

APPRAISAL AND COMPETENCE IN MORAL JUDGEMENT AND BEHAVIOR

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ABSTRACT

Moral judgement is conceptualized within the framework of Descriptive Psychology. This conceptualization provides a set of distinctions for a systematic understanding of moral development and shows that another way to study moral development is to evaluate the extent to which persons have acquired an ethical perspective. The judgement paradigm is used to show the relationship of an ethical perspective to behavior in general, and to distinguish forms of moral dilemma and moral criticism. A competence formulation of moral judgement is presented in contrast to the traditional approaches to moral development, and four components of this competence are described. Appraisal is discussed as it relates to competence in moral judgement and behavior. Finally, this conceptualization is discussed in terms of its implications for research and a general understanding of the systematic aspects of moral judgement.

Advances in Descriptive Psychology, Volume 5, pages 173-197.
Editors: Anthony O. Putman and Keith E. Davis.
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ISBN: 0-9625661-0-1.

To become and to act as "rational creatures" is something that we learn, as we learn a language. If we had not some initial capacity for it, we could never learn at all, but given that capacity, which we hopefully impute to "human nature", reasonable action, at the familiar level of good sense, is the reward and fruit of practice and discipline in those activities in which a difference between getting things right and getting them wrong can be made out by those with sense enough to make this distinction. (Murphy, 1964, p.48)

This paper is concerned with the ways in which persons develop competence in a particular form of social criticism, i.e., moral criticism. As persons develop socially and become adult members of a community, they learn the range of customary and acceptable social practices among the members of that group. Further, to make decisions regarding what they ought to do, or to know how to act in ways which are not socially incorrect or inappropriate, requires that persons acquire competence as social critics. It is the development of this competence that requires further clarification before we can expect to understand and to guide children more effectively in this regard.

Psychologists have long been fascinated with questions about moral development and how individuals come to manage whatever conflicts there may be between their personal inclinations or interests, and the various requirements of social living. There is general agreement that a child develops from a position of complete dependence upon adults for decisions about what behaviors are right or wrong, to a position of practical independence, i.e., the position of a rational person who is capable of making his or her own appraisals and acting accordingly. However, there is considerable disagreement regarding the nature or course of that development, and the ways in which that development is fostered during the lifetime of each individual.

Prior to launching another investigation, it is important to keep in mind the advice of Wittgenstein (1922) who alerted us to the possibility that our difficulty in understanding a problem may come from the way the problem is initially formulated. It appears that this has been the case with some of the investigations into the nature of moral development; some of the theories and research have been based on more or less inadequate or incomplete conceptualizations of the problem, and this has sometimes generated considerable confusion. It therefore seems important to review conceptually the phenomenon of moral behavior and to reexamine the questions that arise regarding the developmental aspects of this behavior.

It should be emphasized from the outset that this paper does not deal with moral theories, this is, with questions of which moral judgements or principles are correct or ought to have priority over others. Rather, it describes what it is for people to be competent in moral criticism and

what they are doing when they make moral judgements. This paper emphasizes that competence as a moral critic reflects (a) the extent to which a person has mastered the use of ethical concepts, and (b) a person's opportunities to have been involved in the use of these concepts.

CLASSIC APPROACHES TO MORAL DEVELOPMENT

Most psychological research related to moral development can be classified in terms of the theoretical orientation employed by the investigator: (a) Cognitive-Developmental; (b) Psychoanalytic; and (c) Learning Theory. Each of these orientations can be further characterized by the way it organizes the facts of behavior in general, and its differential emphasis on one or another aspect of behavior. The sections which follow provide a brief description of some of the assumptions within each of these general approaches to moral development, including a description of the paradigmatic research generated by each approach.

Cognitive-Developmental

This currently popular theoretical approach has resulted from attempts to integrate the thinking of American pragmatists with the developmental model of Jean Piaget (1932/1965). Piaget's book, *The Moral Judgement of the Child*, provided the first systematic application of the cognitive-developmental model to moral judgement. Later, Kohlberg (1964, 1969, 1976) applied the cognitive-developmental model to moral judgement in a highly elaborate classification system that includes six stages in the development of moral judgement.

Through conversations with children, Piaget (1932/1965) identified what he believed to be two major stages in moral development. The first stage he at various times referred to as "heteronomous morality", "moral realism", or a "morality of constraint"; the second stage he variously called "autonomous morality" or "morality of cooperation".

The morality of constraint develops as a result of two interacting factors: cognitive immaturity and unilateral emotional respect for adults. Piaget further elaborates cognitive immaturity in terms of "egocentrism" or "realism" as ways of characterizing the child's inability to distinguish between aspects of the self and aspects of the external world. One expression of egocentrism is the child's inability to take the viewpoint of another person in various social situations. Realism or egocentrism also includes those situations where the child cannot yet distinguish between objective and subjective aspects of experience. This is reflected in the moral domain by a tendency to regard moral rules as absolutes, rather than flexible principles.

A child progresses from "heteronomous morality" to "autonomous morality" by developing an ability to function cooperatively. The appropriate environmental structures stimulating this gradual transition are the various opportunities a child has for reciprocal social interaction. Piaget (1932/1965) holds that all children make the transition from a morality of constraint to a morality of cooperation, unless their development is retarded by the lack of such opportunities. He further maintains that under conditions of mutual respect and equality in social interchange, the developing mind cannot help coming to regard the principle of cooperation as "an immanent condition of social relationships" (p. 198). At the advanced level of development, morality is no longer regarded as the will of authority, but as a system of modifiable rules, expressing common rights and obligations among equals, a system essential to the effectiveness of any social system.

Kohlberg proposed a sequential set of stages of moral judgement in which an individual exhibits varying sensitivity to social norms and moral principles. A complete explication of these stages may be found in Kohlberg's several treatments (1964, 1969, 1976) of the development of moral judgement. Kohlberg's structural theory stresses that "movement to the next stage occurs through reflective reorganization arising from sensed contradictions in one's current stage structure" (1976, p. 51). These contradictions can arise in at least two types of situations: (1) where some form of experience or decision leads a person to recognize the inadequacy or inappropriateness of his own moral reasoning abilities, or (2) when a person is exposed to another person's moral reasoning which is discrepant from his own. In this way, Kohlberg emphasizes the interactional aspect and suggests that development will be significantly influenced by the environment's provision of various opportunities for that interaction (e.g., role-taking opportunities) and the particular level of moral reasoning represented by the social institutions in which a person has been involved.

The cognitive-developmental approach is unique in its attempt to provide qualitative descriptions of the different types of thinking a person uses. These qualitatively different types of thinking are said to represent some kind of "cognitive-structural transformation" that results from an interaction between the self and the social environment. In contrast to other approaches, the cognitive-developmental approach views this interaction between organism and environment as being of primary importance to development. They often describe this interaction as having a dynamic property of balance in which a certain drive for equilibrium predisposes a person's cognitive capacities to accommodate certain environmental requirements, and to search for a match between various cognitive expectancies and structural aspects of the environment.

In this way, the cognitive-developmental approach is a dynamic interaction scheme that portrays development as a certain, inevitable, and interactive sequence of behavior development.

For the most part, research within the cognitive-developmental approach has been designed to elaborate the various stages of moral reasoning by asking persons of different ages and cultures to respond to a variety of hypothetical moral dilemmas (Kohlberg, 1969). This research technique was designed to yield data calling for the maximum usage of the child's cognitive capabilities. The general rationale for this lies in the cognitive-developmental approach's definition of a moral act as one based on prior judgement of its rightness or wrongness. Thus, the obvious objective would be to study the higher mental processes and thought structures underlying such judgements. Most of the other research elaborates this basic research by focusing on particular issues which will provide more understanding of these cognitive "structures". For example, considerable research has been conducted to discover whether a child's level of moral reasoning corresponds to various behaviors such as role-taking behaviors (Selman, 1976) or specified prosocial behaviors (Damon, 1978).

Psychoanalytic

For psychoanalytic theorists, a person's moral structure is regarded as the "unconscious product of powerful motives which are based on the need to keep antisocial impulses from conscious awareness or expression" (Hoffman, 1977). This follows from Freud's general view of development as an individual's subordination of his or her instinctual energies, in which subordination represents the internalization of external, social constraints, by socialization agents, practices, and institutions.

This approach, like the cognitive-developmental approach, postulates stages of development. However, in psychoanalytic theory, the emphasis is on motivational aspects of behavior, rather than on cognitive ones. The transition between these postulated stages is considered to take place early in the child's development through the "internalization" of parental and/or societal norms. As such, psychoanalytic moral theory has not emphasized interactional components in its stages of moral development as much as it focused on "internalization" aspects.

It is believed that this internalization process begins when the young child, whose pre-eminent motive is to satisfy his own drives, must be tamed by the adults of his world. In essence, the child lacks the motivation to control his own behavior, and external agents (e.g., parents or teachers) must intervene and provide such control.

The psychoanalytic theory of moral development is based on causal relationships. Adults become desired objects for the child through repeated experiences of need reduction through interaction with them. Thus, threats of losing them can provide the basis (cause) for the internalizing of various social/moral requirements.

One important way a child internalizes socially sanctioned behavior is by means of various discipline experiences. The general rationale for assuming discipline to be important is that the notion of moral "internalization" was considered to imply that a person had acquired the motivation to weigh one's desires against the moral requirements of a situation, and one's earliest experience of doing something similar to this occurs in response to parental discipline.

Guilt is taken to be the source of the standard behavioral expressions from which moral development is inferred. The treatment of guilt as a result of violating internalized moral standards, and as a way of keeping someone in line, is another one of the ways the psychoanalytic approach infers a causal connection between the cognitive and motivational components of behavior.

Based on this general set of assumptions, psychoanalytically oriented research has developed along the following lines: (a) attempting to understand moral development in terms of the guilt that results from violating socially sanctioned standards (e.g., Peck & Havingshurst, 1960; Boehm, 1962), (b) an investigation of various forms of resistance to temptation (Aronfreed, 1968, 1976); and (c) discipline methods as they relate to (a) and (b) (Hoffman, 1977; Sears, Maccoby, & Levin, 1957; and Whiting & Child, 1953).

Learning Theory

Learning theorists view the development of any behavioral patterns in associationistic terms. That is, they view the structure of behavior as the result of the continual association of discrete stimuli with one another. Mental structures are often considered to be the result of the patterning or association of events in the world.

Following from this basic notion, it is assumed that children acquire knowledge bit by bit, as if they are constantly accumulating small pieces of information. Typically, there is no relation hypothesized between the individual pieces beyond the "associations" formed through the various regularities experienced during contacts with elements of the environment. The more complex conceptual achievements like the development of social or moral standards are also taken to happen in the same piecemeal fashion. For example, Berkowitz (1964) claims that moral values are learned in the order in which they are introduced to the child by his particular environment.

Social-learning theories of morality operate on similar assumptions. However, these theorists also talk about hypothetical processes like the internalization of cultural or parental norms. In general, learning and social-learning theorists tend to avoid specifying the ways in which the cognitive and motivational aspects of behavior develop. Typically, they tend to assume that mechanisms of learning will somehow transmit the values of the socializing agents to children. Even the more elaborate version of social-learning theory (Mischel & Mischel, 1976) does not seem to relate the acquisition of these values to a person's behavior.

The paradigmatic research design in the social-learning tradition is to use either direct or vicarious reinforcements, with minimal or no accompanying rationale, to elicit behaviors which are "good" in terms of some culturally shared standard of conduct. Various forms of research on imitation and modeling (Bandura & Walters, 1963; Kanfer & Phillips, 1970) have indicated that these processes are the ways in which a young child internalizes social standards and values.

Critique

The preceding review of the major approaches to moral development focused on presenting a descriptive overview of various theoretical and empirical approaches related to this problem area. The present paper was stimulated in part by the recognition of various problems not adequately handled in these approaches. The following examination of those problems is designed to (a) clarify the desirability of a different approach to understanding the development of moral competence; and (b) introduce certain criteria for evaluating the various approaches to the study of moral development, including the formulation presented here.

The first problem encountered is one of comparability. Ossorio (1970/1981) has often referred to this problem among general theories of personality. This problem as it relates to theories of moral development goes as follows. First, it is taken that each approach is concerned with discovering the process involved in the development of moral judgement. That is, each theorist assumes that the phenomena associated with moral development require an explanation, so each proceeds to hypothesize the nature of a process involved. However well-meaning the effort, there is a fundamental danger involved in this sort of approach to behavioral research. If moral judgement and moral behavior were not identifiable and desirable independently of the theories, there would be no moral phenomena for these theories to provide explanations of.

A major technical problem that arises is that without a description of moral judgement independent of various theories, there is a danger that

there will be very little agreement among the various theorists regarding an appropriate description of the behavior for which each has a theory. The problem involved here is similar to the problem involved if a poet, a botanist, and a lumberjack were to try to agree about trees. The description of the same tree varies considerably as a result of the particular orientation of the person describing it. In each case, the tree remains the same, but the description varies. The resulting confusion usually has nothing to do with the phenomenon described, but is more often related to the fact that there are alternative perspectives for the describers.

The same sort of problem holds for the various approaches to understanding the development of moral judgement. Although the phenomenon under investigation is the same for all theorists, each of their descriptions is likely to be different. Each of the major approaches focuses on a different aspect of behavior: Cognitive-developmental theory emphasizes the cognitive aspect of moral behavior, psychoanalytic theory the motivational aspect and learning theories emphasize the performance aspect.

This differential focus gives each a separate perspective on the phenomenon. However, unless we have a description of moral judgement which is not also a theory about its operation, theories which each provide their own hypothetical account cannot be compared. Furthermore, without a way to compare these theories to a description of the phenomenon, there is no standard by which to appraise the appropriateness of any one theory for its contribution to understanding moral development.

Conceptual problems of this sort generate empirical problems. For example, the research on moral development is most often criticized for its lack of concern with the relationship between acquiring moral concepts and the corresponding real-life behavior. One finds frequent reference to this problem in the literature (Lickona, 1976; Hoffman, 1977; and Damon, 1978), but it appears that the direct study of this relationship is often enmeshed with the various hypothetical processes. For example, theoretical disagreement often revolves around which socialization experiences are most likely to foster the "internalization" of moral standards. The corresponding research may focus on aspects of discipline and other childrearing experiences (e.g., modeling, conditioning experiences, and role-taking opportunities) to decide if these experiences will produce the desired socially appropriate reasoning levels or reflect the "internalization" of moral standards.

Another problem emerges out of the attempt to resolve this question of the relationship between the cognitive and motivational aspects of morally relevant behavior. In looking for specific empirical evidence that

relates moral judgement to actual behavior, many researchers have attempted to demonstrate a causal relationship between the hypothetical cognitive structures (e.g., conscience, superego, stages, etc.) and various criteria such as resistance to temptation, prosocial behaviors, or indices of guilt. The psychological literature on moral judgement as well as everyday experience is filled with examples of what appear to be irresolvable problems derived from attempts to treat this relationship as causal. The best known example is the consistency with which persons at various stages of moral reasoning fail to act in ways that correspond to their level of reasoning.

In summary, an alternative approach to understanding moral judgement must meet certain criteria: (a) It must provide a descriptive account of moral judgement which is atheoretical; (b) it must be responsive to a variety of questions that arise concerning moral judgement, like providing a way of illuminating the relationship between the cognitive and motivational components of morally relevant behavior; and (c) it must provide a noncausal, or at least partially noncausal, account of the operation of moral judgement.

A CONCEPTUALIZATION FOR MORAL JUDGEMENT

The formulation presented in this section is designed to provide a descriptive account of moral judgement and to show that another way to study moral development is to evaluate the extent to which persons have acquired a certain competence, i.e., the competence which corresponds to having an ethical perspective. This conceptual framework for moral judgement includes a paradigm case formulation (Ossorio, 1969/1978) which delineates the logical components of competence and proposes a competence formulation for our understanding of how persons develop an ethical perspective.

The acquisition of an ethical perspective is treated here as an instance of socialization (i.e., learning to participate in social practices, social institutions, and other human ways of life) where persons become competent at a certain form of social criticism, i.e., moral criticism. Paradigmatically, the extent to which persons have acquired an ethical perspective will be reflected in their level of ethical competence. This competence is exercised in four ways: (1) distinguishing conceptually between various ethical grounds of action and between ethical and other grounds; (2) recognizing circumstances for which ethical distinctions are relevant; (3) recognizing ethical reasons to act; and (4) regulating their behavior accordingly. Furthermore, each of these abilities will be variously expressed in a person's behavior as they respond to ethically relevant situations. In the following discussions, these various

expressions of the ethical perspective are treated as related, yet distinctive aspects of behavior.

Before presenting this paradigm case in more detail, it is necessary to discuss what it means to have an ethical perspective, and to show what sort of position the ethical perspective has in relation to behavior in general. This discussion will also distinguish two forms of moral dilemma and two forms of moral criticism. For these purposes, elements of a more general conceptualization for behavior developed by Ossorio (1966, 1970, 1978, 1981) will be employed.

Ethical Perspective and the Judgement Paradigm

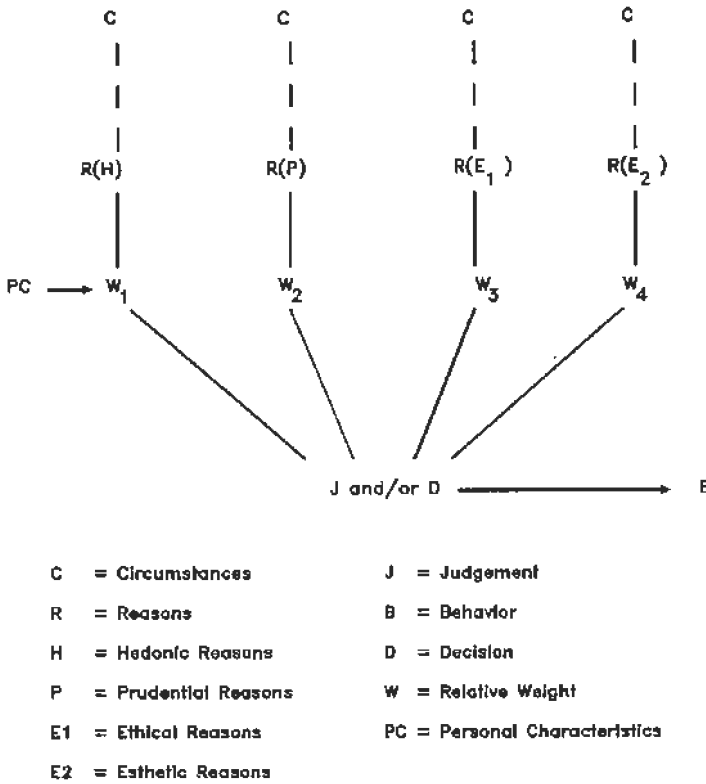
The ethical perspective contrasts with the hedonic, prudential, and esthetic perspectives. All these perspectives provide grounds for making behavioral choices. Ossorio (1976) presents each of these as the different perspectives that are, paradigmatically, always available to persons for particular choices and for self-regulation in general. Self-regulation is a general phenomenon exemplified by Deliberate Action (where a person distinguishes among behaviors, chooses among them, and enacts the chosen behavior) and codified directly by the Actor-Observer-Critic schema (Ossorio, 1970/1981). More specifically, having an ethical perspective implies that a person is able to distinguish and choose behaviors in ways that indicate an understanding and an appreciation of ethical questions.

Ossorio's (in this volume) paradigm formulation for judgement is a device for reconstructing a behavior as a case of Deliberate Action. It allows us to reconstruct any behavior for a better understanding of the deliberate action which has taken place (or could have, etc.). This formulation, represented in the Judgement Diagram (Figure 1), also demonstrates that the ethical perspective is only one among several perspectives that normatively come into play in behavioral choice and self-regulation. Finally, it can be used to portray any behavior that involves the ethical perspective in making judgements of what is the case, and/or deciding of what to do under a variety of circumstances. Portraying behavior in this way will help to clarify the significance of the four competence expressions involving the ethical perspective.

Judgement (I)

"Judgement of what is the case" is used here to refer to those situations where a person recognizes the circumstances (C) as providing reasons (R) for doing or not doing one thing rather than another. A judgement that is characteristically a moral judgement will specifically involve recognizing the ethically relevant facts in a situation which

Figure 1. Judgement Diagram



provide reasons (E₁) to act accordingly.

Judgement actually involves only the cognitive aspect of a behavior (i.e., recognition and discrimination) and is not directly observable. One connection between judgement and an observable behavior would be the verbal behavior where a person states what he believes to be the case. However, the verbal behavior only expresses some of the content of a particular judgement, i.e., whenever a person states what he takes to be the case, he is not articulating all the things he could distinguish, or is distinguishing that case *from*. Similarly, if a child only states that lying is wrong, we do not know if the judgement is based on prudential reasons (e.g., the fear of being spanked for telling a lie) or on ethical reasons (i.e., it is wrong or unfair to lie to another person). Upon inquiry, it would be possible to identify some of the relevant circumstances providing reasons for an individual's judgement, decisions,

or behavior; however, there is no way to determine that we have identified all of the reasons providing the content for any judgement.

The foregoing serves as a reminder that it is not logically appropriate to equate moral development, moral judgement, or moral conduct with merely the verbal behavior of expressing an appraisal, or with various behavioral choices that may or may not appear to be ethically motivated.

Weights (W)

The notion of relative weights is included in this formulation to help account for (a) some of the observed variations in moral judgements which one person may demonstrate on separate occasions (including at different ages), or (b) the differences we observe among different persons or groups of persons when they act from the ethical perspective. In any situation, a person's decision of what to do or say will reflect the relative weights attached to circumstances and corresponding reasons (both pro and con) revealed by all four perspectives.

Circumstances, providing the reasons to do something, differ from one occasion to the next, and a person's decision of what to do reflects the relative weights given to each of those reasons. For example, consider a situation where a person is asked to play golf with friends during a time when he has an appointment to meet with his son's teacher. He is a person who enjoys playing golf and usually plays whenever he gets the opportunity. While he would prefer to be playing golf, when it comes to keeping the appointment with his son's teacher, playing golf carries less relative weight when there are competing commitments.

In general, the relative weights reflect the way a person perceives a situation, and his sensitivity to its relevance will, in turn, be influenced by his person characteristics (PC), such as: (a) his particular moral point of view (e.g., a particular ethical theory or religious dogma) which consists of having certain principles or rules for resolving ethical dilemmas, and (b) his particular experience in situations involving the use of those principles and rules.

To summarize, the notion of weights provides at least four things to consider in accounting for the individual differences observed in the moral decisions of either different persons in the same situation, or of the same person on different occasions. Each of these four can influence the relative weights that particular reasons carry with a given individual. For each person, on each occasion, the types of reasons may be differentially weighted as a result of: (1) a person's perception of the circumstances; (2) that person's sensitivity to the relevance or

implications of these circumstances; and (3) a person's personal characteristics, including having a particular set of moral principles or rules for deciding among conflicting reasons, and (4) a person's prior experience in morally relevant situations.

Forms of Moral Dilemma

With the judgement paradigm in mind, it is possible to envision at least two general forms of moral conflict: (1) cases in which there are conflicting ethical reasons (E_1), or (2) cases in which there is conflict between ethical reasons (E_1) and other kinds of reasons, (i.e., hedonic, prudential, or esthetic ones). For purposes of clarification, the first sort of problem is referred to here as a "purely moral", and the second as a "morally relevant" dilemma.

A "purely moral" dilemma may be exemplified by a situation in which a person is in conflict between his duty to the social order and his duty to his family. For example, a person may have to decide whether to steal food or to allow his family to starve. In this case, a person has at least two conflicting ethical reasons: (1) it is wrong to steal, and (2) it is wrong to neglect the duty to provide for one's family.

A situation which typifies a "morally relevant" problem may occur when a person is torn between his obligation to treat other persons fairly while also desiring to advance his financial status. For example, a person may be in a position to embezzle funds from a charitable organization. In this case, a dilemma arises because of several conflicting relevant reasons: (a) it is wrong to take what belongs to someone else (ethical reason), however, (b) the extra money would be nice to have for purchasing certain material comforts (hedonic reasons), but then (c) it would be personally disadvantageous to be caught and punished (prudential reasons).

Distinguishing these two general forms of moral dilemma will help to eliminate potential confusions in understanding a person's ability to make the kind of appraisals required in moral criticism. One such confusion is that some appraisal terms may have both ethical and aesthetic applications, e.g., something may be the ethically right (judicious or fair) thing to do, and it may be the aesthetically right (correct, or appropriate) thing to do. In other cases, these concepts may have applications in all four domains. Establishing this distinction between "purely moral" and "morally relevant" dilemmas, allows us to avoid the problems involved with confusing various uses of moral concepts, as, for example, the confusion in the moral-development literature generated by treating resistance to temptation as an ethical problem when it also includes hedonic and/or prudential aspects.

Forms of Moral Criticism

At this point, note that if we were to evaluate a person's ethical competence, there would be at least two targets: (1) we can criticize the extent to which a person has mastered the specific aspects of the ethical perspective (E_1), or (2) we can criticize the weights (W) a person attaches to ethical reasons. The first is a criticism of competence; the second is a criticism of character. Using the Judgement Diagram, note that the criticism of competence occurs at the position of reasons (R), and the criticism of character occurs at the positions of weights (W) or person characteristics (PC).

When criticisms are made of a person's moral character, it is primarily a criticism of the weights he has attached to the different reasons for certain behavior choices. If we regard someone as having a bad moral character, we are typically talking about his tendency to act in ways that ignore or disregard opportunities to act in ways that give an appropriate emphasis to ethical reasons. A person judged to be of good moral character tends to be someone whose behavioral choices appear to give appropriate emphasis to ethical reasons. Those persons seen as ethical fanatics are typically persons regarded as inappropriately giving too much weight to the ethical grounds for action, while minimizing the importance of other grounds (e.g., hedonic, prudential, or esthetic) for behavior. In some cases, a person's moral character can be criticized in so far as he appeals to ethical reasons primarily for prudential concerns, i.e., in an effort to enhance his status by using ethical reasons for instrumental purposes.

Consider also a situation where a person is asked, "Is it wrong to treat another person unfairly?" Conceivably, the answer could be forms of "yes", "no", or "not always". Answering affirmatively suggests a person recognizes a certain conceptual relationship between the concepts "unfair" and "wrong". This would reflect competence in the use of the ethical perspective (E_1). A negative answer may imply a competence deficit, that the person fails to see these concepts as related. However, something else is indicated when a person states that it is not always wrong to treat a person unfairly. He may cite an example where it would be right that he failed to keep an appointment because he stopped to help an accident victim on the way to the appointment. Although this person may have the ethical competence to recognize the conceptual relationship between the concepts of "wrong" and "unfair", and recognizes an instance of failing to keep an appointment as unfair, he also has the competence, appreciation, or understanding required to give appropriate priority (W) to other relevant reasons in deciding upon a certain course of action.

Because there are times when circumstances indicate that it may be right to do something that is wrong (e.g., certain acts of war or self-defense), some persons regard such instances as providing a rationale for taking a position of ethical relativity and/or ethical nihilism. In the present approach, however, such phenomena merely remind us that we will more fully appreciate the significance of the ethical perspective for social criticism if we recognize the distinction between conceptual mastery and the competence to give appropriate weights.

A situation involving self-defense, for example, does not eliminate our use of the ethical perspective. Harming someone is wrong and provides ethical reason to avoid doing so, but recognizing the situation as a case of "it's either him or me" provides a prudential reason which may be appropriately stronger. Recognizing that the decision to harm someone who is threatening you may be the right thing to do, does not necessarily indicate that one is ignorant of the conceptual relationships that exist among the relevant ethical reasons (i.e., that you have an obligation to be fair in your dealings with other persons, that it is wrong to harm another person, or that it is unfair, etc.). Instead, it points out that in some circumstances, ethical reasons can have more or less weight than certain hedonic, prudential, or esthetic reasons.

Instead of deciding that ethical questions are unresolvable, these distinctions point to the necessity of looking at more than just (a) the behavior, (b) the verbal report, or (c) the knowledge of moral concepts in assessing any person's moral competence. These distinctions also emphasize that at any point, we will only have access to a partial description of a person's competence. With these cautions in mind, the following section delineates the components of moral competence. This conceptual framework is designed to help us account for some of the potential variations, as well as the similarities among people in their acquisition and use of an ethical perspective.

A Framework for Ethical Competence

It is in the nature of any social system that there is a certain regularity, stability, and consistency in basic beliefs, in values or norms, and in the way its people treat one another. It is also the case that this regularity, stability, and consistency is intelligible not only to the participant-observers of a certain social system, but also to an outside observer who is a member of another social group. For there to be this kind of regularity within and relativity among social systems, one would expect that certain elements are fundamental to the way all social practices are organized. Also, these elements will be somewhat independent of the particular content attached to them in the variety of beliefs and lifestyles within and across social systems.

This conceptualization suggests that the kind of systematizing that occurs in social behavior is somewhat analogous to the kind of relativity and regularity found among the various systems of measurement. In a metric system of measurement, for example, there is regularity within the system of measurement whether one is using centimeters, meters, or kilometers (i.e., 100 centimeters equals one meter and 1,000 meters equals one kilometer, etc.) in measuring length, width and height. In using the English system of measurement, there is also regularity among the same measurements using inches, yards, or miles. Additionally, the measurements in one system are relative to the measurements in the other system (e.g., 2.54 centimeters equals one inch, etc.). These features of measurement make it possible for anyone to understand another person talking about the length, width, or height of a table whether one is using either the metric or the English system of measurement. Similarly, a person from a social system where certain forms of behavior are considered fair or just should be able to understand the significance of forms of behavior considered fair or just within another social system. This should be the case even if the same behavior considered fair in one system is considered unfair in the other. To take an extreme case, if a person from a midwestern American community visiting a particular group of Native Americans learns their equivalent terms for the concepts of "wrong" and "unfair", he could use those terms in his appraisals of their social practices. For example, this person might communicate to members of this community, his belief that their practice of leaving elderly members of the group behind to die while the tribe moves on to new territory was wrong. Although members of this community may not agree with his appraisal, they would be able to understand what the person was doing by saying that it was wrong or that he saw it as neglecting a duty.

In the present approach we regard moral development as the acquisition of a particular range of competence. Note that this contrasts with treating it as the acquisition of certain habits (Eysenck, 1976); as a process like internalization (Hoffman, 1977; Aronfreed, 1976); as a hypothetical construct like superego, conscience, or developmental stage (Freud, 1938; Boehm, 1962; Kohlberg, 1964; and Piaget, 1965); or as a more or less sophisticated way of talking about moral dilemmas (Kohlberg, 1976).

As the development of a competence, moral development can be compared to the way in which any other competence (e.g., reading or mathematics) is acquired. In effect, we are using a general socialization/education model. For example, before a decision is made as to how well a child reads, there must be agreement on (a) what would count as being able to read, and (b) what it takes to be able to read (e.g., spelling, word

recognition, etc.). Similarly, the requirements for evaluating a person's ability to use an ethical perspective include: (a) a relevant description of what counts as moral competence, and (b) an accounting of the components involved in moral competence.

To meet these requirements, we make use of a paradigm case formulation of moral competence that includes four components: (1) knowledge of the network of ethical concepts that are tautologically linked to one another; (2) the ability to recognize instances of behavior that exemplify these concepts; (3) the use of these concepts in reasoning, justifying, or negotiating for or against behavioral choices that involve the use of these concepts; and (4) actions, other than the verbal behavior, that give these concepts appropriate priority. Paradigmatically, the standard for what counts as moral competence or as having an ethical perspective is the person who demonstrates normative abilities in all four of these forms of expression of moral competence.

Knowledge of a Network of Ethical Concepts

Having a set of concepts provides a way to differentiate one thing from another. In art criticism, for example, the distinctions of harmony, balance, and coloring differentiate aspects of a particular painting, and also help to differentiate certain paintings from others. In moral criticism, the ethical concepts like "duty", "obligation", "just", "right", etc., are used to differentiate the ethical aspects of behavior so that we can distinguish and compare social behaviors.

It is important to emphasize that critic concepts, like the ethical concepts, refer to ways of comparing behavior and not to a particular behavior. In art criticism, referring to the beauty of a painting is a way of classifying that painting in order to distinguish it from others; it is not a reference to an additional attribute of the painting itself that we would call its beauty, harmony, balance, etc. In like manner, if we appraise a certain behavior as wrong or unfair, we are using these concepts for comparing that behavior to others, and not for specifying a quality that is inherent in that behavior.

In a related way, it is important to recognize that there is no behavior, per se, that is necessarily an unfair or wrong behavior. Just as the movie critic talks about X behavior as dramatic, comic, or tragic, in doing this, he is not referring to a particular behavior, but to behavior that occurred under certain circumstances. Or, to take another example, in playing bridge, a "brilliant" defensive strategy may involve the behavior of leading a trump while on other occasions the same behavior might be appraised as "stupid". Thus, to appraise any behavior is to look at what else is going on at the time. Appreciation of this aspect of moral

concepts helps to point out that competence at moral judgement is more than learning to attach terms like right, wrong, fair, unfair, etc. to specific behaviors. That is, a person must also understand the distinctive use of the various moral concepts, which includes knowing the ways each concept is related to others within that system of concepts.

To master the use of a system of ethical concepts requires that a person be able to use them in some of the ways that reveal his awareness of certain tautological relationships among these concepts. For example, a competent bridge player knows the interrelationship among the concepts "trump", "suit", and "bid", when he knows that in order to play a trump, he must play the bid suit. This is to say that without these related concepts, the concept of trumps would be meaningless. Similarly, the concept "just" is meaningless without the related concepts "right", "wrong", "fair", "obligation", etc. Recognizing that a person is unjust, in his dealings with X, is also to recognize that he is wrong, unfair, neglecting an obligation, or violating X's rights.

This does not necessarily mean that for a person to be competent, he is required to know that the relationships among these concepts are tautological. Instead, it is suggesting that the tautological connections are an essential feature of knowing, understanding, and appreciating the concept. To understand a concept is also to understand the related concepts, and this understanding will be reflected in the person's actual use of the concepts. Thus, in assessing a person's understanding of concepts, certain behaviors will demonstrate his understanding of the related concepts. For example, most persons would agree that a person who plays a trump by randomly selecting cards from his hand does not understand the concept of trumps. In this case, the person seems unaware of the relationship between trumps and the bid suit. Likewise, a person who does not recognize that unfair treatment of another person, e.g., cheating, is also wrong or bad, does not fully understand the concepts of unfair, wrong, or bad.

Recognition of Instances

Instances where ethical concepts apply are found every day in a variety of social practices. A person refines his ability to use ethical concepts with practice in making and acting on decisions which hinge on these distinctions. Thus, participation in social practices appears to be an important factor in learning to recognize circumstances for which ethical distinctions are relevant. Refinement in the use of ethical distinctions will also be expressed in a person's ability to recognize new or unfamiliar exemplars of situations where ethical concepts apply.

Extending the analogy between competence at playing bridge and competence at moral criticism helps illustrate the use of ethical concepts in this way. Merely knowing the concepts of hearts, diamonds, or trumps and their interrelationships is not a sufficient condition for competence. A person must also be able to recognize situations involving the use of each of these concepts and know when they are appropriately employed. If a bridge player did not recognize an opportunity to trump an opponent's trick, his competence at bridge playing would be seriously questioned. Similarly, a moral critic must be able to recognize those situations where a moral concept applies, i.e., if a person is unable to recognize that breaking a promise is in general a case of wrongdoing, we could certainly doubt his moral competence.

Reasoning

Sometimes the very nature of a subject matter invites differences in judgement. Whenever we use an appraisal concept, we are using it in only one of the variety of situations to which it applies. Also, we are using it in a way that reflects the relative weights attached to those circumstances which we have identified. In most situations involving competence expressions, demonstrating a competence does not require an ability to justify the use of relevant concepts. Typically, it is only necessary to recognize the situation as one where the concept applies and to act accordingly. For example, a tennis player expresses competence at tennis when he recognizes an opponent's drop shot and rushes to the net to save his point. It would be unlikely that anyone would challenge a description of the situation as a drop shot or as one that called for a person to rush the net. However, when the competence involves a form of appraisal, the situation can be somewhat different.

Descriptions of situations as ones where an appraisal concept applies, as in moral criticism, require a person to use concepts that are "essentially contested" (Gallie, 1955/1956). To appreciate the essentially contested quality of critical concepts, Gallie lists certain characteristics which apply to the use of these concepts. Three are particularly relevant to this discussion: (1) these concepts are appraisative in the sense that they signify some form of valued achievement; (2) this achievement can be modified considerably in light of changing circumstances; and (3) different persons or groups of persons may adhere to quite different views regarding the correct use of these concepts.

Thus, understanding appraisal concepts necessitates using them to signify value, and recognizing their application in a variety of situations. At times, the various uses of these concepts by the same person or by different persons may appear contradictory. In this event, it is up to the

person using the concept to be able to modify the appraisal in light of different circumstances or to justify the use of a concept according to the circumstances that he considered relevant. It follows that one avenue to evaluating a person's mastery of the ethical perspective is to ask him to justify his use of a particular concept in an appraisal, or in guiding a behavioral choice which was based on that appraisal. Note that this is not to say there is nothing but individual relativity in the use of appraisal concepts. However, it does allow for the systematic variation we often see in the use of these concepts.

Acting on the Basis of Ethical Concepts

Finally, for a person to be competent at moral criticism requires that he also be able to act in ways other than merely verbal that give ethical reasons appropriate priority. If the bridge player could recognize when it was appropriate to play a trump, and could also provide adequate justification for or against playing trumps at a particular time, but continually failed to trump when given the opportunity, his partner certainly would have reason to question his competence to play bridge. In like manner, we would also question the moral competence of a person who demonstrated verbal knowledge of ethical concepts, could recognize moral situations, justify his use of the concepts in particular appraisals, but failed to act in other ways that gave ethical reasons appropriate priority.

A common problem among the various approaches to moral development is the inability to resolve questions concerning the relationship between the cognitive and the motivational aspects of moral behavior. For years researchers have looked for specific empirical evidence that would relate moral judgement to real-life behavior. Usually, researchers in moral development have attempted to validate certain cognitive aspects (e.g., stages of moral reasoning, conscience, superego, etc.) by considering the performance of certain behaviors (e.g., resistance to temptation; indexes of guilt; sharing; or various other pro-social behaviors) as caused by the various cognitive "structures". Instead of asking how thoughts, fantasies, and impulses get translated into action, or how a person's actions become translated into thought, it may be more illuminating to contrast the concepts of "thought" and "action" in a different (noncausal) way.

This conceptualization provides a response to that problem from a different angle. For these purposes a review of the concept of appraisal as elaborated by Ossorio (in this volume) is especially relevant. Appraisal is a fundamental concept in Descriptive Psychology because

it is one of the essentials for human behavior. The familiar definition is: "an appraisal is a description that tautologously carries motivational significance" (1969/1978). As discussed in the preceding section, ethical concepts are appraisative in the sense that they signify some form of valued achievement.

As motivationally significant, the notion of appraisal includes a feature of behavioral self-regulation, i.e., a first person reference. Appraisal refers to the various ways persons specify their relationship to other elements (e.g., persons, objectives, circumstances) of their world. In effect, appraisals are evaluative, i.e., they are ways each person evaluates these elements as they relate to *him*. Assigning value or appraisal is the same thing as having reason to act. For example, if a person (X) appraises a situation as one where he has an obligation to take care of Y, then X recognizes that *he* has reason to act on Y's behalf.

Since appraisals correspond to a person's having his own reasons for action, the use of concepts in appraisal is central to any discussion of intentional action or rational behavior. Furthermore, understanding the use of the ethical concepts (e.g., justice, duty, obligation, etc.) as appraisals is particularly relevant for understanding this particular form of rational behavior, i.e., ethical behavior.

In summary, for a person to be competent in moral judgement is for him to master the various uses of the set of interrelated ethical distinctions. Mastering the use of these distinctions implies being able to use these concepts appropriately when the situation calls for it. Opportunities to use these concepts are of three distinct kinds: (1) situations where a person must recognize instances of behaviors where the concept applies; (2) situations where a person must justify the use of these concepts in a particular appraisal; and (3) situations where a person acts on these concepts in ways other than verbal behaviors.

Two features of this paradigm case help clarify developmental aspects of moral judgement. First, these four components of the paradigm case of moral competence are like having a set of coordinates to use in the assessment of a person's development of competence as a moral critic at any point in time. Secondly, this paradigm case of moral competence provides an anchoring device that establishes an endpoint to the developmental sequence under investigation. Having such an endpoint, and a set of conceptual coordinates for moral development, allows us to decide (a) how much of this particular competence a person has mastered, (b) what sort of expertise or deficiencies a person has in this domain, and (c) how one person compares to another in his ability to make moral judgements and/or decisions.

Implications

A child ideally develops from a position of completely depending upon adults and the social environment to provide information on what forms of behavior are ethically right or wrong, to the more independent position of a rational person who is capable of using the ethical perspective in making his own appraisals of right and wrong and acting accordingly. Identifying the different forms of experience in a person's life which are conducive to the development of the four components of moral competence is fundamental to our general understanding of moral development.

It is not until a person has the competence to use ethical concepts as appraisal that moral judgement can be distinguished from the rote learning of various rules or principles. In responding to the developmental question of how a person comes to use concepts as appraisal, this formulation suggests that with participation in a range of social practices, a person gets practice in acting on ethical distinctions. As such, participation provides a paradigm case for what it takes to develop an ability to use ethical concepts as appraisals rather than as mere descriptions.

With developmental considerations in mind, certain features of this set of four competences are worth noting. First, considering the variety of experience and lifestyles to which different persons are exposed, there are no obvious reasons to think that everyone would acquire these competences in the same way. Secondly, there seems to be a certain interactional relationship among these four components which facilitates the over-all development of this particular competence. That is, it is unlikely that a person completely masters one aspect (e.g., tautological relationships) and then moves on to master another (e.g., recognition of instances). On the contrary, it seems quite possible that any change in one aspect will lead to changes in another. For example, a child may accidentally do something which a parent identifies as right (or just, or fair, etc.), and that experience may variously (a) enhance his concept of "right"; (b) increase his repertoire of situations which he would recognize in the future as "right"; and (c) increase the likelihood that he will in the future perform that or a similar act again.

In conclusion, the framework for moral competence presented here provides conceptual access to ways by which persons acquire an ethical perspective. Using this formulation of moral development for empirical investigations into ways by which children acquire moral competence seems warranted for a variety of reasons: (a) The logic of acquiring competence suggests the possibility of there being systematic differences in competence acquisition. These differences are likely to be related to

a number of individual differences, including age and experience. (b) Because it seems unlikely that anyone would master this or any competence all at once, it would be informative to identify some of the various antecedents and sequences among the various ways that different persons come to acquire the four competences involved in the skill. (c) The formulation of moral competence presented here also suggests that it is possible to encourage or facilitate the development of moral competence by discerning some of the conditions (i.e., participation in social practices) which provide a person with the opportunity and experience to use that competence. (d) Because one person could vary from any other person in these ways, it would add to our understanding of the differences among people, and of an individual's particular developmental progress, if we could articulate moral development in terms of the extent to which that person has demonstrated mastery in the various aspects of moral competence expression, or in terms of their opportunities to engage in the use of that competence.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This paper is based on my doctoral dissertation. I would like to thank Peter G. Ossorio for his guidance in the completion of the dissertation, for his patience as a teacher, and for his development of Descriptive Psychology as a way to make sense of the world. I would like to thank Mary Roberts whose support, encouragement, and helpful comments made the completion of this paper possible. I would also like to thank Betsy Bellinger, Anthony Putman, Ray Bergner, and Keith Davis for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

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