Henry Dixon

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Psychology: Mr. Spence & Ms. Batty

Developmental Psychology Response

Development On A Spectrum and Morality As a Social Construct

Although an ideal situation would merit the ability to circumscribe developmental stages to certain ages, Jean Piaget’s work suggests that this definition is far too steadfast for humans. Piaget’s theory attempts to compartmentalize psychological development into several stages, with each stage corresponding to a certain period of time in one’s life. While the stages occur in a non-permuted order, precise timeframes are difficult to come by. The bulk of these predictions are derived from biology (read: physiology instead of psychology); the statements with solely psychological roots tend to be more inexact. For example, the prefrontal cortex has been implicated in planning complex cognitive behavior, personality expression, and decision-making, specifically in accordance with internal goals. In the teenage years, the prefrontal cortex of an adolescent is not fully developed, and as such, he or she is more likely to make impetuous decisions. Moreover, the psychological state wherein the adolescent develops a sense of *morality* has no direct correlation to a physiological circumstance, which proves to have a more indefinite timeframe as such. Later, in a seemingly discrete section, the textbook will propound, “age is less a predictor of abilities […] than is proximity to death.” As Piaget himself noted, development does not always progress in the smooth manner his theory seems to predict.

Nevertheless, although the text argues that a sense of ‘moral thinking’ is inherently arrived at, it does not put forth specific evidence or logical reasoning as to why, nor does it address the inevitability of morality. The nebulous topic of *morality* is assumed to be a unavoidable destination for all humans, but it is unclear why humans need morality inherently, and how one can know morality is not a societal construct. Psychopaths and sociopaths are two paradigms wherein morality is disregarded with arguably no disadvantages to the individual. While it may be difficult for most with a sense of empathy to fantasize about lacking this human connection, the pragmatists in the population could certainly see the advantages. In other words: why is it morally wrong to harm, as long as you are not the one being harmed? The implication that morality is inherently instilled within oneself is potentially misleading and equivocal; one could argue that society fosters morality, instead of one’s developmental psychology reaching it. Erik Erikson’s work on psychosocial development, Lawrence Kolhberg’s work on moral development, and Jean Piaget’s work on cognitive development all play an important role in answering this question, but it is doubtful there is a steadfast and concise response.

The author of the textbook remarks, “somewhere on your journey from egghood to childhood you became conscious,” but leaves the statement at that. Although he goes on to explore the concept of developmental psychology, the vague and nebulous idea of *consciousness* is left untouched. Cognition is said to be “the mental activities associated with thinking,” but it is difficult for one to ascertain an understanding of either of the aforementioned terms. Do all humans wield consciousness? If it is a viable theory that adults exist - perhaps on the periphery of society, or at least, known as someone who is not ‘all there’ – who do not have advanced cognition or consciousness, where is the line drawn? How is one to distinguish a conscious being from an unconscious one?