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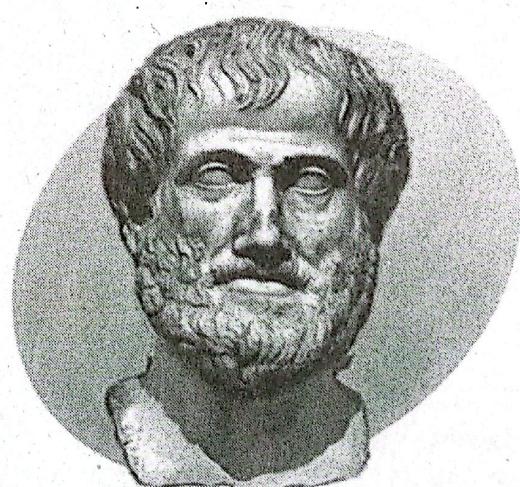
Chapter Three

The Development of Moral Character

The judgment regarding the morality of an action is based on the person who did the action. This was basically the belief of Plato, Aristotle, Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. The goodness of an action can be based on the kind of person who did the action; from the intention of doing an act; from the character of the moral agent. In order to determine the kind of person one is, one should base himself on the character that one person possesses.

Etymologically, **character** comes from the ancient Greek term *charakter*, which initially referred to the mark impressed upon a coin. Such mark determines the value of the coin. Consequently, a person's value will be determined by the character that a person possesses. A person's character is the mental and moral character that one possesses which makes him different from the others. In philosophy, the person's character refers to the moral aspect of a person.

In order to give more light to character, Aristotle often used the term *εθη* (ethē) in order to refer to his idea of the character. His idea of character is etymologically linked to "ethics" and "morality." Aristotle's concept of morality is connected with his concept of *αρετη* (arête), which Aristotle translated as excellence. To make the person moral, his action must be an act done in the most excellent way. For



Aristotle of Stagira [<http://bigthink.com>].

this reason, the Aristotelian concept of excellence is associated with function. A human person is considered to be an excellent man if he is functioning in the most excellent way.

In general, excellence is a quality that makes an individual a good member of his kind. Excellence is connected to his function. For this reason, a person will have a greater value if he keeps on acting as a person excellently. When a human person is acting excellently consistently, then he is said to have a great character.

A person who has shown greatness in his character is surely going to obtain a certain level of success. In this regard, a person who is aiming for success should live a moral life because a moral person will develop his character that will determine his destiny. Moral character is the force behind moral action.

The Life of Lawrence Kohlberg

Lawrence Kohlberg was born on October 25, 1927, at Bronxville, New York, USA. Kohlberg was an American psychologist and educator, who is known for his theory of moral development.

Kohlberg was the youngest of four children of Alfred Kohlberg, a successful silk merchant of Jewish ancestry, and Charlotte Albrecht Kohlberg, a Protestant and a skilled amateur chemist. When the couple divorced in 1932 after 11 years of marriage, each of the children was required by a court order to choose which parent he or she would live with. The two younger children chose their father and the older ones chose their mother.

He finished his studies at Phillips Academy in Andover, Massachusetts in 1945. After serving in the U.S. Merchant Marine, he worked on a ship that had been hired by Haganah, the Zionist military organization, to smuggle Jewish war refugees into Palestine, past the British blockade. However, the ship was intercepted and Kohlberg was imprisoned in a British internment camp in Cyprus. Returning to the U.S. in 1948, he enrolled at the

University of Chicago, where he completed his Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology in one year and his Ph.D. in Psychology in 1958. Eventually, he began his teaching career at various academic institutions and, later on, at Harvard University in 1968.



Lawrence Kohlberg [<https://sites.google.com/site/worldofmaher/moral-development>]

Kohlberg's theories on both psychology and education are very much influential. His theory is said to be the only one that provided a very detailed explanation regarding the moral development of children. Before he developed his theory of psychology, most psychologists during his time were behaviorists. It was only Kohlberg's work that broke new grounds as he focused on the cognitive phenomena. Because it was new, according to the American psychologist Carol Gilligan, it ignored the distinct patterns of moral development exhibited by girls, Kohlberg's work received criticisms.

In 1971, while he was doing research in Belize, Kohlberg was said to have contracted a parasitic infection that led him to develop severe illness and depression for the rest of his life. On January 17, 1987, Kohlberg committed suicide (Doorey).

The Moral Ideas of Lawrence Kohlberg

Moral character serves as the basis for moral action. In such a case, what kind of character should one have in order to have his action be considered moral. Here lies the problem. Ethical relativism claims that the morality of an act depends upon one's particular culture or society. This principle of the ethical relativism was denied by the psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg, who had a great interest in philosophy.

Kohlberg upheld the idea that there should be a consensus of morality. In the case of differences on moral perspectives, he held that there must be a consensus of rightness. This is what he termed as the "Consensus Theory of Rightness" (Kohlberg 1984, 4). Kohlberg held that

... rightness is the ideal limit of dialogue. In any case, it seemed to me very important that we have a focus upon rightness because this is an area where there is a requirement to reach a consensus about rightness, where there isn't a requirement to reach consensus about the good, the ideals of the good and their basis perhaps in ontology or religion. That is, that regardless of the varying ideals of the good, we still need to have a consensus on issues of justice, that is where individuals' competing ideals of the good come into conflict with one another. There needs to be some resolution to this problem.

How did Kohlberg come up with such idea of morality? During the time when he was pursuing his doctoral degree, Kohlberg became interested in Jean Piaget's work regarding the moral development of children. Kohlberg agreed with Piaget's theory of moral development principle. However, he wanted to develop this further. In such a case, he used the storytelling technique of Jean Piaget. He narrated what he called the *Heinz dilemma*:

In Europe, a woman was near death from a very bad disease, 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 \$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 get together only about \$1,000 which was 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." Heinz got desperate and broke into the man's store to steal the drug for his wife (Kohlberg 1984, 6-7).

From Jean Piaget, he took the idea that children naturally progress from a form of moral reasoning based on the consequences of an act (e.g., punishment) to one that takes the actor's intentions into account. In order to prove his point, he interviewed 72 lower and middle-class white boys, presenting each with the Heinz dilemma written above. He tried to find out

about the view of the respondents on the issue as to whether it would be morally permissible for a poor man to steal medicine for his dying wife. The children's responses became his basis for his theory on the stages of moral development.

Kohlberg conducted this study because he was unhappy with the relativistic slant of many social scientists. From the children's responses, he was able to point out that there can be an absolute moral decision based on the stages of development of a person. Kohlberg identified psychological principles that may support his claim for a more objective approach to morality. Kohlberg tried to develop a morality by combining moral philosophy with moral psychology.

Moral philosophy and moral psychology, according to Kohlberg, represent the two basic areas of inquiry into moral education. Moral psychology studies what moral development *is*. Moral philosophy, on the other hand, studies what moral development *ought to be*. For Kohlberg, the *is* of psychology and the *ought* of philosophy must be integrated before one can have a reasoned basis for moral education (Gensler, et al.).

Kohlberg held that the problem of morality is always the question of what universal moral principle must be used in order to determine what decision can be made in every moral situation. Regardless of our culture, we all develop our moral thinking through a series of set stages. For this reason, moral education should help children develop their moral thinking toward more advanced stages.

The Stages of Moral Development

From the case presented above, Kohlberg developed his Stages of Moral Development. After presenting to his subjects the Heinz dilemma, he asked the series of questions such as: (1) Should Heinz have stolen the drug? (2) Would it change anything if Heinz did not love his wife? (3) What if the person dying was a stranger, would it make any difference? (4) Should the police arrest the chemist for murder if the woman died? By studying the answers from children of different ages to these questions, Kohlberg hoped to discover how moral reasoning changed as people grew older. The 72 boys aged 10-16 years were interviewed. 58 of these boys were followed up at three-yearly intervals for 20 years. Kohlberg was not actually interested in the judgment of the boys but on the reasons given for the decision. He found that these reasons tended to change as the children got older (McLeod, 2013). From here, he enlisted three distinct levels of moral reasoning, each with two sub-stages. Each new stage replaces the reasoning typical of the earlier stage. But Kohlberg noted that not everyone achieves all the stages.

1. Pre-Conventional Stage

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This stage is also called the Self-Focused stage because this is concerned with concrete consequences to individuals and it is focusing on pursuing a concrete interest while avoiding sanctions. At this stage (most nine-year-olds and younger, some over nine), we do not have a personal code of morality. Instead, our moral code is shaped by the standards of adults and the consequences of following or breaking their rules. Here, authority is outside the individual and reasoning is based on the physical consequences of actions. This stage is further subdivided into:

- a. **Stage 1: Obedience and Punishment Orientation.** This is the orientation to punishment and reward and to physical and material power. At age 10, the respondents say, "Heinz shouldn't steal; he should buy the drug. If he steals the drug, he might get put in jail and have to put the drug back anyway" (Kohlberg, 7). Hence, at this stage, what is right for the person to do is to obey the rules and avoid physical damage to persons and property. The reason for making a moral decision is to avoid punishment (Power, 2018).
- b. **Stage 2: Pleasure Orientation or the Instrumental-Purposive Orientation.** This stage is characterized by hedonistic orientation with an instrumental view of human relations. The emphasis in this stage is placed on the idea of reciprocity. The child respondent says: "Heinz should steal the drug to save his wife's life. he might get to jail, but he will still have his wife" (Kohlberg). This response of a child is an individual, egoistic conception that he values his wife's life more than the values going to jail for a while.

A child even commented: "if it was a pet he could get a new pet, but it is not easy to get a new wife." The focus in this stage is placed on the idea of reciprocity, i.e., on the exchange of favors. What is right is one's immediate interest, and letting others act also in their own interest. An action is considered to be morally right if it is fair. The reason for acting morally is merely to satisfy one's need and admit the needs of others in their own self-interest. While the other is after his own, interest, I also have my own interest. Hence, if I do what is wrong, I might not obtain my own interest. Human relations, in this stage, is seen as a marketplace, i.e., a place of exchange of interest (Gensler, 189-190).

2. Conventional Stage - 10-25

This stage is characterized by the Group-Focused stage and it is concerned with fulfilling role expectations, as well as maintaining and supporting the social order. At this level (most adolescents and adults), we begin to internalize the moral standards of valued adult role models. Here, authority is internalized but not questioned, and reasoning is based on the norms of the group to which the person belongs (McLeod).

- c. **Stage 3: Peer and Group Acceptance Orientation.** This stage is the "good boy" orientation as it seeks to maintain expectations and win approval of one's immediate group. A boy at this stage says, "If I was Heinz, I would have stolen the drug for my wife. You cannot put a price on love, no amount of gifts make love, you cannot put a price on life either" (Kohlberg, 8).

In this stage, what is considered morally right is what pleases or helps others and what is approved by others. A moral act is that which reinforces mutual relationships such as trust, loyalty, respect, and gratitude. Here, the reason for helping and for pleasing others is his own need to be seen by the others as a loyal and caring person, and therefore, a moral person. In terms of one's relation to the society, a person in this stage takes the third person's perspective; hence, one should be aware of shared feelings and group expectations (Kohlberg).

- d. **Stage 4: Social Structure Orientation.** At this stage, the individual becomes aware of the wider rules of society, so judgments concern obeying the rules in order to uphold the law and to avoid guilt (McLeod). The stage is characterized by an orientation to authority, law, and duty. The main preoccupation is on how to maintain a fixed order, whether social or religious. Such order is assumed as a primary value.

At this stage, one respondent says, "When you get married, you take a vow, love and cherish your wife. Marriage is not only love, it is an obligation like a legal contract. But it is also a contract before God." In this regard, one has already a notion of religious and legal order, which is obligatory and in which one has a defined place, a role, and that one has entered into this role and this commits one to certain rules (Kohlberg). Hence, the person is expected to show respect for laws, authority, and society. They are also required to contribute to the maintenance of the society and institution. Kohlberg believed that conscience is imperative to the moral law and to the ethical system. A conscientious person will definitely feel bad if he fails to perform his duty and will feel worse if, instead of performing one's duty, he becomes the cause of the destruction of the community.

3. Post-Conventional Stage — 26 —

Individual judgment is based on self-chosen principles, and moral reasoning is based on individual rights and justice. According to Kohlberg, this level of moral reasoning is as far as most people get. Only 10 to 15% are capable of the kind of abstract thinking necessary for stage 5 or 6. That is to say, most people take their moral views from those around them and only a minority think through ethical principles for themselves. In this stage, it is here that one examines, adopts, and applies the different ethical frameworks or principles (McLeod).

- e. **Stage 5: Social-contract orientation.** This stage puts emphasis on equality and mutual obligation within a democratically established order. One of the respondents who went from Stage 2 at age 10 to Stage 5 at age 25 responded to the dilemma: "I think he was justified in breaking in because there was a human life at stake. I think that transcends any right that the druggist had to the drug." At this stage, an individual may look at morality as a way of recognizing the rights of the individual, the rights of other individuals, and not interfering with the rights of others (Kohlberg, 9).

At this stage, one is concerned that obligations be based on calculations of overall utility and on what is really good for all. To a certain extent, there is universality in this good reasoning but still within basic human society and basic human agreements.

- f. **Stage 6: The Universal Ethical Principle.** This stage is focused on the principles of conscience that have logical comprehensiveness and universality. The highest value is placed on the human life, on equality, and on human dignity. People at this stage have developed their own set of moral guidelines which may or may not fit the law. The principles apply to everyone; hence, universal.

The person who has arrived at this stage will be prepared to act to defend the moral principles even if it means going against the rest of society in the process and having to pay the consequences of disapproval or even imprisonment. For Kohlberg, people will rarely reach this stage (McLeod).

From this theory of Kohlberg, ethicists have different opinions. For instance, the dilemma that he presented to his young respondents may be unfamiliar to them. His subjects, who were aged between 10 and 16 had no idea about married life and they might not have been in such a situation. In such a case, they would never know whether Heinz should steal the drug (Rosen 1980, 260).

Moreover, Gilligan (1977, 492) commented that Kohlberg's theory was based on an all-male sample, which is, in return, based on abstract principles of law and justice. Gilligan mentioned that this is definitely different from women's point of view because the latter is based on principles of compassion and care. Not taking into consideration the point of view of women can have a great impact in creating a moral theory.

Some moralists would also claim that the dilemma presented by Kohlberg is hypothetical. The question raised to him was: if the respondents were placed in the real situation, would they have the same decision? Because the dilemma raised is hypothetical, it may not produce a valid result.

Although Kohlberg's theory had criticisms, his work was still a great value because he was able to connect psychology and philosophy in establishing a moral perspective on human behavior and character. Moreover, his study was a proof that a human person is capable of making moral decisions and such decisions can be for the benefit not only of one's self but of the others. At the same time, every human person can grow to maturity depending on the kind of education one receives or the environment where one lives in.