Lawrence Kohlberg 's stages of moral development

 Lawrence Kohlberg 's stages of moral development constitute an adaptation of a psychological theory originally conceived by the Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget . Kohlberg began work on this topic while a psychology graduate student at the University of Chicago in 1958 , and expanded and developed this theory throughout his life .

 The theory holds that moral reasoning , the basis for ethical behavior , has six identifiable developmental stages , each more adequate at responding to moral dilemmas than its predecessor . Kohlberg followed the development of moral judgment far beyond the ages studied earlier by Piaget , who also claimed that logic and morality develop through constructive stages . Expanding on Piaget 's work , Kohlberg determined that the process of moral development was principally concerned with justice , and that it continued throughout the individual 's lifetime , a notion that spawned dialogue on the philosophical implications of such research .

 The six stages of moral development are grouped into three levels : pre @-@ conventional morality , conventional morality , and post @-@ conventional morality .

 For his studies , Kohlberg relied on stories such as the Heinz dilemma , and was interested in how individuals would justify their actions if placed in similar moral dilemmas . He then analyzed the form of moral reasoning displayed , rather than its conclusion , and classified it as belonging to one of six distinct stages .

 There have been critiques of the theory from several perspectives . Arguments include that it emphasizes justice to the exclusion of other moral values , such as caring ; that there is such an overlap between stages that they should more properly be regarded as separate domains ; or that evaluations of the reasons for moral choices are mostly post hoc rationalizations (by both decision makers and psychologists studying them) of essentially intuitive decisions .

 Nevertheless , an entirely new field within psychology was created as a direct result of Kohlberg 's theory , and according to Haggbloom et al . ' s study of the most eminent psychologists of the 20th century , Kohlberg was the 16th most frequently cited psychologist in introductory psychology textbooks throughout the century , as well as the 30th most eminent overall .

 Kohlberg 's scale is about how people justify behaviors and his stages are not a method of ranking how moral someone 's behavior is . There should , however , be a correlation between how someone scores on the scale and how they behave , and the general hypothesis is that moral behaviour is more responsible , consistent and predictable from people at higher levels .

Stages

 Kohlberg 's six stages can be more generally grouped into three levels of two stages each : pre @-@ conventional , conventional and post @-@ conventional . Following Piaget 's constructivist requirements for a stage model , as described in his theory of cognitive development , it is extremely rare to regress in stages ? to lose the use of higher stage abilities . Stages cannot be skipped ; each provides a new and necessary perspective , more comprehensive and differentiated than its predecessors but integrated with them .

 Level 1 (Pre @-@ Conventional)
 1 . Obedience and punishment orientation
 (How can I avoid punishment ?)
 2 . Self @-@ interest orientation
 (What 's in it for me ?)
 (Paying for a benefit)
 Level 2 (Conventional)
 3 . Interpersonal accord and conformity
 (Social norms)
 (The good boy / girl attitude)
 4 . Authority and social @-@ order maintaining orientation
 (Law and order morality)

Level 3 (Post @-@ Conventional)
5 . Social contract orientation
6 . Universal ethical principles
(Principled conscience)
The understanding gained in each stage is retained in later stages , but may be regarded by those in later stages as simplistic , lacking in sufficient attention to detail .

= = = Pre @-@ conventional = = =

The pre @-@ conventional level of moral reasoning is especially common in children , although adults can also exhibit this level of reasoning . Reasoners at this level judge the morality of an action by its direct consequences . The pre @-@ conventional level consists of the first and second stages of moral development and is solely concerned with the self in an egocentric manner . A child with pre @-@ conventional morality has not yet adopted or internalized society 's conventions regarding what is right or wrong but instead focuses largely on external consequences that certain actions may bring .

In Stage one (obedience and punishment driven) , individuals focus on the direct consequences of their actions on themselves . For example , an action is perceived as morally wrong because the perpetrator is punished . " The last time I did that I got spanked , so I will not do it again . " The worse the punishment for the act is , the more " bad " the act is perceived to be . This can give rise to an inference that even innocent victims are guilty in proportion to their suffering . It is " egocentric , " lacking recognition that others ' points of view are different from one 's own . There is " deference to superior power or prestige . "

An example of obedience and punishment driven morality would be a child refusing to do something because it is wrong and that the consequences could result in punishment . For example , a child 's classmate tries to dare the child to skip school . The child would apply obedience and punishment driven morality by refusing to skip school because he would get punished .

Stage two (self @-@ interest driven) expresses the " what 's in it for me " position , in which right behavior is defined by whatever the individual believes to be in their best interest but understood in a narrow way which does not consider one 's reputation or relationships to groups of people . Stage two reasoning shows a limited interest in the needs of others , but only to a point where it might further the individual 's own interests . As a result , concern for others is not based on loyalty or intrinsic respect , but rather a " You scratch my back , and I 'll scratch yours " mentality . The lack of a societal perspective in the pre @-@ conventional level is quite different from the social contract (stage five) , as all actions at this stage have the purpose of serving the individual 's own needs or interests . For the stage two theorist , the world 's perspective is often seen as morally relative .

An example of self @-@ interest driven is when a child is asked by his parents to do a chore . The child asks , " what 's in it for me ? " The parents offer the child an incentive by giving a child an allowance to pay them for their chores . The child is motivated by self @-@ interest to do chores .

= = = Conventional = = =

The conventional level of moral reasoning is typical of adolescents and adults . To reason in a conventional way is to judge the morality of actions by comparing them to society 's views and expectations . The conventional level consists of the third and fourth stages of moral development . Conventional morality is characterized by an acceptance of society 's conventions concerning right and wrong . At this level an individual obeys rules and follows society 's norms even when there are no consequences for obedience or disobedience . Adherence to rules and conventions is somewhat rigid , however , and a rule 's appropriateness or fairness is seldom questioned .

In Stage three (good intentions as determined by social consensus) , the self enters society by conforming to social standards . Individuals are receptive to approval or disapproval from others as it reflects society 's views . They try to be a " good boy " or " good girl " to live up to these expectations , having learned that being regarded as good benefits the self . Stage three reasoning may judge

the morality of an action by evaluating its consequences in terms of a person 's relationships , which now begin to include things like respect , gratitude , and the " golden rule " . " I want to be liked and thought well of ; apparently , not being naughty makes people like me . " Conforming to the rules for one 's social role is not yet fully understood . The intentions of actors play a more significant role in reasoning at this stage ; one may feel more forgiving if one thinks that " they mean well " .

In Stage four (authority and social order obedience driven) , it is important to obey laws , dictums , and social conventions because of their importance in maintaining a functioning society . Moral reasoning in stage four is thus beyond the need for individual approval exhibited in stage three . A central ideal or ideals often prescribe what is right and wrong . If one person violates a law , perhaps everyone would ? thus there is an obligation and a duty to uphold laws and rules . When someone does violate a law , it is morally wrong ; culpability is thus a significant factor in this stage as it separates the bad domains from the good ones . Most active members of society remain at stage four , where morality is still predominantly dictated by an outside force .

=== Post @-@ Conventional ===

The post @-@ conventional level , also known as the principled level , is marked by a growing realization that individuals are separate entities from society , and that the individual ? s own perspective may take precedence over society ? s view ; individuals may disobey rules inconsistent with their own principles . Post @-@ conventional moralists live by their own ethical principles ? principles that typically include such basic human rights as life , liberty , and justice . People who exhibit post @-@ conventional morality view rules as useful but changeable mechanisms ? ideally rules can maintain the general social order and protect human rights . Rules are not absolute dictates that must be obeyed without question . Because post @-@ conventional individuals elevate their own moral evaluation of a situation over social conventions , their behavior , especially at stage six , can be confused with that of those at the pre @-@ conventional level .

Some theorists have speculated that many people may never reach this level of abstract moral reasoning .

In Stage five (social contract driven) , the world is viewed as holding different opinions , rights , and values . Such perspectives should be mutually respected as unique to each person or community . Laws are regarded as social contracts rather than rigid edicts . Those that do not promote the general welfare should be changed when necessary to meet ? the greatest good for the greatest number of people " . This is achieved through majority decision and inevitable compromise . Democratic government is ostensibly based on stage five reasoning .

In Stage six (universal ethical principles driven) , moral reasoning is based on abstract reasoning using universal ethical principles . Laws are valid only insofar as they are grounded in justice , and a commitment to justice carries with it an obligation to disobey unjust laws . Legal rights are unnecessary , as social contracts are not essential for deontic moral action . Decisions are not reached hypothetically in a conditional way but rather categorically in an absolute way , as in the philosophy of Immanuel Kant . This involves an individual imagining what they would do in another ? s shoes , if they believed what that other person imagines to be true . The resulting consensus is the action taken . In this way action is never a means but always an end in itself ; the individual acts because it is right , and not because it avoids punishment , is in their best interest , expected , legal , or previously agreed upon . Although Kohlberg insisted that stage six exists , he found it difficult to identify individuals who consistently operated at that level .

=== Further stages ===

In Kohlberg 's empirical studies of individuals throughout their life Kohlberg observed that some had apparently undergone moral stage regression . This could be resolved either by allowing for moral regression or by extending the theory . Kohlberg chose the latter , postulating the existence of sub @-@ stages in which the emerging stage has not yet been fully integrated into the personality . In particular Kohlberg noted a stage 4 ½ or 4 + , a transition from stage four to stage five , that shared

characteristics of both . In this stage the individual is disaffected with the arbitrary nature of law and order reasoning ; culpability is frequently turned from being defined by society to viewing society itself as culpable . This stage is often mistaken for the moral relativism of stage two , as the individual views those interests of society that conflict with their own as being relatively and morally wrong . Kohlberg noted that this was often observed in students entering college .

Kohlberg suggested that there may be a seventh stage ? Transcendental Morality , or Morality of Cosmic Orientation ? which linked religion with moral reasoning . Kohlberg 's difficulties in obtaining empirical evidence for even a sixth stage , however , led him to emphasize the speculative nature of his seventh stage .

== Theoretical assumptions (philosophy) ==

Kohlberg 's stages of moral development are based on the assumption that humans are inherently communicative , capable of reason , and possess a desire to understand others and the world around them . The stages of this model relate to the qualitative moral reasonings adopted by individuals , and so do not translate directly into praise or blame of any individual 's actions or character . Arguing that his theory measures moral reasoning and not particular moral conclusions , Kohlberg insists that the form and structure of moral arguments is independent of the content of those arguments , a position he calls " formalism " .

Kohlberg 's theory centers on the notion that justice is the essential characteristic of moral reasoning . Justice itself relies heavily upon the notion of sound reasoning based on principles . Despite being a justice @-@ centered theory of morality , Kohlberg considered it to be compatible with plausible formulations of deontology and eudaimonia .

Kohlberg 's theory understands values as a critical component of the right . Whatever the right is , for Kohlberg , it must be universally valid across societies (a position known as " moral universalism ") : there can be no relativism . Moreover , morals are not natural features of the world ; they are prescriptive . Nevertheless , moral judgments can be evaluated in logical terms of truth and falsity .

According to Kohlberg : someone progressing to a higher stage of moral reasoning cannot skip stages . For example , an individual cannot jump from being concerned mostly with peer judgments (stage three) to being a proponent of social contracts (stage five) . On encountering a moral dilemma and finding their current level of moral reasoning unsatisfactory , however , an individual will look to the next level . Realizing the limitations of the current stage of thinking is the driving force behind moral development , as each progressive stage is more adequate than the last . The process is therefore considered to be constructive , as it is initiated by the conscious construction of the individual , and is not in any meaningful sense a component of the individual 's innate dispositions , or a result of past inductions .

=== Formal elements ===

Progress through Kohlberg 's stages happens as a result of the individual 's increasing competence , both psychologically and in balancing conflicting social @-@ value claims . The process of resolving conflicting claims to reach an equilibrium is called " justice operation . " Kohlberg identifies two of these justice operations : " equality , " which involves an impartial regard for persons , and " reciprocity , " which means a regard for the role of personal merit . For Kohlberg , the most adequate result of both operations is " reversibility , " in which a moral or dutiful act within a particular situation is evaluated in terms of whether or not the act would be satisfactory even if particular persons were to switch roles within that situation (also known colloquially as " moral musical chairs ") .

Knowledge and learning contribute to moral development . Specifically important are the individual 's " view of persons " and their " social perspective level " , each of which becomes more complex and mature with each advancing stage . The " view of persons " can be understood as the individual 's grasp of the psychology of other persons ; it may be pictured as a spectrum , with stage one having no view of other persons at all , and stage six being entirely socio @-@ centric . Similarly , the social perspective level involves the understanding of the social universe , differing from the view

of persons in that it involves an appreciation of social norms .

= = Examples of applied moral dilemmas = =

Kohlberg established the Moral Judgement Interview in his original 1958 dissertation . During the roughly 45 @-@ minute tape recorded semi @-@ structured interview , the interviewer uses moral dilemmas to determine which stage of moral reasoning a person uses . The dilemmas are fictional short stories that describe situations in which a person has to make a moral decision . The participant is asked a systemic series of open @-@ ended questions , like what they think the right course of action is , as well as justifications as to why certain actions are right or wrong . The form and structure of these replies are scored and not the content ; over a set of multiple moral dilemmas an overall score is derived .
A dilemma that Kohlberg used in his original research was the druggist 's dilemma : Heinz Steals the Drug In Europe .

= = Criticisms = =

One criticism of Kohlberg 's theory is that it emphasizes justice to the exclusion of other values , and so may not adequately address the arguments of those who value other moral aspects of actions . Carol Gilligan has argued that Kohlberg 's theory is overly androcentric . Kohlberg 's theory was initially developed based on empirical research using only male participants ; Gilligan argued that it did not adequately describe the concerns of women . Kohlberg stated that women tend to get stuck at level 3 , focusing on details of how to maintain relationships and promote the welfare of family and friends . Men are likely to move on to the abstract principles , and thus have less concern with the particulars of who is involved . Consistent with this observation , Gilligan 's theory of moral development does not focus on the value of justice . She developed an alternative theory of moral reasoning based on the ethics of caring . Critics such as Christina Hoff Sommers , however , argued that Gilligan 's research is ill @-@ founded , and that no evidence exists to support her conclusion .
Kohlberg 's stages are not culturally neutral , as demonstrated by its application to a number of different cultures . Although they progress through the stages in the same order , individuals in different cultures seem to do so at different rates . Kohlberg has responded by saying that although different cultures do indeed inculcate different beliefs , his stages correspond to underlying modes of reasoning , rather than to those beliefs .
Another criticism of Kohlberg ? s theory is that people frequently demonstrate significant inconsistency in their moral judgements . This often occurs in moral dilemmas involving drinking and driving and business situations where participants have been shown to reason at a subpar stage , typically using more self @-@ interest driven reasoning (i.e. , stage two) than authority and social order obedience driven reasoning (i.e. , stage four) . Kohlberg ? s theory is generally considered to be incompatible with inconsistencies in moral reasoning . Carpendale has argued that Kohlberg ? s theory should be modified to focus on the view that the process of moral reasoning involves integrating varying perspectives of a moral dilemma rather than simply fixating on applying rules . This view would allow for inconsistency in moral reasoning since individuals may be hampered by their inability to consider different perspectives . Krebs and Denton have also attempted to modify Kohlberg ? s theory to account for a multitude of conflicting findings , but eventually concluded that the theory is not equipped to take into consideration how most individuals make moral decisions in their everyday lives .
Other psychologists have questioned the assumption that moral action is primarily a result of formal reasoning . Social intuitionists such as Jonathan Haidt , for example , argue that individuals often make moral judgments without weighing concerns such as fairness , law , human rights , or abstract ethical values . Thus the arguments analyzed by Kohlberg and other rationalist psychologists could be considered post hoc rationalizations of intuitive decisions ; moral reasoning may be less relevant to moral action than Kohlberg 's theory suggests .

= = Continued relevance = =

Kohlberg 's body of work on the stages of moral development has been utilized by others working in the field . One example is the Defining Issues Test (DIT) created in 1979 by James Rest , originally as a pencil @-@ and @-@ paper alternative to the Moral Judgement Interview . Heavily influenced by the six @-@ stage model , it made efforts to improve the validity criteria by using a quantitative test , the Likert scale , to rate moral dilemmas similar to Kohlberg 's . It also used a large body of Kohlbergian theory such as the idea of " post @-@ conventional thinking " . In 1999 the DIT was revised as the DIT @-@ 2 ; the test continues to be used in many areas where moral testing is required , such as divinity , politics , and medicine .