

Describe and discuss cognitive explanations of the development of moral reasoning

The field of moral development is a vast subject. There are theories accessible in this field with a variety of approaches taken to practise experiments, with similar or unexpectedly new outcomes. The approach we will be discussing throughout this essay is that of cognitive development and how it co insides with that of moral reasoning. Cognitive development is a term used to explain how a child gains the knowledge of basic human abilities, such as problem solving, reasoning, memory and so on. One of the theorists that have made a huge impact on the science of psychology is Jean Piaget; the well-known, reputable psychologist was born in Neuchatel, Switzerland 1896. Piaget began his educational journey of science, from the age of 11 years old, then going on to achieve his PhD for the natural sciences when graduating from the university of Neuchatel. Somewhere throughout this journey, his passion for the brain's capabilities began to mold his career, thus resulting in his position of Director located at the Jean-Jacques Rousseau Institute, Geneva, then going on to create the International Centre for Genetic Epistemology. Before his passing, the theories of which Piaget had produced, still currently paves the way for psychologists to better understand the workings of the mind and how to use experimentally activities to achieve relative data to improve the lively hood of all individuals internationally. An individual who took interest in Piaget's theory was that of Lawrence Kohlberg; the American psychologist born in Bronxville, New York 1927. From a career as a sailor in the earlier years of his life, to obtaining a bachelor's degree in just one years, Kohlberg's clear ability to striving in many areas of life was clear. This was no different to the field of psychology, after achieving his doctorate, as well as teaching at Yale and Harvard University, Kohlberg began to pay his attention to moral development; recognising Piaget's theory as something he agreed with, he made the decision to elaborate on the field of interest, attempting to gain further detailed information, resulting in his finding of moral development. Kohlberg's take on the workings of Piaget was found to be interesting to many; one psychologist established they could develop this theory from a different standpoint. Carol Gilligan, also an American psychologist, born in New York, United States 1936; is best known for her journey through education, researching girls and women and their processes of moral development.

Jean Piaget believed he could create a guideline of stages in which children developed abilities in certain aspects of life, he suggested that the intellectual capabilities of children change as they grow older. In the 1920s, he observed that children would give wrong answers to logical questions that seemed to have a simply correct answer; thus, prompting the interest to investigate the matter further by creating a set of questions. Piaget suggested that social interaction was the primary impact to any child's informative development; the use of communication or interact with peers was crucial, but later he would come to realise, after using controlled and naturalistic observations of his own 3 children, that a child's independent activities and physical observations were more beneficial than the use of language. (Dorling Kindersley Limited, 2011, pp. 264–269). Piaget's theory of cognitive development included 4 key stages of progression, with an age range in which an average child would achieve the competence; stage one being the 'Sensorimotor' stage, from birth to 18-24 months. Suggesting during these months, the babies would make use of their senses to explore and understand their environmental surroundings; the recorded outcome of Piaget's finding was that the babies would develop certain abilities, such as, object permanence, self-recognition, also representational play. Stage two, the 'Pre-operational' stage; was for the ages between 2 to 7 years old. The young children begin too symbolically interpret the world around them, taking their surroundings how they see it, not for how it may be; not capable of logical thinking, as well as still mentally egocentric. Stage three, the 'Concrete operational' stage, for 7- to 11-year-old children;

considered to be the vital turning point for an individual's development process. During this stage in Piaget's theory, a young child's logical thinking has taken shape, being considered in all aspects of life; they start to think about other people's feelings and thought process, becoming less egocentric, as well as beginning to grasp the concept of conversation. Lastly, stage four, the 'Formal operational' stage; age 12 and above. During this stage, it is suggested that the individual now has most abilities to make informed decisions and can comprehend what is expected of them, problem solving, understanding of abstract concepts, as well as logical and scientific reasoning. Each stage has a clear expectation of what a child can achieve, thus, creating a guide in which to observe for any underlying struggles or overachieving, intelligent individuals. (McLeod, 2020) Since the founding of Piaget's cognitive development theory, the contributions it has made to the field of psychology has been endless; from fellow psychologist's individual inputs to the theory or enhancing other ideas, helping people to understand the concept from a different perspective. The support in which Piaget has received for his work is shown from many individuals over decades, intensifying how important, and how famous his finding has been to further understanding the process of mind; that society still use his theory today, to understand the process of a child's mind, to benefit their progression in life. The conditions to which the theory was performed solidifies the findings due to the realism of the experiment; he would observe behaviours and answers that a child would give under everyday life circumstance, guaranteeing the most accurate results. Another strength to Piaget's theory; he outlined the thought processes a child will progress through and how they would achieve each stage, using object permanence to increase memory capabilities, observing the feelings of others, in turn, thus decreasing a child's egocentric thoughts. Arguably, the most important component in relation to Piaget's theory is that it can be used through educational facilities to discover any underlying disorders a child may possess, for example, it can determine if autism is a factor. Like all theories, even successful, there are flaws that can ultimately affect the reliability of the results; the failure to consider social influence may have an impact on if the results are accurate. Society has a large role to play in the cognitive development of brain which Piaget failed to recognise. (Alahmad, 2020).

An American psychologist who recognised the importance of social interaction was that of Lawrence Kohlberg, he agreed with Piaget's theory of development stages but wanted to expand the theory in relation to moral development. Kohlberg's theory consists of 3 levels, each split into two stages, level one being 'Pre-conventional morality' with an 'Obedience and punishment orientation' stage, also an 'Individualism and exchange' stage. Level two being 'Conventional morality' with a 'Good interpersonal relationships' stage, also a 'Maintaining the social order' stage. Lastly, level three being the 'Postconventional morality' with a 'Social contract and individual rights' stage and a 'Universal Principles' stage; he suggested that a child will go through each stage in an order that cannot be changed. (Gibbs, 2014) Through reviewing the data collected from the children after being exposed to a series of moral situations, Kohlberg came to realise it would be the reasoning for the answers that would be of more use than the answer itself. As Kohlberg was interviewing children, he used the technique of multiple answers to better understand how they would explain why they have chosen the options they did; if two children chose the same answer, it was the reasoning behind the choice that differed the stages at which each child had reached on the scale in place. One of the most famous moral stories Kohlberg presented to the subjects, was that of a man called Heinz. This story explains of a moral dilemma between the lawfully right thing to do in comparison to the ethically right act; after communicating the story to the children, he went on to ask a series of questions; for example, 'should Heinz steal the drug?' and 'What if the person dying was a stranger, would it make any difference?'. The answers from the children outlined the differences in which everyone thinks regarding moral values, as they grow older. His theory constructed of 72 children aged 10 to

16 years old, 58 of which had multiple interviews every 3 years following. All interviews consisted of 2 hours to ensure maximum results, involving up to 10 moral dilemmas; as they were of different ages, as well as accounting for the interviews they received following to the first, it was clear they were developing morally as they grew older, evolving through the stages suggested by Kohlberg. (McLeod, 2013). The use of Kohlberg's moral development theory has been a major contribution to the field of psychology, as it has been used throughout the educational system to accelerate the mind of children and young adults to the world of humanity, outlining the importance of moral behaviour. A critical error that Kohlberg failed to anticipate was, during the selection of the young children to include in his research; he only chose that of young boys; limiting the accuracy of the data collected.

The obvious critic of Kohlberg's moral development theory was recognised by another American psychologist Carol Gilligan. She felt as though the concept of which Kohlberg had identified was correct but needed to further the research, from the perspective of girls and women. Gilligan suggested that girls and women visibly show more care and passion in relation to moral decision making than that of boys; women will tend to consider other people's feelings and the outcome of the situation before making any decisions that involve any other individuals. Her beliefs remain that the theory produced by Kohlberg is correct, girls, like boys, will go through the same stages of moral development; yet Gilligan used her research in a way to collect data in a more detailed manner. Gilligan's 'Stages of the Ethic of Care' also consists of the three stages, each with different expectations tailored to that of women. Stage one is where Gilligan believed that women are in their selfish frame of mind, only concerned about their wants and needs as an individual, only focused on the ability to uplift their own elements. Stage two, being the change of evaluation, that the needs of the people around you are that of significant importance, thus helping to step into the selflessness aspect of development. Lastly, stage three, the responsibility of her own actions comes to realisation; importance of relationships with others is magnified, thus rendering the need to protect other people feelings as an aspect that always needs to be considered. (Vinney, 2021) This being the highest stage a woman can reach in the moral development theory, is it unclear if it is stated that of males can accomplish the same attributes. Gilligan's celebrated theory has made major contributions to psychology and society, as it has suggested, with research, the dominance of attributes that femininity can bring; the importance of women and what we stand for mentally and physically. The strengths and weaknesses to all theories can be brought to light by all that evaluate the concept; Gilligan's was no different, 'It is a powerful and persuasive theory that derives a female model of moral development from the moral reasoning of primarily white, middle-class women in the United States... However, as Black and Third World feminist researchers have emphasized, gender is a construct shaped by the experience of race, class, culture, caste and consciousness.' (Hooks, 1987). Other professionals in the field have stressed that although the concept of the theory was a variable theory itself, there are critics that the theory does not emphasize the way society is viewed in this current age.

In conclusion, the cognitive explanation of that of moral reasoning, is a contrast field; in which there is no definitive definition or explanation. It is but a string of conceptual theories, some development from the previous idea that has been published, that in a different way can be researched further to strengthen the data retrieved; providing valuable knowledge to society. The data achieved over the decades, provided by Piaget, Kohlberg and Gilligan, has been beneficial to society and educational systems that has changed the way we perceive our thoughts and actions. All may have some critics, nevertheless, still contributing to the evaluation of psychological findings. Before completing this essay, my knowledge on the vast subject was limited; thus, after completion, the clear contributions from all the discussed theorists have been informative and mind altering.

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