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Kohlberg cognitive theory

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International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology, 48, 161-174.43 Haggbloom, S.J., Warnick, J.E.; Jones, V.K., Yarbrough, G.L., Russell, T.M. The 100 Most Emonent Psychologists of the Twentieth Century. Review of General Psychology, 6 (2000), pp. 139-152.44 Gibbs, JC. Basinger, KS. Grime, RL. Snarey, JR. (2007). Kohlberg's stages of moral development are planes of moral adequacy conceived by Lawrence Kohlberg to explain the development of moral reasoning. Created while studying psychology at the University of Chicago, the theory was inspired by the work of Jean Piaget and a fascination with children's reactions to moral dilemmas. He wrote his doctoral dissertation at the university in 1958, outlining what are now known as his stages of moral development.This theory holds that moral reasoning, which is the basis for ethical behaviour, has six identifiable developmental stages. He followed the development of moral judgment beyond the ages originally studied by Piaget, who claimed that logic and morality develop through constructive stages. Kohlberg expanded considerably on this groundwork, determining that the process of moral development was principally concerned with justice and that its development continued throughout the lifespan, even spawning dialogue of philosophical implications of his research.Kohlberg used stories about moral dilemmas in his studies, and was interested in how people would justify their actions if they were put in a similar moral crux. He would then categorize and classify evoked responses into one of six distinct stages. These six stages where broken into three levels: pre-conventional, conventional and post-conventional. His theory is based on constructive developmental stages; each stage and level is more adequate at responding to moral dilemmas than the last. Stages Kohlberg's six stages were grouped into three levels: pre-conventional, conventional, and post-conventional. Following Piaget's constructivist requirements for a stage model (see his theory of cognitive development), it is extremely rare to regress backward in stages. Even still, no one functions at their highest stage at all times. It is also not possible to 'jump' stages; each stage provides a new yet necessary perspective, and is more comprehensive, differentiated, and integrated than its predecessors. Level 1 (Pre-Conventional) 1. Obedience and punishment orientation2. Self-interest orientation (What's in it for me?) Level 2 (Conventional) 3. Interpersonal accord and conformity (The good boy/good girl attitude) 4. Authority and social-order maintaining orientation (Law and order morality) Level 3 (Post-Conventional) 5. Social contract orientation6. Universal ethical principles (Principled conscience) Pre-Conventional The pre-conventional level of moral reasoning is especially common in children, although adults can also exhibit this level of reasoning. Reasoners in the pre-conventional level judge the morality of an action by its direct consequences. The pre-conventional level consists of the first and second stages of moral development, and are purely concerned with the self in an egocentric manner.In stage one, individuals focus on the direct consequences that their actions will have for themselves. For example, an action is perceived as morally wrong if the person who commits it gets punished. The worse the punishment for the act is, the more 'bad' the act is perceived to be. In addition, there is no recognition that others' points of view are any different from one's own view. This stage may be viewed as a kind of authoritarianism.Stage two espouses the what's in it for me position, right behaviour being defined by what is in one's own best interest. Stage two reasoning shows a limited interest in the needs of others, but only to a point where it might further one's own interests, such as you scratch my back, and I'll scratch yours. In stage two concern for others is not based on loyalty or intrinsic respect. Lacking a perspective of society in the pre-conventional level, this should not be confused with social contract (stage five), as all actions are performed to serve one's own needs or interests. For the stage two theorist, the perspective of the world is often seen as morally relative. Conventional The conventional level of moral reasoning is typical of adolescents and adults. Persons who reason in a conventional way judge the morality of actions by comparing these actions to societal views and expectations. The conventional level consists of the third and fourth stages of moral development.In Stage three, the self enters society by filling social roles. Individuals are receptive of approval or disapproval from other people as it reflects society's accordance with the perceived role. They try to be a good boy or good girl to live up to these expectations, having learned that there is inherent value in doing so. Stage three reasoning may judge the morality of an action by evaluating its consequences in terms of a person's relationships, which now begin to include things like respect, gratitude and the ' golden rule'. Desire to maintain rules and authority exists only to further support these stereotypical social roles. The intentions of actions play a more significant role in reasoning at this stage; 'they mean well...'.In Stage four, it is important to obey laws, dictums and social conventions because of their importance in maintaining a functioning society. Moral reasoning in stage four is thus beyond the need for individual approval exhibited in stage three; society must learn to transcend individual needs. A central ideal or ideals often prescribe what is right and wrong, such as in the case of fundamentalism. If one person violates a law, perhaps everyone would - thus there is an obligation and a duty to uphold laws and rules. When someone does violate a law, it is morally wrong; culpability is thus a significant factor in this stage as it separates the bad domains from the good ones. Post-Conventional The post-conventional level, also known as the principled level, consists of stages five and six of moral development. Realization that individuals are separate entities from society now becomes salient. One's own perspective should be viewed before the society's. It is due to this 'nature of self before others' that the post-conventional level, especially stage six, is sometimes mistaken for pre-conventional behaviors.In Stage five, individuals are viewed as holding different opinions and values, and it is paramount that they be respected and honored impartially. Issues that are not regarded as relative like life and choice should never be withheld or inhibited. In fact, no single choice is correct or absolute – 'who are you to judge if they are or not'? Along a similar vein, laws are regarded as social contracts rather than rigid dictums. Those that do not promote general social welfare should be changed when necessary to meet the greatest good for the greatest number of people. This is attained through majority decision, and inevitably compromise. In this way democratic government is ostensibly based on stage five reasoning.In Stage six, moral reasoning is based on abstract reasoning using universal ethical principles. Laws are valid only insofar as they are grounded in justice, and that a commitment to justice carries with it an obligation to disobey unjust laws. Rights are unnecessary as social contracts are not essential for deontic moral action. Decisions are met categorically in an absolute way rather than hypothetically in a conditional way (see Immanuel Kant's ' categorical imperative'). This can be done by imagining what one would do being in anyone's shoes, who imagined what anyone would do thinking the same (see John Rawls's ' veil of ignorance'). The resulting consensus is the action taken. In this way action is never a means but always an end in itself; one acts because it is right, and not because it is instrumental, expected, legal or previously agreed upon. While Kohlberg insisted that stage six exists, he had difficulty finding participants who consistently used it. It appears that people rarely if ever reach stage six of Kohlberg's model. Further stages In his empirical studies of persons across their life-span, Kohlberg came to notice that some people evidently had undergone moral stage regression. He was faced with the option of either conceding that moral regression could occur, or revise his theory. Kohlberg chose the latter, postulating the existence of sub-stages wherein the emerging stage has not yet been adequately integrated into the personality. In particular Kohlberg noted of a stage 4½ or 4+, which is a transition from stage four to stage five, sharing characteristics of both. In this stage the individual has become disaffected with the arbitrary nature of law and order reasoning. Culpability is frequently turned from being defined by society to having society itself be culpable. This stage is often mistaken for the moral relativism of stage two as the individual considers society's conflicting interests with their own choices relatively and morally wrong. Kohlberg noted that this was often seen in students entering college.Kohlberg further speculated that a seventh stage may exist (Transcendental Morality or Morality of Cosmic Orientation) which would link religion with moral reasoning (see James W. Fowler's stages of faith development). However, because of Kohlberg's trouble providing empirical evidence for even a sixth stage, he emphasized that most of his conjecture towards a seventh stage was theoretical. Theoretical assumptions (philosophy) Kohlberg's theory is not value-neutral. It begins with a stake in certain perspectives in meta-ethics. This includes for instance a view of human nature, and a certain understanding of the form and content of moral reasoning. It holds conceptions of the right and the scope of moral reasoning across societies. Furthermore it includes the relationship between morality and the world, between morality and logical expression, and the role of reason in morality. Finally, it takes a view of the social and mental processes involved in moral reasoning.The picture of human nature which Kohlberg begins with is the view that humans are inherently communicative and capable of reason, and they possess a desire to understand others and the world around them. The stages of Kohlberg's model refer to the qualitative moral reasonings that people adopt, and thus do not translate directly into praise or blame of the actions or characters of persons. In order to argue that his theory measures moral reasoning and not particular moral conclusions, Kohlberg insists that the form and structure of moral arguments is independent of the content of the arguments, a position he calls " formalism".Kohlberg’s theory revolves around the notion that justice is the essential feature of moral reasoning. By the same token, justice relies heavily upon the notion of sound reasoning upon principles. Despite being a justice-centered theory of morality, Kohlberg considered it to be compatible with plausible formulations of deontology and eudaimonia.Kohlberg's theory understands values as a critical component of the right. Whatever the right is, for Kohlberg, it must be universally valid across societies (a position known as " moral universalism"): there can be no relativism. Moreover, morals are not natural features of the world; they are prescriptive. Nevertheless, moral judgments can be evaluated in logical terms of true and falsity.According to Kohlberg, a person who progresses to a higher stage of moral reasoning cannot skip stages. For example, one cannot jump from being concerned mostly with peer judgments (stage three) to being a proponent of social contracts (stage five). However, when one encounters a moral dilemma and finds their current level of moral reasoning unsatisfactory, they will look to the next level. Discovery of the limitations of the current stage of thinking drives moral development as each progressive stage is more adequate than the last. This process is constructive; it arises through the conscious construction of the actor, and is neither in any meaningful sense a component of the actor's innate dispositions, nor a result of past inductions. Formal elements Progress along the stages of development occurs because of the actor's increased competence in both psychologically and socially balancing conflicting value-claims. The name of " justice operation" is given to the process which resolves the dispute between conflicting claims and strikes an equilibrium between them. Kohlberg identifies two of these operations in " equality" and " reciprocity", which respectively involve an impartial regard for persons (i.e., irrespective of who the individual persons are), and a regard for the role of personal merit. For Kohlberg, the most adequate result of both operations is " reversibility", where a moral or dutiful act within a particular situation is evaluated in terms of whether or not the act would be satisfactory even if particular persons were to switch roles within the situation (also known colloquially as " moral musical chairs").Knowledge and learning contribute to moral development. Specifically important are the actor's view of persons and their social perspective level, each of which becomes more complex and mature with each advancing stage. The view of persons can be understood as the actor's grasp of the psychology of other persons; it may be pictured as a spectrum, with stage one having no view of other persons at all, and stage six being entirely sociocentric. Similarly, the social perspective level involves the understanding of the social universe, differing from the view of persons in that it involves a grasp of norms. Examples of applied moral dilemmas To do this, Kohlberg established the Moral Judgement Interview in his original 1958 dissertation. During the roughly 45 minute tape recorded semi-structured interview, the interviewer uses moral dilemmas to determine which stage of moral reasoning a person uses. The dilemmas are fictional short stories that describe situations in which a person has to make a moral decision. The participant is asked a systemic series of open-ended questions, like what they think the right course of action is, as well as justifications as to why certain actions are right or wrong. The form and structure of these replies are scored and not the content; over a set of multiple moral dilemmas an overall score is derived. Heinz dilemma A dilemma that Kohlberg used in his original research was the druggist's dilemma: Heinz Steals the Drug 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 produce. He paid $200 for the radium and charged $2,000 for a small dose of the drug. The sick woman's husband, Heinz, went to everyone he knew to borrow the money, but he could only get together about $ 1,000 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 Heinz got desperate and broke into the man's store to steal the drug-for his wife. Should Heinz have broken into the laboratory to steal the drug for his wife? Why or why not? From a theoretical point of view, it is not important what the participant thinks that Heinz should do. Kohlberg's theory holds that the justification the participant offers is what is significant, the form of their response. Below are some of many examples of possible arguments that belong to the six stages:Stage one (obedience): Heinz should not steal the medicine because he will consequently be put in prison which means you are really terrible. Or: Heinz should steal the medicine because it only worth $200 and not how much the druggist wanted for it; Heinz had even offered to pay for it and was not stealing anything else besides.Stage two (self-interest): Heinz should steal the medicine because he will be much happier if he saves his wife, even if he will have to serve a prison sentence. Or: Heinz should not steal the medicine because prison is a awful place, and he would probably languish over a jail cell more than his wife's death.Stage three (conformity): Heinz should steal the medicine because his wife expects it; he wants to be a good husband. Or: Heinz should not steal the drug because stealing is bad and he is not a criminal; he tried to do everything he could without breaking the law, you cannot blame him.Stage four (law-and-order): Heinz should not steal the medicine because the law prohibits stealing making it illegal. Or: Heinz should steal the drug for his wife but also take the prescribed punishment for the crime as well as paying the druggist what he is owed. Criminals cannot just run around without regard to the law; actions have consequences.Stage five (human rights): Heinz should steal the medicine because everyone has a right to choose life, regardless of the law. Or: Heinz should not steal the medicine because the scientist has a right to fair compensation. Even if his wife is sick it does not make his actions right.Stage six (universal human ethics): Heinz should steal the medicine, because saving a human life is a more fundamental value than the property rights of another person. Or: Heinz should not steal the medicine, because others may need the medicine just as badly, and their lives are equally significant. Criticisms One criticism of Kohlberg's theory is that it emphasizes justice to the exclusion of other values. As a consequence of this, it may not adequately address the arguments of people who value other moral aspects of actions. Carol Gilligan has argued that Kohlberg's theory is overly androcentric. Kohlberg's theory was initially developed based on empirical research using only male participants; Gilligan argued that it did not adequately describe the concerns of women. Although research has generally found no significant pattern of differences in moral development between sexes, Gilligan's theory of moral development does not focus on the value of justice. She developed an alternative theory of moral reasoning that is based on the ethics of caring.Other psychologists have questioned the assumption that moral action is primarily reached by formal reasoning. One such group, the social intuitionists, state people often make moral judgments without weighing concerns such as fairness, law, human rights and abstract ethical values. Given this, the arguments that Kohlberg and other rationalist psychologists have analyzed could be considered post hoc rationalizations of intuitive decisions. This would mean that moral reasoning is less relevant to moral action than Kohlberg's theory suggests. Continued relevance Theory and research of Kohlberg's stages of moral development have been utilized by others in academia. One such example, the Defining Issues Test or DIT, was created by James Rest in 1979 originally as a pencil-and-paper alternative to the Moral Judgement Interview. Heavily influenced by the six-stage model, it made efforts to improve validity criteria by using a quantitative test of a likert scale to rate moral dilemmas similar to Kohlberg's. It also used a large body of Kohlbergian theory such as the idea of 'post-conventional thinking'. In 1999 the DIT was revised as the DIT-2; the test persists in many areas that require moral testing and in varied cohorts.

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