

Describe and discuss cognitive explanations of the development of moral reasoning.

In this assignment, I will be exploring and discussing the cognitive explanations and development of moral reasoning. It is important to review the supporting arguments for and against this topic, as it is still an important field of study in today's era; Development is described as a sequence of changes over the full lifespan of an individual. Furthermore, moral reasoning can be defined as active thinking that decides what we consider right or wrong, usually influenced by societal standards or by the people around us and what is expected of us by higher authority. Specifically, in this writing, we will be looking at how moral reasoning, and the development of cognition link together and the different views. The key theorists I will be working among in this area of study, to explore my research and findings will focus on Piaget, Kohlberg, and Gilligan.

Many theories developed by these theorists remain somewhat intact today. However, have been changed or developed further in some way. Foremost, I will first be looking into Piaget. Piaget is one of the earliest remembered theorists whose structure is still used today. Piaget believed; children construct their mental model of how they perceive the world influenced by their primary caregiver. Piaget's theory consists of 4 stages: sensorimotor (birth-age 2), children at this stage are considered to reason by object permanence; logic is not yet involved in their reasoning. Rather, they develop through their senses, i.e., touch, smell, sight, sound, and taste (Mcleod, 2007). They interact with objects in their nearness for around 8 months and understand object permanence. Preoperational (2-7 years old) children at this stage reason through symbolic thought, and how the world is perceived and not what it is. Children at this stage are still unable to divide objects into subcategories, all objects of a similar shape are viewed as one of the same items, and the children in this age range show animism. Decisions at this age prove self-centered and egocentric. children after this stage is believed to enter autonomous thinking. Concrete operational is the stage where the logic starts to develop (7-11 years old). At this age, abstract thinking is still difficult. However, children start to understand that they are separate from other beings and develop their sense of understanding. This stage is the turn where the basic stages of logical thinking and conservation first develop. The final stage – is formal operational (ages 12 and above) where they start to think systematically, deal with hypothetical problems and develop scientific reasoning. Each stage varies by culture, but the principles are universal. (Mcleod, 2007). Piaget believed that children are born with an innate mental structure, which evolves through cognitive development. He introduced a term, that he called a schema; "a cohesive, repeatable action sequence possessing component actions that are tightly interconnected and governed by a core meaning." He described this as a fundamental need for intelligent behaviour, namely, to organise knowledge somewhere. Another theorist indicated that the schema can be thought of as 'index cards' inside the cortex, each one sending receptors from a reaction to incoming stimuli Wadsworth (2004).

Moral stages and moralization.

Other theorists had their thoughts on the topic of cognitive development and moral reasoning, including Jean Kohlberg. Kohlberg wanted to do more research to answer his queries about the topic. He varied from Piaget for the reason that Kohlberg's theory of moral development consisted

of three major developmental stages that were subdivided into 6 sub-stages because Kohlberg believed that these stages could go a level deeper. As such, Kohlberg believed that “since moral reasoning clearly is reasoning, advanced moral reasoning depends upon advanced logical reasoning. There is a parallelism between an individual’s logical stage and his moral stage.” The 3 major stages can be defined as the intuitive, the concrete operational, and the formal operational. Each major developmental stage has 2 subdivided steps. The intuitive level is also known as; the pre-conventional moral level. Children at stage 1 of this level are believed to have heteronomous morality, children avoid taking actions that may lead to punishment for their own sake. From a social perspective, children at this stage do not yet reach a full understanding of what is required of them by society. children usually believe these rules given by society are deemed external to the self and are unable to understand their own individuality from a primary caregiver. At stage 2 of this level, children develop individualism, they realise that others have separate interests from them, and they are not all the same. Reasons people at this stage follow rules, usually because it is someone’s immediate interest. Level 2 is the conventional stage, the term “conventional” means conforming to and upholding the rules and expectations, and conventions of society or authority just because they are society’s rules – as found in *Moral Development And Behavior: Theory, Research, and Social Issues* by Thomas Lickona. Chapter 2, pages 32, 33. When stage 1 of this level is reached, children tend to have the mentality of trying to do and be good, it is usually important at this stage to keep mutual relationships by caring for others in order to “be a good person” by conforming to stereotypical behaviour’s. development of an individual’s conscience happens at stage 2, Individuals at this part of the conventional stage have accepted what is expected of them, especially what is required of them by authority. They believe to give back to society to avoid a breakdown in the “system.” Level 3 is what is considered a post-conventional person, this idea is also divided into 2 stages. Stage 1 being that this person will have his own opinions and is aware that people have separate morals; beliefs they think should be upheld regardless of the majority opinion. However, such rules of the law are still abided by the individual because they hold certain principles and have an obligation to the law because of social contracts; what he deems to be right. However, this individual does not go out of his way to break societal rules – a contractual commitment. The second stage can be defined by certain rules that only remain upheld because they rest on such principles, if a rule doesn’t sit right with one’s values, one will usually act on their own universal moral principles and beliefs. People at this stage usually make rational decisions.

An additional theorist, Carol Gilligan was an assistant who worked alongside Kohlberg. She developed her own theory and critiqued these previous theories because they were based on predominantly male subjects, she claimed the experiments to be biased because women weren’t studied for the way their cognition develops and how it could differentiate. Gilligan then delved into her own thoughts based on previous experiments and came to her own conclusion that included gender differences. Gilligan then based her own theory on the ethics of care: the relation of reason and love; the very issue that was in moral development in the 18th century. Kakkori, Leena & Huttunen, Rauno. (2010). *The Gilligan-Kohlberg Controversy and Its Philosophico-Historical Roots*. She argued that women make their decisions based on relationships and interconnection and men make decisions based on logic, separate from emotions - Gilligan believed that, in her first phase, women transition through stages from once caring for themselves to responsibility for others. In her second phase, she believed, that inequality is developed. Women balance caring for themselves and caring for others simultaneously. Her third phase consisted of being able to understand that there are interconnections in relationships. Care is self-chosen and is their main priority. Goodness is equated to self-sacrifice, an example of this is when a woman becomes a mother or wife. A critique

of Gilligan's theory was found to be quite broad and unrealistic because if society's expectations of men and women were different, so would the experiment taken – found from an online source. Larrabee, M.J. also states in her edition of *An Ethic of Care: Feminist and Interdisciplinary Perspectives* that “sex differences were not innate or learned but developed.”

To conclude, Gilligan appeared to be one of Kohlberg's most prominent critiques. As Gilligan based her theory on “connectedness” emphasizing the interconnection between relationships with others, while Kohlberg based his theory on justice. However, other studies show both genders are able to use both moral orientations. All 3 theorist studies still remain relevant to each other, each taking a different approach. Piaget's theory revolved around a contractual development model while Kohlberg described his theory as a process of unraveling principles through a lifespan - Lordanis Kavathatzopoulos (1991) Kohlberg and Piaget: differences and similarities, *Journal of Moral Education*, 20:1, 47-54, DOI: 10.1080/0305724910200104 . In contrast to Kohlberg's theory, according to Gilligan, it was deemed to be biased but Gilligan's theory is still criticized due to societal expectations, However, Kohlberg's theory still remains the most relevant today.

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