

Universe and You: A Search for Universal Moral Values

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Abstract

Intercultural and multicultural communication can be difficult when opposing points of view try to find common ground. This is, in part, due to the different moral values people hold, which can come from their spiritual beliefs, legal systems, personal principles, relationships, and more. The present study aims to find a set of universal moral principles that apply to all humans in order to improve intercultural and multicultural communication. This study will synthesize the current literature on universal moral values across six different disciplines. These disciplines include philosophy/ethics, religion, communication, developmental psychology, evolutionary psychology, and anthropology. First, this paper will review the literature on universal moral values in each of the six selected disciplines to establish what each discipline believes to be the best contenders for universal moral values. Then, this literature will be synthesized and compared to assess the prevalence of certain moral values across research disciplines. Results show the most prevalent moral values, and best contenders for universal moral values, to be justice and care/harm, followed by sanctity, respect for/recognition of authority, honesty, and tolerance. Some more values that could be contenders for universal moral values with more research are reciprocity, loyalty, forgiveness, and harmony. Perhaps these moral values come in varying degrees across cultures and people, with justice and care/harm being prevalent in most people, and forgiveness and harmony showing up in fewer, but still a considerable amount, of people. Future research should continue this search for universal moral values across different disciplines, as each of the six disciplines explored in this paper brought insightful contributions to the research on moral values. Further exploration of the values mentioned in this paper is necessary, as well as more research on other values and disciplines not investigated here.

Universe and You: A Search for Universal Moral Values

Introduction

“North Americans...too often assume that people elsewhere hold comparable values, or would, at least if they were given the opportunity” (Condon, 1981). Personal values and how one distinguishes between right and wrong might seem obvious to the individual, and might lead one to believe that everyone else shares this same perspective. If this were the case, there would be no world wars, no disagreements between countries, no political parties, and no arguments with loved ones. However, because different people have different classifications for right and wrong, these central ideals come into conflict and cause disagreements on the “right” thing to do. For those living in a western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic nation, their moral values might actually be the minority in the world (Henrich et al., 2010). Thus, it is important to have an understanding of what other cultures value in order to foster good cross-cultural communication.

This poses a problem for communication, as it becomes more difficult to communicate between two opposing moral worldviews. As communication theorist Kenneth Burke (1969) stressed, identification is imperative for persuasion to occur. Without the ability to understand and identify with others, communication practices become much harder, if not impossible. In order to attempt to study others’ moral values, people must understand their own moral values. Where do moral values come from? How people make decisions about right and wrong can be influenced by a lot, and moral values may come from different places. Some turn to religion to tell them how to live a “good” life, while others turn to ancient Greek philosophy. Where some find their moral values are shaped by their parents’ moral values, others base their moral values on societal rules and expectations.

It can be difficult to identify moral values that are universal for all human beings. It seems as though there are too many factors involved in the formation of one's personal moral system to be similar to another, but nonetheless, similar values do come up in very different societies. Perhaps there are universal efforts to maximize happiness and minimize unhappiness, as consequentialism suggests (Mill, 1863). Or maybe there are particular virtues akin to Aristotelian virtue ethics that appear in different societies, such as justice and faith (Aristotle, 2002). These basic moral values, if universal, could lead to great strides in cross-cultural and even multicultural communication. At a time where the U.S. is more polarized than ever, people in opposing political parties are having trouble communicating with one another because of differing core values (Desilver, 2022). This kind of research could be informative for communication strategies by finding common moral values opposing groups can appeal to to foster better relationships.

Before diving into the literature on moral values, a clear definition of morality should be presented. While some philosophers make a distinction between "morality" and "ethics," the two are often used interchangeably in other disciplines. Because this paper has a communication focus, "morality" and "ethics" will be used interchangeably. The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy defines morality as "certain codes of conduct put forward by a society or a group (such as a religion), or accepted by an individual for her own behavior" (Gert & Gert, 2020). These "codes of conduct" are often based on the moral values that one holds. Even in this definition, it is clear how the morality of someone part of one "society or group" could be vastly different from the morality of someone part of another "society or group." These different moral systems make understanding the morality of another group difficult, leading to conflict in communication.

There is also much debate in philosophy about whether certain moral principles and values can be used for all moral situations (moral absolutism/objectivism) or if different moral principles and values are used depending on the nature of the situation (moral relativism). The Metaethical Moral Relativism Theory states that the judgment of right and wrong in moral situations is not universal, but dependent on the perspective of the moral agent(s) (Gowans, 2021). In other words, there are no moral situations in which the judgments of right and wrong are universally accepted. Differing moral values across people will always lead to disagreement, as no moral values are universally accepted. This might be the case, or it might be that there are a select few moral values that align with a moral absolutist's perspective that there *is* an objective right or wrong out there. Either way, an investigation of the moral values that people hold will provide insight into how moral values are used in moral situations and the respective moral weight they each hold. Perhaps morality is a combination of moral relativism and moral absolutism, where some moral values are absolute and others are weighted differently depending on the situation.

Distinguishing the moral values of a society depends on research and critical analysis of how people make decisions about right and wrong. A handful of disciplines have stood out most prominently in the research on moral values, theories, principles, foundations, frameworks, and ethics. The first, and somewhat obvious, is the discipline of ethics, supported by philosophy. Ancient Greek philosophers like Aristotle (2002) proposed theories on morality and how to live a virtuous life. Other more modern ethicists are also speculating on morality and moral values shared amongst humans (Bok, 2002; Christians & Traber, 1997; Dalai Lama, 2001). Another discipline closely intertwined with morality is religious studies, as many people base their moral systems off of their religious values. This being the case, some religious scholars have proposed

moral rules that appear in most world religions to be universal moral rules, such as The Golden Rule (Confucius & Lau, 1979; ESV Bible, 2018). Other religious scholars investigate the core moral values of the most popular world religions to compare and contrast their central ideals (Oppelt, 2012; “Summary of Religions and Beliefs: University of Bolton,” n.d.).

It would not be wise to write this paper with a communication focus without discussing the moral values investigated by communication scholars. In fact, some scholars have developed sets of ethical principles to address fundamental aspects of humanity (Chen & Starosta, 2005; Kale, 2003). Moving to more empirical research, the psychology discipline has seen a recent resurgence in moral psychology research, shifting from a focus on moral development to moral intuitions. Previous moral psychological research was incorporated into developmental psychology with models outlining how human moral systems develop (Kohlberg, 1958; Gilligan, 1982). Current moral psychological research is supported by evolutionary psychology, seeing moral values as moral intuitions in moral situations (Darwin, 1871; Haidt & Joseph, 2007). Finally, anthropology has contributed greatly to the cross-cultural understanding of moral values, and has the potential to contribute so much more with further morality research with an anthropological methodology (Shweder et al, 1997).

By synthesizing the relevant literature from these disciplines that incorporate moral values research, this paper will compare moral values across the disciplines to determine their universality. Recurring values and themes in the literature are the best indicator morality researchers have to determine whether or not there is a true universal morality that can unite different groups. Without being able to understand and identify with the moral values of an outgroup, communication suffers, and it becomes hard to agree on solutions. A set of universal moral values would provide focus points for communication to improve communication between

two seemingly unrelated groups. Most people will not share the exact same preferences for certain moral values, but perhaps there are some universal moral values that define what it means to be a human being. These contenders for universal moral values should appear as important values across the research of different disciplines, establishing their prevalence in the moral psychology of humans. This paper aims to review the literature involved in moral values research across six disciplines, before synthesizing and comparing this literature to provide an interdisciplinary research paper on the best contenders for universal moral values.

Literature Review

Philosophy/Ethics

It seems intuitive that a search for universal moral values would look at the philosophy/ethics discipline for insight. Different ethicists and philosophers have proposed lists of moral values that they deem to be essential to living the best life. Aristotle, for example, spoke about virtues and vices, suggesting that the best person embodies the right amount of virtue in their lives (Aristotle, 2002). The four cardinal virtues that Aristotle emphasized were prudence (the ability to govern oneself with reason), justice (fairness), temperance (self-restraint), and courage (bravery). By embodying these virtues, Aristotle suggested that anyone could be a good person. Along these lines, Aristotle believed that one becomes a good person by making a habit of the virtues to the point at which they come naturally. Aristotle also believed that people needed to embody the middle ground of these virtues, rather than one extreme or the other. Not being courageous enough can lead to missed opportunities, while being too courageous can lead to risky decisions. The best person is able to recognize the extent to which they should embody each virtue, and makes a habit of following them.

Aristotle's (2002) virtue ethics puts moral weight on virtuous character traits to uphold and embody. Certain virtues, or character traits, are offered by other ethicists and provide easy comparisons across theories. Philosopher and ethicist Sissela Bok (2002) proposes "minimalist" values that she argues are held by most human beings. These include positive duties of mutual support, care, loyalty, and reciprocity. She also proposes standards for fairness and procedural justice in societies, which, taking note, was one of Aristotle's cardinal virtues. In their search for universal moral values, communication ethicists and philosophers Clifford Christians and Michael Traber (1997) claim that what makes humans unique is respect for the sacredness of human life (which suggests a theological component). This respect for life underlies their suggestions of ethical principles, including telling the truth, not harming the innocent, unconditionally accepting the other as a person, and having solidarity with the weak and vulnerable.

It is clear how Christians and Traber's (1997) theory about respecting human life being at the foundation of moral systems influenced their set of ethical principles. While this may create some differences in emphasized values, there are similarities with Bok's (2002) minimalist values of mutual support and reciprocity. Finally, the Dalai Lama (2001), while a leader of the Buddhist religion, has contributed to the ethical literature on moral values by searching for a transcultural ethical system that is based on universal ethical principles rather than religious ones (as he is a religious leader). The ethical principles suggested by the Dalai Lama are based on a common philosophical idea that people should aim to maximize happiness and minimize suffering. With this foundational principle in mind, the Dalai Lama proposes a set of transcultural ethical virtues including love and compassion, patience, tolerance, forgiveness, contentment, a sense of responsibility, and a sense of harmony.

The Dalai Lama's (2001) patience virtue aligns with the temperance virtue Aristotle (2002) proposed, and his ideas of love and compassion might also be seen with Bok's (2002) duty of care and maybe Christians and Traber's (1997) principle to not harm the innocent. There are many connections and differences in ethical virtues and principles in the philosophy discipline alone, which is further informed with the perspectives of other disciplines. The Dalai Lama demonstrates a disconnect between his religious principles and his ethical principles, claiming that religion is not a requirement for being a good person. However, he recognizes the role that religion does play in ethical thought as the source from which many derive their own ethical values.

Religion

If religion is the basis for many people's conceptions of right and wrong, then it makes sense that religious studies would have a place in the study of moral values. In the comparison of more than 2,500 censuses, surveys, and population registers, The Pew Research Center (2012) shows that over 80% of humans around the world follow some kind of religion. It cannot be stated that *everyone* derives their morals from their religion, but knowing that a good amount do suggests that the moral values of the major world religions are worthy of study. Additionally, many who do not claim to be religious still develop moral values that have religious roots. One moral value that appears in some form in most religious texts and values follows the familiar line, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." This idea, also known as The Golden Rule, appears in all of the major religions of the world with slightly different language.

Christianity tells its followers, "And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise" (ESV Bible, 2018, Luke 6:31). Similarly, Islam claims, "No one of you is a believer until he desires for his brother that which he desires for himself" (Khatab, 2016, Hadith

#13). From Hinduism, “This is the sum of duty: Do naught unto others which would cause you pain if done to you” (Vidyalkar, 1998). From Buddhism, “Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful” (Rockhill, 2015). Also, Confucianism states, “Surely it is a maxim of loving kindness: Do not unto others that you would not have them do unto you” (Confucius & Lau, 1979). These are just examples from a handful of world religions, let alone others that preach the same concept. A further analysis of what The Golden Rule means exactly is included in the discussion. This representation of both western religions and eastern religions suggests the idea of the The Golden Rule to be universal and foundational to human moral values.

Treating others how one would want to be treated is not the sole moral teaching of a given religion, however, Differences arise in the other values and beliefs different religions hold, as The University of Bolton (n.d.) summarizes. Hinduism, for one, values respect for elders, reverence for teachers, regard for guests, and tolerance of all races and religions. Buddhism demands followers refrain from harming living beings, taking what is not given, sexual misconduct, harmful speech, and drugs and alcohol. Judaism proposes the greatest principle of social life to be love of one’s neighbor, which seems to adequately sum up the Hinduism values of showing special care toward elders, teachers, guests, and other races and religions. Reflecting Buddhism’s rule of refraining from harming living beings, Jainism’s main moral principle concerns the avoidance of physical or mental harm to any living being.

Perhaps showing care toward other people and minimizing the harm caused to them are common moral values across religions that point to a universal moral value. After combing through the core principles and values of the world’s major religions, Integral Church (Oppelt, 2012) presents a list of 15 universal religious principles. Of these, loving others, minimizing harm, and The Golden Rule all earn a place. Other universal principles include speaking the

truth, forgiveness, and respecting elders. If these are all truly examples of universal religious principles, and over 80% of people around the world follow some religion, then it would be presumed that these would also reflect universal moral values (Pew Research Center, 2012). More research on what people believe to be core ethical principles could provide insight, such as from a communication perspective on how people can communicate in a moral way.

Communication

Communication scholars focus on the ethics people should keep in mind when communicating with others. These principles and values are a way to understand how people's moral values are reflected in how they interact with others in the world. Guo-Ming Chen and William Starosta (2005) acknowledge that while cultural variations will create many cultural differences in moral values, there are universal values that can be identified. The main principle they identify is a familiar one under a different name. Chen and Starosta claim reciprocity to be the fundamental universal principle of interpersonal communication. They alter the phrase of The Golden Rule, "Communicate unto others as you wish them to communicate unto you." Reciprocity is considered to be the most basic of moral principles to Chen and Starosta, and is then applied through four more principles they identify.

First, they claim mutuality to be a universal principle, or the idea of both communicators being on the same page for ethical communication (Chen & Starosta, 2005). Non-judgmentalism is their second principle, or being open to new ideas to allow an ethical flow of different perspectives and ideologies. Next is honesty, where telling the truth ensures that people can trust what others are communicating. Finally, they propose a principle of respect, mainly respecting others as human beings. These moral principles of mutuality, non-judgmentalism, honesty, and respect can be compared to other sets of moral principles within the communication discipline,

which often appear as ethical communication rules. All of these principles could apply to different areas of communication, such as public speaking and political rhetoric. Communication scholars present these principles to guide ethical communication in any context.

David Kale (2003) believes that all humans share a similar human spirit that universal moral values come from. His set of ethical principles are grounded in achieving a world where all of the world's cultures coexist peacefully. Kale's first principle is another reiteration of The Golden Rule, stating that "Ethical communicators address people of other cultures with the same respect that they would like to receive themselves." Chen and Starosta (2005) would label this moral value the value of reciprocity, which is a continued theme throughout communication ethical principles. His second principle says, "Ethical communicators seek to describe the world as they perceive it as accurately as possible." This principle highlights the moral value of honesty, which is another principle identified by Chen and Starosta.

The third principle claims, "Ethical communicators encourage people of other cultures to express themselves in their uniqueness" (Kale, 2003). This value of tolerance, while not explicitly identified by Chen and Starosta (2005), is similar in thought to their principle of non-judgmentalism, which encourages people to be open to the uniqueness of other cultures. Finally, Kale's fourth principle is "Ethical communicators strive for identification with people of other cultures." An aspect of empathy or compassion is inherent in the identification with others. This principle promotes a kind of care ethic for treating others with love. Care ethics is a popular philosophical framework that incorporates moral values associated with caring for others. This idea has been further researched in the developmental psychology field, fostering a philosophical dichotomy between justice and care ethics.

Developmental Psychology

Developmental psychologists have been interested in how the morality of people develops over time, assuming all humans have the same developing systems. In Kohlberg's (1958) research on moral development, he offered three stages of moral development from birth to adulthood: the preconventional, conventional, and postconventional stages. First is the preconventional stage, which people experience at about 3-7 years old. In this stage, moral reasoning is based simply on rewards and punishments. For a child in the preconventional stage, right and wrong is determined by what rewards them and what punishes them, respectively. Next is the conventional stage, occurring around 8-13 years old. Here, children start to base their ideas of right and wrong to what makes them look like a good person to those around them. They derive their ethical principles from social rules and their relationships with others. The last of Kohlberg's moral development stages is the postconventional stage, which starts in the teenage years and carries on throughout adulthood. This is the stage of complete moral development, where people are able to develop ideas of right and wrong based on their own personal ethical principles, derived from their religious beliefs, the legal system, and other environmental factors. At the beginning of this stage, people begin to think about morality in a utilitarian way, seeking the moral actions that produce the best overall outcomes for the greatest number of people.

In adulthood, Kohlberg (1958) suggests that people base their moral decisions on universal principles that indicate right and wrong. He does not specify what these universal principles are, but other developmental psychologists have suggested that Kohlberg's stages of moral development center around an ethic of justice. One such researcher pointed out that this presented a major limitation in Kohlberg's research. While testing his stages of moral development, Kohlberg often found that his male participants scored in the highest stage of moral development more than his female participants. This led to Kohlberg's conclusion that

women are less morally developed than men. Gilligan (1982) disagreed, claiming that Kohlberg's stages were based on values of rules and justice, which appeal more to men than women. She created her own stages of moral development based on Kohlberg's that focus on connections and care toward others instead of justice.

Gilligan (1982) argued that in the preconventional stage, about 7 to 9 years old, women aim towards individual survival. What is right is that which ensures this survival, and what is wrong is anything that hinders it. After this women go through a kind of transitional phase, shifting their moral systems away from being focused on the self and towards focusing on their responsibilities to family, friends, and others. Next women reach the conventional stage, where they start to believe self sacrifice as an important part of their ethical systems. Gilligan suggests that during the tween and teen years of a woman she develops the understanding that anything that is self-sacrificial is good. Note that this is the exact opposite of women's moral systems in the preconventional stage. Next comes another transitional period where women transition from believing self-sacrifice equates goodness to the understanding of herself as an individual with needs. This is reflected in Kohlberg's (1958) postconventional stage, where teens and adults base their moral systems on their own needs and values.

The postconventional stage proposed by Gilligan (1982) differs from Kohlberg's (1958) postconventional stage in that in Gilligan's model, women instill a principle of nonviolence, to not harm others or oneself. Kohlberg suggested that people develop universal moral principles in the postconventional stage, but Gilligan puts a name to the principle she suggests is universal for women: nonviolence. Maybe Kohlberg would agree that nonviolence is a universal moral principle, or maybe he would believe that nonviolence is only a universal moral principle for women. Nonetheless, Kohlberg and Gilligan's respective research suggest that men and women

may develop different moral principles, namely justice and care, respectively. Their two stages of moral development, while sharing similarities, provide a nice contrast when put next to each other showing how different moral systems might develop when emphasizing different moral values. Perhaps justice and care are good contenders for these, or maybe men and women just have different moral values, disproving the theory of universal values. Or maybe more psychological research can give insight to moral values that developed over a longer span of time, such as through a kind of moral natural selection.

Evolutionary Psychology

Charles Darwin (1859), known as the father of evolution, claimed that natural selection would favor the traits best suited for survival and reproductive success, a theory commonly described as “survival of the fittest.” Evolutionary and moral psychologists now wonder if this applies to moral traits as opposed to just physical ones. This opens up opportunities for the research of those moral traits that were best suited for survival and reproductive success. Darwin (1871) noted that sympathy and submission to authority both would have given evolutionary ancestors a better chance at survival, naming them as potential naturally selected moral traits. In more modern evolutionary psychological research, Haidt and Joseph (2004) set out to study moral intuitions, or quick and automatic feelings in moral situations. These moral intuitions are most likely indicative of universal moral values that are innately ingrained in all human beings, as they manifest as uncontrollable thoughts or feelings in moral situations.

In their initial research, Haidt and Joseph (2004) identified four basic clusters of moral intuitions: suffering, hierarchy, reciprocity, and purity. Based on these, Haidt and Joseph (2007) developed Moral Foundations Theory, a set of five innate moral foundations that are activated to a different degree depending on the moral situation. The first foundation, care/harm, focuses on

the adaptive challenge of protecting children from harm and caring for them, which would have been triggered by one's children suffering. Today, this foundation is triggered by images of childlike creatures, cartoon characters, etc. and aligns with values of compassion and kindness. The second foundation is fairness/cheating, which focuses on the adaptive challenge to reap the benefits of reciprocity in a group and would have been triggered by people who were being good and cooperating, or people who were being bad and cheating. Today, this foundation is triggered by infidelity or times when one does not get something that they believe they deserve and aligns with values of fairness, justice, and trustworthiness.

Next is the loyalty/betrayal foundation, an intuition that developed in order to form cohesive coalitions and alliances and was triggered by a threat or a challenge to the group (Haidt & Joseph, 2007). This foundation is triggered today by threats to one's group as well, which can include sports teams and nationality, aligning with values like loyalty, patriotism, and self-sacrifice for the group. The penultimate foundation is authority/subversion, which adapted to form beneficial relationships within hierarchies and to be able to discern who was in power and who was not and was triggered by signs of dominance and submission. Power relationships like bosses and employees or professionals and the public are how this foundation is triggered today, dictating values of obedience and deference to authority.

The final foundation is sanctity/degradation, which adapted in order to avoid contamination such as waste products and people with diseases (Haidt & Joseph, 2007). Intuitions of the sanctity/degradation foundation might be triggered today by taboo ideas like communism and racism, or other politically progressive ideas that contradict spiritual or religious beliefs, reflecting values of temperance, chastity, piety, and cleanliness. Researchers are now working on incorporating a sixth moral foundation, liberty/oppression, which speaks both to

the desire for liberty from unwanted intrusion and the opposition to oppression (Iyer et al., 2012). Other foundations being discussed in evolutionary psychology research include honor (Atari et al., 2020), honesty, ownership, and efficiency (Graham et al., 2012). All of these moral foundations indicate universal moral values that are activated to a different degree at different times depending on the individual. Moral Foundations Theory is, however, just a theory, and may not be as indicative of moral values as actually asking people about their values, which anthropology provides a great opportunity for.

Anthropology

The common methodologies of anthropological research provide some of the most authentic answers possible to the question of moral universals. By studying the values of different cultures from within the communities, anthropologists can get a better understanding of the moral values that differ cross-culturally, as well as moral values that appear, possibly in different forms, across cultures. An issue arises, however, that there is not much work out there on moral values in anthropological experimental studies. Future morality-related anthropological studies should explore the moral values of communities and how those differ or stay constant around the world. One study does a great job of this, examining the people of Bhubaneswar, Orissa, India.

In Shweder et al's (1997) first study, the researchers interviewed residents of Bhubaneswar to identify what they considered to be breaches of morality or transgressions in their culture. Examples of these transgressions included, "Two people applied for a job. One of them was a relative of the interviewer. Because they were relatives he was given the job although the other man did better on the exam," "A father told his son to steal flowers from his neighbor's garden. The boy did it," and "One of your family members eats a dog regularly for dinner." In

order to code these incidents and find commonalities between them, the researchers listened to the rationales behind why certain incidents were right or wrong. They identified the moral values behind these rationales to be issues of harm, rights, justice, duty, hierarchy, interdependency, sacred order, natural order, and personal sanctity.

Initial comparisons see similarities between the anthropology and psychology disciplines, such as with the researched values concerning harm, justice, hierarchy, and personal sanctity. After categorizing and grouping these central moral values together, Shweder et al. (1997) outlined their “Big Three” of morality: the ethics of autonomy, the ethics of community, and the ethics of divinity. First, the ethics of autonomy is made up of principles like harm, rights, and justice that protect individuals and their personal needs and preferences. For societies that promote individualism, such as the United States, autonomy would be an important ethical value. Next is the ethics of community, which is made up of principles like duty, hierarchy, and interdependency, or any value that aims to protect the greater good of the community. Community would be an important ethical value for societies that promote collectivism. The final principle is the ethics of divinity, which includes values such as sacred order, natural order, and personal sanctity. The principle of divinity would be important to those who value the protection of the spirit and soul from degradation.

The ethics of autonomy, ethics of community, and ethics of divinity serve to describe the most prominent ethical values of participants in Bhubaneswar, India and touch on values surrounding being an individual, belonging to a community, and the cleanliness of the spirit (Shweder et al, 1997). Perhaps these are better descriptions of humanity’s universal moral values as opposed to focusing on virtues like care and justice, as they came directly from descriptions of moral situations from real people. The anthropological perspective provides these descriptions of

core moral behaviors in relation to how people interact with the world instead of mere abstract concepts. This might be the appropriate way to explain and further investigate “right” and “wrong,” but it is certain that more anthropological research is needed to gain an even better understanding of people’s interpretations of moral and immoral behaviors from their unique cultural perspectives.

Methodology

With more time, funds, and dedication, researchers might survey all of the different countries of the world on their moral values and compare them. Until then, this paper will attempt to synthesize the current literature on moral values. As stated earlier, moral values can vary widely from culture to culture, and are based on many things. However, some similarities arise in the comparison of different sets of moral values identified by researchers in many different fields. Also referred to as theories, principles, foundations, frameworks, and ethics, moral values take different forms depending on the type of research, and this synthesis will attempt to bring the most relevant research together for comparison. By pulling the relevant literature and comparing the moral values emphasized, this paper will be able to formulate a list of the most prevalent moral values in morality research, proposing their candidacy for universal moral values. Establishing the moral values that are most prevalent in the moral psychology of human beings can open the door for better communication by appealing to these universal values. Engaging in communication with a focus on shared moral values can help to generate healthy moral discourse and lead people to mutually beneficial decisions.

Morality research can make a connection to every discipline in one way or another. Because of this, there is relevant research on moral values across a handful of disciplines. This paper pulls the most relevant research from the disciplines most prominent in moral values

research. These disciplines include ethics/philosophy, religious studies, communication, developmental psychology, evolutionary psychology, and anthropology. While other disciplines do incorporate morality into their research in some way, these disciplines have stood out as the most prominent ideas and attempts to create a set of universal moral principles. Now that the literature has been reviewed for these disciplines, this paper will analyze the research to find recurring themes or ideas about moral values across the disciplines. The increased prevalence of certain moral values in the literature would make them good contenders for universal moral values. After comparison of the most prevalent moral values in the research of each of these disciplines, this paper will derive a list of moral values that appear most often and suggest that future research on these values be done to further prove their universality.

Analysis

Now that the most prominent theories about moral values have been identified, they can be synthesized for comparison. One strong contender for a universal moral value is that of justice, or fairness. This value appears in many theories and research on human morality. Dating back to ancient Greece, justice was one of the four cardinal virtues proposed by Aristotle (2002). He believed that practicing fairness was the way to live a morally good life and be a morally good person. Modern philosophers have followed suit, for example, Sissela Bok (2002), who suggests that fairness and procedural justice are important for a good society. The Golden Rule, which appears in most of the major world religions, can be seen as a rule of fairness depending on the translation. For example, Christianity explains the concept as, “[a]nd as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise” (ESV Bible, 2018, Luke 6:31). The Bible proposes that one should treat others how they themselves would want to be treated, suggesting an important value of treating everyone fairly in the Christian religion.

Interestingly, values of justice and fairness do not readily appear at the forefront of communication ethics research. There are hints of it, such as Chen and Starosta's (2005) turn on The Golden Rule, "Communicate unto others as you wish them to communicate unto you." Their commitment to reciprocity, while different from justice, also includes a touch of fairness to achieve mutual satisfaction. The ethic of justice is very prominent in developmental psychology research with Kohlberg's (1958) stages of moral development that favored moral reasoning that focused on fairness. To Kohlberg, the most developed moral systems are moral systems that prioritize justice in moral dilemmas. From an evolutionary psychology perspective, Haidt and Joseph (2007) deem fairness/cheating to be one of the core moral foundations people hold, where evolutionary ancestors learned that being fair would allow them to benefit from, again, reciprocity.

In Shweder et al's (1997) study, the researchers asked participants in Bhubaneswar, India to identify some of their cultural moral transgressions and provide rationales for why these actions would be morally questionable. One of the common moral values the researchers identified was justice, showing how this value holds moral weight in Bhubaneswar. This value of justice is included in their ethics of autonomy, suggesting fairness aids a person in pursuit of personal life satisfaction. Justice is a moral value that appears all around the world, with research supporting its prominence in both the western world (Kohlberg, 1958) as well as the eastern world (Shweder et al., 1997). If justice, or fairness, is a universal moral value, it suggests that being fair is a morally good action, and one should pursue the just solution when caught in a moral dilemma.

While The Golden Rule might be a doctrine of fairness, its wording in some religious texts suggests another possible universal moral value: care. The ethic of care might reflect

showing care or love to someone, and also minimizing the harm done to others. Some teachings of The Golden Rule seem to reflect an ethic of care, such as Buddhism teaching, “Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful” or Confucianism instructing, “Surely it is a maxim of loving kindness: Do not unto others that you would not have them do unto you” (Confucius & Lau, 1979; Rockhill, 2015). Judaism teaches that the greatest principle of social life is to love one’s neighbor, and Jainism’s main moral principle is the avoidance of harm to living beings (“Summary of Religions and Beliefs: University of Bolton,” n.d.). The principles of loving others and minimizing harm are also two of the 15 universal religious principles identified by Integral Church (Oppelt, 2012). Clearly, an ethic of care is present in religious values, focusing on loving others and avoiding harm.

This ethic of care also appears in communication ethics, such as in David Kale’s (2003) set of ethical principles for intercultural communication. His fourth principle states that “Ethical communicators strive for identification with people of other cultures.” Identifying with people of other cultures suggests a kind of empathy with a different group, bringing with it an ethic of care for understanding the position of others and communicating with careful consideration of that. Along with the ethic of justice, the ethic of care is the other most prominent moral value of developmental psychological research. In opposition to Kohlberg’s (1958) moral development stages, Gilligan’s (1982) stages give more room for considerations of maximizing care and minimizing harm in a moral situation. She suggests that while ethics of justice appeal more to men generally, women gravitate toward moral decisions that value care. Charles Darwin (1871) suggests the possibility of sympathy as a moral trait that was naturally selected throughout human evolution. This ability to care for others would have been beneficial to the survival of evolutionary ancestors, as it would have ensured that no one wanted to kill them. Care/harm is

also one of the moral foundations proposed by Haidt and Joseph (2007) in their moral values model based on evolutionary psychological research. They suggest that this care value originates from evolutionary ancestors' endeavors to care for children and protect them from harm, thus ensuring the family line continues.

While care was not identified as a common moral value by Shweder et al (1997), they did identify what seems to be the converse of the moral value of care based on the aforementioned ideas across the disciplines: harm. This value was incorporated into their ethics of autonomy, along with justice, suggesting that harm and justice might sometimes work together for the individual's self-interests. Ethicists have also identified care as a value important for a person's overall moral system, such as with Sissela Bok's (2002) four minimalist values, which include a duty of care. Philosophers Christians and Traber (1997) also identify not harming the innocent as an essential ethical principle, exhibiting the converse of the ethic of care again. This research suggests that people have some kind of moral responsibility to maximize care and minimize harm in moral dilemmas, if the ethic of care is universal. This might seem easy in some moral cases, but could be complicated by a clash of the moral values of justice and care.

Although the moral values of justice and care appear most prominently across the disciplines, there are many other good contenders for universal moral values. One of these is a moral value of sanctity, or divinity. In their anthropological study of the people of Bhubaneswar, India, Shweder et al (1997) identified sacred order, natural order, and personal sanctity to be important moral values of the participants. These three values make up one of the "Big Three" of morality: the ethics of divinity. The ethics of divinity aims to protect the spirit and soul from degradation, suggesting that the morally good act is the one that ensures the cleanliness of the soul, which can differ in interpretation based on the individual. This is a central aspect to many

of the world's religions, which often teach about the soul and spirituality. The morally good actions that religions propose to ensure one's sanctity vary, such as the prohibition of drugs and alcohol in religions like Buddhism and certain Christian denominations (Smith, 2004, 89:5-7; "Summary of Religions and Beliefs: University of Bolton," n.d.).

While sanctity seems inherent to most religious teachings, it is found in modern philosophical teachings as well. Modern philosophers Christians and Traber (1997) believe that what makes humans special is respect for the sacredness of human life. In their evolutionary psychological research, Haidt and Joseph (2004) identified purity as one of the four basic moral inclinations, later developing it into the sanctity/degradation moral foundation (2007). Unlike spiritual explanations of the sanctity value, this moral foundation is explained with physical cleanliness, which further research connects with spiritual cleanliness. Haidt and Joseph suggest that the sanctity/degradation foundation adapted to avoid contamination by avoiding triggers like waste products and diseased people. However, modern-day triggers can include taboo ideas that make one feel unclean. Haidt and Joseph associate with their sanctity/degradation foundation the value of temperance, or, self-restraint. If temperance is indeed a kind of sub-value of sanctity, then it also has strong backing from ancient Greek philosophers. Aristotle (2002), for example, named temperance as one of the four cardinal virtues aimed at happiness.

An ethic of sanctity or divinity does not entirely focus on spiritual cleanliness, but physical cleanliness as well, showing how the value of sanctity can be elicited even by those who are not religious. While not explicitly informed by religious values, the moral value of sanctity appears both in cultural research and abstract thought. Perhaps it is morally good to do what is sacred, or ensures the cleanliness of the soul. This value is difficult to definitively prove, as many people are not spiritual and might not believe it is important to practice sanctity. However, given

its relative prevalence in the literature surrounding moral values, it is a very good contender for a universal moral value.

Another good option for a universal moral value that could use a little more exploration is the value of authority. The father of evolution, Charles Darwin (1871), proposed that a submission to authority moral trait could have developed as it was beneficial to earlier humans. If submitting to authority meant that a person would not be killed, it was in their best interest to submit and ensure survival. In their evolutionary psychological research, Haidt and Joseph (2004) originally identified hierarchy as one of the four basic clusters of automatic moral inclinations, which developed into the authority/subversion moral foundation (Haidt & Joseph, 2007). They suggest that a recognition of someone's authority helped evolutionary ancestors forge relationships within societal hierarchies, which enabled their survival. Today, this is seen in relationships such as a parent and a child or a boss and an employee. Shweder et al. (1997) also identified hierarchy as a common moral value among their participants in their anthropological study. They included this value in their ethics of community, suggesting that respect for authority is a morally good action that benefits society.

Haidt and Joseph claim that respect for authority is morally good on a personal level, Shweder et al suggest that respect for authority is morally good on a societal level. Religious scholars have also found that respect for elders appears in most of the world's religions, suggesting it might be a universal religious principle (Oppelt, 2012). Hinduism in particular puts special emphasis on respect for elders and reverence for teachers ("Summary of Religions and Beliefs: University of Bolton," n.d.). If this value is indeed universal, it would suggest that a moral action can be defined by how much respect one showed for an authority figure, which might not always seem intuitive. Again, there is not as much evidence for this respect for

authority value as justice and care, but it certainly does appear in research across multiple cultures and religious value systems.

Besides sanctity and respect for/recognition of authority, another good contender for a universal moral value is honesty. Some modern ethicists such as Christians and Traber (1997), who believe a respect for life underlies ethical principles, list telling the truth as one of their four moral rules. They believe that honesty shows a respect for the sacredness of human life, which is what makes us human. Many of the world's major religions preach honesty, instilling that as a moral value for those who derive their concepts of right and wrong from their religions. Integral Church's list of 15 universal religious principles based on research of the values of the world's major religions includes speaking the truth (Oppelt, 2012). This again demonstrates the possible universality of the moral value of honesty, considering it is present in so many religious value systems.

Honesty is a very common value for communication ethicists, as many believe honest communication is essential for ethical communication. In their search for universal moral values in communication, Chen and Starosta (2005) identify honesty, where truthful communication ensures that audiences can trust what someone is communicating. Communication ethicist David Kale (2003) attempted the same search for humans' universal moral values. One of Kale's four ethical principles claims, "Ethical communicators seek to describe the world as they perceive it as accurately as possible." Kale believes that to be honest in one's communication is a universal ethical principle that everyone should follow.

Along with honesty, another possible universal moral value might be the value of tolerance. Many religions stress the importance of tolerance (although many also do not) and respecting those who may have different values than one's own. For example, Hinduism places

special emphasis on tolerance among its central values (“Summary of Religions and Beliefs: University of Bolton,” n.d.). For other religions, however, tolerance is not one of the core values or principles. Some equate tolerance with non-judgmentalism, which does appear in most religious principles, suggesting that people should not judge others or risk being judged themselves (Oppelt, 2012).

Communication ethicists often stress the importance of tolerance in ethical communication, making it a recurring principle in this discipline. Non-judgmentalism was one of Chen and Starosta’s (2005) four ethical principles for ethical communication, which speaks to the value of tolerance under a different name. According to Chen and Starosta, tolerance should be a universal moral principle of communication to ensure the free flow of different perspectives and ideologies. In his set of four ethical principles, Kale (2003) also emphasized tolerance, claiming that “[e]thical communicators encourage people of other cultures to express themselves in their uniqueness.” Even some who specialize in philosophical thought see tolerance as a foundational principle that maximizes happiness and minimizes suffering. The Dalai Lama proposed tolerance as a transcultural ethical virtue that is universally good. If tolerance were to be a moral universal, this would suggest that tolerant acts are morally good, and people should strive for tolerance in order to be a good person.

Justice, care/harm, sanctity, respect for/recognition of authority, honesty, and tolerance offer a promising list for the moral values that make humans human as supported by the disciplines of philosophy/ethics, religion, communication, developmental psychology, evolutionary psychology, and anthropology. A handful of other values might also fit in with this list but could use more research. One of these is reciprocity, which is a heavily considered value of evolutionary psychology and one of the four basic clusters of Haidt and Joseph (2004) (Haidt

& Joseph, 2004; McCullough, 2020). This is supported by ethicist Sissela Bok's (2002) four universal moral values, which includes reciprocity. Some religious scholars view The Golden Rule as a rule of reciprocity, which would make reciprocity a foundational moral principle for most religions. While reciprocity seems like a foundational moral principle for multiple disciplines, it could use more research to prove its universality.

Another moral value that does show up in research but could use more development is loyalty. Philosophical works feature loyalty as a universal moral value, such as Sissela Bok's (2002) minimalist values. Haidt and Joseph (2007) propose loyalty/betrayal as one of their six moral foundations, suggesting that evolutionary ancestors learned to prioritize loyalty as they needed to form cohesive coalitions and alliances. Because of that, people today experience things like group pride and anger at traitors. Perhaps the loyalty value has become a universal one, as forging successful and beneficial relationships was (and still is) such a fundamental aspect of human society.

Aside from reciprocity and loyalty needing more research to legitimize their candidacy for universality, forgiveness is another value worthy of more investigation. Integral Church identified forgiveness as a universal religious principle, appearing in the core principles of the world's major religions, showing its significance as a religious moral principle (Oppelt, 2012). It was also identified by the Dalai Lama (2001) as a transcultural ethical virtue in his philosophical work, although his religious values still may have influenced this. More research on forgiveness as a moral value needs to be done with disciplines outside of religion, such as communication or developmental psychology, to truly establish it as a universal moral value.

One final value that appeared in the research over multiple disciplines is a state of coexistence, or harmony. In their anthropological research with participants in Bhubaneswar,

India, Shweder et al (1997) identified the moral values most frequently used in the participants' moral reasoning. One of these was interdependency, or, the dependence of two things on each other. This mutual dependence is similar to the Dalai Lama's (2001) identification of a sense of harmony to be a transcultural ethical principle. Maybe Shweder et al's interdependency value and the Dalai Lama's harmony principle can find a meeting point at a moral value of coexistence, where individuals can form a mutually beneficial group that everyone is pleased with. More research needs to be done on universal moral values, but good contenders for universal moral values include justice, care/harm, sanctity, respect for/recognition of authority, honesty, tolerance, reciprocity, loyalty, forgiveness, and harmony.

Discussion

After full synthesis and comparison of the most relevant literature on moral values, this study presents a list of ten possible universal moral values, in decreasing order of saliency in the literature. These moral values are justice, care/harm, sanctity, authority, honesty, tolerance, reciprocity, loyalty, forgiveness, and harmony. As will be discussed later, this is not an exhaustive list and limitations of the study point out possible issues in its accuracy. Nonetheless, this list was the result of a careful literature review and synthesis and the results can give at least an idea of some popular moral values that are held by all human beings. Informed by philosophy/ethics, religion, communication, developmental psychology, evolutionary psychology, and anthropology, this paper offers literature spanning six different disciplines and the most relevant ethical principles involved. While there may be other disciplines that could have contributed to this study, a selection needed to be made, so the disciplines with the most literature on moral values were selected.

This study presents research on moral values that appears in morality research across different disciplines and with different groups of people. Eastern religions as well as Shweder et al's (1997) study provide insight into eastern moral values to be compared with western moral values. The results suggest that humans have a natural inclination towards justice and care/harm, so decisions based on these values would be seen as good decisions. Universally, just actions and actions that maximize care and minimize harm are deemed good moral actions. Issues start to arise when these values start to conflict, such as a moral dilemma where caring for someone is not necessarily the fair thing to do. These two values in particular appear in a lot of morality research, suggesting that these might be core foundational principles of humans. Some morality scholars wonder what about human morality distinguishes people from animals, and it might be humans' inclinations for justice and care.

Besides justice and care, humans also seem to have inclinations toward the sanctity of life and a respect for/recognition of authority. The relevant literature suggests that people also believe that actions that preserve the sanctity of life or cleanliness of the soul are morally good actions, whether religiously based or not. For the authority value, this appears in the literature in a couple different ways. While some view this value as a respect for authority figures, others use this value as a recognition of the presence of authority figures, which demands less unquestionable respect. In other words, morally good actions are those that happen in accordance with existing hierarchies, and morally bad actions challenge authorities and hierarchies. In cases where justice and care/harm values are not at the center of the moral tension, people might base their moral decisions on what respects the sanctity of life and existing hierarchies or power structures.

The moral values that do not have as much literature supporting them, though enough literature to establish their candidacy for universal moral values, might just require more research. Future research might explore these values in particular to add to their prevalence in the literature. However, these values might not be as well-supported because they emerged in some cultures and not others, showing cultural differences in what moral values a group of people hold. Honesty and tolerance are two examples of this. Some cultures may value honesty in all situations, but others may place other moral values above honesty in moral decisions. While some may believe that one should do the honest thing, even if it is not the tolerant thing, others might put more moral weight on tolerance and argue that one should do the tolerant thing, even if it is not honest. The same goes for reciprocity, loyalty, forgiveness, and harmony. Further research on these values in particular could prove them to be closer to universal moral values than considered in this study. However, future research might also prove that these moral values emerged due to cultural differences, leading to different cultures placing varying amounts of moral weight on the different values.

This concept of emphasizing particular moral values is supported by Haidt and Joseph's (2007) research on Moral Foundations Theory. Haidt (2012) likens the five moral foundations to taste receptors on the tongue, where certain taste receptors are activated for certain foods. He claims that people's moral foundations (or values) are activated for certain moral situations. Perhaps all of these moral values are on an equal playing field instead of being on a spectrum, with different values activated in different moral dilemmas. In one situation, someone might act in accordance with their sanctity moral value, and in another situation act in accordance with their loyalty moral value. For one person, honesty might be the most important moral value, dictating all of their moral choices, where another person may not value honesty at all. Further

research could work to categorize the universal moral values of certain groups of people. With Moral Foundations Theory, Graham et al. (2009) found that liberals are more inclined to base moral decisions on the care/harm and fairness/cheating foundations, whereas conservatives base their moral decisions on loyalty/betrayal, authority/subversion, and sanctity/degradation. Future research could look at different groups and the moral values that are universal to that particular group.

The ten possible universal moral values presented in this paper contribute to the literature on universal moral values in a way that brings different disciplines together. Most research on universal moral values is done from a particular discipline's perspective and researchers do not often conduct research in a field that is not their own. More research is needed that compares all (or as much as possible) of the existing moral values literature to discern values that exist in all disciplines. This study also provides a list of values that can be compared with other lists of universal values. Within a discipline this would look like comparing research on moral values with this list in new research studies. Communication scholars might assess their ethical communication principles with this list of universal moral values to ensure they are addressing all relevant moral considerations. This would help in the development of ethical codes based on essential moral values.

Outside of research, one of the goals of this study was to produce a list of possible universal moral values that might help people better understand other perspectives. By identifying common moral values in humans, intercultural and multicultural communication can be improved. With an understanding of the moral values of a particular culture, communication becomes easier and more productive. United States politics involves lots of communication issues, where opposing sides have a hard time understanding where the other one is coming

from. If liberals and conservatives were to understand that their disagreements merely stem from different moral values, they might have an easier time understanding the perspective of the other side. This would also improve the way liberals and conservatives communicate with each other by giving them perspective on how the other side makes decisions about right and wrong. The more research that is out there on universal moral values, the more research there is to compare with each other.

Future research might focus on establishing moral values within a specific discipline. Ethics plays a role in most disciplines, allowing scholars in any field the ability to research their discipline's core values. One discipline that was not explored in this paper but involves many ethical principles is the medical field. Studying bioethics and ethical codes in the medical field would certainly present ethical principles that could contribute to universal moral values research. Business and economics also involve large ethical components, opening them up to investigation of their respective discipline's ethical principles. Future research within a singular discipline might also serve to clarify the moral values of the discipline as a whole. Most of the research involved in this study identified specific ethical codes and theories about ethics. Instead, one might try to review the fundamental moral principles or values of the discipline overall, taking more of an absolutist approach.

Much more interdisciplinary research is needed in the future of moral values research. Morality researchers should be encouraged to synthesize literature across disciplines as this paper does in order to compare different approaches to morality. In order for moral values to be universal, or nearly universal, their presence is required across disciplines, which requires the synthesis and comparison of moral values across disciplines. If future researchers were to perform a synthesis such as this one, they could compare their results to the results of this study

to improve the reliability of the ten moral values suggested. Future research might also explore empirical approaches to moral values, as the best way to discern the moral values of a community is to simply ask them. Psychology and anthropology have started doing this, providing self-reported moral values straight from the source. Empirical research on moral values will help the overall mission of identifying universal moral values.

This study was limited in many ways, and future similar research should work to address these limitations. First of all, this is not a comprehensive list of all of the moral values discussed in these disciplines. It would be near impossible to identify every single moral value identified in the history of the literature. Because of this, there is literature that was left out of this study that could have provided further or differing insight to the moral values discussed. Additionally, the disciplines cited here are not the only disciplines that have done moral values research. These were the disciplines that have had the biggest links to moral values according to the researcher with a psychology background (note the division of the psychology discipline into two subdisciplines). A different researcher with a business background might include ethical business principles instead of (or in addition to) the disciplines selected for this study. This might shift the results of the study, as ethical business principles might emphasize moral values not present in other disciplines.

There was also no standard methodology for which the results were obtained. While a true synthesis of literature, the pieces selected were done so by the researcher, which leaves room for human error and bias. The literature was chosen from the lens of a psychologist, which, again, would be different for someone who was not a psychologist. Perhaps different pieces would be selected by a different researcher, affecting the emphasis and de-emphasis of certain moral values. This could lead to different results in a similar study. However, it is worth noting

that if these moral values are indeed universal moral values, they should appear in all disciplines so different research and a different researcher should not matter. If they are truly universal moral values, values like justice and care should be considered fundamental principles everywhere.

Conclusion

Intercultural and multicultural communication face a problem when opposing sides cannot identify with each other because of a lack of understanding of the other side's values. Identification is necessary for good communication, and the inability to find commonalities for communication makes the communication process much more difficult (Burke, 1969). Some philosophers believe that there are some moral absolutes that apply to all human beings in all situations, offering a way to bridge the gap in intercultural and multicultural communication (Gowans, 2021). However, determining if these moral absolutes, or, universal moral values exist can prove difficult as there are many different cultures that value different things. This paper provides possible contenders for universal moral values based on a synthesis of literature on moral values across six different disciplines. By reviewing the literature and then synthesizing and comparing the moral values prevalent in philosophy/ethics, religious studies, communication, developmental psychology, evolutionary psychology, and anthropology, this reports the most prevalent moral values across these disciplines.

Going back to the ancient Greek teachings of Aristotle (2002), the philosophy discipline provides insight into significant moral values in the field. More modern ethicists look at humanity and morality in different ways and derive their moral values from different perspectives (Bok, 2002; Christians & Traber, 1997; Dalai Lama, 2001). Many people derive their moral values from their religious values, so religious studies also provide helpful ideas

about universal moral values. For example, The Golden Rule appears in most of the world's major religions, suggesting a universality of the values associated with it (Confucius & Lau, 1979; ESV Bible, 2018). Communication scholars recognize the issues with communication, so they suggest values that ensure successful communication. They provide principles for ethical communication that they claim to be universal (Chen & Starosta, 2005; Kale, 2003).

Shifting to more empirical approaches to studying moral values, developmental psychology contributes theories about moral reasoning development that highlight different ethical values (Gilligan, 1982; Kohlberg, 1958). It also brings up the question of whether men and women are different in their respective moralities, leading them to have different moral values. Another way moral systems could have been developed is throughout evolutionary history as a kind of natural selection for moral traits (Darwin, 1871). A modern take on this idea is Moral Foundations Theory, which proposes five moral intuitions that were naturally selected to increase chances at survival (Haidt & Joseph, 2007). Finally, anthropological methodologies are very effective in identifying the moral values of a group of people. One study suggests the “Big Three” of morality based on the research of a population in India (Shweder et al, 1997).

The first contender for a universal moral value is justice. Ideas of justice or fairness appear in nearly all of the disciplines reviewed, such as Aristotle's (2002) cardinal virtues and Kohlberg's (1958) justice-based moral reasoning model. Another value that could possibly be universal is care/harm. Valuing care and the avoidance of harm is prevalent in many disciplines, such as appearing in many different religions and Gilligan's (1982) ethic of care (Confucius & Lau, 1979; Oppelt, 2012; Rockhill, 2015). Ideas about sanctity also appear in much of the moral value literature, suggesting a universal moral value of the cleanliness of one's soul. While clearly tied into the religious studies discipline, values of sanctity are also supported by Christians and

Traber's (1997) ethical theory and Shweder et al's (1997) ethic of divinity. Some of the disciplines include a moral value of respect for or just recognition of authority and hierarchy. Many religions such as Hinduism emphasize respect for elders and reverence for teachers, and Haidt and Joseph (2007) suggest an authority/subversion as an evolved moral foundation ("Summary of Religions and Beliefs: University of Bolton," n.d.).

A moral value that could use more research is honesty, which appears in the literature slightly less often than the aforementioned values, but still does seem to hold a significant spot in moral values research. Chen and Starosta (2005) and Kale (2003) all emphasize the importance of honesty in communication ethics, and honesty appears to be a universal religious principle across the world's major religions (Oppelt, 2012). Another moral value in need of more research before it can be established as a universal moral value is tolerance. Similarly to honesty, the value of tolerance is most prevalent in research on religion and communication ethics (Chen & Starosta, 2005; Oppelt, 2012; Kale, 2003; "Summary of Religions and Beliefs: University of Bolton," n.d.).

A few more moral values might be good contenders for moral values with more research. Reciprocity is a moral value explored heavily in evolutionary psychology (Haidt & Joseph, 2004; McCullough, 2020), so further research on reciprocity in other disciplines is necessary. Loyalty is also popular in evolutionary psychology research, as well as modern philosophical works (Bok, 2002; Haidt & Joseph, 2007). Forgiveness is a value popular across religious values and modern ethical values, but more research is needed to establish its universality (Dalai Lama, 2001; Oppelt, 2012). One final moral value in need of further research is harmony, or living in an interdependent state of peaceful coexistence. This is supported by Shweder et al's (1997) anthropological research as well as the ethical principles proposed by the Dalai Lama (2001).

By identifying the universal moral values that are held by all human beings, communication between cultures can be improved by allowing for easier identification with the other side. The best contenders for universal moral values include justice and care/harm, followed by sanctity, authority, honesty, tolerance, reciprocity, loyalty, forgiveness, and harmony. All of these moral values appear often in the literature of philosophy/ethics, religious studies, communication, developmental psychology, evolutionary psychology, and anthropology. This study was limited by the selected disciplines and literature, as other research on moral values might contribute to this search. Future research on universal moral values might look into other disciplines such as the medical field, business, or economics to incorporate more perspectives. Universal moral values can tell morality researchers how people tend to make decisions about right and wrong, and provide a way to improve intercultural and multicultural communication with a shared sense of the values that distinguish humanity.

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