

1.2 Moral Development and Moral Reasoning

A child's adherence to moral standards is essentially based on a self-absorbed avoidance of pain.

Kohlberg:

Level 1: *Preconventional Stages*

stage 1: punishment and obedience orientation

The physical consequences of an act wholly determine the goodness or badness of that act.

stage 2: *instrument and relativity orientation*

Right actions are those that serve as instruments for satisfying the child's own needs.

Level 2: Conventional Stages

stage 3: *interpersonal concordance orientation*

Good behavior is living to the expectations of those for whom one feels loyalty, affection, and trust.

stage 4: *law and order orientation*

Right or wrong is determined by loyalty to one's own larger nation or surrounding society.

Level 3: Postconventional, Autonomous or Principled Stages

stage 5: *social contract orientation*

Need for reaching consensus by agreement, contract, or due process.

stage 6: *universal ethical principles orientation*

Right action is defined in terms of moral principles chosen because of their logical comprehensiveness, their universality, and their consistency.

Kohlberg found that many people remained stuck at one of the early stages throughout their lives.

Carol Gilligan suggests that although Kohlberg's theory correctly identifies the stages through which men pass as they develop, it fails to adequately trace out the pattern of development among women.

It is important to note that both Kohlberg and Gilligan agree that there are stages of growth in our moral development. Both also agree that moral development moves from a pre-conventional stage focused on the self, through a conventional stage in which we uncritically accept the conventional moral standards of the groups to which we belong, and on to a mature stage in which we learn to critically and reflectively examine the adequacy of the conventional moral standards we earlier accepted and to fashion more adequate standards of our own, both standards of caring for particular persons, as well as standards of impartiality toward all persons.

This study of ethics is the process of developing one's ability to deal with moral issues, a process that should enable the individual to acquire the more reflective understanding of "right" and "wrong" that characterize the later post conventional stages of moral development.

Moral Reasoning

Moral reasoning refers to the reasoning process by which human behaviors, institutions, or policies are judged to be in accordance with or in violation of moral standards.

Analyzing moral reasoning

First and primarily, moral reasoning must be *logical*.

Second, the factual evidence cited in support of a person's judgment must be *accurate*, it must be *relevant*, it must be *complete*.

Third, the moral standards involved in a person's moral reasoning must be *consistent*.

When inconsistencies between one's moral standards are uncovered, one (or both) of the standards must be modified.

Consistency also refers to the requirement that one must be willing to except the consequences of applying one's moral standards consistently to all persons in similar circumstances.

1.4 Moral Responsibility And Blame

A judgment about a person's moral responsibility is a judgment about the extent to which the person deserves blame or punishment.

A person is morally responsible only for those acts and their foreseen injurious effects (1) which the person knowingly and freely performed or brought about and which it is morally wrong for the person to perform or bring about, or (2) which the person knowingly and freely failed to perform or prevent and which it was morally wrong for the person to fail to perform or prevent.

There is wide agreement that two conditions completely eliminate a person's moral responsibility for causing a wrongful injury: (1) ignorance and (2) inability.

Since people cannot control matters of which they are ignorant, they cannot have any moral obligations with respect to such matters, and their moral responsibility for such matters is consequently nonexistent. Negligently or deliberately created ignorance is an exception to this principle because such ignorance can be controlled.

In determining one's moral responsibility for wrongful act, therefore, one must judge one's uncertainties, the pressures to which one is subjected, and the extent of one's involvement, and weigh these against the seriousness of the wrong. Obviously such judgments are often extremely difficult and tragically painful to make.

Passively allowing something to happen is morally no different from actively causing it to happen.

Corporate responsibility

Any individual who knowingly and freely joins his actions together with those of others, intending thereby to bring about a certain corporate act, will be morally responsible for that act.

Subordinates responsibility

A superior can put significant economic pressures on an employee and such pressures can mitigate the employee's responsibility but they do not totally eliminate it.