

Kohlberg's Moral Development

In his studies Kohlberg (1963) asserted six stages of moral development. His experimentation focused on Males ages 10 to adulthood, and this has been the focus of most criticism of his work.

Below are a summary of the six stages:

1. In the primary stage of moral development actions are assessed in terms of reward and punishment from adults/ authority figures.
2. Right and wrong are judged in terms of personal pain and pleasure.
3. Actions are valued on social praise and blame.
4. Appeals to conventional morality
5. Social contract, constitution, democratic principles and law.
6. Universal principles of moral conduct

"Although Kohlberg's stages are not tied to any age or period in life, as Piaget's are, we generally understand that people pass through these stages as they become more mature. Kohlberg believed that stages of moral development were indicated not by specific moral choices, but rather by the process of reasoning that individuals engaged in.

Level 1. Pre-conventional morality: avoid punishment seek reward

Stage 1: Avoid punishment while advancing self-interest

Stage 2: Follow rules only when in own interest

LEVEL 2. Conventional morality: emphasis on social rules

Stage 3: Do things for approval from others

Stage 4: Obey the rules set down by society,

LEVEL 3. Principled morality: emphasis on moral principles

Stage 5: Valuing the rights of others. upholding values regardless of majority

Stage 6: Follow self-chosen ethical principles, even if they violate the law

The first level of moral thought is generally found at the elementary school level. In the first stage of this level, people believe according to socially acceptable norms because they are told to do so by some authority figure (e.g., parent or teacher). This obedience is compelled by threat or application of punishment. The second stage of this level is characterized by a view that right behavior means acting in one's own best interests. The second level of moral thinking is that generally found society, hence the name "conventional." The first stage of this level (stage 3) is characterized by an attitude which seeks to do what will gain the approval of others. The second stage is one oriented to abiding by the law and responding to the obligations of duty. The third level of moral thinking is the one Kohlberg felt the majority of adults never recall. Its first stage (stage 5) is an understanding of social

mutuality and a genuine interest in the welfare of others. The last stage is based on respect for universal principle and the demands of individual conscience.

Kohlberg believed that individuals could only progress through these stages one stage at a time. That is, they could not "jump" stages. They could not, for example, move from an orientation of selfishness to the law and order stage without passing through the good boy/girl stage. They could only come to a comprehension of a moral rationale one stage above their own. Thus, according to Kohlberg, it was important to present them with moral dilemmas for discussion which would help them to see the reasonableness of a "higher stage" morality and encourage their development in that direction. The last comment refers to Kohlberg's moral discussion approach. He saw this as one of the ways in which moral development can be promoted through formal education. Note that Kohlberg believed, as did Piaget, that most moral development occurs through social interaction. The discussion approach is based on the insight that individuals develop as a result of cognitive conflicts at their current stage.

A Typical Experimental Moral Dilemma*

In Europe, a woman was near death from a special kind of cancer. There was one drug that the doctors thought might save her. It was a form of radium that a druggist in the same town had recently discovered. The drug was expensive to make, but the druggist was charging ten times what the drug cost him to make. He paid \$400 for the medicine and charged \$4,000 for a small dose of the drug. The sick woman's husband, Heinz, went to everyone he knew to borrow the money and tried every legal means, but he could only get together about \$2,000, which is half of what it cost. He told the druggist that his wife was dying, and asked him to sell it cheaper or let him pay later. But the druggist said, "No, I discovered the drug and I'm going to make money from it." So, having tried every legal means, Heinz gets desperate and considers breaking into the man's store to steal the drug for his wife.

1. Should Heinz steal the drug?

1a. Why or why not?

2. Is it actually right or wrong for him to steal the drug?

2a. Why is it right or wrong?

3. Does Heinz have a duty or obligation to steal the drug?

3a. Why or why not?

niak ffer n

4. If Heinz doesn't love his wife, should he steal the drug for her? Does it make a difference if Heinz should do whether or not he loves his wife?

4a. Why or why not?

5. Suppose the person dying is not his wife but a stranger- Should Heinz steal the drug for the stranger? 5a. Why or why not?

6. Suppose it's a pet animal he loves. Should Heinz steal to save the pet animal? 6a. Why or why not?

7. Is it important for people to do everything they can to save another's life? 7a. Why or why not?

8. It is against the law for Heinz to steal. Does that make it morally wrong? 8a. Why or why not?

9. In general, should people try to do everything they can to obey the law? 9a. Why or why not?

9b. How does this apply to what Heinz should do?

10. In thinking back over the dilemma, what would you give as the most responsible thing for Heinz to do? 10a. Why?

10a. why?