

Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development

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***Abstract:**Lawrence Kohlberg, a psychologist belonging to the University of Harvard is known for putting forward a theory of the development of moral judgement in the individual, right from the years of early childhood. He has based his theory of moral development on the findings of his studies conducted on hundreds of children from different cultures. Morality is the conformity to the moral code of social group. It is the internalization of a set of values, virtues, and ideas sanctioned by the society which becomes an integral part of the individual self through the process of development. It is considered a sum total of an individual's way of behaving which is judged in terms of ethical rightness or wrongness. The studies will emphasis the various importance of Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of Moral development.*

***Keywords:** Development, Internalization Judgement, Kohlberg, Moral, Morality, Values.*

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Introduction

He differs from the popular view that children imbibe the sense and methods of moral judgement from their parents and elders by way of learning. According to him as soon as we talk with children about morality, we find that they have many ways of making judgements which are not internalized from the outside, and which do not come in any direct and obvious way from parents, teachers and even peers, (Kohlberg, 1968). Going further he clarified that internal or cognitive processes like thinking and reasoning also play a major role in one's moral development, i.e. the way children make moral judgement depends on their level of intellectual development as well as on their upbringing and learning experiences.

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Objectives of the Study

1. The study will emphasise the various importance of Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of Moral development.
2. To highlight various ways to create such an awareness of Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of Moral development.
3. The study will suggest the meaning, concept of Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of Moral development.
4. The study will suggest the stage of Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of Moral development.
5. The study will conduct how we can promote Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of Moral development.

Meaning & Concept of Morality

The word moral comes from the Latin word 'Mors', which means custom or practice or a way of accomplishing things. Therefore it has come to mean 'belonging to manners and conduct of men' or 'pertaining to right and wrong, good in conduct'. Morality is the conformity to the moral code of social group. It is the internalization of a set of values, virtues, and ideas sanctioned by the society which becomes an integral part of the individual self through the process of development. It is considered a sum total of an individual's way of behaving which is judged in terms of ethical rightness or wrongness.

The term 'Morality' stands for following the moral code of society or conformity in behaviour to the manners, values and customs of the social group. It also includes a sense of right or wrong. Morality consists of ideals or rules that govern human conduct. Morality has a social reference. Moral standards vary from group to group depending upon what has been accepted by the group as the socially approved behaviour. True morality comes from within the individual. It is internal in nature and not imposed by external authority.

Hence the ability to make moral judgement plays an important facet of the total development of the child. Moral judgement involves the cognitive capacity and insight to see the

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relationship between the abstract principle and concrete cases and judge the situations as right or wrong, keeping in view the knowledge of moral standards.

The theory which most directly inspired the research on moral judgement has been that of Swiss psychologist, Jean Piaget (1928, 1932) who endeavoured to interpret the child's concept of moral rules. He attempted to test children's moral judgement towards intentional and unintentional wrong-doing and described six types of moral thoughts which appeared in children of different age groups. More recently, studies on moral judgement have been conducted by Kohlberg (1968), in which he asked the children to judge the morality of conduct as described in the stories.

Different Educational Commissions and committees in our country have expressed their deep concern over the declining values in human activities and emphasized on providing value oriented education. The National Policy on Education-1986 has categorically stated "The growing concern over erosion of essential values has brought to focus the need for readjustment in the curriculum in order to make education a forceful tool for the cultivation of moral and social values". The Education Commission of 1964-66 has noted, 'A serious defect in the school curriculum is the absence of provision for education in social, moral and spiritual values. In the life of the majority of Indians, religion is a great motivating force and is intimately bound up with the formation of character and inculcation of ethical values. A national system of education related to life needs and aspirations of the people cannot afford to ignore this purposeful force'. Thus concerns are being expressed to inculcate right moral values in our present generation.

Meaning of Moral Development

Hemming in his book, 'The Development of Children's Moral Values' writes, 'Moral development is the process in which the child acquires the values esteemed by his community, acquires a sense of right and wrong in terms of these values, learns to regulate his personal desires and compulsions so that, when a situational conflict arises, he does, what he ought to do rather than what he wants to do. Moral development is the process by which a community seeks to transfer the egocentricity of the baby into the social behaviour of the mature adult.'

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Moral development includes moral behaviour and moral concepts:

Moral behaviour: Moral behaviour means behaviour in conformity with the moral code of the social group. The term 'Moral' comes from the Latin word 'mores' meaning manners, customs and folkways. Moral behaviour not only conforms to social standards but also it is carried out voluntarily. It is always accompanied by a feeling of responsibility for one's acts. It involves giving primary consideration to the welfare of the group and considering personal gain or desires as having secondary importance.

Moral concepts: Moral concepts are the rules of behaviour to which the members of a culture become accustomed and which determine the expected behaviour patterns of all group members.

Meaning of Moral Judgment

Moral judgments are evaluations or opinions formed as to whether some action or inaction, intention, motive, character trait, or a person as a whole is (more or less) good or bad as measured against some standard of Good. The moral judgments of actions (or inaction) are usually the primary focus of any discussion of Moral Judgments in particular and Ethical analysis in general. This is because the judgments of intentions, character traits, and persons are generally based on the judgment of actions that the intention, motive, character trait, or person might potentially do or not do.

What distinguishes moral judgments from non moral judgments is the context of the statement. Philosophy, and particularly Ethics, differs from the sciences in one very important way. All of the sciences, both 'hard' and 'Soft', deal with descriptions of Reality. They purport to describe in varying levels of detail, what **is** about Reality. Ethics, on the other hand, is that branch of Philosophy that describes what one ought. All of the various philosophers, in all of their various works on Ethics, are detailing what you 'Should' do or how things 'Should' be, not what is. In answer to the questions 'What should I do?' or 'What is the 'right' thing to do?', ethics answers 'You should do what you 'ought' to' So moral judgments are judgments about what one 'ought' to do (or not do), or have done (or not done).

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Types of Moral Judgement

We can group moral judgments into two broad classes. There are "before-the-fact" moral judgments, and there are 'after-the-fact' moral judgments. Before-the-fact judgments are those made before the action (or inaction) takes place. They are made based on the best information available at the time as to what the moral landscape holds and what its future shape will be. These are judgments about what you "ought to do (or not do) and whether what you are planning to do (or not do) is Good or Bad. After-the-fact moral judgments are made after the action (or inaction) has taken place, and are based on 20/20 hindsight view of the actual consequences. These are judgments about what you 'ought to have done (or not done)', and whether your actual actions were Good or Bad.

A second major distinction of moral judgments is that they can only be made of an agent with the freedom or will to choose. Moral judgments are judgments of certain choices, or potential choices, where the one who chooses is aware that there is a choice, and has the capability to choose. A person who cannot do other than what was done, is not subject to moral judgment. But if a person has the freedom to choose alternatives, then that person's intentional, or unintentional actions or inaction can be subject to moral judgments. This argument is the ethical basis of the 'Insanity' defence. The insanity defence argues that the accused cannot be considered guilty because the accused was unable to make a choice of an alternate behaviour. The behaviour exhibited was 'unavoidable'. This line of reasoning is never too successful when it is applied to the average human, with an average degree of intelligence. But it is the reason we do not make moral judgments about what a falling tree does on its way down. If the tree happens to kill someone, we don't judge that the tree 'ought not to have done that' because the tree had no other alternative.

The third important distinction is knowledge. In order to be able to make a choice, we have to be aware that there are alternatives. If our knowledge about our current situation is thin, or our knowledge about how reality behaves is thin, then we might come to the conclusion that there are no better alternatives. We might make a choice that we believe is the correct one, but because our knowledge is thin, we overlook a better one. In such a case, we could make an after-the-fact judgment about what we ought to have done, if we had had better information, but any before-the-

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fact moral judgment we might make about what we did, has to be based on the knowledge available to us at that time.

Theories of Moral Development

Moral development is one of the most significant aspects of the personality development. It is a major task of society and education. Moral development proceeds along with social development. A person whose social development has been disturbed due to some, or the other reason, a person who is socially maladjusted develops immoral behaviour.

Immoral behaviour is that behaviour which fails to conform to social expectations. Such behaviour arises not due to ignorance of social aspects, but due to intentional disapproval of social standards or lack of feelings of obligation to conform. Similarly a person who has been deprived of opportunity to learn social standards or lack of feelings of obligation to conform. Similarly a person who has been deprived of the opportunity to learn social behaviour develops unmoral or non-moral behaviour. Unmoral or non-moral behaviour arises due to ignorance of what the social group expects rather than intentional violation of the group's standards.

Stages of Moral Development

For studying the process of moral development in human beings, Kohlberg first defined moral development as the development of an individual's sense of justice. For estimating one's sense of justice he concentrated on one's views on morality with the help of a test of moral judgement consisting of a set of moral dilemmas. For instance, should a man who cannot afford the medicine his dying wife needs, steal it? Should a doctor mercy-kill a fatally ill person suffering terrible pain? Is it better to save the life of one important person or a lot of unimportant persons? With the help of the responses he got from his subjects he came to the conclusion that like the Piagetian stages of cognitive development, there also exist universal stages in the development of moral values, and the movement from one stage to another depends on cognitive abilities rather than the simple acquisition of moral values of one's parents, elders and peers. He then identified three levels of moral development, each containing two stages as shown in the following table:

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Table: Kohlberg's Six Stages of Moral Development

Level I	Pre-moral (Age 4 to 10 years)
Stage 1 :	The stage of obedience for avoiding punishment
Stage 2 :	The stage of conforming to obtain rewards and favours in return
Level II	Conventional morality (Age 10 to 13 years)
Stage 3 :	The stage of maintaining mutual relations and approval of others
Stage 4 :	The stage of obedience for avoiding censure by higher authority or social systems
Level III	Self accepted moral principles (Age 13 or not until middle or later adulthood or never)
Stage 5:	Stage of conforming to the democratically accepted law and mores of community welfare
Stage 6:	Stage of conforming to the universal ethical principles and the call of one's conscience

Let us now briefly discuss these levels and stages of morality.

Pre-moral level (4 to 10 years). The child begins to make judgements about what is right or wrong, good or bad. However, the standards by which he measures the morality are those of others. He is persuaded to take such judgement either to avoid punishment or to earn rewards. Development of morality at this level usually follows the following two stages:

Stage 1: In the beginning, the child's morality is controlled by the fear of punishment. He tries to obey his parents and elders purely to avoid reproof and punishment.

Stage 2; In the second stage of the pre-moral level, children's moral judgement is based on self-interest and considerations of what others can do for them in return. Here they value a thing because it has some practical utility for them. They obey the orders of their parents and elders and abide by some rules and regulations, because it serves their interests.

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Conventional morality level (10 to 13 years). At this stage also, children's moral Judgement is controlled by the likes and dislikes of others-the conventions, rules and regulations and the law and order system maintained within society. Stealing or mercy-killing would thus be judged wrong because it is considered wrong by society at large and by the legal system. In this way, the conventional level of morality may be regarded as the level where the child identifies with authority. It is characterized by the following two stages:

Stage 3: In the early years of the second level of moral development, the child's moral judgement is based on the desire to obtain approval of others and avoid being disliked by being declared a good boy or a good girl. For this purpose he begins to judge the intentions and likes or dislikes of others and acts accordingly.

Stage 4: In the later years of the conventional morality level, children's moral judgements are governed by conventions as well as the laws and mores of the social system. The standards of others are now so established that it becomes a convention to follow them. The children now follow the rules and regulations of society and take decisions about things being right or wrong with a view to avoiding censure by the elders, authorities or the social system.

Self-accepted moral principles level (Age 13 or during late adulthood): This marks the highest level of attainment of true morality as the controlling force for making moral judgements now rests with the individual himself. He does not value a thing or conform to an idea merely because of consideration of the views of others, conventions or the law and order system of society but because it fits into the framework of his self-accepted moral principles.

This level is also characterized by two separate stages:

Stage 5: At this stage the individual's moral judgements are internalized in such a form that he responds positively to authority only if he agrees with the principles upon which the demands of authority are based. The individual at this stage begins to think in rational terms, valuing the rights of human beings and the welfare of society. For example, at this stage in deference to the rights of the human being, the decision about mercy-killing may be left to the individual who is suffering, and if so needed, the concerned laws may be amended for the welfare of society at large.

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Stage 6: At this stage, the controlling forces for making moral judgements are highly internalized. The decisions of the individual are now based upon his conscience and the belief in universal principles of respect, justice and equality. He does what he, as an individual thinks right regardless of legal restrictions or the opinion of others. Thus, at this stage people act according to the inner voice of their conscience and lead a life that they can without self-condemnation or feeling of guilt or shame.

Conclusion

From the above discussion of the stages of moral development, it is clear that although children begin to think about morality in terms of justice or right and wrong at a very early age, yet they have to wait until adolescence or adulthood for the dawning of the stage of true morality. Also, it is not essential that all people pass through the third level of moral development. Most adults are not able to cross the second level and few can reach stage 5, and among these there are very few who, being intellectually quite sound, can think rationally and base their moral judgement purely on the dictates of their conscience at the risk of life and property.

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