



# Moral Development & Moral Reasoning

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Distinguish between the six stages of Kohlberg's theory of moral development

Explain the pros and cons of disciplining a child

Identify the components of moral dilemma

Describe ways to help people make better moral decisions

## Learning Objectives

At the end of the lecture, student should be able to:

- Distinguish between the six stages of Kohlberg's theory of moral development
- Explain the pros and cons of disciplining a child
- Identify the components of moral dilemma
- Describe ways to help people make better moral decisions



**BE  
KIND**



# Part 1

## Ethics and Morality

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## Ethics and Morality

Morality is about what is good and evil, right and wrong, virtue and vice, justice and crime

Ethics is the philosophical study of morality

There are normative theories (about how morality should be determined) and descriptive theories (about how people actually determine morality)

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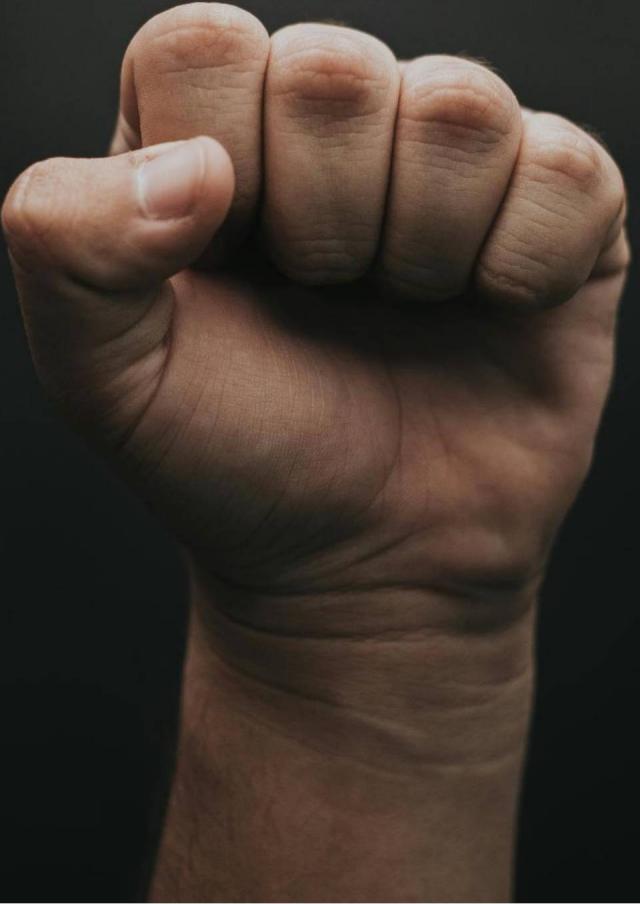
## Morality as the Reason/ Justification

Morality can sometimes be a very strong reason for a behaviour

The right thing to do vs the Beneficial thing to do

On the other hand, sometimes morality is just one of the many factors that people consider when making a decision; or sometimes it is only used *post hoc* to justify a behaviour

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## Tool 79: Moral Reasoning

A person's behaviour might be explained by what they consider to be morally acceptable and unacceptable

Or what they consider to be morally obligated

(We'll later consider some common ways people determine what is moral or not)





## Moral Reasoning in the face of Dilemma

Moral Dilemma (according to Sinnott-Armstrong) occurs when

1. (Morally,) I ought to do A.
2. (Morally,) I ought to do B.
3. I cannot do both A and B.
4. (t) Does not override (2) and (2) does not override (1).



## What is / isn't a Moral Dilemma?

Mencius: “I like both my life and justice; but if I cannot have both, I'll choose justice over my life.” r^b 我所欲也；熊掌，亦我所欲- fe，二者不可得兼，# 魚而取熊掌者也。生，亦我所欲也；義，亦我所欲也，二者不可得兼，舍生而取義者也。」《孟子·告子上》

Philippa Foot's Trolley Problem:  
should I pull a lever so that the trolley kills 1 person rather than 5 people?

## Tool 80: Moral Dilemma



A person's seemingly immoral behaviour might be the result of a moral dilemma (where a person is forced to choose between two alternative behaviours that are both moral) rather than the result of a person choosing between a moral behaviour and an immoral (or amoral) behaviour



## Part 2

### Heinz Dilemma (Kohlberg & Elfenbein, 1975)

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## Scenario 1 (page 1)

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 \$200 for the radium and charged \$2000 for a small dose of the drug.

## Scenario 1 (page 2)

The sick woman's husband, Heinz, went to everyone he knew to borrow the money, but he could only get together about \$1000.... 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.

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## Scenario 1 (page 3)

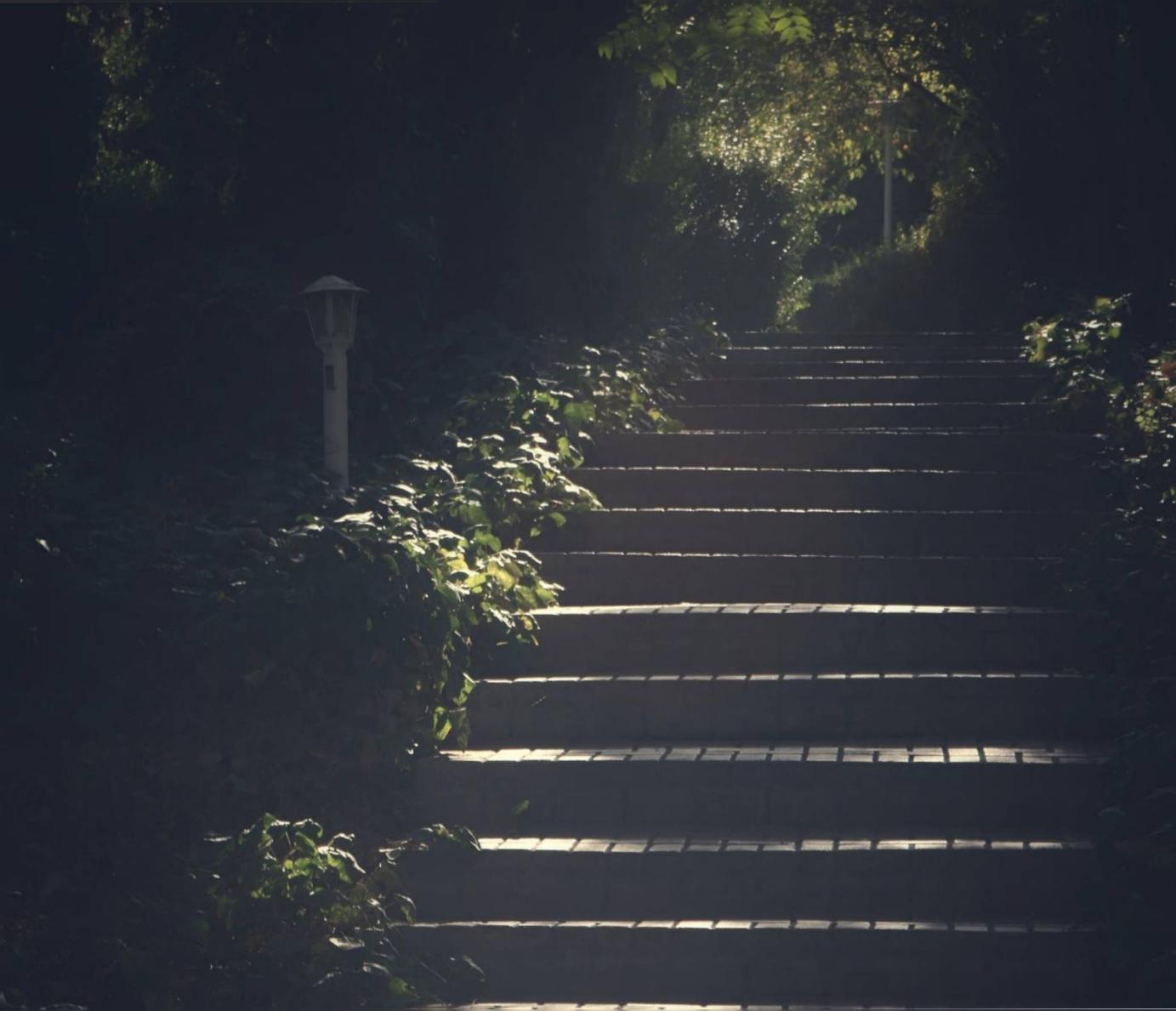
Should Heinz have stolen the drug?

Why or why not?

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# Part 3

## Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development

## Heinz Dilemma (Kohlberg & Elfenbein 1975)



1. I ought to save my wife.
- 2.1 ought to respect other's property / not to steal.
3. I cannot do both A and B.
4. (1) Does not override (2) and (2) does not override (1).

Therefore I have a moral dilemma

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A photograph of a green surface with various medicine containers and pills. In the foreground, there are two white ramekins; one contains several yellow capsules and the other contains a green, granular substance. There is also a clear glass dropper bottle with orange liquid and a small white bowl with a single white tablet. Several more tablets and capsules are scattered across the green surface.

## Heinz Dilemma (Kohlberg & Elfenbein 1975)

Question:

Should Heinz have stolen the drug? Why or why not?

The reason one gives reflect the level of moral development (i.e. how advance is one's moral thinking & reasoning)

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# 1

## Punishment and Obedience Orientation

### Stage 1

Punishment and obedience orientation

Yes, because:

If you let your wife die, you will get in trouble. You will be blamed...

No, because:

You shouldn't steal the drug because you'll be caught and sent to jail if you do

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# 2

Individualism, instrumental purpose  
and exchange

## Stage 2

Individualism, instrumental purpose and exchange

Yes, because:

The druggist can do what he wants and Heinz can do what he wants to do.

No, because:

Heinz is running more risk than it's worth saving his wife.

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# 3

Mutual interpersonal expectations,  
relationships, & interpersonal conformity

## Stage 3

Mutual interpersonal  
expectations, relationships, &  
interpersonal conformity

Yes, because:

Your family will think you're  
an inhuman husband if you  
don't (steal).

No, because

It isn't just the druggist who  
will think you're a criminal,  
everyone else will do.

# 4

## Social system and conscience (Law and order)

### Stage 4

Social system and conscience  
(law and order)

Yes, because:

Heinz has a duty to protect his wife's life. But it's wrong to steal, so he would have to take the drug with the idea of paying the druggist for it and accepting the penalty for breaking the law later.

No, because:

Even if his wife is dying, it's still (his) duty as a citizen to obey the law.

## Stage 5

Social contract or utility and individual rights

Yes, because:

Although there is a law against stealing, the law wasn't meant to violate a person's right to life

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Social contract or utility  
and individual rights

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# 6

Universal ethical principles

Stage 6

Universal ethical principles

Yes, because:

Respect for human life and personality is absolute and accordingly (people) have a mutual duty to save one another from dying

## *Pre-conventional*

*(What is right is what you can get away with)*

## *Conventional*

*(Conform to social rules)*

## *Post-conventional*

*(Driven by abstract principles & values)*

*1. Punishment and obedience orientation*

*2. Individualism, instrumental purpose and exchange*

*3. Mutual interpersonal expectations, relationships, & interpersonal conformity*

*4. Social system and conscience (law and order)*

*5. Social contract or utility and individual rights*

*6. Universal ethical principles*



## Limitation of Kohlberg's Theory

Mainly focused on justice as the most important moral principle (rather than care, virtue, empathy and compassion)

Is about formal reasoning and articulation of rational thoughts (i.e. understanding of ethics rather than being ethical, good, or virtuous)



## Tool 81: Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development

What a person finds acceptable and unacceptable can be explained by their understanding of morality

According to Kohlberg, one's moral reasoning can be classified as either pre-conventional, conventional, or post-conventional

Moral development is tied to cognitive development as well as knowledge, experience, and upbringing



## Part 4

### Moral Reasoning in Action

## Moral Development in terms of Age

搵食啫！ 犯法呀？

Treat others as ^ou would  
like others to trecit 40M

A4-&珠撈-S^

We condemn *all* violence

革命無罪、造反有理

An evje for av\ eye; a tooth  
for a tooth

Jis? A \*6 Sp 'im f® im r's!

People's understanding of morality slowly develops through age - but similar to cognitive development, the speed and degree of development varies a lot

Very small children cannot understand right from wrong, but might obey if they were told to, or if they were threatened by punishment; older children can understand something to be wrong if it harms someone



## Common Struggles (Apart from Doing Good)

Ends versus means: in what circumstances does the ends justify the means?

Individualism versus collectivism: how much individual rights should be sacrificed for the common good?

Current versus future: how much do we owe the future generations - even the ones not yet born?

A photograph of a young woman with dark hair styled in braids, wearing a light blue sweatshirt. She is seated at a white round table, looking down and holding her head in her hand in a gesture of stress or despair. On the table in front of her is a white cup and saucer with coffee, and a plate with some food. In the background, there's a white shelf with a vase and a small bowl. A framed picture hangs on the wall above the shelf.

## Difficulties in Ethical Reasoning

Even if we are quite sure that we are correct, it is often difficult to reason about ethics cooperatively, and even more difficult to convince someone that they are ethically incorrect

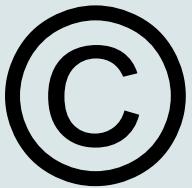
But there are tools to, at least, help us reason more productively in ethics



**Autonomy**



**Beneficence**



**Non-maleficence**



**Justice**



## Four Principles of Bioethics

Proposed by Beauchamp & Childress (2001)

- Respect for autonomy
- Beneficence
- Non-maleficence
- Justice

**Not for assessment**

# Greatest good for the greatest number of people



Utilitarianism  
(e.g., Jeremy  
Bentham)

A type of consequentialist ethics (judging morality according to the consequences of the action)

"Greatest good for the greatest number of people"

**Not for assessment**



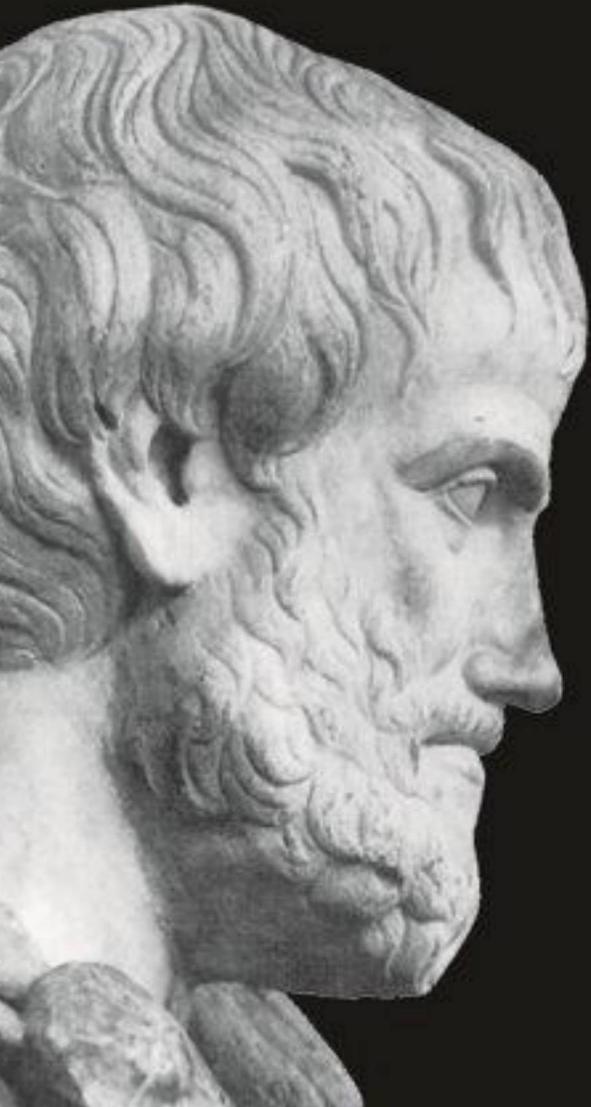
# Justice as Fairness

Contractualism  
(e.g., John Rawls)

A type of deontological ethics  
(judging morality in terms of  
one's duties and one's rights)

Moral acts are those that we  
would all agree to if we were  
unbiased, behind a "veil of  
ignorance"

**Not for assessment**



If a man  
knows what  
is right to do,  
he does not  
require a  
formal  
reason.

## Virtue Ethics (e.g., Aristotle)

Judging morality according to  
what a virtuous person would  
do in the same circumstances

Virtues might include courage,  
temperance, liberality, proper  
ambition, truthfulness,  
wittiness, friendliness, and  
modesty

**Not for assessment**



## Ethics of Care (e.g., Joan Tronto)

Emphasis the importance of inter-personal relationships and care, which includes the following ethical qualities:

- Attentiveness
- Responsibility
- Competence
- Responsiveness
- Solidarity

**Not for assessment**



## Tool 79: Moral Reasoning (recap)

A person's behaviour might be explained by what they consider to be morally acceptable and unacceptable

Apart from moral development, we might also consider the moral system they are employing; we might also let our understanding of moral systems inform our own behaviour



## Part 5

Intervene or not  
(part 1)

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## Changing Other's Immoral Behaviours

It is often unacceptable to label others' behaviour as immoral and to intervene - but maybe least unacceptable if we are the parents or guardians of small children

But arguably, in all circumstances, we should consider the importance of "understanding" other people more than disciplining or changing them

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## Disciplining as a Type of Behavioural Change

For really young children who do not understand moral reasoning or even "punishment & obedience", operant conditioning (positive or negative punishment) might be the only way to discourage them from certain behaviours

For older children, punishment are common ways to discipline; similarly, threat of punishment is often used to prevent bad behaviours



## Discipline: Punishment

Punishment like physical or verbal assault or other unpleasant circumstances being forced onto the perpetrator

Useful when immediate obedience is necessary; but may only promotes momentary compliance

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## Side Effects of Punishment

Too frightened to figure out  
what to do



Models of aggression: the person copy the aggressive behaviour (physical, verbal, or psychological) and apply it unto others

Mental health problems: the person might become chronically stressed, depressed, or sacred; or relationships are broken

A photograph showing a young child with curly hair from behind, looking towards an adult male standing across the room. The adult is wearing a white t-shirt and grey sweatpants, pointing his finger towards the child. The setting appears to be a domestic interior.

## Alternatives to Punishment

For older children (or indeed adults), we can discipline according to their moral development

Individualism, instrumental purpose and exchange → based on pros and cons (e.g., it is not worth doing the bad thing)

Mutual interpersonal expectations, relationships, & interpersonal conformity -> based on interpersonal relationship



## Inductive Discipline

Let the child know the effects caused to others because of his/her misbehaviour

Empathy-based guilt

How to deal with guilt feelings constructively

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## Useful Ways to Discipline

Time out (removing the child from the immediate setting)

Reduce opportunities for misbehaviours

Provide reasons for rules

Express confidence and appreciation of children's ability

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A red octagonal STOP sign stands prominently in the foreground, mounted on a grey metal post. The sign features the word "STOP" in large, white, sans-serif capital letters. The background is a soft-focus landscape of rolling green hills under a clear blue sky.

## Tool 82: Discipline

A person's behaviour might be explained by the disciplinary action of previous behaviour

Punishment can be effective for inducing immediate obedience, but inductive discipline might be preferable in the long term



# Part 6

## Intervene or not (part 2)

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# Changing People's Immoral Behaviours

The act of disciplining somebody relies on our power over the person and maybe a moral high-ground - both of these are often not totally justifiable

One needs to be careful before judging a behaviour as immoral, and be extremely careful before judging someone as immoral

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## Explaining the Lack of Moral Behaviour

In many situations, our behaviour is not determined by how our moral understanding of the situation, or by how we solve a moral dilemma

We might understand the moral issues and principles behind certain issues, behaviours, and choices, but we might not act on them or think about them often



## "Wokeness"

The term “woke” means “alert to racial prejudice and discrimination” and later “awareness of social inequalities” - however, it has since been used more and more as a pejorative term for being intolerant or performative

Regardless of how the term is used or abused, few people argued against being aware of social inequalities

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A close-up photograph of a protest sign made of brown cardboard. The word "SILENCE" is written in large, white, hand-painted capital letters across the top half of the sign. Below it, the word "COMPLIANCE" is also written in large, white, hand-painted capital letters. A portion of another sign is visible on the left, showing the letters "H" and "R".

## Acting on Social Inequalities

Consider the following issues.  
Are you aware of them? Do  
you speak up against them?  
Do you act upon them?

- Freedom, free speech,  
universal suffrage
- Suffering of certain groups  
in a population
- Climate-change and  
environmental injustice
- Oppression of certain  
populations in the world
- Late-stage capitalism with  
its exploitations and  
inequalities

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## Reasons for not Acting on / Speaking out

Practicality: knowing what is morally correct ≠ easy to act on it

Opportunity costs: there are too many important issues for anyone to shape their lives around, as well as speak out for and give money to

Other negative consequences:  
legality, relationship, and financial costs, etc.



## Commitment within Relativistic Thinking (recap)

Formulate a perspective that synthesizes contradictions

Generate rational criteria against which options can be evaluated

Seek out differing perspectives to advance one's knowledge and understanding;

Reflect & interact with peer

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A photograph of a middle-aged man with dark hair and glasses, wearing a light-colored trench coat over a blue shirt. He is sitting in a chair with his head bowed and hands clasped together in front of him, appearing to be in deep thought or distress. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

## Tool 83: Awareness of Moral Issues

A person's moral behaviour (or lack thereof) might be explained by whether they are aware of the issue, as well as competing forces including practicality, opportunity costs, and other negative consequences of speaking out or acting upon the issue

A photograph of a young woman with dark hair styled in braids, wearing a light blue sweatshirt. She is seated at a white round table, looking down and holding her head in her hand in a gesture of stress or despair. On the table in front of her is a white cup and saucer with coffee, and a plate with some food. In the background, there's a white shelf with a vase and a small bowl. A framed picture hangs on the wall.

# Difficulties in Ethical Reasoning (Recap)

It is difficult to reason about ethics cooperatively, and even more difficult to convince someone that they are ethically incorrect

But there are tools to, at least, help us reason more productively in ethics

And we can also try to raise people's awareness about moral issues and moral tools



## Making Better Moral Decisions

The way to help others (and ourselves) to make better moral decisions is to be

- (i) More aware of the moral implication of a decision
- (ii) More aware of the presence of moral dilemma
- (iii) More aware of the moral system and moral argument that can be applied in a particular situation
- (iv) More skilled in applying moral reasoning

A photograph showing two young men in a study booth. One man, seen from behind, is wearing a light-colored t-shirt. The other man, facing the camera, is wearing a dark t-shirt. They are sitting at a table, looking towards each other, suggesting a conversation or study session. The background shows large windows with a view of greenery.

# Part 7

## Explaining Behaviours & Suggesting Moral Arguments

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## Scenario 2

### **Bored child in a hospital**

Ethical thing to do:

Play without disturbing others

Common unethical behaviour:

Play which disturb others

## **Antibiotics treatment**

Ethical thing to do:

Finish course of antibiotics even if recovered

Common unethical behaviour:

Stop antibiotics when recovered

Scenario *b*,

## Patient doesn't want to stay in hospital

Ethical thing to do:

Stay anyway? Insist on being discharged?

Common unethical behaviour:

Discharge themselves unannounced?

## Dilemma 1

### Patient with hereditary cancer

Ethical thing to do:

Tell their family & relatives about it

Also ethical thing to do:

Not tell their family & relatives about it

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## Dilemma 2

### **People likely to already have Covid-19**

On the one side (quarantine):

Population health, reduce chance of outbreak,  
reduce mortality & morbidity

On the other side (not quarantine):

Personal autonomy, not harming ppi's freedom  
or livelihood

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## Dilemma 3

### Abortion

On the one side (pro-choice):  
Women should have authority over their own  
body

On the other side (pro-life):  
The unborn child also has right that need to be  
protected

## Dilemma 4

### Allow e-cigarettes or not

On the one side:

Switch from normal cigarettes to e-cigarettes is likely to reduce harm

On the other side:

Non-smokers might pick up e-cigarettes and later maybe normal cigarettes

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## Dilemma 5

### Freedom vs Prosperity

On the one side:

Human rights, liberty, democracy, rule of law

On the other side:

Prosperity, stability, patriotic; freedom from starvation; freedom from oppression from other countries; not chaotic, restless or disorderly



# Part 8

## Behavioural Change

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## Case 17

### Vegetarianism

A vegetarian diet contains vegetables, fruits, grains, pulses, nuts, and seeds; and in many versions also contains dairy products, eggs, and other animal-derived products; it excludes all animal flesh (including meat, poultry, game, fish, and shellfish)

Can you name some reasons why someone might adopt a vegetarian diet?

## Case 17

Canice is 9 years old and often has constipation. His parents brought him to see a doctor and the doctor suggests Canice should eat more leafy vegetables. In fact, Canice does not eat much vegetables - leafy or otherwise, and the only vegetable that he (sometimes) enjoys is cauliflower.

Canice's parents recently became much more health-conscious because of a health scare. As a result, they are keen for the whole family to have more vegetables (and less meat) in their diet. Rather than forcing Canice to change, they are hopeful that they can convince him to change willingly.

### Rational reasons for behaviour

- Right thing to do (justice, virtue, greater good, etc.)
- Beneficial thing to do (health, pleasure, profit, etc.)
- Lesser of two evils?

### Non-rational reasons for behaviour

- Subconscious (habit, conditioned behaviour, etc.)
- Lack of will, addiction, other psychopathologies?



## Part 9

### Conclusion



A behaviour can be considered by a person to be morally acceptable or not (or it can even be a moral dilemma)

Kohlberg's theory of moral development: pre-conventional, conventional, post-conventional

Punishment versus Inductive Discipline

Not acting / speaking out can be the result of a lack of understanding of the moral implication, lack of awareness, the avoidance of negative consequences

## Conclusion (page 1)

A person's behaviour might be explained by what they consider to be morally acceptable and unacceptable (or indeed a moral dilemma)

According to Kohlberg, one's moral reasoning can be classified as either pre-conventional, conventional, or post-conventional





A behaviour can be considered by a person to be morally acceptable or not (or it can even be a moral dilemma)

Kohlberg's theory of moral development: pre-conventional, conventional, post-conventional

Punishment versus Inductive Discipline

Not acting / speaking out can be the result of a lack of understanding of the moral implication, lack of awareness, the avoidance of negative consequences

## Conclusion (page 2)

Punishment can be effective for inducing immediate obedience, but inductive discipline might be preferable in the long term

Apart from the lack of understanding, a lack of awareness, and negative consequences might prevent a person from acting on (or speaking out about) any moral issues



A photograph of a library aisle. On both sides, there are tall, dark wooden bookshelves filled with books. The books are arranged vertically, their spines facing outwards. In the center of the aisle, several vintage-style lightbulbs are suspended from the ceiling by black cords. The light from the bulbs creates a warm, glowing atmosphere. The background is slightly blurred, showing more of the library's interior.

## Reading / References

Boyd, DR & Bee, H (2019). Lifespan development (8th ed.). Chapter 12.3 Kohlberg's Approach to Moral Development. Boston, MA: Pearson.



~ End of Lecture ~

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