



Moral Development & Moral Reasoning

Health Psychology (CMED2006)

LKS Faculty of Medicine

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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



Part 1

Ethics and Morality



Are most people Evil?

It is not uncommon to see other people (or ourselves) doing things that are morally wrong

Is it because they (or we) are evil? Are their explanations just excuses, or do they really believe in them?



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)



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



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. (1) 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." 「魚，我所欲也；熊掌，亦我所欲也，二者不可得兼，舍魚而取熊掌者也。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 one person rather than five 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)



Scenario 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. 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.



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



Part 3

Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development



Heinz Dilemma (Kohlberg & Elfenbein 1975)

1. I ought to save my wife.
2. I 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



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)



Stage 1

Punishment and obedience orientation

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

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



Stage 2

Individualism, instrumental purpose and exchange

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

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



Stage 3

Mutual interpersonal expectations, relationships, & interpersonal conformity

- ✓ Your family will think you're an inhuman husband if you don't (steal).
- ✗ It isn't just the druggist who will think you're a criminal, everyone else will do.



Stage 4

Social system and conscience (law and order)

- ✓ 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
- ✗ 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

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



Stage 6

Universal ethical principles

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

<i>Level</i>	<i>Stage</i>
<i>Pre-conventional</i> <i>(What is right is what you can get away with)</i>	<p><i>1. Punishment and obedience orientation</i></p> <p><i>2. Individualism, instrumental purpose and exchange</i></p>
<i>Conventional</i> <i>(Conform to social rules)</i>	<p><i>3. Mutual interpersonal expectations, relationships, & interpersonal conformity</i></p> <p><i>4. Social system and conscience (law and order)</i></p>
<i>Post-conventional</i> <i>(Driven by abstract principles & values)</i>	<p><i>5. Social contract or utility and individual rights</i></p> <p><i>6. Universal ethical principles</i></p>



Limitation of Kohlberg's Theory

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

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



Conventional Morality

Contrary to popular belief, most people are not evil or have a complete lack of conscience – they still believe what they do is morally alright

Most adults understand (and maybe practice) moral conventions, but might not think very deeply about them



Common Sayings about Morality

「搵食啫.....犯法呀？！」

“An eye for an eye; a tooth for a tooth”

「人不為己、天硃地滅。」

“Treat others as you would like others to treat you.”

「殺人填命、血債血償。」

“We condemn all violence.”

「革命無罪、造反有理。」



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?



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



Four Principles of Bioethics

Proposed by Beauchamp & Childress (2001)

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



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”



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”



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



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



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)



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



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



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



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



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



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)



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



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



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



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



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



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



Part 7

Explaining Behaviours & Suggesting Moral Arguments



Scenario 2: Bored child in a hospital

Ethical thing to do:

Play without disturbing others

Common unethical behaviour:

Play which disturb others



Scenario 3: Antibiotics treatment

Ethical thing to do:

Finish course of antibiotics even if recovered

Common unethical behaviour:

Stop antibiotics when recovered



Scenario 4: Pt 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



Dilemma 2: Ppl 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 ppl's freedom or livelihood



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



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



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.



Case 17 Pointers

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



Conclusion

- 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
- 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



Reading / References

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



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