Development Part III

Moral Reasoning
Outline

- Kohlberg’s theory of moral development
- Criticisms of Kohlberg’s theory
- Recent contributions of social psychology and neuroscience to understanding moral judgment
- Baby morality
Moral reasoning

• **Prescriptive question**: what is right and wrong?
  • Philosophy/Ethics

• **Descriptive question**: what happens during moral reasoning?
  • Psychology
How do we go from being little s#*!s to moral adults?
Lawrence Kohlberg

- Had people solve moral dilemmas
- Not so interested in the particular decisions people reached
- Interested the reasoning they used to reach their decisions
Heinz Dilemma

In Europe a woman was near death from cancer. One drug might save her, a form of radium that a pharmacist in the same town had recently discovered. The pharmacist was charging $2000, ten times what it cost him to make.

The sick woman's husband, Heinz, went to everyone he knew to borrow the money, but he could only get together about half what it cost. He told the pharmacist that his wife was dying and asked him to sell it cheaper and let him pay him later. But the pharmacist said "No."

The husband got desperate and broke into the man's store to steal the drug for his wife.

Should the husband have done that? A. Yes  B. No

Why or why not?
Kohlberg’s Three levels of Moral Development

• Preconventional
• Conventional
• Postconventional
Level I: Pre-conventional

Actions are good if they lead to reward; Actions are bad if they result in punishment or loss for the self

Who: Most children under nine, some teens, many adult criminals

Examples

- "If he lets his wife die, he’ll get in trouble."
- "It won't bother him much to serve a little jail time if he still has his wife when he gets out."
- "He shouldn't steal it. He'll be caught and sent to jail."
Level II: Conventional

Good actions improve relationships or society
Bad actions harm relationships or society

Who: Most teens and adults

Examples
- "Heinz should steal the drug. You can't blame him for doing something out of love for his wife; you'd blame him if he didn't love his wife enough to save her."
- "It's always wrong to steal. What if everyone stole? Then there would be no law."
Level III: Post-conventional

Good actions are in accord with universal ethical principles that may conflict with a society’s laws. Bad actions violate universal principles.

Who: A minority of adults

Example

“"It's wrong to violate another person's rights, in this case, to property. But...the fact that her life's in danger transcends every other standard you could use to judge his action. Life is more important than property. Usually moral and legal standpoints coincide. Here they conflict.”
How Piaget's and Kohlberg's stages are related

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Piaget</th>
<th>Kohlberg</th>
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<tr>
<td>Pre-Operational</td>
<td>Pre-Conventional</td>
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<tr>
<td>Concrete Operations</td>
<td>Conventional</td>
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<td>Formal Operations</td>
<td>Post-Conventional</td>
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Kohlberg: Summary

- Focused only on **reasoning** as the primary force behind moral judgment

- As children’s reasoning becomes more abstract, they are able to grapple with moral issues in a less self-centered and more sophisticated way
Criticisms of Kohlberg's Theory

- **Culture bias:** The focus on abstract principles of justice and individual ethics in post-conventional reasoning is very Western.
Criticisms of Kohlberg's Theory

- **Culture bias:** Post-conventional is very Western
- **Gender bias**
Justice: Focusing on abstract moral principles such as fairness, equality under the law, the right to liberty, property, life

Caring: Focusing on how a decision would effect others around one. Would it promote harmony or dissention?
The Porcupine and the Moles

It was growing cold, and a porcupine was looking for a home. He found a lovely cave, but it was occupied by a family of moles. "Would you mind if I shared your home for the winter?" the porcupine asked the moles.

The generous moles consented, but the cave was small and every time the moles moved around they were scratched by the porcupine's sharp quills. At last the moles gathered courage to approach their visitor. "Please leave," they said, "and let us have our cave to ourselves once again."

"Oh no!" said the porcupine. "This place suits me very well."

How would you solve this problem? Why is your solution a good one?
Porcupine and Moles: Example responses

Lyons (1988) participants: 60 adolescents, aged 11 & 15 years

**Justice**
- "The porcupine has to go definitely. It's the moles’ house."
- "It's their ownership and nobody else has a right to it."

**Caring**
- "Wrap the porcupine in a towel" (so he can stay but he won't prick the moles).
- "The both of them should try to get together to make the hole bigger."
- "There'd be times when the moles would leave or the porcupine would stand still or they'd take turns doing stuff -- eating stuff and not moving."
Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Justice</th>
<th>Caring or both</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>60%</td>
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Not a hierarchy. Instead of seeing these as a hierarchy with justice as the higher form of moral reasoning, Gilligan argues that both perspectives are equally important in responding to situations morally.
Criticisms of Kohlberg's Theory

- **Culture bias:** Post-conventional is very Western
- **Gender bias**
- **Reasoning ability may not correspond to moral behavior**
Recent evidence delivers serious blows to Kohlberg’s purely reason-based approach.

Psychologists, philosophers and neuroscientists find that:

- People often can’t explain how they know something is moral or immoral.
- Emotions contribute to moral judgment in important ways.
Trolley Problem 1: switch dilemma

Would you throw the switch?

A. YES
B. NO

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6WB3Q5EF4Sg&feature=related
What justifies your judgment?

- “Save as many as you can.”
- “The good of the many outweighs the good of the few.”
- “Act so that you provide the maximum benefit to the maximum number of people.”

→ Utilitarian perspective
Trolley Problem 2: footbridge dilemma

Would you throw the man off the bridge?

A. YES
B. NO
Trolley problem survey results

• Most people answer yes to the switch question, no to the footbridge question

• Similar responses were found in:
  ➢ Europe, Asia, North and South America
  ➢ men and women (although men favor the utilitarian perspective more than women)
  ➢ teenagers and 80-year-olds
  ➢ Jews, Christians, Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, and atheists
  ➢ People with elementary-school educations and Ph.D.’s.
Philosophers have puzzled over why people believe it is morally acceptable to sacrifice one life for five in one case, but unacceptable in the other.

Difficult to find a unifying set of principles that explains what is morally acceptable.

But maybe cognitive neuroscience can provide insights …
Brain Imaging Research

- Differences in emotional engagement might explain differences in response (Greene et al.)
  - Trolley dilemma: “impersonal” moral dilemma
    - activates memory areas
  - Footbridge dilemma: “personal” moral dilemma, requires active personal involvement
    - activates brain areas associated with emotion
• Ventromedial prefrontal cortex produces feelings (such as empathy, anticipation, dread) as we consider the future consequences of our actions

• Patients with damage to ventromedial prefrontal cortex say “yes” for both trolley dilemma’s

• Question of cause and effect
Social Intuitionist Model

- Jonathan Haidt (2001):
  - Deemphasizes role of formal reasoning in moral judgment
  - Moral judgment created by an intuitive process
  - Reasoning is performed on a post hoc basis to justify judgment made
  - Argues that reasoning has an important purpose -- to influence other people, particularly by triggering moral intuitions in them
Universal Moral Core?

- Are we born with a sense of morality?

- Chomsky: We are born with a “universal grammar” that helps us learn language

- Some psychologists and neuroscientists (e.g., Haidt; Bloom; Greene) propose that we may be born with the necessary foundations for analyzing human action in terms of its morality
Baby morality

- 1-day-old infants cry when another infant cries
- Toddlers try to comfort people in distress
Video: Baby Morality (Part I ~ 2min) preference for good guys over bad guys

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FRvVFW85lcU
(whole segment is relevant, but this class video starts at around 1:50)
Video: Baby Morality (Part II ~ 2min)
Preference to “reward” punishment of bad guys

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FRvVFW85lcU
(whole segment is relevant, but this class video starts at around 4:33)
Moral judgment then and now

- Kohlberg focused on the gradual development of abstract reasoning as the basis of moral judgment.
- Since then, we’ve learned that emotionless rationality doesn’t capture what human morality is about.
- A broad range of emotions guide moral decisions (empathy, love, pride, disgust, anger, guilt, shame, fear).
- These subjective feelings about what’s moral are partly innate.