Virtue, Sex, and Gender: Some Philosophical Reflections on the Moral Psychology Debate*

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INTRODUCTION

Lawrence Kohlberg has received more attention from philosophical quarters than any contemporary American psychologist apart from B. F. Skinner. The reasons for this attention arise from Kohlberg's brave and self-conscious attempt to wed descriptive psychological and prescriptive ethical analyses. Kohlberg has attempted to reunite moral psychology and moral philosophy in a way no one else has dared since G. E. Moore's caveat concerning the "naturalistic fallacy."[1]

Not all the assessments of Kohlberg's work have been favorable, however. Some have read his theory merely as a disguised apology for some form of Kantian-Rawlsian ethical theory.[2] Others have decried the lack of attention given to moral action as opposed to moral thinking. Still others have worried about the theory on epistemological grounds, expressing concern over the mysteriousness of, and ad hoc adjustments to, the scoring system used to plot moral development.[3]

Some recent criticisms of Kohlberg's theory by Carol Gilligan have focused on the lack of attention given to differences in male and female moral development.[4] My purpose in this paper is to use the controversy about sex differences and morals as a vehicle for teasing out some of the main philosophical deficiencies in Kohlbergian theory. The merit of this

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1. G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1913).

2. See C. M. J. Braun and J. M. C. Baribeau, "Subjective Idealism in Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development: A Critical Analysis," *Human Development* 21 (1978): 289–301.

3. W. Kurtines and E. Grief, "The Development of Moral Thought: Review and Evaluation of Kohlberg's Approach," *Psychological Bulletin* 81 (1974): 453–70.

4. Carol Gilligan, "In a Different Voice: Women's Conception of Self and of Morality," *Harvard Educational Review* 47 (1977): 481–517, and "Woman's Place in Man's Life Cycle," *Harvard Educational Review* 49 (1979): 431–46.

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strategy consists in the fact that the ease with which Kohlbergian theory moves from descriptive to normative claims comes back to trouble, if not to defeat, the theory when confronted with the research on "sex" and virtue. First I want to set out the problem as clearly as possible.

THE PROBLEM

There is a famous story in the Old Testament which is said to prove Solomon's wisdom. The story involves two prostitutes who share a house and have given birth to sons within three days of each other. The first woman claims that the other woman's son died one night and that "she arose at midnight, and took my son from beside me, while your maid servant slept, and laid it in her bosom." The second woman swears that "my son is alive and your son is dead." To this the first exclaims, "No, but your son is dead and my son is the living one." Solomon tells his servant, "Bring me a sword," and orders him to "divide the living child in two, and give half to the one and half to the other." To which one of the women begs, "Oh, my lord, give her the living child and by no means slay it." And the other woman says, "It shall be neither mine nor yours; divide it." Solomon interrupts and says, "Give the living child to the first woman, and by no means slay it. She is the mother" (1 Kings 3:16–28).

The thing which I find interesting about the story is upon what the attribution of wisdom to Solomon rests. Solomon was faced with a classical one-word-against-another dilemma. There was no available recourse to third-party testimony, for there were no husbands involved and the "maid servant slept." So Solomon's problem was to come up with a criterion for the demarcation of the mother from the nonmother. Solomon's wisdom, then, by most accounts consists in this: he generated a seemingly infallible criterion for maternity by sheer force of psychological insight into the nature of motherhood. In lieu of footprint plasters, fingerprints, blood tests, lie detectors, and eyewitness testimony, Solomon constructed a decision procedure in contrast to which all these other tests would have paled in terms of epistemic punch even if they had been available. His wisdom, then, turned on his psychological acumen. Solomon had insight into the special virtue of motherhood.

In fact, if Freud was right, when in speaking of the differences between male morality and female morality he said that women in making ethical choices are "more often influenced in their judgements by feelings of affection and hostility,"[5] then Solomon's wisdom was even greater than the standard interpretation gives him credit for, because his insight then was into female (moral) psychology in general and not just the psychology of motherhood. The mother in Solomon's tale is identified, after all, not only by her unconditional love for her child, by the "feelings of affection" of which Freud speaks, but also by the radical

5. Sigmund Freud, "Some Psychical Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction between the Sexes," in *The Standard Edition of The Complete Works*, vol. 19, ed. J. Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1961; originally published 1925).

contrast those feelings create with the feelings of hostility and vengefulness of the nonmother. Solomon's test on this interpretation, then, shows special insight into both the bright and seamy side of feminine virtue, into the yin and the yang of female moral psychology in general.

I want to replay another famous biblical story—this one about Abraham, Isaac, and Sarah. I read this story as a panegyric to a special virtue that males are thought to be uniquely capable of achieving. The two stories contrast so utterly in their depiction of male and female moral psychology that they will neatly set us our problem.

When Abraham was ninety-nine years old and still without an heir, God spoke to him and said, "I will make a covenant between you and me, and you will multiply exceedingly . . . you shall be the father of a multitude of nations" (Genesis 17). Sarah, Abraham's wife, became pregnant and gave birth to Isaac the year following the prophecy when she herself was over ninety. A few years passed and God tested Abraham and said to him, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering" (Gen. 22:1-4). When Abraham reached Mount Moriah he built an altar, laid wood upon it, and bound his son. Then Abraham "put forth his hand and took the knife to slay his son." Here God intervened, provided a ram to be offered in Isaac's stead, and announced, "Because you have done this and not withheld your son, your only son, I will indeed bless you, and I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore" (Gen. 22:9-17).

There are many interpretations of this tale. There is the historical one, which sees this story simply as the mythic vehicle by which the powers that be informed the hoi polloi to stop human sacrifice. There is the psychological interpretation that Kierkegaard flirts with in *Fear and Trembling* which sees Abraham as mad. He is not tested by rational or divine principle but by the delusionary voices of his own psychosis, the result perhaps of his megalomania and senility.

The interpretation I want to deploy here, however, is the traditional one, or the secular version of the traditional one. I suggest that we read the story of Abraham as a story about ultimate value—as a story extolling the highest stage of morality, where "principle" always wins out in conflicts with even the strongest affiliative instincts and familial obligations: "Take your son, your only son, whom you love." And I want to suggest that it is no accident that Sarah, Abraham's wife, does not even know that, let alone why, Abraham has left for Mount Moriah to sacrifice their only son. Principled morality is portrayed biblically as the special virtue of males, and affiliative, context-sensitive morality as the special virtue of females.

Abraham would do with his own hand what the mother in Solomon's tale would rather give up her child to another woman than have done. Abraham, in his own way, of course, was also willing to give up his child—not to another person but to a principle, not laterally but vertically. Whereas the moral crux in Solomon's tale has to do with putting

oneself out for another person, in this case one's child, the moral crux in Abraham's tale involves putting oneself and even one's child out for higher (somewhat private and mysterious) principles. The stories of Solomon and Abraham are paradigmatic depictions of the types of moral conduct which are viewed even today as characteristically feminine and masculine. Furthermore, there is no biblical "separate but equal" doctrine concerning the two moralities; the moral orientation of males is clearly superior. Abraham, after all, is the father of all Israel. The women in Solomon's tale do not even have names.

We now have our problem. It is contained in the twin theses that there are two moralities and that the male morality is superior or more adequate than the female morality. My tactic is to discuss both theses as they appear in recent work in the cognitive-developmental moral psychology literature inspired by Jean Piaget[6] and Lawrence Kohlberg. The interesting thing about this tactic is that both of the biblical themes of "sex"-linked virtue and a pecking order between them find their place in empirical research on moral development. Kohlberg, for example, claims that the higher stages of moral development, the highest being "principled morality," are more adequate than the lower stages.[7] The lower stages turn out to be those stages in which contextual, relational, and personological variables are morally decisive, and these stages researchers have found are more frequently occupied by females than by males.

THE ADEQUACY THESIS: PRINCIPLED MORALITY OR CONTEXTUALISM?

Kohlberg argues that there are five or six (in the most recent scoring, manual stage 6 has been absorbed into a substage of stage 5) stages of moral reasoning.[8] Kohlberg makes three important claims about the stages. First, he claims that the stages are universal. Second, he claims that progress through the stages follows an invariant sequence such that one never reaches stage $n + 1$ without traversing stage n and $n - 1$. Third, Kohlberg claims that each successive stage is "more adequate" than its predecessor.[9]

6. Jean Piaget, *The Moral Judgement of the Child* (New York: Free Press, 1965; originally published 1932).

7. Lawrence Kohlberg, "The Claim to Moral Adequacy of the Highest Stage of Moral Judgement," *Journal of Philosophy* 70 (1973): 630–45.

8. See Ann Colby, John Gibbs, and Lawrence Kohlberg (*The Assessment of Moral Judgement: Standard Form Moral Judgement* [Cambridge, Mass.: Moral Education Research Foundation, 1979]) for the new manual; and see Ann Colby ("Evolution of a Moral Development Theory," *New Directions for Child Development* 2 [1980]: 89–104) for a discussion of some of the theory and history behind the scoring-manual revisions.

9. See Kohlberg, "The Claim to Moral Adequacy"; see also his "From Is to Ought: How to Commit the Naturalistic Fallacy and Get Away with It in the Study of Moral Development," in *Cognitive Development and Epistemology*, ed. Theodore Mischel (New York: Academic Press, 1971), pp. 151–235, and "Moral Stages and Moralization: The Cognitive Developmental Approach," in *Moral Development and Behavior: Research and Social Issues*, ed. Thomas Lickona (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1976), pp. 31–53.

The fact that some of Kohlberg's students and colleagues, generally individuals working within the cognitive-developmental tradition, have found that females are disproportionally represented in the middle, "conventional" stages raises the issue of interpretation with a vengeance. These findings, when conjoined with the foregoing claims, logically imply that females are, on the average, morally less adequately developed than males.

The question arises, Should we interpret the theory as a biological developmental-stage theory and thus the findings of male-female differences as sex-linked ones, as uncovering essential traits? Did Solomon's wisdom consist in the identification of the "maternal instinct"? Or should we interpret the theory as a type of learning theory and the findings of male-female differences as gender linked, as the result of socialization? Was Abraham just a well-socialized male? Are females occupying stages 3 and 4 simply not getting the right kind of moral chances? Are males simply driven to excessively abstract moral reasoning?

In either case, what are we to do with the claims for the adequacy of the successive stages, and especially the claim of adequacy for the highest stage, Abraham's stage, the one Kierkegaard thinks might be mad, the one Gilligan insightfully identifies with the romantic vision of Stephen Daedalus, the hero of Joyce's *Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man*. Is the claim of adequacy a claim about the world, about chronology, about logic, about biology—or is it just a claim, as some critics would have it, about the "moral style" the people in charge of psychological research prefer? Some comment on Gilligan's findings will be helpful in hashing all this out.

Gilligan is a colleague of Kohlberg's at Harvard and a proponent of developmental theory in psychology. She also collaborated with Kohlberg on a very well-known article in *Daedalus* in 1971 which promoted classical Kohlbergian theory.[10] This familiarity with the model makes Gilligan's recent criticism of the theory worth listening to, overcoming as it seems to the "paradigm blindness" to which people working within a tradition are prone (although, as we shall see in the final section, Gilligan, perhaps to her detriment, remains very committed to the moral stage paradigm). The essential theme of Gilligan's work on female moral development is that the stage sequence described by Kohlberg, derived as it was from a longitudinal study of eighty-four males,[11] mirrors the moral developmental patterns of males and ignores, indeed denies, the possibility of a different developmental schema for females.

Gilligan claims to have discovered empirical evidence that the conceptual categories females employ in moral thinking and the sequence in

10. Lawrence Kohlberg and Carol Gilligan, "The Adolescent as a Philosopher: The Discovery of the Self in a Post Conventional World," *Daedalus* 100 (1971): 1051–86.

11. Lawrence Kohlberg, "The Development of Modes of Moral Thinking Choice in the Years Two to Sixteen" (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1958). Kohlberg is still following up his original study on fifty or so of these males.

which their moral conceptions develop differ from Kohlberg's model. She has found that females employ moral categories having to do with affective, affiliative, relational variables much more than males do. In fact, she identifies a "relational bias"[12] in women's moral thinking. Women conceive of morality less in terms of rights and more in terms of responsibilities than males, and their moral thinking operates with an "insistent contextual relativism."[13] Gilligan captures the essence of the difference between the "rights" and "responsibility" conceptions of morality as follows:

> Whereas the rights conception of morality that informs Kohlberg's principled level (Stages Five and Six) is geared to arriving at an objectively fair or just resolution to the moral dilemmas to which "all rational men can agree," the responsibility conception focuses instead on the limitations of any particular resolution and describes the conflicts that remain . . . a woman in her thirties . . . says that her guiding principle in making moral decisions has to do with "responsibility and caring about yourself and others, not just a principle that once you take hold of, you settle (the moral problem). The principle put into practice is still going to leave you with conflict.[14]

The alternative moral conception depicted here by Gilligan is reminiscent of one suggested in a more analytical critique of Kohlberg offered by two dialectical psychologists—Braun and Baribeau—who in the following passage nicely describe what Simone de Beauvoir once called *The Ethics of Ambiguity*.[15] "Even though it admits that the motor of cognitive development is contradiction, cognitive developmental theory unfortunately makes the claim that stage-6 corresponds to a level of absolute non-contradiction. Formalism under-emphasizes the importance of crises, problems, confusions, doubts, and questions in the initiation and maintenance of cognitive change."[16] Furthermore, Gilligan sees a strong relation between conceptions of self, the maintenance of ego identity, and women's moral Weltanschauung. She says, in speaking of psychologists like Freud, Piaget, and Kohlberg, that these "men whose theories have largely informed this understanding of development have all been plagued by the same problem, the problem of women, whose sexuality remains more diffuse, whose perception of self is so much more tenaciously embedded in relationships with others and whose moral dilemmas hold them in a mode of judgement that is insistently contextual."[17] Gilligan

12. Gilligan, "In a Different Voice," p. 482.

13. Gilligan, "Woman's Place," p. 444; and J. M. Murphy and Carol Gilligan, "Moral Development in Late Adolescence and Adulthood: A Critique and Reconstruction of Kohlberg's Theory," *Human Development* 23 (1980): 77–104.

14. Gilligan, "Woman's Place," p. 444.

15. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1949).

16. Braun and Baribeau, p. 296.

17. Gilligan, "In a Different Voice," p. 482.

describes women's moral conception as being "in a different voice" than that spoken (or heard, if she is right about the bias in research on moral development) by males. The voice of female morality sings a song of "intimacy and care,"[18] while the male (Kohlbergian) ranking of virtue gives priority to autonomy and objectivity, to a morality "freed from both psychological and historical constraints."[19]

Kohlberg typically mentions people like Socrates, Jesus, and Gandhi as models of stage 6 virtue. The examples are interesting, first because all these men occupy, at least retrospectively, places in what Gilligan calls the "public world of social power."[20] This, of course, is just one among many possible moral worlds, but it is a male favorite. Second, all these men espoused a philosophy of nonviolence, a fairly substantive moral commonality for a theory which claims not to have content implications. Third, these "moral giants" all seem to have had ethical weaknesses in the world(s) of "domestic interchange." Socrates went about Athens doing philosophy and expressing antipathy toward his wife Xanthippe. Jesus failed to have any documented close relations with others, especially women. And Erikson claims his interest in Gandhi arose precisely because Gandhi's personal situation was so antithetical to his political one. Erikson says of Gandhi that he "displaced violence where nonviolence was the professed issue."[21]

So one begins to wonder about virtue, about whether and how it makes sense to claim adequacy for moral orientations which have little to do with females and little to do with moral action, or at least little to do with the transference of moral principles from political to close relationship contexts, from the "public world of social power" to the private world of "domestic interchange."

The grounds Kohlberg cites for the adequacy of the highest stage are curious. And although Gilligan fails to revisit Kohlberg's arguments in this regard (she merely asserts that the "relational bias" in women's moral thinking "instead of being seen as a developmental deficiency . . . reflects a different social and moral understanding"),[22] her case against Kohlberg can be considerably strengthened by so doing. In fact, unless this is done, nothing has been said, save rhetorically, to deny the thesis that female moral development is, on the average, different from and inferior to male moral development.

THE FAILURE OF THE ADEQUACY THESIS

In his 1973 *Journal of Philosophy* paper, "The Claim to Moral Adequacy of a Highest Stage of Moral Judgement," Kohlberg argued that each stage

18. Ibid., p. 509.
19. Ibid., p. 483.
20. Ibid., p. 489.
21. Erik Erikson, *Gandhi's Truth: On the Origins of Militant Nonviolence* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1969).
22. Gilligan, "In a Different Voice," p. 482.

of moral development, culminating with the highest stage, is better integrated and differentiated than its predecessor, which it logically absorbs. He also points out that individuals "prefer the highest stage they comprehend."[23] Neither of these claims establishes the increasing-adequacy thesis.

First of all, although it is true that the moral stages as described by Kohlberg do fit into a neat logical hierarchy (this is all that "integration" means) and are increasingly differentiated (i.e., involve more and more subtle conceptual discriminations), so is the statement "my brother and sister are wicked" more integrated and differentiated than the statement "my sister is wicked." But this former statement is even less adequate than the latter statement since it is doubly false. So the merely logical facts of integration and differentiation are not sufficient to establish increasing adequacy.

Second, the claim that "people prefer the highest stage they comprehend" reduces to the claim that people prefer the stage they are in, since according to the theory one only comprehends the stage one is in and its predecessors. The claim so put, of course, loses all philosophical punch, since the preference can be explained purely in terms of "ego identity"; people identify with and prefer traits which they now possess to ones which they have given up or to ones they have yet to conceive of. This, however, says nothing about adequacy, only about tenacity.

Kohlberg is, I think, partially aware that his attempts to ground the adequacy claim on either logical or psychological facts fails, for he frames his overall task as establishing that "a higher or later stage of moral judgement is 'objectively' preferable to or more adequate than an earlier stage of judgement according to certain *moral* criteria. Since these criteria of adequacy are those central to judgement at our most advanced stage, 'stage 6,' the problem becomes one of justifying the structure of moral judgement at stage 6."[24] Thus Kohlberg is sensitive to the problem he faces—the problem of justifying stage 6 in stage 6 terms. The way he attempts to avoid vicious circularity and the embarrassment of performing the psychologist's version of merely "preferring the stage one is in" is by joining forces with what he takes to be the philosophical mainstream. Kohlberg says that the "assumptions of our psychological theory are naturally allied to the formalistic tradition in ethics from Kant to Rawls. This isomorphism of psychological and normative theory generates the claim that a psychologically more advanced stage of moral development is more morally adequate, by moral-philosophic criteria. . . . This implies that the philosopher's *justification* of a higher stage of moral reasoning maps into the psychologist's *explanation* of movement to that stage and vice versa."[25] Kohlberg's argument is a defense via John Rawls.[26] Rawls is

23. Kohlberg, "The Claim to Moral Adequacy," p. 633.

24. Ibid., p. 630.

25. Ibid., p. 633.

26. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971).

"the" philosopher of whom Kohlberg speaks. The "isomorphism," then, is a statement to the effect that Kohlberg and Rawls agree. There is, or so Kohlberg claims, a one-to-one correspondence between these two Harvard professors' moral theories.

But why Rawls? Why not Robert Nozick, the libertarian who is also a Harvard philosophy professor; or W. V. Quine, Harvard philosophy professor emeritus who has recently decried "the methodological infirmity of ethics compared to science"[27]; or Peter Singer or R. M. Hare, two non-Harvard professors but famous utilitarians nonetheless; or Jürgen Habermas, the great German critical theorist who thinks that there is a seventh stage of moral development which is more adequate than any of Kohlberg's stages?[28]

Kohlberg's argument for the adequacy of the highest stage rests on theory convergence between Kohlbergian and Rawlsian theory. But theory convergence alone is not sufficient to establish anything. If it were, then every major candidate for "the" moral psychology (e.g., Albert Bandura's social learning model) would gain verification by virtue of its convergence with some moral philosophy (e.g., some brand of utilitarianism).

The resolution of the argument for the adequacy of the highest stage resolves itself, therefore, into the problem of justifying Rawls's theory of justice. This, however, puts us back on square one, because Rawlsian theory is far from being vindicated—far from being "the" moral philosophy that Kohlberg makes it out to be.

Rawls's moral theory has been proclaimed *The Liberal Theory of Justice*[29] in a book by Brian Barry, which articulated one of the most common charges against Rawls, namely, that his moral theory is at least in part the projection of a "liberal mind." Rawls has also been criticized by Habermas and many other neo-Marxists for espousing an ahistorical moral theory. So in the end the transfer of the burden of proof for the adequacy claim from himself to Rawls only increases the justification problems facing Kohlberg's theory and leaves his theory in greater philosophical knots than before the adequacy claim was made.

CONCLUSION

Since Kohlberg fails to establish the adequacy thesis, he provides no grounds for the claim that the contextualistic, relationally focused moral orientation described by Gilligan is less adequate than the "principled morality" depicted by stage 6. There are no grounds offered by Kohlberg, therefore, for thinking that female moral development is on the average less adequate than male moral development. We are left, however, with

27. Willard Van Orman Quine, "On the Nature of Moral Values," *Critical Inquiry* 5 (1979): 471–80.

28. Jürgen Habermas, "Moral Development and Ego Identity," in *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, ed. T. McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979), pp. 69–94.

29. Brian Barry, *The Liberal Theory of Justice* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973).

the problem of just how to interpret the male-female differences discovered in work such as Gilligan's. The issue is important because, among other things, the credibility of stage theories of morality hinges to a certain extent on adequacy claims of the sort Kohlberg makes but fails to establish.

Stage-theoretical models that are more aligned with biology, such as Piaget's model for the development of spatial cognition, have little trouble establishing adequacy claims, both because, for example, the stage of mature operational space is actually universal and because one can give an account in evolutionary terms of why our biological perceptual capabilities end up so well matched to the way the molar world of our spatial movements really is. But here, of course, we have a background theory, evolutionary biology, which supplies a well-grounded model for adequacy, namely, the degree of match of our perceptual mechanisms with natural contingencies, with the way the world actually is.

This way of establishing adequacy is not, of course, open to moral developmental stage theorists unless they can identify *the moral world*, a notoriously losing proposition. It may well be that there is no sense of "moral world" other than that circular sense which is given to it by an agent who constitutes (with help from a community which presses a constitution) some such world by his or her actual moral orientation.

Along these lines, Gibbs,[30] in a sympathetic critique, has suggested that the last two Kohlbergian stages, the ones about which the adequacy claim is made, are not "natural" in the classical Piagetian sense, which requires first that movement through the stages "should be commonly in evidence among members of the species, from birth to maturity,"[31] and second that movement should be "achieved through processes which are spontaneous and essentially unconscious."[32] Gibbs argues that the last two stages in Kohlberg's scheme are not natural but existential, that is, they are freely chosen during periods of critical and self-conscious reflection on one's unique moral situation.

One's moral situation, of course, is unique. Insofar as it is embedded in many other worlds, it can and does change in ways in which one's spatial world, one's spatial situation, does not. This radical flux in the independent variable(s) of the theory of moral development as contrasted with the fixity of the independent variables of the theory of spatial, temporal, and causal development makes the modeling of moral development along the lines of these well-entrenched and relatively fixed schema problematic.

Theses such as that of Gibbs, in fact, suggest a possible interpretation of Gilligan's data along classical social learning theoretical lines. Males

30. John Gibbs, "Kohlberg's Stages of Moral Judgement: A Constructive Critique," *Harvard Educational Review* 47 (1977): 42–61, and "Kohlberg's Moral Stage Theory: A Piagetian Revision," *Human Development* 22 (1979): 89–112.

31. Gibbs, "Kohlberg's Stages," p. 47.

32. Ibid., p. 53.

and females are constituted by the social world and choose to be constituted in ways for which they are reinforced. Females tend to have more contextual and relational moral orientations than males because they are reinforced for traits which lead to success in the world(s) of "domestic interchange." Males (and females) who occupy stages 5 and 6 do so because the contingencies of reinforcement in their world place value on activities like doing normative philosophy (every philosopher Kohlberg has tested is stage 5 or 6!)[33] and attending theoretically to the world of large social interactions. Moral change, then, would be explained, in much the way Kohlbergians already do, in terms of the tests and challenges offered by experience, by the conflicting demands of different social worlds which we may come to move from, in, and between. But the focus of such an analysis would be primarily on our public, albeit unique, social world(s) and only secondarily on our private, albeit shared, styles of reasoning.

On such an analysis, male-female differences in morality would be explained in terms of gender. Abraham was made, not born. The temptation to offer a nativistic account in terms of biological sex would not arise. Such a temptation is provided by Kohlberg, however, since he claims to lie in the classical Piagetian tradition, and in traditional Piagetian naturalistic stage theory different conceptions (e.g., spatial, temporal, or causal) in adults require explanation in terms of physiology or biology.

In light of the problems with the philosophical underpinnings of Kohlbergian theory and the accumulating empirical evidence against the claims to universality, irreversibility, and invariance of sequence of (at least) the higher stages,[34] one wonders why the model has so many fervent devotees—so devout, in fact, that some of Kohlberg's followers are working enormously hard to save the paradigm by making theoretical adjustments which require the fewest possible changes in matters of developmental faith and dogma. Murphy and Gilligan,[35] for example, have recently promoted an expanded or adjusted model of moral development. Although it is still too early to tell how fruitful their adjusted model will be, I will close by commenting on some reasons for caution in embracing

33. See Kohlberg, "The Claim to Moral Adequacy."

34. See C. P. Edwards, "Societal Complexity and Moral Development: A Kenyan Study," *Ethos* 3 (1975): 505–27; C. Holstein, "Development of Moral Judgment: A Longitudinal Study of Males and Females," *Child Development* 47 (1976): 51–61; and E. L. Simpson, "Moral Development Research: A Case Study of Scientific Cultural Bias," *Human Development* 17 (1974): 81–106.

35. Murphy and Gilligan. Carol Gilligan has told me that she agrees with my overall argument in this paper, and especially with my claim that her work on women's moral conceptions does not need to be pinned onto or supported by Kohlberg's moral stage theory. Nonetheless, she has complained that my critique of the Murphy and Gilligan paper assigns her too much of the blame for the attempt to save Kohlberg, and Murphy too little. Gilligan has passed along a paper to me called "The Philosopher and the 'Dilemma of the Fact': Moral Development in Late Adolescence and Adulthood" in which she is first author and Murphy is second author, and sure enough, this paper hangs not at all on the commitment to Kohlberg's model.

this most recent attempt to save the paradigm—looking as it does a bit "conventionalistic," a bit ad hoc, as if it is led by, rather than leading, Gilligan's own work on female moral development.

Murphy and Gilligan, like Kohlberg, consider the main anomaly in Kohlbergian theory to lie in the evidence for stage regression, undermining as it does the classification of the theory with classical cognitive-developmental theories. The traditional Kohlbergian strategy for dealing with this set of counterexamples is by revising the scoring manual so as to make it so precise that what were formerly actual regressors are transformed into scoring errors. Ann Colby[36] defends this way of theory protection (what she calls "bootstrapping") on the ground that it is not as circular, not as ex post facto, as it might first appear, because the empirical expectation—which is testable—is that a revised scoring manual will eliminate future anomalies. Be that as it may, it has turned out that a decade of revisions have failed to eliminate the evidence for regression.

Murphy and Gilligan argue that the evidence for regression requires a new conceptualization which will allow differentiation of two very different kinds of relativists. Murphy and Gilligan claim to be following Riegel, Perry, and Meacham[37] in distinguishing between a relativism in which there are no right answers and a relativism which is sensitive to the uniqueness of different moral situations. They write, "We rely on the contrast described by Perry [see n. 37] between the relativistic *multiplicity* . . . the position that there are many right answers to moral problems and no way of choosing among them, and *contextual relativism* . . . the position that while no right answers may be objectively right in the sense of being context free, some answers and some ways of thinking are better than others."[38] Murphy and Gilligan argue that the failure of the scoring-manual revisions to solve the regression problem was due to the fact that Kohlbergian theory was committed to scoring all relativists as regressors. They claim that by scoring context-sensitive reasoners differently from context-insensitive relativists the regression problem is solved. The regressors become progressors.

This new stage, they insist, constitutes a "developmental advance" over context-insensitive relativism and rigid "principled morality" and is the stage which tends to be provoked (if at all) in adulthood by dealing with real-life moral conflicts. Thinking at this new stage "articulates an ethic of responsibility that focuses on the actual consequences of choice . . . the criterion of adequacy of moral principles changes from objective truth to 'best fit,' and can only be established within the contexts of the dilemma itself."[39]

36. Colby.

37. Klaus Reigel, "Dialectical Operations: The Final Period of Cognitive Development," *Human Development* 16 (1973): 345–76; William Perry, *Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development in the College Years: A Scheme* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1968); John A. Meacham, "A Dialectical Approach to Moral Judgement and Self-Esteem," *Human Development* 23 (1980): 77–104.

38. Murphy and Gilligan, p. 83.

39. Ibid.

Despite the rhetoric of "developmental advance" and discussion of the manner in which "the criterion of adequacy" changes, Murphy and Gilligan show some restraint in coming out for the adequacy of their "adult" stage of moral development. They say, "we are not arguing that uncertainty is 'higher' than certainty or that contextual theories of philosophy are better than formalistic ones, we are claiming that our subject's is both more differentiated and integrated . . . because it takes into account aspects of the dilemma that previously were not considered."[40] Now what troubles me here is not so much that I doubt that dialectical, context-sensitive morality is superior to context-insensitive morality or pure formalistic morality; it is the almost magical way in which the morality described in this article as the developmentally most advanced stage mirrors the voice of female morality Gilligan described in her 1977 and 1979 *Harvard Educational Review* articles. In this latest article Murphy and Gilligan comment that "(our) alternative conception applies particularly to those groups (women and relativists) whose judgements have been most problematic for Kohlberg's developmental analysis."[41] And although Murphy and Gilligan say they do not claim adequacy for this new stage, they claim that it is "more adaptive,"[42] so the effect is the same. The moral orientation that Gilligan once described as characteristically female, not a "developmental deficiency . . . [but] a different social and moral understanding,"[43] has now become *the* developmentally most advanced, the most adaptive moral orientation.

One has to wonder why in two decades of research by hundreds of Kohlbergians this new stage was not noticed before. One has to worry also about the "conventionalistic," ad hoc character of the attempts to save the theory. In fact, the entire project of adjusting a model in order to eliminate anomalies is often a sign of a paradigm's degeneracy. And one has to fear the existence of a "Rosenthal effect"—fear, that is, that the experimenter's preferences may have carried the data rather than the other way around.[44] Finally, one must ask to what degree this is still a theory of moral development.

Contextual relativists, as Murphy and Gilligan describe them, make many subtle discriminations: they are cognitively very advanced, much more cognitively advanced than people who do not make subtle discriminations, who do not see what makes situations unique—the crime of context-insensitive relativists and context-insensitive formalists. But all that has been described here is a type of cognitive sophistication. We have been told nothing about morality until we are told what weightings the context-sensitive people put on the different "things" they discriminate. And that will lead us back full circle to their principles, to their specific

40. Ibid.

41. Ibid., p. 96.

42. Ibid., p. 97.

43. Gilligan, "In a Different Voice," p. 482.

44. See Robert Rosenthal, "On The Social Psychology of the Psychological Experiment: The Experimenter's Hypothesis as Unintended Determinant of Experimental Results," *American Scientist* 51 (1963): 268–83.

values. Research on principles and values, and the changes they undergo, can, however, be carried out (as Gilligan's *Harvard Educational Review* articles partially testify) without any assumptions whatsoever about hierarchical stages of moral development. As things now stand, Murphy and Gilligan have told us little about morality in introducing this new stage. One can be a context-sensitive utilitarian, a context-sensitive Kantian, a context-sensitive amoralist, or a context-sensitive Nazi.

All this trouble with the paradigm makes me think that what is really important and interesting about morality might be more fruitfully discussed by people who focus on the social world(s) from which people's moral visions ultimately come, in which they do their good or harm, and from the perspective(s) of which they are ultimately criticized and transformed. We do need discussion and criticism of the different ways in which men and women are trained to "see" and "do" their moral worlds, but I am inclined to think that might be best done in a scientific context freed of the ideological weight of moral stage theories with their tenous suite of claims about universality, irreversibility, and, especially, adequacy.