of separating different dimensions of judgment in studies of reasoning about rights and civil liberties, including accounting for similarities and differences in judgments of rights in the abstract and in contextualized situations of different types. By directly examining the role of criteria believed to define the moral domain (e.g., universality and noncontingency on laws and authority), several aspects of reasoning about civil liberties and rights were identified that appear to be continuous across development in childhood and adolescence. These include the conceptualization of civil liberties as universal rights believed to be independent of social convention and law, and their association with substantive rationales that historically have been invoked to justify and support these rights in philosophical and political theorizing (Emerson, 1970). At the same time, although individuals have been found to apply these rights in many situations (both straightforward situations and in conflict with other issues), they sometimes subordinate rights to other social and moral concerns, including issues such as compliance with laws and conflicting moral norms and values, such as avoidance of harm and the unequal treatment of individuals. Thus, this research demonstrates both a genuine understanding of, and commitment to, civil liberties among individuals across a variety of ages coupled with the recognition that civil liberties are not the only social and moral concern operating in individuals' moral judgments (Helwig, 1995a; Helwig & Turiel, 2002).

These findings also help to account for some perplexing and rather pessimistic conclusions reached by older research on rights conceptions. Global stage theorists such as Kohlberg (1981) and Melton (1980) have argued that young children do not possess truly moral or universalizable concepts of rights. Instead, children (and even most adults) are characterized as holding a conventional or pre-conventional perspective in which rights are seen as deriving from power, authority, or existing laws. In part, this conclusion stems from the finding that basic rights such as the right to life often were not endorsed in the face of opposing laws when these rights were presented in the context of complex moral dilemmas (as in Kohlberg's Heinz dilemma). Moreover, when asked directly to explain where rights come from, participants, including young children, frequently cited law, authority, or power (Melton, 1980). These conclusions are overdrawn, however, due to the failure to separate concepts of rights in general or in straightforward situations from applications of rights in more complex situations entailing conflicts with other moral and social concepts, such as prevention of harm, discrimination, or abiding by important laws.

Instead, the overall pattern of results obtained in the extensive research on rights we have reviewed is consistent with models of social reasoning that postulate the early differentiation of domains of social and moral concepts, such as morality and social convention, and their interrelation in increasingly complex ways throughout development (Helwig, 1995b; Turiel, 2002). This perspective, commonly termed the "domain approach," postulates that children construct multiple forms of social understanding through their encounters with different types of social experiences. These understandings include moral conceptions based on a concern with justice, fairness, and harm, as well as social-conventional conceptions based on authority, tradition, and explicit social rules and customs and psychological

beliefs about the competence of agents to exercise specific types of rights. According to this perspective, the reasoning of individuals cannot be described in terms of a global or central tendency to emphasize one form of social reasoning over the other at different points in development (Kohlberg, 1981). Rather, individuals will give priority to different concerns depending on a variety of factors, such as the particular features of situations that are perceived to be salient and the way that different types of conflicting concerns are coordinated at different points in development (Helwig, 1995b; Neff & Helwig, 2002; Turiel, 2002).

### **Distinguishing Different Types of Rights: Self-Determination and Nurturance Rights**

In the scholarly and empirical literatures, a distinction has been made between two types of rights, broadly categorized as nurturance and self-determination rights (Rogers and Wrightsman, 1978; Ruck, Abramovitch, & Keating, 1998), which serve different but important functions in children's lives (Peterson-Badali & Ruck, 2008). Children's rights declarations, such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations General Assembly, 1989), reflect the importance of both types of rights to children's development and well-being. Nurturance rights, sometimes referred to as "protection" and "provision" rights, pertain to the obligation of others in society (e.g., parents) to provide for and safeguard children's emotional, psychological, or physical welfare. Examples include parental provision of food and clothing, protection from abuse and harm, and emotional support. In contrast, children's self-determination rights correspond broadly to those types of personal freedoms, discussed earlier, that give children some measure of control or choice over areas of their own lives. Examples include the right to privacy, freedom of expression or religion, and to vote, or to choose one's friends and recreational activities. The distinction between nurturance and self-determination rights is relevant not only in terms of legal and social policy; research conducted over the past several decades indicates that children conceptualize the two types of rights differently and these differences have both theoretical and practical implications.

Evidence that children think in distinct ways about nurturance and self-determination rights is apparent both in survey research (e.g., Rogers & Wrightsman, 1978) as well as in studies that examine the reasoning used to support individuals' endorsement of a position on a rights issue. With respect to endorsement, children's rights to nurturance receive strong support from children, adolescents, and adults (Peterson-Badali, Ruck, & Ridley, 2003). However, both children and adults (Peterson-Badali et al., 2003; Ruck, Peterson-Badali, & Day, 2002) show significantly less, as well as greater variability in, support for self-determination rights (although not all studies of youth show greater support for nurturance than self-determination rights; Ruck et al., 2002; Ruck, Tenenbaum, & Sines, 2007). Not surprisingly, support for children's rights also varies with the age of the child about whom participants are responding. Whereas endorsement of children's rights to nurturance typically remains high regardless of the age of the 'target' child (Morton & Dubanoski, 1980; Peterson-Badali et al., 2003; Ruck, Tenenbaum & Willenberg, 2011), support for self-determination rights for adolescents is significantly stronger than for younger children (Ruck et al., 1998). Indeed, support for younger children's (e.g., 12-year

olds') rights to self-determination over a range of issues tends to be quite poor, particularly among adults (Peterson-Badali et al., 2003; Rogers & Wrightsman, 1978) and older adolescents (e.g., Day, Peterson-Badali, & Ruck, 2006).

Moving from endorsement to an examination of respondents' reasoning about their views provides an important context for understanding variation in support for the two types of rights. Consistent with earlier discussion of the importance of situational factors in children's thinking and decision making about rights and civil liberties, the type of right—nurturance or self-determination—emerges as a relevant contextual factor in children's reasoning about children's rights. Studies have shown that children's justifications for asserting or withholding nurturance rights often consider social or familial roles and well-being, and rarely refer explicitly to the rights of the various parties involved (e.g., children, parents; Ruck et al., 1998, 2002). In contrast, judgments about self-determination rights are more likely to include an explicit focus on individual rights and rights-related concepts such as personal freedom and autonomy (Ruck et al., 1998, 2002). Such differentiation is consistent with the domain approach described above and stands in contrast to a global stage interpretation of children's reasoning about their rights (Ruck et al., 1998).

Few studies have compared children's and parents' social reasoning about children's nurturance and self-determination rights. This is surprising given that parents are often the "gatekeepers" to children's rights (Cherney, Greteman, & Travers, 2008; Helwig, 1997; Ruck et al., 2002). Since children are typically economically, psychologically, and physically dependent on their parents, children's rights are often accessed by parents on the child's behalf rather than via the child's own agency (Cherney et al., 2008; Peterson-Badali, Morine, Ruck, & Slonim, 2004). In North American research, comparisons of children's and parents' (usually mothers') views regarding children's rights indicate that children generally show significantly greater support for self-determination rights than their mothers, with the reverse holding true for nurturance rights (e.g., Day et al., 2006; Peterson-Badali et al., 2004; Ruck et al., 2002). There also appears to be somewhat of a rapprochement during later adolescence, when parents and young people show similar levels of support for adolescents' nurturance and autonomy rights (Ruck et al., 2002).

When the reasoning behind endorsements is explored, the distinction between role- and relationship-based justifications for nurturance rights and more explicit autonomy and rights-based rationales for self-determination rights emerges for mothers as well as children. However, in addition, compared to adolescents, mothers' reasoning is more likely to reflect sensitivity to the age or maturity of the target child, particularly in the context of self-determination rights (Ruck et al., 2002). The finding that, for mothers, maturity issues are more salient for self-determination situations is consistent with the types of concerns adults often consider when determining whether children should be able to exercise various self-determination rights and civil liberties (Helwig, 1997). In some cases mothers also explicitly recognize the tension between children's right to self-determination and their entitlement to care and protection in their reasoning (Ruck et al., 2002). For some mothers, children's entitlement to care supersedes their need for self-determination and is explained by mothers in terms of their right to intervene in their child's life for the child's benefit.

As described above, there is now an extensive body of research on children's and adolescents' conceptions of their own nurturance and self-determination rights. Much of the research designed to assess young people's reasoning about their own rights has employed



stimuli (e.g., hypothetical situations) where it is assumed that the child respondent will identify with the story character; hence characters are age- or sex-matched to the respondent (e.g., Ruck, et al., 1998; for a methodological review, see Peterson-Badali & Ruck, 2008). In contrast, in other studies examining children's reasoning about rights, the age of the story character is kept constant so that participants are all evaluating the rights of children of the same age (e.g., Day et al., 2006; Helwig, 1997; Peterson-Badali et al., 2003). In both types of studies, there is an implicit assumption that, regardless of age, participants are characterizing the target child as a member of their own group (i.e., in-group). Yet what these studies fail to tell us is how children may think about the rights of individuals who are members of other groups (i.e., out-groups). Recently, however, studies have begun to explicitly investigate how young people think about the rights of children who are members of out-groups, such as asylum seekers or refugees (Ruck, Tenenbaum, & Sines, 2007; Tenenbaum & Ruck et al., 2007).

For example, in the United Kingdom, as well as many other European countries, concerns about immigrants, asylum seekers, and refugees have become a major focus in political and public debates concerning tolerance and the rights of ethnic minority groups (Ceobanu & Escandell, 2010; Lynn & Lea, 2003; Muss, 1997). In addition, recent surveys in the United Kingdom conducted with adult samples suggest that refugees or asylum seekers are often viewed negatively and perceived as a threat to British culture (MORI, 2003; YouGov/*Mail on Sunday*, 2004). However, less is known about how British children and adolescents think about the nurturance and self-determination rights of asylum-seeker and refugee youth who are often perceived as "different" by the majority or in-group.

Employing hypothetical vignettes where an asylum-seeker child's nurturance and self-determination rights conflicted with the societal practices of the majority group, two recent studies examined British youth's understanding concerning secular nurturance and self-determination rights of asylum seekers. Ruck et al. (2007) found that British early to middle adolescents were more likely to endorse same-age asylum-seeking children's nurturance rights than self-determination rights. In addition, reasoning about both types of rights was multifaceted and focused on moral, social-conventional, and psychological issues. British children were more likely to make appeals to moral-based reasoning (e.g., notions of fairness and empathy) when providing justifications for asylum-seeker children's nurturance rights. In contrast, when participants reasoned about asylum-seeker children's self-determination rights (which they were less likely to endorse), they were more likely to employ social-conventional (e.g., the importance of maintaining group functioning or adherence to authority) and psychological (e.g., focus on personal choice) reasoning.

In the United Kingdom, many asylum seekers engage in cultural and religious practices often unfamiliar to members of mainstream British society (Lynch & Cunningham, 2000). Yet, relatively little is known about how British youth view the religious rights of asylum seekers or refugees. To address this gap, Tenenbaum & Ruck (2012) examined British young people's understanding of the religious and nonreligious nurturance and self-determination rights of asylum-seeker youth in a sample of 11- to 24-year olds. They found that participants showed the highest levels of support for asylum-seeking youth's nonreligious nurturance rights (e.g., the right to parental emotional support) and religious self-determination rights (e.g., right to practice one's own religion) followed by less support for religious nurturance rights (e.g., the right to food prepared according to specific

religious beliefs). British youth showed the lowest level of support for asylum seekers' nonreligious or secular self-determination rights (e.g., the right to choose where to live). In terms of specific age differences, the youngest participants (11–12 and 13–14 years of age) were more willing to endorse asylum seekers' nonreligious self-determination rights than the oldest participants (17–18 and 19–24 years of age). According to the authors, these findings suggests that with increasing age British youth may become less tolerant of same-age asylum seekers' nonreligious or secular self-determination rights.

The patterns of reasoning participants exhibited varied based on the type of right and whether the scenario implicated religious or nonreligious rights. Appeals to practical considerations were more likely to be made when discussing whether asylum seekers' religious nurturance rights should be supported. For example, for one of the scenarios that dealt with the preparation of food according to the asylum seeker's religious belief, participants were more likely to focus on the difficulty in trying to fulfill various religious dietary restrictions for so many different asylum seekers. When considering religious self-determination rights, British youth were aware of the importance of respecting the asylum seekers' beliefs and customs. However, for nonreligious or secular self-determination rights (which participants were less likely to endorse), these same youth were more likely to suggest that asylum seekers should "just be grateful for being allowed in the country." As Tenenbaum and Ruck (2012) noted, "[I]t may be for the British youth we interviewed endorsing secular self-determination rights might be interpreted as giving asylum-seekers privileges or rights not warranted given their non-citizenship status or providing them with advantages not accorded to others, whereas no obvious benefit [for the asylum seeker compared to a British citizen] would result for supporting religious self-determination rights" (p. 1112).

In general, the findings from these two studies are consistent with recent work focusing on Dutch youth's attitudes toward the political rights and civil liberties of Muslims (Verkuyten & Slooter, 2007), which found that older adolescents (15- to 18-year olds) were less supportive than their younger counterparts (12- to 14-year olds) of Muslims' political rights than similar rights for non-Muslims. In addition, the work of Ruck and colleagues (Ruck et al., 2007; Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2012) provides evidence of the multifaceted nature of majority group youth's intergroup social reasoning about the rights of ethnic minority youth such as asylum seekers. The findings from such research have important implications for understanding the development of attitudes about the fair treatment of others, equality, and human rights.

The research described up to this point has focused on children's understanding of agency as self-determination, largely considered in terms of noninterference in people's lives or freedom or personal choice. In the next section, we shift the focus to children's understandings of people's right to participate in various forms of social decision making, long seen as a core feature of democratic social organization. This broad democratic idea is at the nexus where human agency and choice meet moral obligations regarding the justice and structure of social institutions (e.g., families, schools, and government).

## Democracy and Democratic Decision Making

Democracy comprises forms of social organization in which individuals are given a say in decisions that affect them (Cohen, 1971). Democracy, in its varied forms, is frequently

justified as serving general or universal moral aims of justice and respect for persons (Cohen, 1971; Richardson, 2002). Democratic procedures of social decision making that allow individuals from various segments of society to express their viewpoints (either directly or through their elected representatives), and to have an impact on social policies or decisions, have been argued to help protect individuals from the arbitrary exercise of political power and to provide a means for correcting existing injustices in policies or practices.

One avenue of research has examined children's developing understandings of democratic decision-making processes (e.g., majority rule) in a variety of social contexts familiar to children, such as the peer group, school, or family (Helwig & Kim, 1999; Kinoshita, 2006). This research has found that children from 6 years of age and older endorse majority rule as a fair procedure for making decisions in social groups (e.g., Kinoshita, 1989; Moessinger, 1981). Although younger children are more likely to endorse majority rule in general as the fairest way of making decisions when people have conflicting preferences, adolescents are more aware of how certain features of group structure can determine the fairness of majority rule. For example, adolescents see majority rule as fair only if the group is composed of shifting majorities, in which people are on different sides of different decisions over time; otherwise the group may become dominated by an entrenched majority, resulting in a tyranny of the majority.

Children's applications of majority rule are also influenced by the appropriateness of the particular decision being considered. For example, democratic decision-making procedures that give children full input into decisions, such as majority rule or consensus, are seen as appropriate for decisions about matters such as recreational pursuits or for coordinating decisions involving conflicting personal preferences, such as what game to play (Helwig & Kim, 1999). In that study, Canadian children between the ages of 6 and 13 believed that it would be wrong for adults to unilaterally make these kinds of decisions for children, and they appealed to democratic principles such as majority rule or children's need to have a voice in decisions that mattered to them. In some instances, they even extended these democratic notions into social contexts where adults have traditionally had decision-making authority, such as school classrooms. When a class decision was perceived as largely recreational in nature or as involving children's own personal interest, such as a school class deciding where to go on a field trip, children believed that the decision should be made democratically, by the vote of the class, and they criticized unilateral adult decision making as unfair. At the same time, when the decision was seen as having implications for children's welfare or when adults were perceived as more competent to make better decisions (e.g., concerning school curriculum), children ceded legitimate decision-making authority to adults. Thus, children are sensitive to issues of children's competence or maturity as well as the goals instantiated in different social organizational contexts (e.g., recreation versus education) in deciding the particular issues over which children should be given democratic decision-making autonomy.

Children's reasoning about the suitability of different democratic procedures (i.e., majority rule versus consensus) also showed subtle discriminations by social context (Helwig & Kim, 1999). One issue children considered when reasoning about which decision-making procedure was appropriate was the likelihood of reaching agreement in different social contexts. For example, consensus was seen as more appropriate for decisions made

in small groups, such as the family or the peer group, where differences of opinion were fewer and could be resolved through discussion. However, in larger groups such as the classroom, where divergence of opinion might be greater and compromise more difficult to achieve, children preferred more formal democratic procedures such as voting or majority rule.

Children's early understandings of democracy in more familiar or proximal social contexts are based on beliefs about the importance of having a say ("voice") and majority rule. Other research with Canadian and U.S. children has extended investigation of these fundamental democratic notions into the more distal sphere of government (e.g., Helwig, 1998; Sinatra, Beck, & McKeown, 1992), where earlier research characterized children's understandings as highly limited (Greenstein, 1965). Rather than asking children to provide definitions of democracy, as in the earlier research, these studies presented children with examples of different "classic" systems of government, including democratic and nondemocratic systems, and asked them to evaluate their fairness and explain their judgments. It was found that even elementary school-age children judge democratic governments, such as a direct democracy in which everyone votes on every important policy decision, or a representative democracy in which the people elect representatives to govern for them, as more fair than nondemocratic forms of government, such as an oligarchy of the wealthy or a meritocracy of the most knowledgeable (Helwig, 1998). In justifying these judgments, children appealed to basic democratic principles of voice or accountability (i.e., people should have a say and leaders have to be accountable to the wishes of the people) in justifying why the democratic systems are fairer.

However, children's political understandings also display several limitations. Children's understanding of the political concept of representation is limited in elementary school, leading them to prefer direct democracy (simple majority rule) to representative government (Sinatra et al., 1992). Also, children do not fully appreciate some of the problems associated with direct democracy as a form of government, including whether majority rule can adequately protect minority rights and whether it is the best approach to deciding complex questions of public policy (Helwig, 1998). In contrast, by mid-adolescence, representative democracy is preferred because it is seen as fulfilling both the democratic functions of voice and representation along with the pragmatic function of delegating decision making to those who have the time to devote to formulating and debating public policy (Helwig, Arnold, Tan, & Boyd, 2007).

Another limitation of young children's moral and political reasoning pertains to their understanding of political agency. In Helwig's (1998) study, elementary school-age children were presented with a dilemma in which a democratically elected government passes a law restricting the freedom of speech rights of a minority to criticize the governments' decisions. When asked what could be done about it, 6-year olds tended simply to state that "you'd have to live with it," consistent with their view of people as essentially political subjects (Gallatin, 1985). In contrast, 11-year olds spontaneously mentioned a host of actions that those opposed to the law could take, including political protests, boycotts, and petitions to the government. Older children conceived of democratic citizens more as political agents who could effectively challenge unjust governmental policies through political action.

The findings of the research on democratic decision making bear several similarities to those of the research on rights reviewed earlier. First, the research shows that even young

children possess understandings of basic features of democratic norms and procedures, including norms of fairness based on majority rule and the importance of voice, or allowing people to have a say in group decision-making processes. These democratic principles or norms were seen to apply not only to adults but also to children. Furthermore, there was no evidence that the development of democratic understandings follows a pattern of differentiation of truly democratic understandings from those based on punishment, authority, or social custom or convention (Kohlberg, 1981). Rather, even young children seem to understand the basic functions and rationales that underlie democratic norms and procedures. With development, applications of democratic concepts appear to become more sophisticated as children and adolescents consider different features of social contexts, including the competence of different agents to exercise democratic decision-making autonomy, the goals and functions of different types of social organizations, and the practical implications of implementing democratic decision making in groups of different sizes and compositions.

### **Nonuniversalistic Perspectives: Cultural Psychology and Individualism–Collectivism**

The research on conceptions of rights and democracy described in the previous sections has come mostly from Western societies, or at least those with Western-style democratic political systems. The extent to which these findings may generalize to other cultures with different political and social organizations is an important question. This question is of prime significance for theorizing in moral development because of the current popularity of theoretical perspectives from cultural psychology (see Miller & Bland, this volume) that propose that cultures vary over their commitment to personal autonomy, rights, and other democratic values and beliefs. One way of framing these differences has been in terms of individualism versus collectivism (mentioned at the outset of this chapter; see also Triandis, 1989).

Distinctions about individualism and collectivism were originally framed in dichotomous (either or) terms (e.g., Shweder, Mahapatra, & Miller, 1987); however, more recent versions of these positions have argued that although each of these opposing orientations may be available to individuals across cultures, the degree to which they are used or valued varies by culture. For example, Shweder et al. (2006) have proposed that there are three ethical systems available to people in all cultures: an ethics of *autonomy* that focuses on personal choice, rights, and equality; an ethics of *community* that emphasizes social duties, hierarchy, group goals, and traditions; and an ethics of *divinity*, which emphasizes one's place in a religious or supernatural order. The ethics of autonomy is more frequently used in Western societies and especially by highly educated, liberal, secular groups within these societies (Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009). The ethics of community is prominent within East Asian societies and other collectivist societies emphasizing group conformity, and the ethics of divinity characterizes much of moral reasoning in societies in which religion permeates the social order (e.g., India). Developmentally, it has been proposed that these orientations become salient at different ages, with the ethics of autonomy understood and used by young children even in non-Western or collectivist cultures, but in those societies where social groups or religious duties are salient, autonomy becomes increasingly

subordinated to the ethics of community or divinity as children come to better understand the basis of these other moral codes with age (Jensen, 2008). The individualism–collectivism construct, and the notion that cultures can be characterized through the use of such general templates or cultural ideologies, have been extensively critiqued elsewhere (see, for example, Bond, 2002; Helwig, 2005; Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2008; Turiel, 2002; Wainryb & Turiel, 1994). Here, we will examine these propositions in light of the body of research examining judgments and reasoning about rights, autonomy, and democratic concepts in a variety of non-Western cultural settings.

A growing body of research from the social domain perspective indicates that children from a variety of other cultures (besides North America) also identify a personal domain that is viewed as beyond the bounds of authority regulation and justified by appeals to personal choice and autonomy. This form of reasoning has been found in cultures as diverse as Japan (Killen & Sueyoshi, 1995; Yamada, 2009), Brazil (Nucci, Camino, & Sapiro, 1996), Colombia (Ardila-Rey & Killen, 2001), Korea (Kim & Turiel, 1996), and China (Yau & Smetana, 2003a, 2003b). Some of these studies (e.g., Nucci et al., 1996; Yau & Smetana, 2003b) have traced the development of the personal domain across various age ranges, and as in the North American studies, the scope of the personal has been found to expand as children get older and claim increasing personal jurisdiction over a wider range of issues. However, in research conducted in a variety of environments (urban versus rural) within Brazil, children from rural or lower SES settings were found to endorse personal jurisdiction at later ages than children from urban or higher SES settings, although these differences disappeared by mid-adolescence (Nucci et al., 1996).

Furthermore, other studies with non-Western samples (e.g., Asian societies) have found that the expansion of the personal domain in adolescence often leads to increasing conflict with adults, as found in North America. For example, Yau and Smetana (2003b) examined adolescents' reports of experiences of conflict and disagreement with their parents, and their reasoning about these events, in Hong Kong and Shenzhen, a city in Mainland China. It was found that in both cities, conflicts between adolescents and their parents were not infrequent—a finding that contrasts with collectivist characterizations of Chinese family life and culture as reflecting mainly social harmony and submission to parental authority. Although conflicts were less frequent in Shenzhen than in Hong Kong overall, conflicts over schoolwork were more frequent in Shenzhen. Similarities were found between the results of this study and those of previous research with Western samples (Smetana, 1989) in the kinds of issues that lead to conflict (e.g., chores, regulation of activities, interpersonal relationships) and, most significantly, in the kinds of justifications used by adolescents to support their position in disputes. To challenge parental authority and control, adolescents in both cities appealed to concepts such as personal choice and the pursuit of individual needs and desires. Appeals to personal choice increased with age in both Hong Kong and Shenzhen, consistent with the developmental progression toward greater concern with autonomy issues in adolescence identified by Western researchers and theorists (Dornbusch et al., 1985; Erikson, 1968; Helwig, 2006).

An emerging body of research in a variety of non-Western cultural groups has examined reasoning about more abstract self-determination rights, including civil liberties such as freedom of speech and religion. Although these rights are sometimes considered to be “Western” notions and thus incompatible with other cultural traditions emphasizing

duty, tradition, and submission to authority or the group (see Bauer & Bell, 1999; Jung, 1994; Zakaria, 1994), adolescents from various non-Western societies have been found to endorse these and other self-determination rights and to view them as universal human rights. These include adolescents from traditional Arab populations residing in both Israel (Ben Arie & Koury-Kassabri, 2008; Turiel & Wainryb, 1998) and the Netherlands (Verkuyten & Slooter, 2008), Chinese adolescents living in Malaysia (Cherney & Shing, 2008), children from South Africa (Ruck, et al., 2011), and even those from urban and rural Mainland China (Lahat et al., 2009). For example, Lahat et al. (2009) examined urban and rural Chinese adolescents' reasoning about the self-determination and nurturance rights of adolescents, presented in scenarios that entailed a conflict with authorities such as school officials or parents. For self-determination, these conflicts included freedom of speech (e.g., whether it would be acceptable for a school principal to prohibit a high school student from publishing an article critical of the school in the school newspaper), freedom of religion (e.g., whether a child's parents, who are atheists, could prohibit a child from belonging to a religion of the child's choice), and privacy (whether or not a parent could read a child's diary). Similar to findings in North American contexts, urban and rural Chinese adolescents were found to increasingly support self-determination rights with age (although urban adolescents endorsed these rights somewhat more strongly than rural adolescents). In supporting adolescents' freedom to make choices, Chinese adolescents explicitly appealed to individual rights, autonomy, and personal choice. In contrast, nurturance rights, such as access to education, the emotional support of parents, or medical care, were endorsed at all ages. The support for children's rights, especially self-determination rights, found in this study is striking and occurred despite the general lack of support for civil liberties in Mainland China's political system when compared with the West (Peerenboom, 2002).

In a recent study of 9- to 13-year-old mixed-race South African children and their mothers that employed similar measures to the Lahat et al. (2009) study, Ruck et al. (2011) found that self-determination rights were endorsed to some extent by participants, and justifications for their choices included references to autonomy and maturity. However, in contrast both to the bulk of North American research and to the study of Chinese youth described above, there was greater support for nurturance rights than self-determination rights at all ages and no increase with age in children's endorsement of self-determination (such as the right to privacy, freedom of expression and political participation, and the right to work). In addition, unlike North American studies, there were no significant differences between children and mothers in terms of support for nurturance and self-determination rights. In interpreting the findings, the authors suggest that the salience of nurturance rights for both mothers and children may be viewed in light of the fact that South Africa has one of the highest murder and violent assault rates in the world (South African Institute of Race Relations, 2004) and noted that the findings are also consistent with a recent qualitative investigation (Willenberg & Savahl, 2004) in which South African children viewed well-being in terms of protection from threats to their personal safety.

Other recent research conducted in China has explored Chinese adolescents' understandings of democratic principles, such as majority rule (Helwig, Arnold, Tan, & Boyd, 2003; Helwig et al., 2011). Chinese adolescents also endorse majority rule as a fair procedure for making decisions in social groups, with the same kinds of variations across

social contexts and conditions documented in the research with Western adolescents (e.g., Helwig & Kim, 1999). Interestingly, some findings appear to go against broad cultural orientations such as individualism–collectivism. For example, Chinese adolescents were found to show *stronger* support for students' democratic decision making over issues of school curriculum and greater criticism of control over the curriculum by educational authorities than did Canadian children in the prior research. In doing so, Chinese adolescents objected to the top-down, uniform curriculum in China geared toward standardized tests and university entrance examinations, and they desired more student input into the curriculum as a way of fostering creativity and motivation. As one Chinese adolescent in that study remarked (Helwig et al., 2003, p. 796), when the curriculum is decided by educational authorities “many things, such as natural inclination, creativity, and freedom, are strangled because of this.”

Other research shows that Chinese adolescents recognized how democratic principles of majority rule can be constrained by personal freedoms and individual rights. One study (Helwig et al., 2011) explored urban and rural Chinese adolescents' understandings of the types of issues over which groups such as a school class could make decisions by majority rule and when these decisions would be seen as binding on individuals. For adolescents from both settings, majority rule was judged acceptable and binding for deciding social–conventional group activities (such as how to organize a class party or what to paint on a class mural), but it was not seen as acceptable or binding for deciding personal issues such as what a class would eat for lunch, or with whom members of the class could be friends. Helwig et al. (2011) also examined Chinese adolescents' reasoning about individual political or democratic rights, such as students' voting rights presented in the context of a scenario involving a hypothetical school election.

According to Hofstede (2001), a key difference between political systems in collectivist versus individualist societies is that in collectivist societies, opinions and votes are seen as predetermined by group memberships, whereas in individualistic societies, the principle “one person, one vote” applies, and voting is expected to reflect personal opinions. It was found that, consistent with Hofstede's (2001) characterization, younger (13-year-old) rural Chinese children were more inclined to believe that it would be acceptable for a school class to decide by majority rule who the whole class would vote for in the election, and to compel all members of the class to vote for that candidate. In contrast, however, older (17-year-old) rural adolescents (and urban adolescents in general) were more likely to view voting as an individual decision that was beyond group jurisdiction.

Thus, despite the greater pressure to conform to the desires of salient groups evident within the traditional and collectivistic setting of the rural adolescents (and reflected in the responses of the rural 13-year olds), with increasing age, rural adolescents tended to define voting as an individual right and to prioritize personal choice over considerations of following group preferences or maintaining classroom solidarity. Furthermore, in other research (Helwig et al., 2007), Chinese adolescents from both rural and urban settings have been found to judge hypothetical democratic systems of government based on representation (elected leaders) and majority rule as more fair than various nondemocratic alternatives. In that cross-cultural study, both Chinese and Canadian adolescents similarly appealed to democratic principles of voice, representation, and accountability to justify why democratic governments were more just. These cross-cultural similarities in reasoning



and preferences for democratic systems of government were found despite the fact that Chinese citizens do not presently have the right to elect their leaders in national elections.

All of this recent research indicates that personal choice, autonomy, and democratic concepts are salient dimensions of the thinking of children and adults in a variety of non-Western societies. This is not, of course, to say that individual rights or democratic notions such as voice, personal freedom, or equality would always be given priority over other considerations. Indeed, the findings of these and other studies employing conflicts between rights and other issues have shown similar patterns as those found in studies in the West, with democratic rights and personal choice given priority in some situations but subordinated to concerns with welfare or upholding cultural traditions or customs in other situations (e.g., Lahat et al., 2009; Ruck et al., 2011; Turiel & Wainryb, 1998; Verkuyten & Slooter, 2008).

Taken together, all of this research suggests that considerations of personal choice, autonomy, and democratic notions of voice and participation are salient dimensions of the thinking of children and adults in a variety of non-Western or traditional societies. As such, the findings call into question global characterizations of non-Western societies in terms of duty-based moralities for whom personal choice and autonomy are considered of little importance.

In many instances, considerations of personal autonomy or individual rights are not increasingly subordinated to community norms or obedience to authority with socialization (Jensen, 2008), but remain important and are acted on by both children and adults in these societies. In fact, in diverse cultural settings, reasoning based on rights and autonomy often showed age-related increases throughout childhood and adolescence (e.g., Lahat et al., 2009, Nucci et al., 1995; Yau & Smetana, 2003b). At the same time, people coordinate notions of personal freedom and democratic principles of voice and participation with other issues—such as social-conventional norms or social-organizational goals implicated in different social contexts—in ways that often show contextual variations or even disagreement among those occupying different positions in social hierarchies (e.g., men versus women, parents versus children, students versus educational authorities). Individuals also show sensitivity to how different rights are being met or not in their social environments, leading them to prioritize self-determination or nurturance in different ways (e.g., Helwig et al., 2003; Ruck et al., 2011). Accounting for this complexity requires us to move beyond general, cultural-level explanations and to consider the diverse conceptual systems brought to bear by individuals as they attempt to make sense of, and evaluate, their social environments.

## **Do Rights and Democracy Matter? Relations With Well-Being and Adjustment in Various Social Contexts**

In this section, we examine some recent research addressing the question of whether or not rights and democracy may also be adaptive and have functional significance for individuals' psychological well-being.

Researchers from diverse theoretical perspectives have identified autonomy as an important psychological function necessary for the formation of a personal identity and self (e.g., Erikson, 1968; Nucci, 2001; Ryan & Deci, 2011). Social domain theorists have suggested that children's formulation of a personal domain is rooted in these necessary

and universal dimensions of human psychological functioning, believed to hold across different cultural environments (Nucci, 2001; see Nucci, this volume). Correspondingly, self-determination theorists (Ryan & Deci, 2011) have postulated that autonomy is one of three basic human psychological needs whose nourishment is necessary for optimal human functioning (the others are needs for relatedness and competence). Here, autonomy is conceptualized as acting on one's will and fully endorsing one's actions, rather than being compelled by external circumstances or other people. Notably, this definition of autonomy is different from *independence from others*, as the construct of autonomy is sometimes conceptualized—too much of which could be unhealthy as individuals also has relatedness needs (see Kagitcibasi, 2005, for a discussion of the differences between autonomy and independence). The perception that one's behavior is lacking in choice or externally compelled (heteronomy) has been argued to be associated with a host of negative outcomes for psychological well-being, such as depression, low self-esteem, and anxiety, as documented in a large body of research (reviewed in Ryan & Deci, 2001).

Correspondingly, social environments, including institutions such as families, schools, and political systems themselves, may vary in the extent to which they provide opportunities for fulfillment of basic needs (Ryan & Deci, 2011). Democratic social environments may be especially autonomy-supportive because they allow individuals greater choice and input into decisions and are explicitly designed to respect their autonomy and freedom within appropriate boundaries (Helwig & McNeil, 2011). Given, as we have seen, that individuals from diverse cultural environments develop conceptions of personal freedom and democratic principles based on autonomy-related ideas such as 'voice' and personal choice, an important question, then, is whether individuals who perceive their social environments (e.g., authorities, institutions) as illegitimately restricting their freedoms and democratic rights also would suffer detrimental consequences to their psychological well-being.

An emerging body of cross-cultural research from different theoretical perspectives has begun to address this question. Building on social domain theory, researchers have investigated the effects of perceived parental control in a variety of social domains on Japanese, U.S., and Chinese adolescents' psychological well-being (Hasebe, Nucci, & Nucci, 2004; Helwig, Yang, Nucci, & To, 2009). Consistent with the findings reviewed earlier, adolescents from all of these countries did not accept parental control for issues that were seen as purely personal, or for some mixed or "overlapping" issues that involved conflicts between adolescents' autonomy and other domains, such as social conventions. When adolescents perceived their parents as overcontrolling of these issues (i.e., as actually restricting their autonomy more than they thought was legitimate), they reported higher levels of internalizing symptoms, such as anxiety and depression (Hasebe et al., 2004; Helwig et al., 2009). However, they did not tend to report these symptoms for parental control in other domains (e.g., social-conventional issues or "prudential" issues involving behaviors having potential harm to the adolescents themselves), where parental control was seen as legitimate. Thus, the harmful effects of behavioral or psychological control (Barber, Stolz, & Olson, 2005) were not general but were specifically confined to those issues in which adolescents perceive and claim personal freedom (or self-determination).

Other research has focused on perceptions of democratic school or family climate, usually conceptualized in terms of children having a say or input into decision making. Way,

Reddy, and Rhodes (2007) conducted a large, longitudinal study of over 1,400 U.S. adolescents in sixth through eighth grades and found that perceptions of students' autonomy in schools became more negative over the course of the 3-year period of middle school, and that those changes were associated with increases in depressive symptoms, lower self-esteem, and adjustment problems. Moreover, using path analyses, the researchers were able to show that the direction of effect was from changes in perceptions of autonomy to well-being (rather than changes in adjustment predicting changes in perceptions of democratic school climate). It is not known whether adolescents' perceptions of declining autonomy were based on actual declines in the levels of opportunities for decision making that they were being given as they progressed through the grades, or whether adolescents' developmental expansions in claims for decision-making autonomy (as documented in the social domain research reviewed earlier) were leading them to become more critical of the level of autonomy provided by their schools as they grew older. Nevertheless, these findings provide support for the idea that the provision of voice and opportunities for decision making in social institutions such as schools is an important avenue for the expression of children's developing autonomy needs, and that the failure of institutions to provide developmentally appropriate avenues for the expression of these needs is negatively associated with psychological health and adjustment.

Recent research has replicated these associations in studies conducted in Mainland China (Jia et al., 2009; To, Helwig, & Yang, 2011). Jia et al. (2009) found that Mainland Chinese students from the city of Nanjing who perceived their schools as having a more democratic climate had higher self-esteem and lower levels of anxiety and depression than those who perceived their schools as relatively lacking in student opportunities for involvement in decision making. To et al. (2011) found similar relations between perceptions of democratic climate (conceptualized as including not only opportunities for decision making but also school and authority support for students' freedom of expression and due process rights) and a variety of well-being measures (anxiety, depression, and general life satisfaction), among Chinese adolescents from both urban and rural settings. These associations were even stronger for adolescents' perceptions of their own families' democratic climate, indicating that these relations between democratic climate and well-being extend beyond schools to include home environments. Furthermore, perceptions of both family and school democratic climate predicted significant additional variance in psychological well-being over and above that predicted by parental and teacher responsiveness, as well as that predicted by a more general measure of autonomy support (used in self-determination theory research) that included other features of autonomy not directly related to democracy (e.g., parental or teacher encouragement of adolescents' exploration of their interests). Thus, specifically *democratic* features of autonomy (i.e., voice, freedom of expression, and due process) appear to be uniquely predictive of varied indicators of psychological well-being among adolescents from urban and rural Mainland China.

The recent research reviewed in this section suggests that rights and democratic concepts are related to psychological well-being and adjustment in a variety of cultures (Western and non-Western) and social environments (schools, families). Social contexts and institutions that are perceived by adolescents as supportive of individual rights and freedoms and that provide opportunities for democratic involvement in decision making are associated with higher levels of self-esteem, fewer psychological problems, and better

adjustment for adolescents. Of course, this research is preliminary in scope and needs to be extended to other cultural environments beyond East Asia and North America. Nevertheless, these intriguing results suggest that democracy and freedom are not only moral goods valued across cultures, but their instantiation in proximal social contexts relevant to children may also contribute positively to human flourishing.

## Conclusion

The findings of the research described in this chapter suggest that conceptions of rights, civil liberties, and democracy begin to develop in early childhood and are found across a variety of cultures. These include societies in North America and Europe, Asian cultures (e.g., Mainland China, Malaysia), and Muslim groups residing in the Middle East. This body of research indicates that notions of personal autonomy and rights are not tied to “Western” intellectual or cultural traditions (Haidt, 2012), but have relevance to people from diverse cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, notions of rights and democracy are not restricted to highly urban, modern environments but are found among traditional, rural populations as well. The emerging literature on relations between psychological well-being and personal freedoms and democracy illustrates the functional role these ideas may play in human psychological flourishing. Individuals desire and need to express their autonomy through defined areas of personal freedom and meaningful, democratic participation in social institutions; when these needs are perceived as not being met by social environments, people’s psychological health may suffer.

There are several directions in which this body of research needs to be extended. First, more cultural contexts need to be sampled to better identify the types of claims for personal autonomy and democratic participation that may be universal. Perhaps surprisingly, the research we have reviewed indicates that individuals from diverse cultural settings construct and affirm many of the basic freedoms identified in classic democratic theorizing, such as freedom of speech and religion, rights to privacy, and freedom of association, while at the same time sometimes subordinating these rights to other concerns or issues in situations of conflict. There appears to be remarkable congruence in the areas over which basic autonomy needs are extended and applied, even in the face of substantial cultural variation in social organizational forms. Based on theoretical propositions from self-determination theory and social domain theory, we would expect that individuals in any society would claim some areas of personal autonomy and jurisdiction free from undue restriction by authorities or social structures, although the particular areas identified as manifestations of autonomy may of course vary by culture (Nucci, 2001). Would individuals in simple hunter–gatherer or premodern societies also develop concepts of freedoms and apply them to some of these areas, or do these concepts require a certain degree of social–organizational complexity and attendant experiences for their construction? What about societies with strong authoritarian traditions (e.g., those ruled by a chieftain or patriarchy), or cultural groups that may share a fundamentalist perspective on religious truth and authority (e.g., the most conservative Islamic regions within Pakistan or Afghanistan)? What areas of personal jurisdiction or potential limits on secular or religious authority are identified by individuals in these sorts of societies? How are the rights of religious apostates or dissenters viewed? Would individuals from these societies

still sometimes assert personal autonomy or prefer more democratic forms of decision making and participation (perhaps despite outward compliance to existing hierarchical social structures)?

A related question pertains to how broad and universal the functional model underlying human autonomy is, and whether or not it would hold beyond the types of societies investigated so far. If it were found that individuals in very simple (hunter–gatherer) or authoritarian or fundamentalist societies do not endorse personal freedoms and democratic participation, would people in these societies still suffer corresponding negative effects on their psychological well-being in the absence of such autonomy (or experience positive effects with enhanced personal freedom and participation)? It may be that the construction of conceptions of freedoms or democratic notions depends, in part, on certain types of positive experiences with more egalitarian forms of social organization, and thus a minimal level of familiarity with certain types of autonomy may be a prerequisite for the explicit construction of many democratic notions. Nevertheless, the positive functional benefits of autonomy may still be universal, and such experiences thus may help to drive the formulation of explicit conceptions of rights and democratic constructs when these opportunities are made available to those who previously have not had them. Studies of cultural transformation and change may prove important in addressing these questions. Understanding the role of varying social experiences and universal human needs for autonomy and participation in the formulation of different types of democratic conceptions remains an enduring issue in moral developmental theorizing and research (Piaget, 1932).

## Note

1. The term *Western* is used in this chapter as referring to knowledge based on the culture, history, and philosophies of Euro-Western thought (Chilisa, 2012) and broadly refers to the following geographical areas: Europe, North America, Australia, New Zealand, and parts of Central and South America. We acknowledge the values and assumptions of colonialism, imperialism, and globalization that are inherent in the use of this term (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2000; Young, 2001).

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