

Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development



Moral Development

- ▶ **Moral development** is the gradual development of an individual's concept of right or wrong – conscious, religious values, social attitudes and certain behaviour.



Moral Dilemmas

- ▶ Social issues with 2+ solutions

Complete the Robin Hood Moral Dilemma:





Kohlberg's theory

- ▶ This theory is a stage theory. In other words, everyone goes through the stages sequentially without skipping any stage.
- ▶ However, movement through these stages are not natural, that is people do not automatically move from one stage to the next as they mature. In stage development, movement occurs when a person notices inadequacies in his or her present way of coping with a given moral dilemma.
- ▶ According to stage theory, people cannot understand moral reasoning more than one stage ahead of their own. For example, a person in Stage 1 can understand Stage 2 reasoning but nothing beyond that.

Kohlberg's Six Stages



Pre-Conventional Moral Development

- Stage 1
- Stage 2

Conventional Moral Development

- Stage 3
- Stage 4

Post-Conventional Moral Development

- Stage 5
- Stage 6

Level 1: Preconventional Morality 0-9 years

Stage 1 - Obedience and Punishment

Especially common in young children, but adults are capable of expressing this type of reasoning. At this stage, children see rules as fixed and absolute.

- ▶ Obeys rules in order to avoid punishment
- ▶ Determines a sense of right and wrong by what is punished and what is not punished
- ▶ Obeys superior authority and allows that authority to make the rules, especially if that authority has the power to inflict pain
- ▶ Is responsive to rules that will affect his/her physical well-being

Stage 2 – Naively egotistical

At this stage of moral development, children account for individual points of view and judge actions based on how they serve individual needs. Reciprocity is possible, but only if it serves one's own interests.

- ▶ Is motivated by vengeance or “an eye for an eye” philosophy
- ▶ Is self-absorbed while assuming that he/she is generous
- ▶ Believes in equal sharing in that everyone gets the same, regardless of need
- ▶ Believes that the end justifies the means
- ▶ Will do a favor only to get a favor
- ▶ Expects to be rewarded for every non-selfish deed he/she does

Level 2: Conventional Morality 10-15 years

Stage 3 - "good boy-good girl" orientation,

This stage of moral development is focused on living up to social expectations and roles. There is an emphasis on conformity, being "nice," and consideration of how choices influence relationships.

- ▶ Finds peer approval very important
- ▶ Feels that intentions are as important as deeds and expects others to accept intentions or promises in place of deeds
- ▶ Begins to put himself/herself in another's shoes and think from another perspective

Stage 4 – Law and Social Order

At this stage of moral development, people begin to consider society as a whole when making judgments. The focus is on maintaining law and order by following the rules, doing one's duty, and respecting authority.

- ▶ Is a duty doer who believes in rigid rules that should not be changed
- ▶ Respects authority and obeys it without question
- ▶ Supports the rights of the majority without concern for those in the minority
- ▶ Is part of about 80% of the population that does not progress past stage 4

Level 3: Postconventional Morality – 16+

Stage 5 - Legalistic Social Contract

At this stage, people begin to account for the differing values, opinions, and beliefs of other people. Rules of law are important for maintaining a society, but members of the society should agree upon these standards.

- ▶ Is motivated by the belief in the greatest amount of good for the greatest number of people
- ▶ Believes in consensus (everyone agrees), rather than in majority rule
- ▶ Respects the rights of the minority especially the rights of the individual
- ▶ Believes that change in the law is possible but only through the system

Stage 6 – Universal ethical Principles

Kohlberg's final level of moral reasoning is based upon universal ethical principles and abstract reasoning. At this stage, people follow these internalized principles of justice, even if they conflict with laws and rules.

- ▶ Believes that there are high moral principles than those represented by social rules and customs
- ▶ Is willing to accept the consequences for disobedience of the social rule he/she has rejected
- ▶ Believes that the dignity of humanity is sacred and that all humans have value

Criticisms of Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development:

- ▶ Does moral reasoning necessarily lead to moral behavior? Kohlberg's theory is concerned with moral thinking, but there is a big difference between knowing what we *ought* to do versus our actual actions.
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- ▶ Is justice the only aspect of moral reasoning we should consider? Critics have pointed out that Kohlberg's theory of moral development overemphasizes the concept as justice when making moral choices. Other factors such as compassion, caring, and other interpersonal feelings may play an important part in moral reasoning.
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- ▶ Does Kohlberg's theory overemphasize Western philosophy? Individualistic cultures emphasize personal rights while collectivist cultures stress the importance of society and community. Eastern cultures may have different moral outlooks that Kohlberg's theory does not account for.