

MORAL DEVELOPMENT AND ITS EXPLANATION:  
KOHLEBERG'S STRUCTURALISM

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## MORAL DEVELOPMENT AND ITS EXPLANATION

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines Lawrence Kohlberg's Cognitive-Developmental theory of moral development and its relation to moral education. Kohlberg's structuralism is called into question as an explanation of the established facts of moral development, and it is suggested that alternative explanations may be at least equally satisfactory. The close connection between Kohlberg's formalist value-theory and his psychological explanation is then explored. It is found that they are mutually involved and that both are of doubtful coherence.

After some of the connexions between Kohlberg's value-theory and his prescriptions for education are noted, an attempt is made to house the facts of development within an explanation embodying a contrasting theory of value. It is suggested that the alternative value-theory offered, and the concomitant explanation of moral development, are both truer to our experience of moral action and moral learning. The importantly different implications of the alternative explanation for education are then sketched. In conclusion, a plea is made for a re-opening of the competition between alternative explanations of moral development. It is suggested that without such critical inquiry, moral education programmes deriving from Kohlberg's work lack theoretical justification.

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## INTRODUCTION

In a society in which traditional authorities, ethical and religious, have been shaken at core, any form of moral education will find itself pressed for theoretical justification. One of the surprising features of contemporary moral education, however, is the lack of significant theoretical underpinnings of many programmes. "Values Clarification" for example, appears to rest upon a pastiche of popular psychologies, and can be seen to be a product of the decades which replaced the acquisition of traditional virtues with the demand for "authenticity" and "self-attunement". A notable exception to this state of affairs is the range of moral reasoning programmes which find authority in Lawrence Kohlberg's cognitive-developmental psychology. Over a period of two decades Kohlberg has laboured to find a form of moral education both commensurate with the facts of psychological development, and justified by philosophical ethics.

This thesis takes its departure at the observation that moral psychologies must incorporate, or presuppose, theories of value. In the case of developmental psychologies, the notion of "moral development" is at the outset so obscure that the "facts" of development can only be gathered once commitments are made concerning the nature



of evaluation. It is the contention of this thesis that the adequacy of Kohlberg's explanation of moral development is intimately involved with his view of morality, and that his educational theory rests upon his psychological theory. By examining closely the "facts" of development as discovered by Kohlberg and their psychological explanation, an attempt is made to discover the interface of psychological and ethical theory. It is suggested that obscurities in Kohlberg's explanation of development are bound up with his formalist theory of value. An attempt is made to re-house the facts of development within an explanatory framework incorporating a quite different theory of value. The contrasting educational implications of this explanation are then briefly drawn.

Chapter One introduces Kohlberg's Stages of Moral Development, and situates them within his cognitive-developmental psychology. The several facets of his theory are outlined, and their lineage traced where possible. A brief enumeration is made of the educational implications of cognitive-developmental psychology. As a prelude to a direct examination of Kohlberg's theory, some of the most pressing objections which have been made against it are mentioned.

In Chapter Two cognitive-development theory is examined as an empirical hypothesis. On the basis of reviews of Kohlberg's research, doubt is cast upon the adequacy of evidence. Using Popper's criterion

of empirical significance the hypothesis is examined for explanatory power and found to be lacking. The close connection that Kohlberg notes between his psychological and his moral theories is then drawn upon to suggest that the problems of explanation outlined may derive from the value-theory incorporated in the explanation. Chapters Three and Four explore this link and its theoretical and educational significance.

Chapter Three examines some of the explanatory tools and metaphors which Kohlberg uses to explain moral development and to justify his claims concerning the terminus of development. The notions of "cognitive-conflict", "equilibration" and the metaphor of the "child-philosopher" are shown to house the facts poorly, and to neglect types of learning which appear central to stage-ascent. A link is drawn between cognitive-developmental and ego theory to show that Kohlberg's description of the stages admits incorporation into ego-theory in a way that puts strict cognitive-developmentalism in jeopardy. Kohlberg's claim that the stimulation of development is a "Platonic" form of education is then examined for its ability to enrich his explanation of stage-ascent. It is found to be purely metaphorical and to add nothing to either the explanation of development or Kohlberg's claim concerning the content of mature moral thought.

Chapter Four takes up directly the question of Kohlberg's

value-theory and attempts to show the necessity of a re-interpretation of moral development. Kohlberg's debt to Kant and Hare is explored, initially by drawing a contrast between the formalisms of the latter two. Questions are raised concerning the intelligibility of an empiricist formalism such as Hare's. It is then argued that Kohlberg's ethical theory has close affinities with Hare's and that it shares its problem. This is exemplified by the problem of "universalizability" as it enters into Kohlberg's explanation of a child's ascent from one stage to another. Tensions within Kohlberg's account of stage 6, particularly with regard to its ability to answer the question "Why be moral?" (raised in Chapter Three) allow the depiction of a distinctive 7th stage of development. It is suggested that this stage--exemplified by Thomas More--can be seen as the terminus of moral development if Kohlberg's moral theory, seriously challenged above, is rejected. A re-interpretation of the stage sequence with Evan Simpson's objectivist theory of value is then sketched. This re-interpretation both by-passes the obscurities of Kohlberg's structuralism, and integrates the affective with the cognitive in moral development. The consequences of the re-interpretation for educational practice are then indicated.

Doubt is cast upon Kohlberg's "stimulation of development" as the goal of moral education because of its derivation from cognitive-developmental theory. It is concluded that the various possible

explanations of moral development must be brought into competition, as their implications for education are diverse and the adequacy of Kohlberg's structuralism is highly questionable.

## NOTES ON REFERENCES

(Because of the number and complexity of the references to Kohlberg, it has been decided to refer to his writings in the text, in accordance with the following schema.)

### KOHLBERG'S WRITINGS

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## CHAPTER ONE

### THE COGNITIVE-DEVELOPMENTAL HYPOTHESIS OF MORAL DEVELOPMENT

In a subject as inherently inter-disciplinary as educational theory, the cautious self-definition and mutual suspicion of the various relevant disciplines--psychology, philosophy, sociology, etc.--is a serious impediment to the development of an integrated theory. Lawrence Kohlberg feels that this tendency to myopic self-absorption has been to some extent overcome in the relationship of cognitive-developmental psychology to "progressive" education. Following in a tradition whose roots he traces in the work of John Dewey, the philosophical pragmatist, and Jean Piaget, the developmental psychologist, Kohlberg has sought to establish a conception of the aims of education that integrates the several disciplines. He has attempted to inter-relate a philosophically justified account of human experience, with a psychological theory of development, the empirical facts thereof, and an ethical theory. In so doing he has tried to avoid the vices of dogmatism and parochialism by attending closely to both the established facts of development, and the relationship of his psychological theorizing to his normative suggestions for education.

Kohlberg's work on moral development has been enthusiastically received by a generation of educators. In Ontario the Mackay Report, motivated in part by the belief that the demise of religious instruction has removed an important traditional mode of imparting society's values, has taken up a position whose theoretical underpinnings are best expressed in the work of Kohlberg. More widely in North America and in Europe, a number of programs have been established which either appeal to his work for justification, or couch their central tenets in the language of his cognitive-developmental psychology. Particularly important in understanding the depth of his appeal in North America is Kohlberg's claim to have discovered a method of education fully commensurate with the ideals of American democracy. In portraying the teacher as the stimulator of a form of development universal to human beings, Kohlberg appears to have charted a central course between the unhappy alternatives of an authoritarian instilling of the acquired body of social norms, and the liberally-motivated "neutrality" of the teacher. If Kohlberg's work is fully established, the programs of moral reasoning founded upon his efforts can claim to embody the right of every person to his or her critically-formulated moral beliefs, while shrugging off the suspicion that such free choice must result in an anarchy of opinion as based upon unfounded beliefs.

The research of Kohlberg and his associates purports to have



uncovered a previously unrecognized sequential development in the form of moral reasoning employed by all human beings. In the sizable body of research papers and essays published by Kohlberg the following chart of the stages of moral development is typical.

The described typology is divided into three levels, each consisting of two stages--as follows.

# 1. DEFINITION OF MORAL STAGES

## 1. Preconventional Level

At this level the child is responsive to cultural rules and labels of good and bad, right or wrong, but interprets these labels in terms of either the physical or hedonistic consequences of action (punishment, reward, exchange of favours) or in terms of the physical power of those who enunciate the rules and labels. The level is divided into the following two stages:

### Stage 1. The Punishment and Obedience Orientation

The physical consequences of action determine its goodness or badness regardless of the human meaning or value of these consequences. Avoidance of punishment and unquestioning deference to power are valued in their own right, not in terms of respect for an underlying moral order supported by punishment and authority (the latter being stage 4).

### Stage 2. The Instrumental Relativist Orientation

Right action consists of that which instrumentally satisfies one's own needs and occasionally the needs of others. Human relations are viewed in terms like those of the market place. Elements of fairness, of reciprocity, and equal sharing are present, but they are always interpreted in a physical, pragmatic way. Reciprocity is a matter of "you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours", not of loyalty, gratitude or justice.

## 2. Conventional Level

At this level, maintaining the expectations of the individual's family, group or nation is perceived as valuable in its own right, regardless of immediate and obvious consequences. The attitude is not only one of conformity to personal expectations and social order, but of loyalty to it, of actively maintaining, supporting, and justifying the order and of identifying with the persons or groups or group involved in it. At this level, there are the following two stages:

### Stage 3. The Interpersonal Concordance or "Good Boy-Nice Girl" Orientation

Good behaviour is that which pleases or helps others and is approved by them. There is much conformity to stereotypical images of what is majority or "natural" behaviour. Behaviour is frequently judged by intention-- "he means well" becomes important for the first time. One earns approval by being "nice".

### Stage 4. The Law-and-Order Orientation

There is orientation toward authority, fixed rules, and the maintenance of the social order. Right behaviour consists of doing one's duty, showing respect for authority, and maintaining the given social order for its own sake.

## 3. Postconventional, Autonomous, or Principled Level

At this level, there is a clear effort to define moral values and principles which have validity and application apart from the authority of the groups or persons holding these principles and apart from the individual's own identification with these groups. This level again has two stages.

### Stage 5. The Social Contract Legalistic Orientation

This level generally has utilitarian overtones. Right action tends to be defined in terms of general individual rights and in terms of standards which have been critically examined and agreed upon by the whole society. There is a clear awareness of the relativism of personal values and opinions and a corresponding emphasis upon

procedural rules for reaching consensus. Aside from what is constitutionally and democratically agreed upon, the right is a matter of personal "values" and "opinion". The result is an emphasis upon the "legal point of view", but with an emphasis upon the possibility of changing law in terms of rational considerations of social utility (rather than freezing it in terms of Stage 4 "law and order"). Outside the legal realm, free agreement, and contract, is the binding element of obligation. This is the "official" morality of the American government and Constitution.

#### Stage 6. The Universal Ethical Principle Orientation

Right is defined by the decision of conscience in accord with self-chosen ethical principles appealing to logical comprehensiveness, universality, and consistency. These principles are abstract and ethical (the Golden Rule, the categorical imperative): they are not concrete moral rules like the Ten Commandments. At heart, these are universal principles of justice, of the reciprocity and equality of the human rights, and of respect for the dignity of human beings as individual persons. (1972, pp 296-297)

Although there are occasional minor variations in the charts-- Kohlberg sometimes separates a Stage 5 a and b, and makes suggestions towards a Stage 7, to be examined later--the above will be taken as paradigmatic for our discussion.

#### Definition of "stage" and its theoretical background

The psychological theory within which the concept of stage is framed is complex, embodying some of the epistemological views of Piaget and Dewey, the structuralist concepts of the former, and a formalist theory of value which Kohlberg finds in the work of philosophers such as Kant and Hare. The following general characterization

of "stages" can be used to unpack some of these relationships.

1. Stages imply distinct or qualitative differences in children's modes of thinking or of solving the same problem.
2. These different modes of thought form an invariant sequence, order, or succession in individual development. While cultural factors may speed up, slow down, or stop development, they do not change its sequence.
3. Each of these different and sequential modes of thought forms a "structural whole". A given stage-response does not just represent a specific response determined by knowledge and familiarity with that task or tasks similar to it; rather, it represents an underlying thought-organization.
4. Cognitive stages are hierarchical integrations. Stages form an order of increasingly differentiated and integrated structures to fulfill a common function. (1972B, p. 458)

1. Recognition of the stage of a child's moral development involves analysis of the form of the judgments and justifications he habitually uses in response to moral dilemmas. The form of the judgment (punishment-avoiding, law-and-order, etc.) is taken to be completely separable from its specific content. Furthermore, the same collection of concepts and principles (Kohlberg recognizes 32 as the basis of moral discourse) are employed at all stages. The same problems of judgment and action are faced at each stage, but the mode of dealing with them changes with stage-accent. Kohlberg's structuralist account of problem solving mirrors Piaget's description of the development of the child's reasoning in the areas of logical, causal, spatial, etc. thought.

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2. Research has tended to show that the sequence of development is invariant, that there can be neither stage-by-passing, nor regression. Although social and cultural factors may affect both the rate of movement and the end point of development (not all human beings reach stage 6; rather the majority remain at stages 3 and 4) the invariance of sequence tends to suggest that traditional learning-models are inadequate to the explanation of development. Against what he refers to as the "cultural input" model of learning, Kohlberg objects that if the changing modes of thought were considered to be the result of contingent factors of learning from the child's human and natural environment, the discovered invariance would be hard to account for. (1972B, p. 457). Against the "cultural input" model's traditional opposition, motivational theory, whose model of development likens the developing child to a growing plant, Kohlberg has evidence to show that the child's interaction with his human environment crucially affects the rate of his development. Taking his epistemological concepts from John Dewey, Kohlberg describes the child's experience as an interaction with his environment. Changes in structure of thought are the response to problems experienced. The learning which occurs is neither a passive "intake" of knowledge, nor the natural unfolding of an innate process. Invariance of sequence reflects the dependence of one mode of experience upon previous modes.

3. Following from the above, responses to hypothetical or actual

moral dilemmas reflect the stage of cognitive-competence of the individual in such a way that the majority of the person's responses at any one time will be of the form of the stage at which he is located. Though he may use reasoning of a lower stage in some of his responses, he never uses reasoning of more than one stage above his own, for this is not fully comprehensible to him. The notion of "underlying thought-organization" reflects Piaget's Kantian account of the active organization of experience through categories. Kohlberg wishes to contrast the categories with those of Kant's 1st Critique in that they are developed through interactive experience and unfold in the described sequence, rather than being the innate transcendental conditions of experience. We shall have occasion to look at this not immediately perspicuous contrast later.

4. The claim that cognitive structures are hierarchical integrations, involving increasing differentiation and integration of functions, directed to a common purpose, sums up the above three features, and, writ large, points to the educational importance of the stages. Stage-ascent is a two-sided process; development involves a progressive delineation of the forms of discourse--aesthetic, prudential, moral reasoning are gradually distinguished from one another--as well as an improvement in the performance of the moral function. This process is engendered by the use of a stable set of concepts and categories in problems of action and decision. Conflicts of duty are both

separated from, say, matters of taste, and are dealt with increasingly adequately by higher stages. It is the inability of lower stages to satisfactorily solve all problems that propels the developing person through the cognitive-developmental "dialectic". Problems newly-delineated by one stage may be only solvable from a higher stage, and it is the need to obtain "equilibrium" that leads to the replacement of one cognitive structure by another.

It is the presence of the same categories and concepts at each stage that for Kohlberg explains the invariance of sequence in stages which are qualitatively differentiated. The sequence represents,

a universal inner logical order of moral concepts, not a universal order found in the educational practices of all cultures. . . since each new basic differentiation at each stage logically depends upon the differentiation before it, the order of differentiation could not logically be other than it is. (1971A, p. 48)

This strong claim, which we will need to examine closely, points to the remaining aspect of Kohlberg's theory: its value-theory.

Rejecting descriptivist meta-ethical positions, Kohlberg aligns himself with the formalist tradition "from Kant to Hare" which has stressed the universal and prescriptive nature of moral judgment. (1971A, p. 57) The greater structural adequacy of the stages, is said to parallel the increased moral adequacy of the stages measured by the criteria of universality and prescriptivity. Each successive stage more fully delineates "ought" from "is", as the sequence

approaches the complete embodiment of the moral form at stage 6.

In the universality of this latter stage it has become clear that all factual grounds for discriminating between moral agents are specious. Kohlberg considers the demand for universality in moral judgment to be closely related to the structural criterion of integration. Universality implies consistency, since that which holds categorically for me must hold for all other persons; "integration" requires the overcoming of inconsistencies and contradictions in judgment. It is stage 6's recognition that what is good or obligatory for all humanity that justifies the philosophers' disdain for conventional morality. Someone who has passed through to the post-conventional level will recognize that conventional judgments are not fully universal and prescriptive. They are "different for Republicans and Democrats, for Americans and Vietnamese, for fathers and sons". (1971B, p. 197) This theory of value is then inherently antagonistic to moral theories which found judgment on authority or convention, derives judgment from facts of one sort or another, or allow grounds for discriminating between one person and another.

The movement towards universality and prescriptivity of judgment can be seen in the stage treatment of various values. The following table charts the development of the value of human life.

Stage 1. No differentiation between moral values of life and its physical or social-status value.



Stage 2. The value of a human life is seen as instrumental to the satisfaction of the needs of its possessor or of other persons. Decision to save life is relative to, or to be made by, its possessor. (Differentiation of physical and interest value of life, differentiation of its value to self and to other.)

Stage 3. The value of a human life is based on the empathy and affection of family members and others towards its possessor. (The value of human life, as based on social sharing, community and love, is differentiated from the instrumental and hedonistic value of life applicable also to animals.)

Stage 4. Life is conceived of as sacred in terms of its place in a categorical or religious order or rights and duties. (The value of human life, as a categorical member of a moral order, is differentiated from its value to specific other people in the family, etc. Value of life is still partly dependent upon serving the group, the state, God, however.)

Stage 5. Life is valued both in terms of its relation to community welfare and in terms of being a universal human right. (Obligation to respect the basic right to life is differentiated from generalized respect for the sociomoral order. The general value of the independent human life is a primary autonomous value not dependent on other values.)

Stage 6. Belief in the sacredness of human life as representing a universal human value of respect for the individual. (The moral value of a human being, as an object of moral principle, is differentiated from a formal recognition of his rights.) (1971A, p. 89)

## II. EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS OF COGNITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

By juxtaposing the twin claims that moral development is a universal (natural) process, and that higher stages are not merely later, or structurally more adequate, but are morally superior, we can

readily draw out the implications of Kohlberg's work for educational practice. Far from accepting the standard "scientific" position of ethical relativism, which social psychologists, psychoanalysts, sociologists and others have used to knock down the claims of a universal moral education, educators can point to the universality of forms of moral reasoning and of fundamental values uncovered by Kohlberg's work. Kohlberg himself, in discussing the philosophical underpinnings of his educational prescriptions, has suggested that social scientists have tended to be guilty of a conflation of what may be called "cultural relativity" and "ethical relativity". Recognizing that moral principles are divergent in a fundamental way (cultural relativism) social scientists have gone on to make the claim that this divergence is logically unavoidable and that there are no rational grounds for the reconciliation of divergent moral beliefs. Kohlberg suggests that the normative ethical relativist view that everyone should live according to his own principles rests upon the above ethical relativist claim, which is false. (1971B, p. 156) The discovery of the universality of the forms of moral discourse and of fundamental values, re-opens the possibility of a form of education not limited by the irrational contingencies of a society's values.

Kohlberg details the educational recommendations of cognitive-developmental psychology in the context of contrasts between "progressive", and "cultural input" and "romantic" educational ideologies.

(1972B, p. 451) Contrary to the models and metaphors of both the older traditions --the cultural input metaphor of the acquisition of knowledge picturing the child's mind as a computer storing information, the romantic metaphor as a plant, developing according to pre-patterned stages--progressive ideology views the child as a "poet-philosopher" actively organizing his experience which sometimes requires the discarding of cherished but inadequate perspectives. It is the element of choice--the developing child is not imposed upon but freely chooses or constructs his own principles--that allows Kohlberg to link the progressivism which embodies cognitive-developmental psychology, with the demands of a liberal democratic education.

In stimulating the child's development by presenting to him moral problems in the form of hypothetical dilemmas the teacher is acting as a catalyst to a natural process. Although the teacher has to make reference to principles which, in the discussion of issues, have a specific moral content,

Reference to such principles is non-indoctrinative if these principles are not presented as formulae to be learned ready-made or as rote patterns grounded in authority. Rather they are part of a process of reflection by the student and teacher. (1971A, p. 457)

The epistemological and ethical foundations of developmental theory seem to entail the "neutrality" of the teacher's activity, and justify the claim that "the stimulation of development is the only ethically acceptable form of moral education". (1971B, p. 153) Such stimulation

is compatible with the ideals of liberal democracy not in the sense that it entrenches the majority or constitutional viewpoint (see the above chart on p. 11 which indicates that the "official viewpoint" of the American constitution is Stage 5) but in that the autonomy of the individual in making a free choice of values "by conscience", is unimpaired.

The planning and practice of courses which can achieve the stimulation above-mentioned, is of course anything but easy. In order to stimulate the development of each of the individuals in a class group, the teacher needs to locate the stage that each is at--to which end Kohlberg and others have prepared assessment tests--in order to be able to put before the reasoner views of the stage one above his own (the cognitive conflict which leads to stage-ascent being optimal under this condition in the classroom situation). The practical difficulties are considerable; as Jack Fraenkel has pointed out, a teacher who could cater for all stages would have to be at least at Stage 5, for a lower-stage thinker cannot fully comprehend the reasoning of a higher stage thinker.<sup>1</sup>

Practical difficulties notwithstanding, Kohlberg's work points towards a form of education which could, in principle, find universal employment in schools. The considerable efforts initiating programs

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<sup>1</sup>J. Fraenkel, "The Kohlberg Bandwagon... Some Doubts" in Purpel and Ryan (eds.), Moral Education... It Comes with the Territory (McCutchan Publishing Corporation, 1976).

and researching techniques of stimulation show that Kohlberg's optimism concerning the close relation of cognitive-developmental theory to practice is well founded. It can be expected that the vast number of man-hours, and the substantial finances, devoted to research, conferences, and the development of media and technical aids will yield increasingly efficient methods of education, and a re-organization of curricula to place appropriately this potential lynch-pin of modern liberal education.

### III. CRITICAL DEMANDS TO BE MET FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE COGNITIVE-DEVELOPMENTAL EXPLANATION OF MORAL DEVELOPMENT AND ITS EDUCATIONAL IMPORT

Claims as far-reaching in import, and as removed from influential contemporary beliefs and expectations as Kohlberg's could not but meet with a broad array of criticisms. Responses, ranging from sympathetic criticism to foundational attack have come from various quarters. Because the theory is multi-dimensional and consciously makes claims which require different forms of scrutiny--data analysis, tests for theoretical consistency and adequacy to the facts, meta-ethical and conceptual analysis--independent criticisms often seem to fail to cohere. The following are however among the most pervasive criticisms.

1. Empirical evidence for the claims of universality and unidirectionality of development is not as adequate or

unequivocal as is sometimes implied by Kohlberg and his fellow-researchers.<sup>2</sup>

2. The Cognitive-Developmental hypothesis of moral development is not the only possible explanation of the established facts and its ascendancy over its rivals has not been clearly demonstrated.<sup>3</sup>

3. In connection with 1--the "logic" of the hierarchy of stages is anything but apparent. Some stages (3 & 4, 5 & 6) appear to be alternatives rather than neighbours in an invariant sequence.<sup>4</sup>

4. The notion that later stages are morally superior requires an ethical-theoretical or meta-ethical position which is controversial.<sup>5</sup>

5. Kohlberg's suggestion that there is a necessary content

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<sup>2</sup>See E. L. Simpson, "Moral Development Research--A Case Study of Scientific Cultural Bias", Human Development, 17 (1974), 81-106; W. Kurtines and E. B. Grief, "The Development of Moral Thought: Review and Evaluation of Kohlberg's Approach", Psychological Bulletin, Vol. 81, No. 8 (1974), 453-470.

<sup>3</sup>See E. L. Simpson, loc. cit.; J. Habermas, "Moral Development and Ego Identity", Telos, Vol. 41, No. 24 (1975), 41-55.

<sup>4</sup>See J. Habermas, "Moral Development and Ego Identity", Telos, Vol. 41, No. 24 (1975), 46.

<sup>5</sup>See B. Crittenden, Form and Content in Moral Education, Monograph Series 12, The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 23.

to mature moral principles and that this centres on the principle of justice is both hard to harmonize with the formalist value-theory built into the psychological theory and poorly founded in evidence.<sup>6</sup>

6. As an "intellectualist" theory, cognitive-developmental psychology largely ignores the role of the affective in moral action, and makes obscure the nature and ethical importance of moral emotions.

For reasons which it is hoped will become apparent in the course of the enquiry, the following examination will move in its focus from claims 1-5, returning to 2 and co-ordinating this with 6. This sequence will serve to carve out the questions which surround the tenability of Kohlberg's central educational thesis, that the "stimulation of development" is a valid educational aim because non-indoctrinative.

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<sup>6</sup>See J. Fraenkel in Purpel and Ryan, loc. cit.; B. Crittenden, Ibid., 14-23.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE FACTS OF MORAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE COGNITIVE-DEVELOPMENTAL EXPLANATION

Elizabeth Leonie Simpson criticizes the research strategies and standards of Kohlberg and his fellow-workers, suggesting that the claim that a universal stage-development has been evidenced is poorly-founded and reflect "cultural-scientific bias". Furthermore, Kohlberg's claims are difficult to assess as they often involve the juxtaposition of different levels of discourse, "sliding freely from unsubstantiated reference to results to theorizing and prescription".<sup>1</sup>

While applauding the typology of development provided by Kohlberg and acknowledging its heuristic power, Simpson expresses the ethnographer's caution in elaborating the complex practical and conceptual problems involved in the attempt to find universal features in human mental development.

Kurtines and Grief<sup>2</sup> in their review of Kohlberg's research

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<sup>1</sup>E. L. Simpson, "Moral Development Research--A Case Study of Scientific Cultural Bias", Human Development, 17 (1974) 81-106.

<sup>2</sup>W. Kurtines and E. B. Grief, "The Development of Moral Thought: Review and Evaluation of Kohlberg's Approach", Psychological Bulletin 81 (1974), 453-470.



confirm Simpson's fear that the scientific integrity of the cognitive-developmentalists' work is questionable. Their examination of research methods, data analysis, and inference, indicate that Kohlberg's tacit acceptance of the confirmation of the universal stage development is, to say the least, premature. Thinness of evidence and methodological and conceptual problems lead them to conclude that "on the basis of the review... the empirical utility of the model has yet to be demonstrated".<sup>3</sup>

Since the Cognitive-Developmental hypothesis purports to explain an involved nexus of developmental facts, and is only meaningful if the facts are as it claims, some of the above problems must be examined in detail.

# I. THE HYPOTHESIS OF A UNIVERSAL, UNIDIRECTIONAL STAGE SEQUENCE IN MORAL DEVELOPMENT

## (a) Data-collection and research methods

Kurtines and Grief point out that the Moral Judgment Scale used by Kohlberg and associates to assess the moral stage of individuals is difficult to use and involves a good deal of subjective judgment on the part of the scorer. Of the two methods used, the Global Rating scale bases its ratings on,

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<sup>3</sup>W. Kurtines and E. B. Grief, Ibid., 453.

intuitive weighting by the rater of the various elements included... and imply some feel for the types as a whole and some experience of the range of possible responses..

As such, the scorer has to be steeped in the expectations of the theorist. This seems to be true also for the Detailed Scoring system. According to one of the researchers, Fodor,<sup>4</sup> scores are assigned to the thought-content of the speaker's response, defined as "all of a subject's utterances which, taken together, seems to express a single moral idea".<sup>5</sup> Even prior to noting that there are five possible combinations of scoring and reporting procedures, we may note that the judgmental activity of the scorer is problematic. Each scorer has to be trained at length by Kohlberg, whose sensitivities to moral thought may reasonably be presumed to shape data collection. This is quite worrying for the meaningfulness of results as philosophers have considerable difficulty in agreeing about what constitutes "a single moral idea". When the possibility that peoples of different cultures have a varying propensity to articulate their moral justifications, and may do so only in specific circumstances<sup>6</sup> is coupled with this unavoidable element of subjectivity, the reliability of the data obtained in cross-

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<sup>4</sup>E.M. Fodor, "Delinquency and Susceptibility to Social Influence Among Adolescents as a Function of Moral Development", Journal of Social Psychology 86 (1972), 257-260.

<sup>5</sup>Fodor, Ibid., 258.

<sup>6</sup>E. L. Simpson, Ibid., 101.

cultural research has to be questioned.

(b) Construct-Validity: cross-cultural trends

Much of the evidence for the universality and invariance of the stage-sequence comes from Kohlberg's study of children in Mexico, Taiwan and Turkey. (1968) Kurtines and Grief note that the published study provides no information on sample size, percentage scores, standard deviation, etc. , and no description of the methods used, rendering tentative the derived conclusions concerning the invariance of the first three stages.<sup>7</sup> No conclusions could reasonably be drawn concerning the later three stages as none of the children in Turkey or Yucatan had reached stage 5, and only the U.S. sample showed age trends at stages 5 and 6. Even the latter evidence is not what it seems since,

the same responses used to derive the stage sequence are also used to provide evidence for the sequentiality of the stages. This is analogous to validating a test on the same sample from which it was derived.<sup>7</sup>

Bogus confirmation of stage number and sequence is the more worrying when Kohlberg's derivation of the stage typology is borne in mind. In his doctoral thesis (1958) he admits that

the number of types we came out with was eventually rather arbitrary and undoubtedly determined by the

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<sup>7</sup>W. Kurtines and E. B. Grief, ibid., 56.

limits of variation of our particular population.<sup>8</sup>

Although the tenacity of the stage-schema may be accounted for in terms of the happiness of Kohlberg's original sample in representing the gamut of moral responses, it is interesting to note that the typology has not significantly developed or changed in the twenty years of research since its humble birth.

(c) Longitudinal Studies

Besides the cross-cultural studies, the chief line of research aimed at establishing sequence has been the longitudinal studies of American boys and men. Amongst the group there was little general change in scoring between ages 16 - 24. At both ages the majority were situated at stage 4. In this group there was no evidence that individuals had passed through the first three stages in the appropriate order. College students in fact, scored lower than high-school students. As Kurtines and Grief say,

although interpreted as a regression, the downward shift seemed to indicate that the stage sequence is flexible.<sup>9</sup>

Altogether, these studies provided no unequivocal evidence of the invariance of the stage sequence.

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<sup>8</sup>L. Kohlberg, "The Development of Modes of Moral Thinking and Choice in the Years Ten to Sixteen", Ph. D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1958.

<sup>9</sup>Kurtines and Grief, ibid., 463.

(d) Problems of Independent Research

Kurtines and Grief indicate that much of the reason why little counter-evidence to the cognitive-developmental theory has been found is the difficulty of independent research. As the Moral Judgment Scale is difficult to score, and precise instructions are obtainable only from Kohlberg himself, the independent research which could confirm or disconfirm Kohlberg's model is effectively precluded. That researchers are ordinarily trained by Kohlberg and enter their data collection with cognitive-developmental expectations and a significant freedom to use their judgment in obtaining and organizing data is further damaging to critical evaluation of their results.

II. THE COGNITIVE-DEVELOPMENTAL HYPOTHESIS OF MORAL DEVELOPMENT AS AN UNFALSIFIABLE HYPOTHESIS

While much of Kohlberg's writing outlines research data, and much again elucidates his psychological and his ethical theories, the link between the putative facts of development and the cognitive-developmental hypothesis is left rather obscure. Kohlberg often suggests that developmental facts point to something more regular in moral maturation than can be accounted for by ordinary learning theories. The following passage is typical:

a stage concept implies universality of sequence under varying cultural conditions. It implies that moral development is not merely a matter of learning the verbal values or rules of the child's culture, but reflects something more universal in development, something which would occur in any culture. (1971B, p. 171)

That development is universal and invariant does not confirm the cognitive-developmental hypothesis in itself, and it remains possible in principle that Kohlberg has been more strongly influenced by cultural and ethical relativism than he realizes, and that there is simply a greater homogeneity to different cultures' moral thought than previously recognized. If there is indeed a universal unidirectional stage development amongst human beings, we may account for it in various ways, and must devise empirical tests to show whether the cognitive-developmental hypothesis has greater explanatory power than its rivals. A greater theoretical gap subsists between establishment of the required facts of development and the confirmation of the educationally all-important cognitive-developmental hypothesis than Kohlberg ordinarily acknowledges.

We will use the above criticisms of Simpson, and Kurtines and Grief to ask a different question--"Is it possible in principle that the cognitive-developmental hypothesis could be corroborated?" For this purpose the Popperian criterion of significance for empirical theories will be assumed, whereby theories can only convey information about the world if they can be submitted to crucial tests which might result in their falsification.<sup>10</sup> We will work towards the following conclusions:

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<sup>10</sup>K. R. Popper, The Logic of Scientific Discovery, (London, Hutchinson, 1959), Chapters 1 and 2.

1. The "facts" of universal, unidirectional ascent through Kohlbergian stages are not well established, and the evidence is often equivocal.
2. These facts could not serve to strongly corroborate the hypothesis even if established--but counter evidence could undermine it, and such evidence is arguably available.
3. The grounds for the falsification of the "universality unidirectionality" hypothesis are undermined by Kohlberg and associates by the adoption of "ceteris paribus" clauses, and the explanatory power is consequently weakened.
4. In its restricted state it is unclear that the cognitive developmental hypothesis could be corroborated, and ipso facto unclear that it explains anything.

(a) Claims and Conditions of the Cognitive-Developmental Hypothesis

To recapitulate, the putative stage of affairs which the hypothesis attempts to explain is as follows. There is a culturally universal, invariant stage sequence in moral development. According to the hypothesis stages are hierarchical integrations which serve to deal increasingly adequately with a stable set of problems of action. Invariance of sequence is explained by the sequence's representing a "universal inner logic of moral concepts". Universality is accounted for by the dialectic of ascent's being an "internal process" of the differentiation and integration of concepts, which while affected in rate by the child's social, cultural environment, is theoretically independent of cultural contingencies. Higher stages are not merely later, nor

more complex, but are morally superior, so that as Kohlberg says

Our approach takes as an hypothesis for empirical confirmation or refutation that development is a movement towards greater epistemological or ethical adequacy as defined by philosophic principles of adequacy. (1971A, p. 67)

Finally, children ascend through the sequence not by acquiring new skills or learning new information, but by the changing of cognitive structures in their interaction with their environments.

The theory of development is only confirmable of course, if there is a culturally universal, unidirectional development through the Kohlbergian stages.

(b) Counter-Evidence

Despite the above-mentioned difficulty with independent research, some evidence is available that throws into question the universality, and particularly the invariance of the stage sequence. Havighurst and Neugarten<sup>11</sup> found a deviation from the "invariant sequence" among children from six Indian tribes. Faith in "immanent justice", the automatic punishment or reward for wrong-doing and rightdoing, which according to Kohlberg should be left behind, tended to increase with age reflecting the common belief among adults of the

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<sup>11</sup>Havighurst and Neugarten, American Indian and White Children (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1955).



culture. Nearer to home Kramer<sup>12</sup> evidences return to lower-level moral functioning among groups of both middle-class and delinquent American boys.

Kohlberg's claim that development takes place through some mode quite different from ordinary learning is particularly hard to make sense of in the light of some recent studies. While the stages supposedly

represent structures emerging from the interaction of the child with his social environment, rather than directly reflecting external structures given by the child's culture,

studies by, Bandura and McDonald, Cowan, Langer, Heavenrich and Nathanson, and Prentice<sup>13</sup> have all shown that moral judgments are directly influenced by the environment. It has been shown to be possible to induce changes which run against cognitive-developmental expectations. Bandura and McDonald's study reports that,

children's judgmental responses are readily modifiable particularly through the utilization of adult modelling cues.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>R. Kramer, "Moral Development in Young Adulthood", Doctoral Dissertation, Chicago, 1968.

<sup>13</sup>See Kurtines and Grief, ibid., 458.

<sup>14</sup>A. Bandura and F. McDonald, "Influence of Social Reinforcement and the Behaviour of Models in Shaping Children's Moral Judgments", Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology 67 (1963), 274-281.

Holstein in 1972 administered a written version of the moral dilemma test to 53 families, to examine cross-sectional and longitudinal data in connexion with a study of sex-difference in development. The data in general failed to support the invariant sequence hypothesis, and the data over three years suggested considerable skipping of stages and much regression among the final stages for both sexes.

In response to apparent counter-instances like the above Kohlberg and collaborators have introduced certain *ceteris paribus* clauses. Kohlberg suggests that some behaviour changes are structural and in accord with the stages while others are "reversible situation-specific learnings". Turiel and Langer<sup>15</sup> have allowed that social training may be "superimposed" on the developmental process, and that resulting conflict may lead to forward or backward change, or fixation. Simpson rightly criticizes these strategems, as they effectively undermine both the claim that the sequence is invariant and culture-independent, and Kohlberg's "logical order" explanation of the hierarchy of concepts. To retain (weakened) explanatory power Kohlberg's thesis would need to distinguish clearly between the two classes of behaviour. This is obviously an extremely hard task to perform in any consistent way particularly where cross-cultural study is involved.

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<sup>15</sup>J. Langer, "Disequilibrium as a Source of Cognitive Development", Doctoral Dissertation, Chicago, 1967.

(c) Corroboration of the Hypothesis

In its initial formulation then, the Cognitive-Developmental Hypothesis could be taken to have been falsified by the above-mentioned instances. Ignoring these for the moment, though, we may ask how the confirmation of the universality and unidirectionality of stage ascent could corroborate the hypothesis that such development is the result of an internal process of the differentiation and integration of concepts which is independent of culture-specific learning. A number of alternative explanations have been offered, two of which will be briefly looked at later. Simpson points out that the cases of ascent through the stages would appear to be explicable in terms of the appeal of the modes of reasoning of the child's parents or peer group and ordinary modes of learning.<sup>16</sup> Kohlberg and associates have conducted tests to show that, consonant with cognitive-developmental expectations, exposure to reasoning one stage above the child's own is optimal for stage-transition. Turiel and Rest's studies of passive exposure of children to stages of reasoning one above their own showed, however, that such conditions are neither necessary nor sufficient for ascent. Turiel's study<sup>17</sup> seemed to show

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<sup>16</sup>E. L. Simpson, ibid., 89.

<sup>17</sup>E. Turiel, "An Experimental Test of the Sequentiality of Developmental Stages in the Child's Moral Judgment", Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 3 (1966), 611-618.

that there was no significant difference in result between the use of reasoning one stage higher and one stage lower than the child's own.

The problem with the above tests is that they may, whatever their results, be interpretable as confirmation for a bewildering variety of hypotheses. If there are several alternatives, all of which satisfy the phenomena, and between which there are no grounds for choice one of two alternatives is possible. Either the hypotheses await a crucial test which would decide between them, or they are all unfalsifiable in which case they explain nothing. To examine the status of Kohlberg's cognitive-developmental hypothesis we may suggest an alternative which apparently covers all the instances, but which few would be prepared to accept.

"Ethical Occasionalism" is that doctrine which, accepting the universality, unidirectionality and irreversibility of Kohlberg's stages, explains them in terms of God's intervention in the child's thinking at certain stages of his development. That the child is attracted to a stage of reasoning one above his own is to be explained as a precognition of divine intervention. To fill out the case we may match the ad hoc with the ad hoc and rather than describing regressing delinquents as "not subject to ordinary conditions" we may look up with sad wizened eye and declare it to be a part of God's unfathomable plan.

In the case of such a claim Kohlberg might draw on evidence showing that only those children who spontaneously used some

reasoning at a level one above their own could understand that stage of reasoning.' From this evidence Kohlberg concludes,

presumably then, movement to the next stage involves internal cognitive re-organization rather than mere addition of more difficult content from the outside.  
(1971A, p. 49)

Again, though, a little ingenuity may turn this into a "victory" for our hypothesis. Noting that for most individuals stage 4 is the terminus of development, and that stage 4 reasoning is authority oriented, we may suggest that God superimposes the higher form on the lower to induce the conflict which may eventually turn the child to his maker for authority.

The point to be drawn from this is that, once refutation of the cognitive-developmental hypothesis through counter-instances to the "universality, unidirectionality" claim is rendered impossible by the incorporating of apparent counter-instances in ad hoc hypotheses, it is far from clear how Kohlberg's theory could be corroborated. While it is possible to evidence the acquisition of specific linguistic skills and abilities, and to measure the rates at which, and record the circumstances in which stage-transition occurs, it is hard to know what could show that such development was the result of "internal cognitive re-organization rather than the mere addition of more difficult content from the outside". (1971A, p. 49) Much of the problem lies in the epistemological obscurity of the cognitive-developmental "interactive"

learning model. Its contrast with the traditional learning models--the logical distinctions of which we will have to return to later--is hard to give empirical weight. That children being examined live in an open language community, and are exposed to various influences, and that a stage reasoner may use reasoning from several stages at any one time, makes conclusive assessment of their mode of learning problematic.

There is no need for our purposes to accept the full force of the falsificationist's strictures and to condemn the cognitive-developmental explanation as trivial. Using the above for heuristic purposes, and acknowledging that the testability of the hypothesis remains an open question, we may observe that both the claim that a universal stage development has been "rather firmly" established, and the claim that the cognitive-developmental hypothesis is the theory that best fits the facts, are roundly hyperbolic. Although the modus operandi of cognitive-developmental researchers discourages the independent research which would be likely to yield counter-instances, some counter-evidence appears to be extant. Whether or not this is adequate to a refutation of the cognitive-developmental hypothesis, the latter's ascendancy over alternative hypotheses has not been demonstrated, and its tenability as an explanation of the known facts stands in question.

### III. THE RELATION OF KOHLBERG'S VALUE-THEORY TO HIS PSYCHOLOGICAL EXPLANATION

Simpson's complaint that Kohlberg's writing leaps from the descriptive to the explanatory to the prescriptive highlights the "architectonical" nature of his theorizing which makes its assessment so difficult. That Kohlberg is fully aware of the complexity of his work is indicated in his noting that,

the distinctive feature of the developmental-philosophic approach (to moral education) is that a philosophic conception of adequate principle is co-ordinated with a psychological theory of development and with the fact of development. (1972B, p. 484)

Part of the reason for the laxness of scientific standards noted by Simpson and Kurtines and Grief, may lie in the recognition that the justification of cognitive-developmental theory has to be sought not at one, but at several levels. While Kohlberg acknowledges responsibility for providing the empirical backbone of his theory, his remarks reveal that the "phenomena" to be observed are only intelligible as part of a philosophical construct. In asserting that the cognitive-developmental approach

takes as an hypothesis for empirical confirmation or refutation that development is a movement towards greater epistemological or ethical adequacy as defined by philosophic principles of adequacy, (1972B, p. 484)

Kohlberg takes upon himself at least the following tasks:

1. Empirical substantiation of the facts of development

2. Explication of the epistemological principles by which the stages can be seen to be increasingly complex
3. Justification of a meta-ethical position.

While the separate elements may be quite compatible and even mutually supportive, each must be examined as far as possible independently of the others (recognizing with Kohlberg that ultimately psychology and philosophy are mutually involved). Failure to co-ordinate the results of these separate enquiries results in situations such as the following. Rest<sup>18</sup> and Rest et. al.<sup>19</sup> carried out tests designed to show that the Kohlbergian stages represent increasing logical complexity. While the studies did indeed provide some such evidence, the evidence is lacking that actual development follows these six stages. Conversely, failure to separate the strands of justification tends to result in "support" that is internal to cognitive-developmental theory; that is, that begs the question. An example of the latter is Kohlberg's explanation of the inability of many philosophers to recognize the adequacy of a "Kantian" formal meta-ethic. These philosophers, he says, tend to import philosophical criteria of rationality

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<sup>18</sup>J. Rest, "The Hierarchical Nature of Moral Judgment: A Study of Patterns of Comprehension and Preference of Moral Stages", Journal of Personality 41 (1973), 86-109.

<sup>19</sup>J. Rest, E. Turiel and L. Kohlberg, "Level of Moral Development as a Determinant of Preference and Comprehension of Moral Judgments Made by Others", Journal of Personality 37 (1969) 225-252.



from other domains, whereas

the greater structural adequacy of the developmentally more advanced, of the more prescriptive and universal, is not something to be established in terms of either scientific truth criteria or means-ends efficiency. We have said that moral judgments are not true or false in the cognitive-descriptivist sense. (1974A, p. 48)

Since what is at issue amongst formalist and non-formalist philosophers is precisely whether there can be distinctively moral criteria of rationality, or forms of judgment, this is only to say that the reason why non-formalists do not recognize formalist criteria is that they are not formalists.

What is required for a complete overview of the cognitive-developmental explanation of moral development is then a prior differentiation of the psychological and ethical theories and the facts of development, before the different elements can be integrated in a comprehensive assessment. In particular, the relation of Kohlberg's structural explanation of stage-ascent, to the formalist value-theory which he says his theory assumes, must be examined. Often in his writings he claims that a very close relationship holds between the two, that the formalist criteria of the universality and prescriptivity of moral judgments, map on to the structuralist criteria of differentiation, integration and equilibrium. In its strongest expression, this view suggests an intermingling and even a merging of structuralist psychological explanation and formalist meta-ethical justification, so that

the scientific theory as to why people factually do move upward from stage to stage, and why they factually do prefer a higher stage to a lower, is broadly the same as a moral theory as to why people should prefer a higher stage to a lower. (1971B, p. 223)

This startling assertion provides a link between the adequacy of the cognitive-developmental explanation of stage ascent and the adequacy of the theory's view of value. The putative inability of the psychological theory to provide a genuine explanation of development may be intimately bound up with its formalist meta-ethic. In the examination of the role of Kohlberg's "formalism" in his psychological theory which follows, the stage-typology will at times be treated as a hypothetical construct. While this is in part legitimated by the dearth of significant empirical evidence, its chief function will be to facilitate an examination of the internal logic and conceptual structure of the stage sequence. Amongst the enigmas which can best be examined by treating the sequence as a philosophical construct are the claim that the stages, while qualitatively differentiated represent an "inner logic" of moral concepts, and the reported ability of the formal, structural process to yield a necessary content to mature moral principles. It is partly on the intelligibility of these claims that the tenability of Kohlberg's view of education rests.

## CHAPTER THREE

### FORMALISM IN THE EXPLANATION OF MORAL DEVELOPMENT

#### I. THE LOGIC OF DEVELOPMENT

Kohlberg's claim that the explanation of why an individual ascends through the moral stages is much the same as the meta-ethical justification of the superiority of a higher over a lower stage of development links the work of the psychologist and philosopher in what appears to be a fascinating new way. If indeed psychologist and philosopher are ultimately obliged to use the same language, or at least languages translatable without conceptual residue, an interpretive relationship is established between the scientist and the rational man which by-passes many problems inherent in main stream psychologies. Unlike the psycho-analyst, for example, who in understanding his patient has to translate the latter's utterances into a quite different language of explanation, the cognitive-developmental psychologist may be able, qua psychologist, to understand a mature moral reasoner's justification of his action at face value. If the way in which one moral justification is morally superior to another is the same as the way the one utterance is psychologically more adequate than the other,

we may expect psychologist and mature moral reasoner to be in complete accord concerning the moral appropriateness of any action and its justification. Before such a relationship can be established however, the relationship between Kohlberg's psychological structuralism and his moral formalism must be examined.

In suggesting an isomorphism between psychological and normative theory Kohlberg proposes to show, amongst other things, how the "inner logic of moral concepts" is to be understood psychologically. Yet the juxtaposition of the claim that later stages are superior by structural criteria with the claim that there is an inner logic of moral concepts such that "the order of differentiation (of concepts) could not logically be other than it is" (1971A, p. 48) raises an enigma. The structuralist criteria of differentiation, integration and equilibration define stages, which, the theory insists, are qualitatively distinguished from one another. If the modes of reasoning called stage 4 are qualitatively distinguished from those of stage 3, and their theoretical superiority consists precisely in this qualitative difference, how can there be a purely logical relationship between them? While Kohlberg's position on this issue is not entirely clear, he often seems to talk in this way, and suggests that lower stages are logically derivable from higher. For example, stage 5 social contract reasoning is said to be deducible from stage 6 orientation to universal principles. (1971B, p. 210) That Kohlberg should want to talk this way is hardly surprising

since such a logic, if established, would furnish a partial explanation of the order of the stages. If there were such, missed by all previous moral philosophers, the structuralist criteria of differentiation and integration would presumably express that logic. As it is, the proof of the logical order has not been redeemed by Kohlberg and, as Jurgen Habermas points out, claims on its behalf fail to yield even an intuitive solution to the problem of stage-ascent--the divisions do not correspond to any obvious morally relevant form of increased complexity in the stages.<sup>1</sup>

Dismissing talk of a deductive relationship of the stages as wishful thinking, we are returned to the problem of the relationship between structuralist and formalist criteria of adequacy. For all a description of the conceptual differentiations and integrations of the succeeding stages can yield is an account of the observed developments in children's reasoning, not an explanation of that development. As long as the reasons for stage-ascent remain unknown, the merging of structuralist and formalist criteria of adequacy remains mysterious. This problem may be alleviated by noting one sense in which the structuralist criteria of differentiation and integration do not map onto the formalist criteria of universality and prescriptivity. Where the processes of differentiation and integration take place at each stage,

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<sup>1</sup>J. Habermas, "Moral Development and Ego\Identity", Telos 41, 1975, 46.

universality and prescriptivity only appear at stages 4-6. The "isomorphism" which Kohlberg claims is in reality a convergence, through the sequence, of the structuralist criteria of psychological adequacy with the formal criteria which supposedly define morality. While the structuralist criteria of adequacy are internal to the developmental process, unlike formal logic, their convergence with formal moral criteria may define a *sui generis* telos which has its own kind of necessity. Kohlberg's careful elaboration of the differentiations and integrations which take place at each stage and their relation to mature moral thought may show how the invariance of the sequence is to be understood.

At least a partial explanation of the late appearance of universal prescriptivism in moral thought is provided by a comparison of moral stage with Piaget's stages of logical thought. This shows that there is a correlation between the levels of moral thought (pre-conventional, conventional, post-conventional) and the levels of logical operations (pre-operational, concrete operational, formal operational) such that stage 5 thinking, for example, presupposes formal operational thought. (1971B, p. 203) Kohlberg tells us that the differences in the formal reasoning of the various stages can be seen as different forms of role-taking, and that the type of role-taking a child is capable of is determined by his stage of logical thought. The formal operations required for stages 5 and 6 are operations upon operations,

which combine all possibilities and facilitate hypothetico-deductive thought.

While higher stages may necessarily be later for reasons of the logical structure of their thought, sheer logical complexity is not in itself moral superiority. It is perfectly possible to imagine a piece of prudential reasoning which is more logically complex than an equivalent piece of moral reasoning in response to the same problem of action, without concluding that the former is morally superior. Kohlberg acknowledges this in saying that the stage of logical thought is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the stage of moral thought, and goes on to show the new differentiations and integrations which make later thought superior to earlier and their relation to the philosophically-approved universal prescriptivism.

That Kohlberg identifies the moral-philosophic adequacy of later stages independently of showing how later stages are structurally superior is very important. It enables him to escape a dilemma which stage psychologists in general face. As Michael Scriven says, the crucial question for developmentalists is whether someone at a conventional stage, say, is more wrong on a moral issue than someone at a "higher" stage.

If the "lower" stage subjects are not demonstrably wrong, then there's no justification for trying to change them, i. e. for moral education. If they are demonstrably wrong, then there must be a proof that they are wrong i. e. , a proof of the increasingly

objective nature of the moral standards (or processes) of higher stages; but no satisfactory proof of this has ever been produced (or endorsed) by the developmentalists. Nor is this accidental. If there were such a proof, who could understand it and find it persuasive? Either the lower stages can, in which case it isn't a higher stage proof and hence is morally inferior and should be ignored by truly moral people--and hence provides no basis for action in the field of moral education; or the lower stages can't understand it, in which case we have no justification for thinking they should be moved since the proof is pragmatically circular; i. e. it only proves the highest stages are highest to highest stages.<sup>2</sup>

This conundrum--whose author expressly acknowledges Kohlberg's readiness to face and answer it--must be born in mind in examination of Kohlberg's theory, at least until the relation between structural adequacy and formal moral adequacy is made clear. If the moral theory which Kohlberg recommends should show itself to reduce to structuralist criteria of adequacy, a charge of the ruinous circularity which Scriven describes may be legitimately levelled at cognitive-developmental theory.

In terms of structural theory, later stages are adjudged higher by merit of the greater "equilibrium" they entail. The cognitive-conflict by which stage transition takes place, develops because the experiencing, reasoning child becomes aware that he cannot resolve moral problems in a consistent way. Stage 1 orientation towards

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<sup>2</sup>M. Scriven, "Cognitive Moral Education" in Purpel & Ryan (Eds.) Moral Education... It Comes With the Territory (McCutchan Publishing Corporation, 1976).



punishment avoidance is thrown into disequilibrium when the possibility is raised that punishment may be avoided and that the satisfaction of wants may be achieved in reciprocation with another. Stage 2 children, unlike stage 1 children can pass tests of logical reciprocity or reversibility and so can enter into a relationship of interaction with another governed by "principles" of fairness, understood as equal exchange. Later, at stage 5, stage 4 orientation to law and order has yielded to the demand for critical revision of laws in accordance with the conditions of social contract. This is a law-making stage, whose logical development is made possible by the onset of formal-operational thought. Laws are seen "as exemplifications of universal logical possibilities", so that the particular laws under which a society lives can be seen to have a degree of arbitrariness to them. (1971B, p. 203) The new-found reflectivity here itself engenders the downfall of stage 5, since the critical individual becomes able to imagine situations which are not answered by contractarian criteria of the securing of rational self-interest. Many issues which require moral decision fall outside the sphere of law and social contract. Kohlberg's favourite example is the intelligibility of civil disobedience. A stage 5 reasoner may feel that, for example, those who aided slaves to escape before the Civil War were morally right, but cannot harmonize this recognition with his belief that obligations are generated by "society" or social-contract. In order to make sense of being under

an obligation to break a law he has to make the transition to stage 6 in which personal rights are categorical, that is unconditioned by contract. Kohlberg identifies the integration by which stage 6 is seen to be more adequate, more equilibrated than stage 5, as a correlativity of duties and rights. (1974, p. 638) Whereas stage 5 gives individuals rights (rights of recipience) which may require law-breaking for their maintenance, it does not define individual duties to maintain that right. In the "Heinz" dilemma (see Appendix), a stage 5 subject may feel that Heinz was justified in stealing, but not believe that the right of his wife to life obligates him to steal. At stage 6 a person's right to life defines an obligation for each individual to maintain that right; rights and duties are then correlative.

"Equilibrium" is then a cross-stage indicator of the adequacy of a form of reasoning. The child-philosopher is pushed by his own demands for consistency to ascend to higher stages of reasoning, which more nearly approach the universality and ideality of judgment which is stage 6 "ideal equilibrium". As Kohlberg says the convergence of formalist and structuralist criteria of adequacy (isomorphism) is made intelligible by the demands for consistency and rigour which the developing child makes upon himself.

The isomorphism assumption is palusible if one believes that the developing human being and the moral philosopher are engaged in fundamentally the same task. (1974, p. 633)

And yet this analogy between the child and the philosopher reveals an ambiguity in Kohlberg's use of the term "equilibrium" which may have important consequences for the adequacy of the explanation of stage-ascent which it yields. In talking of the genesis of his theory Kohlberg elsewhere says,

In Piaget's theory, which we follow, the notion that logical and moral stages are interactional is united to the discrepancies or conflicts between the child's schemata of action and the actions of others. (1971B, p. 194)

While the interaction of a child's thought-structures with those of his human environment is of course central to cognitive-developmental theory, the above quotation implies a dependence upon the modes of thought and action of those surrounding the child-philosopher which is not precisely analogous to that of the "pure" philosopher. While the philosopher is dependent upon the common language of morality for his theorizing he may certainly challenge the consistency of thought of the majority.

What is at question here is the mode of learning which is required for a child to come to cast off his outworn modes of thinking in the "dialectic" of development. The logic of the cognitive-developmental learning model stands in need of elucidation, for if disequilibrium is induced not by the purely logical demand for consistency, but by recognising a disparity between the agent's ways of thinking and doing and those of other people, the cognitive-

developmentalists' dismissal of ordinary modes of learning may be premature. Where failing to match the judgments of others results in anxiety and guilt for a child, there is good reason to suppose that operant learning, for example, may have a role to play in stage-ascent. This is made quite clear when it is recognized that each stage is, in one way, perfectly capable of doing its job.

Before a stage 2 instrumental-hedonist can be thrown into disequilibrium he needs to be able to see that there is something inadequate about the relationships of mutual exchange and reciprocal gratification he holds with his neighbours. Whether the transition to the good-boy perspective can be understood as the achievements of the philosopher's quest for consistency, or whether it involves developing capacities to feel guilt and pride, and so to take-up attitudes of trust, respect for friends and so on is not clear and must be examined later. While Kohlberg does not often identify the mechanism of "attunement", his notion of "equilibration" may conceal reference to a wider sphere of learning in a way that casts doubt on the adequacy of the cognitive-developmental explanation of stage-ascent.

## II. COGNITIVE-DEVELOPMENT AND EGO PSYCHOLOGY

Part of the problem in levelling an accusation of inadequacy of explanation against cognitive-developmental theory is that the exact territory within which it operates is ill-defined. Kohlberg's interest

lies primarily in formal processes of reasoning through which developing children pass. As such, his much-reported neglect of the affective aspects of moral development, particularly with regard to the understanding of motivation, may be seen to be a function of his initial emphasis. That he does not talk at length of these matters need not be grounds for accusing him of unduly truncating the issue of moral development; it may be that independent supplementary research in these areas would flesh out the cognitive-developmental skeleton which he has charted. Nonetheless, as Peters warns, "there is a danger that the unwary will think that he has told the whole story".<sup>3</sup> There is also the concomitant danger that like a parochial geomorphologist who attempts to explain the mountains of his country as a part of national history, Kohlberg may see cognitive-development as an island unto itself and neglect the wider context of personal development within which alone the development of moral reasoning is fully explicable.

The relationship of cognitive-development to ego psychology is particularly interesting here, for the latter's notion of "stages" of development is in many ways parallel to that developed by Piaget and Kohlberg. Kohlberg acknowledges this relationship in his paper "Continuities in Childhood and Adult Moral Development Revisited"

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<sup>3</sup>R. Peters, "Why Won't Lawrence Kohlberg Do His Homework" in Purpel & Ryan, Loc. cit.

by plotting some parallels between his own theory and Erikson's "functional" ego stage-theory. (1973B, p. 42) Erikson suggests that prior to attaining an adult ethical orientation, individuals pass through an adolescent phase in which an awareness of universal ethical principles is attained. At this stage, which coincides with identity crisis, the ability to understand principles is not yet a propensity to act regularly on principle. It is only when identity is achieved that the truly-principled orientation of Kohlberg's stage 6 becomes possible. Kohlberg draws a connection between identity-crisis and the problematic observed "regression" of some of his post-conventional subjects. Having developed the critical powers by which to examine and reject the given rules of conventional morality such subjects are cast into a state of disequilibrium in which they are likely to employ reasoning from both pre-conventional modes, and on occasion from principled thought. The latter usage is insufficient to qualify as attainment of stage 6, which only comes about through "stabilization" over a period of time. A close parallel exists, then, between the "equilibration" by which post-conventional subjects arrive at stage 6, and the securing of ego-identity.

The above, and other close parallels such as the rigidity of conventional morality for cognitive psychology, and the inflexibility of ascribed identities in ego theory, lead Kohlberg to suggest that the two approaches may be seen as different perspectives on the same

processes of development. An integrated theory of social and moral stages would have to combine both perspectives, he says. While this is a helpful and interesting suggestion, the contrast Kohlberg draws between his and Erikson's "perspectives" is telling.

The self-focus of ego stages, in turn, implies another basic contrast between Piaget's and Erikson's stages, that of Erikson's focus upon choice. Stages of perception of the world cannot be defined directly as choice. In contrast, stages in the perception of and movement of the self are stages in the self's choice. Moral decisions and moral development may be viewed as either a choice (or change) in the moral self or as a change in perceived moral principles. (1973B, p. 52)

In fact, Kohlberg suggests that the movement from conventional to post-conventional morality can be understood as a choice in a way that earlier stage-movement cannot. Since, as we have suggested above, it is the mode of learning and so of stage-ascent at the earlier stages which is most problematic, the metaphor of the "poet-philosopher" child is perhaps again misleading. If the capacity to choose between alternative modes of handling moral problems only develops in the twilight of conventional morality, it is doubtful that a homogeneous set of explanatory concepts, "cognitive-conflict", "dis-equilibrium", "equilibration", bolstered by the metaphor of philosophical activity can explain transition between all stages. While the combination of cognitive and ego-theory perspectives may seem a desirable goal, it is hard to see how the radically different theoretical framework of ego psychology could make room for the cognitive-

developmentalists' explanatory tools.

Jurgen Habermas in his "Moral Development and Ego Identity"<sup>4</sup> points out that the nexus of problems that can be subsumed under "ego-identity" have been dealt with by three quite different theoretical traditions. Each of, analytical ego-psychology (H. S. Sullivan, Erikson), cognitive-developmental psychology (Piaget, Kohlberg) and theories of symbolic interaction (Mead, Turner, et. al.) have used ideas of "stage-development" which intermesh and parallel closely. None of them, he goes on to say, has yielded a theory with explanatory power which could give the concepts of ego-identity an exact, content-laden determination. The details of Habermas' re-construction of the stage-sequence within ego-theory do not need to be examined here, but his general strategy is of interest. He proposes to link moral consciousness (as examined in Kohlberg's stage sequence) with the general qualifications of role action, using the theoretical framework for action introduced by Mead and developed by Parsons. He believes that by piecing together the components of role qualifications--cognitive, communicative and motivational--in such a way that they can be seen as constituting the backbone of ego-dynamics, the processes of stage-ascent can be explained. While he attempts to show that the Kohlbergian

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<sup>4</sup>J. Habermas, "Moral Development and Ego Identity", Telos 41, 1975, 44.



stage-sequence can be derived from the constructed account of role competency, what is important is that the explanation of stage-ascent in terms of developing ego-determinations carries us far from the structuralist/formalist framework of Kohlberg.

What both the examples of Erikson and Habermas show is that Kohlberg's stage-sequence readily lends itself to integration in a broader theory of moral, and in turn personal development, which integration tends to threaten the structuralist framework which Kohlberg takes to explain the stage-sequence. For his own part, Kohlberg seeks to demonstrate the internal intelligibility of the cognitive-developmental dialectic by charting in detail the transformations and developments through which the teleology yields stage 6 thought. These developments can be seen either as changing forms of role-playing or as changing "justice-structures". (1971B, p. 195) That is, the developing capacity to perform the operation of putting oneself in the other's shoes, to see a situation of conflict from the other's perspective defines developing ways of resolving the conflicts of interest which Kohlberg takes to be the core of morality. As successive stages perform the same function, and the problems of conflicts of interest can be ordered under the concept of justice, the stages may be called "justice-structures".

When the stages are defined in this way the inner-structure of the teleology becomes considerably clearer. At each successive stage the child becomes better able to perform the operation of

reversibility, and as a result takes in a wider scoop of humanity, such that his judgments become more universal and ideal. In so doing he acquires a better equilibrium through being better able to resolve his moral problems in a consistent way. That the child is motivated to grasp for increasingly adequate structures is shown by evidence that children consistently prefer the reasoning of one stage above their modal stage. Landed by his own efforts with a wider insight into moral problems the learner is pushed to seek their resolution. A stage 3 reasoner who has learnt to use the Golden Rule in order to enter into relations of "ideal reciprocity"--rather than automatically giving an eye for an eye, a punch for a punch as at stage 2, the agent seeks long-term maintenance of the relation of reciprocity through trust--is not yet in a fully equilibrated situation. In the "druggist" dilemma he is aware that he must place himself in the other's shoes, but has as yet no grounds for choosing between the woman's and the druggist's. (1971B, p. 198) Only by pushing upwards towards the ideal role--taking of stage 6, in which the burgeoning demands for equality and fairness are ordered by the principle of respect for human life, can he achieve a finally equilibrated vantage.

Although the processes of the stages are purely "formal" and so dictate no particular content, the ascent to stage 6 leads to a converging of viewpoints. While each stage has a "justice-structure" only stage 6 uses concrete principles of justice to order its thought.

, The process of "growth from within" by which the learner struggles up through the stages finds its terminus, then, in a recognition of "justice" as the ideal form of morality. It is these factors in part that allow Kohlberg to call the stimulation of development a "Platonic" form of education.

### III. KOHLBERG'S PLATONISM (AND ITS DISCONTENT)

When Kohlberg observes that the declaration of allegiance of a cognitive-developmental psychologist to Plato is "more than a cute paradox" he neglects to show just how much more than cute it is.

(1970, p. 57) The act of syncretic jugglery by which the Deweyite, formalist theory--"which assumes the fact/value distinction"--is brought into happy harmony with the thought of the most extreme objectivist in the history of ethical thought, is truly astounding. Once the initial jarring is overcome though, the context and content of what Kohlberg says can be seen to yield a rich metaphorical framework. In order to display this framework, and as far as possible to separate metaphor from doctrine we will examine its "Platonic" theses one by one.

Virtue is ultimately one, not many, and it is always the same ideal form regardless of climate or culture.  
(1970, p. 57)

Despite the confused beliefs of Meno and ethical relativist social scientists there is a common "eidos" of virtue. While different cultures

may have varying concrete mores, the language in which they comment, censure and generally evaluate has the same form. More precisely, the six moral languages in which different individuals within a given culture talk are arranged in the same developmental hierarchy, and the same principles and categories are used universally. While not many individuals, and not all cultures actually achieve stage 6 (even a philosophic cannibal has difficulty in commanding a principle of justice as fairness and respect for human life) all ascend towards the common form in a single invariant order.

Secondly, and following immediately from the above, the name of the ideal form in which morality finds its home is justice. Again, across cultures all mature reasoners use principles of justice, understood as equality, fairness, respect for persons. While the formal definition of mature thought requires meeting only the criteria of universality and prescriptivity ("self chosen principles of conscience") it appears somehow that only the principle of justice can fully resolve the conflicts of obligation which are the central concern of morality. Furthermore, the stages in sequence are all "trying" to embody this form more adequately. Each stage has a justice-structure, so that, for example, the "eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth concept of justice is stage 1". (1970, p. 81) (Although we may dispute this designation with Kohlberg--exact reciprocation seems to be stage 2--we shouldn't be surprised if Judaic traditions have yielded few stage 6 reasoners.)

Stage 6 then is the full embodiment of the form dimly perceived at stage 1. This recognition carries us to the third and fourth claims.

The good can be taught, but its teachers must in a certain sense be philosopher-kings... the reason the good can be taught is because we know it all along dimly or at a low level and its teaching is more a calling out than an instruction. (1970, p. 58)

Because the ascent from stage is neither the result of instruction in its ordinary sense, nor the recommending of a "bag of virtues" to developing children, the "stimulator" cannot be a teacher in the ordinary sense. There is no univocal moral content which can be taught "because the same good is known differently at different levels and direct instruction cannot take place across levels." (1970, p. 58)

In order to carry learners into the "dialectic" in which they ascend the "Divided Line", the teacher has to know which questions his pupil is capable of responding to, which will lead him to the stage of "aporia" in which stage ascent is optimal. To be able to do this for all learners, the teacher has himself to have attained the highest vantage point--otherwise he could not understand that his position was the true one, and so could not understand why he should teach others. The teacher knows that he cannot teach virtue unless his pupils have a dim grasp already of its form; he can only "call out" the embryonic recognition which a stage 1 thinker displays in his use of the words "good", "right", etc. His recognition of the futility of a Boy Scout recitation of common virtues leads us to the fifth and sixth theses.

Not only is the good one, but virtue is knowledge of the good. He who knows the good chooses the good... the kind of knowledge of the good which is virtue is philosophical knowledge or intuition of the ideal form of the good, not correct opinion or acceptance of conventional beliefs. (1970, p. 58)

Kohlberg's research stands against the tradition of western moral philosophy at least since Augustine, in embracing Socratic intellectualism. Although moral maturity is measured by the cognitive-developmentalists in terms of forms of reasoning employed, research has indicated a correlation between stage of reasoning and propensity to act on expressed principles. Instances of "akrasia" are lower amongst stage 6 subjects than amongst members of all other stages. Achieving pure-principled "knowledge of the good" is then at the same time acquiring a propensity to be virtuous. Research into the political action of various stages nicely ramifies this point, and shows why the philosopher's disdain of conventional opinion is justified.

Kohlberg reports on a sit-in carried out at Berkeley in the name of political freedom of communication. (1970, p. 79) The administration of moral judgment interviews showed that the issue was clearly divided along stage lines. Stage 5 reasoners, who were inclined to think of their commitments in terms of their free contracting into the institution and its rules were themselves divided; 50 per cent of stage 5 subjects sat in. In contrast, among stage 6 subjects who were armed with a capacity to derive civil disobedience from their unconditioned

universal principles, 80 per cent sat it. Again, in accord with expectations stage 3 and 4 subjects wholeheartedly rejected the action; only 10 per cent sat in. Most interestingly, a high 60 per cent of instrumental relativists (stage 2) took their stand with stage 6 subjects. Now, as Kohlberg has noted many stage 2 college students are among the problematic group of "regressers". In their rejection of conventional beliefs they have been unable to find a rational basis for their principles and have opted for the solid basis of instrumental self-interest. Blinded by their initial perception of the Good, our Guardians-to-be stagger back into the cave for respite. Having experienced the vision which exposes the hollow-show of conventional and pre-conventional behaviour for what it is they cannot remain in the gloom of the cave for long, and soon return to learn to live in the light. Once they have done so opinion becomes knowledge, and judgment (knowledge) and action become inextricably bound.

The metaphor is rich and plentiful, and has not been fully mined even at this point. For example, justice is at the same time a stage of the relations between men, and inwardly a state of the soul. "Justice" as stage 6 ideal equilibrium can legislate for all rational beings, and is at the same time freedom from the inner burden of inconsistency and conflict from which the child-philosopher has sought to escape in his ascent of the stages. The disanalogies are striking too, and some point to the nub of the issue that Kohlberg's appeal to Plato is intended

to illuminate. While "knowledge of the good" is a philosophical form of intuition, Kohlberg does not require his initiates to withdraw from the "cave" in order to undertake the dialectic that leads to such an intuition. Rather, since level of judgment is the result of an interaction between the child's structuring tendencies and those structures extant in his human environment, education must necessarily take place in the noise of day to day life. Further, this same fact of interaction leads to the "frightening" conclusion that to produce just citizens schools must be just places. (1970, p. 83) It was precisely to give philosophic initiates distance from the corruption that was intrinsic to society that Plato proposed an education in withdrawal.

What is at question, then, is the uniqueness of the philosopher's intuition which constitutes "knowledge of the good". Of course, Kohlberg's talk of "intuition of the ideal form of the Good" is sheer decoration; if it were not, his entire structuralist-formalist explanation would be quite bogus. Stage 6 "knowledge" cannot be knowledge of any object, and Kohlberg makes this clear time and again with observations such as, "if stages of moral judgment develop through conflict and reorganization this is incompatible with the notion that moral judgment is the apprehension of natural or non-natural facts". (1971B, p. 184) In fact, despite his claim to throwing-off his "graduate-school wisdom" about the distinction between fact and value, and his sometimes interesting, sometimes trivial wanderings in the borderlands of psychology



and moral philosophy, Kohlberg's theorizing expresses the polarity of fact and values consistently through its entire structure.

"Knowledge of the Good" amounts to "knowledge" of the principle of justice. Despite Kohlberg's characterization of "principles" as "neither rules (means) nor values (ends) but... guides to perceiving and integrating all the morally relevant elements in concrete situations" (1971B, p. 219) it is tempting to characterize use of a principle as possession of a skill. However conceptual analysis might resolve this issue, it is clear that the structuralist/formalist characterization of the stages places Kohlberg's theory on the nether side of the descriptivist/prescriptivist division of moral theories. It is this division which is vital in understanding both the role of the educator and the question of the reasons for, and explanation of stage-ascent--for the resolution of Scriven's conundrum in short.

The wide gulf separating Kohlberg's formalism from Plato's thought is pointed to in their different understandings of justice, a difference Kohlberg glosses over. A glaring incompatibility with the educational "doctrine" of the Republic is revealed when Kohlberg declares that,

the problems as to the legitimacy of moral education in the public schools disappear ... if the proper content of moral education is recognized to be the values of justice which themselves prohibit the imposition of beliefs of one group upon another. (1970, p. 67)

At this point the pretty painted skin of "Platonism" tears, revealing

the flesh and bones of an altogether different creature. The Republic's Guardians are instructed to show very little regard for the moral freedom of their citizens; indeed they are themselves destined to hold the icons whose reflections on the wall of the cave are to determine the moral beliefs of the citizenry. What is pointed to here is the authoritarianism which such a theory as Plato's can support, and at which liberal formalists like Kohlberg and R. M. Hare jump. The authoritarianism, as Hare has observed, is intimately connected to the theory's "descriptivism" or "objectivism" as is its answer to the question "why be moral?"

A fundamental contrast between objectivist and non-objectivist theories is that the former can yield a direct answer to the above question, whereas the latter cannot. If there are pertinent facts which underlie ethical judgments, the "meta-ethical" question "why be moral?" can be answered "because such and such is the case". Non-objectivist theories have to provide some quite different response. In the case of universal prescriptivism, which justifies judgments by reference to universal principles the question becomes "why hold these principles?" Kohlberg acknowledges this problem, and rather uncomfortably declares that stage 6 does not have to answer it because the question is non-ethical i. e. it does not concern the resolution of conflicts of obligation.

With respect to the issue at hand the contrast entails the

following result. Equipped with knowledge of the forms, from which the resolution of all moral problems can be derived, Plato's Guardians require no further justification of their educational activity.

Even though the "pragmatic circularity" Scriven mentions holds here--the citizen body living in the shadows of conventional belief cannot understand the Guardians' reasons for their commands--the Guardians need not flinch, as the forms are the "omnipresent" justification of their authority. They may drag the prisoners out of the cave, or pacify them with images within the ken of conventional understanding, as they please.

Without any equivalent objective reference--a situation which confronts formalists *prima facie*--the educative activity of the Guardians would appear to be nothing more than an assertion of brute force. The lack of justification for the educator is at the same time the absence of a reason for the would-be learner to ascend the Divided Line. Unless the stirring of dissatisfaction ("inducing of disequilibrium") can be understood as the beginning of a recognition of some state of affairs which is quite independent of any particular stage, neither stimulating another to ascend, nor that other's choosing to move can be rendered intelligible. In themselves neither "cognitive conflict" nor "disequilibrium" explain why a subject ascends from one stage to another. There could be no better example of "disequilibrium", if this is taken to mean merely inconsistency in judgment, than

Thrasymachus. He is, however, quite unable to enter into dialectic because he is able to solve all the problems he allows himself to see as problems. While he might be regarded as a stable stage 2, what is important is that he's "intellectually equipped" in some sense to see that he cannot consistently resolve the problems of justice he's confronted with. It is what we might call his "defense mechanisms" that render him incapable of facing his own contradictions squarely. In the case of the developing child, it is only by pushing the metaphor of the poet-philosopher very hard that the psychological concept of "equilibration" can yield any explanation of stage-ascent. In lieu of an explanation, the rich metaphor of "Platonism" serves to give a glow of intelligibility to the stage sequence, and at the same to "explain" how formal processes can yield a definite content for morality. That finally it can do neither of these things adequately necessitates re-opening the problem of the role of Kohlberg's value-theory in his explanation.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### FORMALISM AND OBJECTIVISM IN THE EXPLANATION OF MORAL DEVELOPMENT

Twentieth century philosophy, it has been noted, has at times been in the grip of a pervasive intellectual fashion; the naming of "fallacies". In this climate the temptation to offer rules for a "Fallacy of Historical Analogy" can only be resisted by recognising the complex processes of assimilation of apparently incompatible perspectives by which the development of philosophical traditions is engendered. None-the-less, when R. M. Hare observes that in outlining a "formal" account of the teachability of virtue he is,

taking the word "form" as Plato used it, and screwing up its formal character perhaps a little tighter than he did, following in this the lead of Kant,<sup>1</sup>

one feels a giddy loss of historical perspective. That the chasm separating Plato and Kant (expressed in the re-interpretation of nature effected by the onset of modern science, with its account of the relation between "facts" and "values") could count for nothing, and that the ancient and the modern thinker could mean much the same by the

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<sup>1</sup>R. M. Hare, "Platonism in Education: Two Varieties", The Monist, Vol. 58, No. 4 (1974), 569.

word "form" is hard to believe.

In a similar though much less striking way, what is being concealed may be as important as what is being revealed when Kohlberg claims to stand with the "formalist" tradition of moral theory "from Kant to Hare". The differences between Kant's and Hare's ethical theories may be as important as the similarities. Since both are appealed to as precursors, and since the role of Kohlberg's value-theory is at question it will be helpful to undertake a short diversion through the history of moral philosophy.

#### I. FORMALISM FROM KANT TO HARE

Descartes, in assessing his intellectual inheritance compared the works of the ancient pagans which deal with Morals to palaces most superb and magnificent, which are yet built on sand and mud alone.<sup>2</sup>

In so doing he expressed a demand for rigour and certitude characteristic not only of the Cartesian Revolution in general, but of modern ethical theory in particular. While Descartes did not live to extend his "universal science" to the realm of ethics, as he had planned to, others, inspired by his achievement took up the task. That the demise of the Greek view of nature was intimately involved with the quite new approaches to the foundations of ethics developed from the 17th century

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<sup>2</sup>Descartes, Discourse on Method, Trans. Haldane and Ross, Cambridge University Press, 85.

has often been argued. Austin Farrar the Oxford theologian has suggested an analogy between the necessity of the downfall of Aristotelian forms for the development of an exact mathematical science, and the necessity of their downfall for a rule-governed ethics.<sup>3</sup>

However the relationship between the idea of modern empirical science and the modern understanding of a "science" of ethics may be exactly formulated, the role of the former in circumscribing the ground of the latter is historically fairly clear. The ubiquitousness of the problem of human freedom and responsibility in an ever-more-clearly mapped deterministic nature is poignantly expressed in Kant's correlation of the "realms" of law-governed behaviour. Legislation for all rational beings involves an abstraction from the diversity of human needs and inclinations analogous to the abstraction from the diverse "natures" of objects achieved by mathematical science. In fact what one might call poetically the "wresting free of man from the realm of nature" in the "phenomenal"/"noumenal" distinction embedded in the critical enterprise, is intimately bound-up with the possibility of a science or formalism of ethics for Kant. When Kant is seen by analytic philosophers as a precursor of both their dismissal of metaphysics and their ethical "formalism" his express intention to set

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<sup>3</sup>A. Farrer, Reflective Faith, London, SPCK, 1972.

metaphysics on a new, correct footing tends to be lost sight of.<sup>4</sup> That the neglect of his metaphysics undermines the rationality of formalist ethical theories claiming lineage from Kant, we shall try to show.

Although a claim as broad as the above would require for full substantiation a lengthy exegesis of Kant's writings, the problem may be highlighted by focusing on the notion of "universalizability" as it enters into Kant's theory, and as it contrasts with the usage of writers like Hare. The claim that moral judgments are universalizable is of course contained in the formulation of the Categorical Imperative as,

So act that the maxim of your will could always hold  
at the same time as a principle establishing universal  
law.<sup>5</sup>

It is the metaphysical ground of the claim that maxims which pass the test of universalizability are "objective" that is crucial. A formal justification of an action is "objective", in so far as it is a priori and universal. "Formality" is to be taken very seriously for Kant; the failure of a maxim to be universalized, that is to be objective, is to be construed on a model of syllogistic logic. For Kant, an argument that introduces an empirical content, for example reference to the desires of the universalizing agent can have at best subjective validity,

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<sup>4</sup>G. Grant, English-Speaking Justice, (Mount Allison University Press, 1974), 33.

<sup>5</sup>I. Kant, Critique of Practical Reason, trans. L. W. Beck, (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1956), 30.



that is it may be universal but contingent. Judgments made under the latter conditions are heteronomous rather than moral--"if such and such an end is desired such and such means ought to be employed".

It is when heteronomous interest is excluded that a willing agent becomes aware of being subject to a causality quite different from the empirical causality felt uniformly in actions springing from natural impulse. Although awareness of the moral law, and so of being a noumenal will is not mediated by positive feeling, the blocking of natural impulse shows the susceptibility of the subject to the law. In so "halting" the empirical causality of inclinations the law "humiliates" self-esteem,

The moral law, which alone is truly, i. e. in every respect objective, completely excludes the influence of self-love from the highest practical principle and forever checks self-conceit, which decrees the subjective conditions of self-love as laws.<sup>6</sup>

As the blocking of inclinations is a condition of awareness of the law, it is only through those maxims which are logically self-defeating, that is that exclude reference to inclinations and so heteronomous interest, that the agent can be aware of himself as a noumenal being. Only judgments which are universal and necessary delimit the range of beings to whom universalizability extends, i. e. the noumenal "kingdom of ends". Wherever universalizing involves not a purely

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<sup>6</sup>Kant, ibid., 77.

logical operation but a consideration of the consequences of an action it introduces an element of contingency and so is heteronomous and fails to command rational beings unconditionally.

In awareness of the law, the lowering of our phenomenal self-esteem is at the same time the raising of esteem for the law on the noumenal side.

In a word, respect for the law is thus by virtue of its intellectual cause a positive feeling that can be known a priori.

Respect is also a subjective ground of action, in so far it has a positive, albeit indirect, effect on feeling. In its hindering of the influence of the inclinations it can be seen as an incentive for obedience to the law. Respect, though, cannot be an external motivation to be moral for Kant, as

the law itself must be the incentive in a morally good will.<sup>8</sup>

This leads to the identification of respect with the moral law.

Thus respect for the law is not the incentive to morality; it is morality itself, regarded subjectively as an incentive inasmuch as pure practical reason, by rejecting all the rival claims of self-love, gives authority and absolute sovereignty to the law.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Kant, ibid., 76.

<sup>8</sup>Kant, ibid., 77.

<sup>9</sup>Kant, ibid., 78.

So this "feeling", which springs from the noumenal self, brings together justification and motivation such that the reasons for acting are inseparable from the motivation to act.

What is crucially important in the above is that the "formal" operation of universalizability is only intelligible insofar as it circumscribes the realm of noumenal beings. Strict necessity cannot attach to judgments which refer to the human contingencies of common inclinations. Only by appealing to that by virtue of which human beings are the same, i. e. their practical reason or noumenal will can judgments be strictly "formal". Kant's formalism then is tautly integrated with the critical philosophy as a whole. The phenomenal/noumenal distinction of the Critique of Pure Reason prepared the ground for the 2nd Critique's ethical formalism. It is not at all clear how the latter could be constructed without the former.

Kant posts his warning to those who would construct practical principles outside the walls of the critical philosophy by discussing two types of aberration which may deceive. "Mysticism" is that type of theory which, ignoring the results of the 1st Critique, posits a non-sensuous type of intuition--for example of an invisible kingdom of God--and as a result "plunges into the transcendent".<sup>10</sup> While such a doctrine is radically false, it is less dangerous than the other,

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<sup>10</sup>Kant, ibid., 73.

namely, "empiricism of practical reason". Empiricism ignores the fact that the highest virtue is found in intentions and not actions alone, and so "uproots the morality of intentions".

It substitutes for duty something entirely different, namely, an empirical interest, with which inclinations generally are secretly in league. For this reason empiricism is allied with the inclinations, which, no matter what style they wear, always degrade mankind when they are raised to the dignity of a supreme practical principle.<sup>11</sup>

Kant goes on to note that since the inclinations are so favourable to most people's feelings, empiricism is a far greater danger to morality than mysticism which can only be a minority opinion.

For a formalism built within empiricism we need look no further than Hare's Freedom and Reason.<sup>12</sup> In this work Hare develops the theory of universal prescriptivism, that theory which claims that the characterizing features of ethical judgment are universality and prescriptivity. As an analyst Hare eschews metaphysics, and claims to derive his account of moral argumentation from an analysis of the logic of moral words. As such his theory, while relevant to moral issues in delineating correct and incorrect moral argumentation, is supposedly morally neutral. The sort of relevance it has is indicated

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<sup>11</sup>Kant, ibid., 74.

<sup>12</sup>R. M. Hare, Freedom and Reason (2nd ed., Oxford University Press, 1972).

in the claim that the analysis displays a mode of compelling moral argumentation whose only pre-condition is the rationality i. e. consistency, of the interlocutor.

Hare attempts to underpin the universalizability of moral terms, and so of moral judgments by separating the descriptive core of moral words from their prescriptive meaning. By thus driving the fact/value distinction into the meaning of moral words, he can mobilize the "universalizable" feature of descriptive words for the purposes of moral argument. That is, because moral words have descriptive meaning, someone using them has to accept that they can be treated like purely descriptive terms. In the same way that someone who claims that X is red can be held to the judgment that anything which is like X in the relevant respect is also red, we can say to the user of moral words

If you call X a good Y, you are committed to the judgment that anything which is like X in the relevant respects is also a good Y.<sup>13</sup>

This fact about moral words thus yields a principle of universalizability which can be stated as follows: If it is right for me to do X in certain circumstances then it is right for anyone to do X in relevantly similar circumstances.

In the act of universalizing Hare requires us to imaginatively

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<sup>13</sup>R.M. Hare, ibid., 20.

role-play; we are to place ourselves in the shoes of the other person or persons involved in any given action. Universalizing formally speaking involves passing from the singular prescription "Let me do X" to the generalized prescription "Let everyone in similar circumstances do X". Where I intend to imprison a debtor I have to universalize so that I myself am hypothetically cast in the position of the debtor. If I can sincerely assent to the singular prescription when its universalized consequences become clear to me, my judgment has passed the test of universalizability. What is of interest is the way in which the agent's desires enter into the act of universalizing.

When a person accepts a set of factual statements about a state of affairs and performs the operation of universalizing to establish the legitimacy of a proposed course of action, he is limited by what he could allow to be done to himself. Whether he can universalize and so whether he can sincerely assent to the singular prescription, which the universal prescription entails, is determined by his inclinations. "Inconsistency" is shown then in a person's psychological inability to have certain results which he proposes for another turned upon himself in the hypothetical case.

Because of his entailment, if he assented to the factual statements and to the universal prescription, but refused (as he must, his inclinations being what they are) to assent to the singular prescription he would be guilty

of a logical inconsistency.<sup>14</sup>

Although Hare wishes to exclude reference to desires from the logic of reasoning then, that acceptance of the prescription "Let me do X" is an expression of a person's wants renders the operation of universalizing "hypothetical" in Kant's terms. An action can be willed universally only if the agent's desires are of a particular sort. While this contingency does not ordinarily lead to adverse consequences, Hare believes, it raises questions in the case of the "fanatic".

While the vast majority of people cannot countenance any action which, in the reversed situation would result in their own destruction there may be those whose pursuit of ideals could embrace even this extremity. The Nazi who on arbitrary factual grounds wills the destruction of anyone with Jewish blood may upon the discovery of a Judaic taint in his lineage lead his family to the furnace--it is logically possible to desire anything. The insistence that the Nazi's discrimination against the Jew must be arbitrary raises a problem about the entire notion of universalizability, however. Since no facts are relevant to the extension of "universalizability", no facts can be appealed to to show the Nazi that the Jew is a "person". And here the idea of producing conclusive moral argument is lightly tipped aside. The principle of universalizability is not a logical principle at all, but

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<sup>14</sup>R. M. Hare, ibid., 109.

embodies a substantive belief concerning "persons", namely that "persons" deserve equal treatment. Since facts are not relevant to universalizing, the class of beings called "persons" is not necessarily co-extensive with the biological class of human beings. While for the most part we can rely upon the happy contingent fact that most people are able to recognize emphatically their fellow human beings to assure us that few people will be inclined to discriminate amongst humans on arbitrary factual grounds, in many relevant instances our uncertainty will engender "reasonable" problems. Are fetuses to be treated as "persons"? How are we to persuade the Christian slave owner that his charges have hopes and wants on a par with his own and so are deserving of respect? In the light of the fact/value distinction and the absence of a metaphysical foundation for "personhood" Hare provides us with nothing to dam the flood of claims which would render moral argument ineffectual.

The problems with Hare's theory are several, though perhaps they find their cumulative effect in the above problem. Much of the difficulty seems to lie with its account of the role of desires and inclinations in reasoning. In some ways the problem is common to the formalisms of Kant and Hare yet finds its expression in a radical disagreement between them. While Kant's phenomenal/noumenal distinction precludes the relevance of the spectrum of affective states, Hare's account of universalizability builds in the contingency of human



desires at base. In both cases though a certain homogenizing of the passions takes place. For Kant the common empirical origin of all emotions denies them any relevance to moral cognition; for Hare the logical fact that it is possible to desire anything removes desires from the realm of the arguable. In Hare's case, the observed logical feature of desires may be deceptive. A strong case can be made that Hare's logical format of argumentation hides a complexity in moral commitment which he is theoretically unable to acknowledge. Edward F. Crowell<sup>15</sup> has argued that the minor premise "Let me do X", which Hare takes to express the psychological fact of wanting, may also embody a moral assessment of the desired object. Hare, in trying to exclude evaluative content from desiring subsumes all desires under "felt disposition to act". In so doing he supposes a clear distinction between the assumed value of the desired object and a description of the want using terms of evaluation, that may be untenable. By portraying desiring as an irreducible psychological fact, Hare bolsters his separation of evaluation from knowledge of states of affairs. As Crowell says,

the danger in viewing a man's desire as a feeling is that there is the possibility of obscuring the relation between a man's wants, his reasons for doing things

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<sup>15</sup>E. F. Crowell, "Hare on Desire and Moral Reasoning", Theoria, 40-41 (1974), 153-162.

to get what he wants, and justification in terms of the benefit and value presumed to lie in the objects of desire.<sup>16</sup>

Kohlberg, of course, need not ally himself in detail with either Kant or Hare. In fact he goes to admirable lengths to argue his position independently, and in so doing he ticks off both his formalist forbears. Finally, his belief in the primacy of justice and his understanding of the nature of moral principles leads him to reject strict formalism, so that

our conception of moral principle implies that one cannot ultimately separate form and content in moral analysis. (1971A, p. 60)

However this surprising about-face may be finally justified, that Kohlberg has taken a good deal that is relevant to an explanation of stage-ascent from formalism is fairly clear. If, as we shall try to show, his position is far more "Harean" than "Kantian" it may have inherited some of the problems of universal prescriptivism. If, to anticipate our conclusion, Kohlberg's moral theory cannot brush off these problems, it may be necessary to attempt a wholesale re-interpretation of the stage sequence.

## II. KOHLBERG ON THE NATURE OF MORALITY

Just how far Kohlberg's stage 6 is from Kantianism is well-

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<sup>16</sup>E. F. Crowell, ibid., 161.

enough indicated by its sequential juxtaposition with utilitarianism. That two theories which have historically been treated as fundamentally opposed to one another should be argued to stand in a sequence--the one performing "the same function" better than the other--tends to imply that we have a deontological stage 5 or a teleological stage 6. Kohlberg's distaste for the harsh edges of Kant's "absolutism" settles this dilemma immediately. Stage 6 principles invariably express a concern for human welfare, so that a stage 6 subject can lie to save a life, notwithstanding Kant's insistence that to do so is incompatible with the Categorical Imperative. Despite Kohlberg's insistence that principles are "neither rules (means) or ends (values)" (1971B, p. 219) his stage 6 has a "humanism" to it that makes "human welfare" appear as the end to which principles of justice are the most efficient means. Kantian morality does not conduce to an independently identifiable end in any analogous way.

Kohlberg's criticism shows an inability to understand, or perhaps a psychological inability to take seriously the old man from Konigsberg, which he shares with many moderns who wish to express some debt to that thinker. Kohlberg believes that his fusing of form and content is required to flesh out the strict formalisms of both Hare and Kant. He says of the latter,

While Kantian universality is identical to formal justice or impartiality, substantive principles (justice, equality, respect for persons) add additional requirements and

make the "ends in themselves" formulation workable.  
(1971B, p. 212)

A recognition of the noumenal foundation of universalizing would, of course, make clear that "equality" and "respect for persons" are built into the act of universalizing in such a way that the latter is unintelligible without them. Within a stage 6 which is perhaps really a form of modified utilitarianism "equality" and "respect for persons" appear as a stipulated content in substitute for a metaphysical foundation.<sup>17</sup>

Another contrast between Kohlberg and Kant bears directly on the rationality of moral education. While Hare's theory is an "empiricized" Kant as mentioned above, Kohlberg is empiricized Kantianism in a double way. Not only is the universalizability of a judgment determined a posteriori (by imaginative role-playing), but the capacity for principled thought is acquired through a developmental, learning process. Kohlberg in fact prides himself on his denial that the moral capacity is innate (i. e. synthetic a priori), and points out that Kant is "refuted" by evidence showing that lower stage subjects cannot grasp even the easiest formulations of the Categorical Imperative. However, that there can be human beings who lack practical reason must cast into doubt the objective validity of its principles. A condition of the

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<sup>17</sup>See overleaf.

moral education, outlined in the "Methodology of Pure Practical Reason" is that children can recognize the moral law, and so be known to partake of noumenal will. Because moral interaction presupposes a community of noumenal wills, any educational activity directed to developing a capacity for moral recognition in children must have difficulty in accounting for itself. The situation would be one of trying to develop a second (noumenal) nature in beings who do not initially possess it.<sup>18</sup>

This issue, bearing as it does on problems deriving from the interactive-learning/developmental core of Kohlberg's thought, leads us to a final contrast between his accounts of moral action and Kant's. Kohlberg, it will be remembered, suggests that to produce just citizens a school must be itself a just place--only in this way can the interaction of the child's structuring tendencies with structures in his environment result in common attainment of stage 6. For Kant, in contrast, the onset of just institutions must always pose something of a threat to morality by introducing a heteronomous interest which threatens the possibility of action done for the sake of duty. Kohlberg's empiricism, uprooting as Kant says such theories must, the morality

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<sup>18</sup>The problem of the intelligibility of the development of human beings from a pre-rational to a rational state is interestingly analogous to that faced by Kant in his hypothetical re-construction of the ascent of man from the natural state in "Conjectural Beginnings of Human History".

of intentions, makes no room for a significant distinction between a legal (i. e. correct but heteronomously motivated) and a moral action (correct and done for the sake of the law).

While Hare's universal prescriptivism is, by admission of its author, a form of modified utilitarianism, it seems that Kohlberg's criticism of it arises from a feeling that it is not "utilitarian" enough. Hare's theory cannot countenance the claim that morality has a necessary content; this springs from the claim that universality and prescriptivity are the characterizing features of morality, with its corollary that any facts are morally relevant. Kohlberg finds that amongst stage 6 reasoners there is a consistent concern for human welfare, and a belief in the unconditional value of human life. Though Hare's universal prescriptivism would allow a broad array of mature moral principles, research shows that stage 6 subjects order their moral thought by principles of justice conceived of as equality or fairness. Stage 6 principles "perform the moral function" better than stage 5 principles. Before examining the account of morality within which this claim can be substantiated, it will be well to note how far Kohlberg walks hand in hand with Hare before they part company.

The imaginative role-playing account of universalizability Kohlberg derives largely from Hare. In the developing forms of role-playing expressed in the stages, children approximate ever more closely to universal judgments, i. e. those that take in the totality of

persons. Kohlberg frequently compares the mature operation of universalizing with Rawls' choice from under the veil of ignorance. A rational calculating individual faced with a situation of choosing principles of justice, knowing the facts of a hypothetical society, including those concerning the needs and desires of its individuals, yet ignorant of which particular person he will be, will naturally try to satisfy "universal" interests. In so doing he is, like Hare's universaliser, willing for everyone what he can will for himself. While, like Hare, Rawls would deny that any interests are intrinsically worthy--they arise from diverse unassessible inclinations which are brute facts about human beings--there are interests which everyone can be presumed to share. Among these will be those which are instrumental to the continuance of life, and which are thus pre-conditions for the pursuit of other interests.

In his dismissal of the "bag of virtues" approach to moral education Kohlberg displays an instinct which finds its full expression in his acceptance of Hare's prescriptivist meta-ethic. The psychologist, Kohlberg says, will have no truck with a "bag of virtues" because he believes that there is no such thing--"virtues and vices are labels by which people award praise and blame to others". (1970, p. 63) This is to say that evaluative words, in so far as they evaluate, do not describe reality. Rather, they hatch out prescriptions for behaviour, so that "be honest" for example, means "don't lie, don't cheat, don't

"steal", etc. Exactly what falls under each of the prescriptions is presumably determined by the decisions of the linguistic community.

It is this Harean logical analysis of virtue-words that enables Kohlberg to afford the principle of justice a special place. "Justice" he says is unlike ordinary virtue-words because it does not hatch out rules for action. Instead, it is procedural and serves to order other values where there is a conflict of obligation. When it is recognized that this resolution of conflicts of obligation is the central role of morality, it is not hard to see why the morally mature give justice the crowning place in their moral thought.

As justice is believed by Kohlberg to most adequately house the moral form, it is in his account of it that we may expect to find his overall view of the nature of morality. He frames this view by rejecting the range of theories which attempt to articulate a set of ends for human action, which believe that obligations can be generated by a conception of the good life.

These are problems beyond the scope of morality or moral principles, which we define as principles of choice for resolving conflicts of obligation. (1971B, p. 215)

The close relation between "morality" and "moral principles" expressed here requires examination before the adequacy of justice as the prime moral principle can be elucidated. While Kohlberg in a looser sense refers to the "principles" of all six stages, these being



the general modes of justification, mature principles involve

an orientation to moral decisions which is universalizable to all moral actors in all moral situations.  
(1971B, p. 219)

While various principles are universalizable in this way, few can generate determinate obligations. "Justice" though, is a procedural tool which can both order conflicts of obligation, for the individual, and adjudicate between the conflicting interests of different parties.

By definition, principles of justice are principles for deciding between competing claims of individuals, for "giving each man his due". (1971B, p. 220)

Here Kohlberg has forged very close conceptual relations between "morality", "moral principles" and "justice". How justice can be logically tied in with morality must depend as stated on the relation of morality to moral principles.

Repeatedly, Kohlberg argues that assessment of the adequacy of the stages requires recognition of the autonomy of morality, that "a criterion of adequacy must take account of the fact that morality is a unique, sui generis realm". (1971B, p. 215) This "fact", which is really Kohlberg's rejection of objectivist or descriptivist ethical theories, entails that there is a distinctively moral form. In turn, this demands "that moral judgment be principled, that is, that it rely on moral principle, on a mode of choosing which is universal which we want all people to adopt in all situations". (1971A, p. 58) Again, although there are various principles which are universal modes of

choosing, the requirement that morality be able to resolve conflicting claims in a determinate fashion calls into question the adequacy of all principles but justice. When Kohlberg says that it is his notion of principle that breaks down the strict separation of form and content he is then pointing to moral requirements that are over and above those of universal prescriptivism and which are met by the principle of justice. The breakdown is supported not least by the fact that most stage 6 reasoners do use principles of justice. Here Kohlberg mobilizes his claim concerning the dependence of a philosophic account of morality upon the facts of moral usage to brush over what appears to be a conceptual soft-spot in his theory. While one response to the putative universality of principles of justice in mature thought might be to deny the adequacy of universal prescriptivism, Kohlberg's strategy is to suggest that justice is the only principle which is able to resolve all conflicts, and so which is truly universal.

How though can a stage 6 principle of justice achieve the ideal equilibrium that is the conclusive resolution of conflicts of interest? Firstly, it must be supposed that no interests are correct, for if they were, some would be denied, resulting in the dissatisfaction of those parties. In defining a fully reversible judgment as one which "appears right no matter whose position is taken" Kohlberg seems to imply that a Charlie Brown desire to be all things to all men is built into

stage 6.<sup>19</sup> Even his rider limiting reversibility to men "insofar as they wish to live under principles of justice", while accounting for the irrational and fanatical fringe, does not provide any clear ground for expecting consensus. A group of universal prescriptivists, even if we exclude fanatics by fiat, might well subscribe to a range of differing principles, depending upon their fundamental inclinations. If we imagine a moderately motley crew of utilitarians, theists, fanatics and self-interest relativists, it is hard to see how all interests could be satisfied.

To deny the possibility of the situation prevailing among stage 6 reasoners, Kohlberg introduces a logical constraint into principled thought. It is impossible that a principled reasoner will disregard the value of human life and pursue his interests at any cost to other persons because anybody who understands the value of human life and, say, of property, will understand that the former ranks over the latter. Anyone equipped with such understanding will opt for the preservation of human life if he engages in ideal role-playing so that

In the Heinz dilemma, Heinz must imagine whether the druggist could put himself in the wife's position and still maintain his claim and whether the wife could put herself in the druggist's position and still maintain her claim. Intuitively we feel the wife could, the druggist could not. (1974, p. 643)

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<sup>19</sup>R. G. Henson, Abstract of paper commenting on Kohlberg's "Claim to Moral Adequacy of a Highest Stage of Moral Judgment", Journal of Philosophy 70 (1973), 649.

How the necessity of "justice" as the content of morality is to be understood depends upon the force of "could not" in this passage.

If the "intuition" of mature reasoners is to amount to anything more than the happy coincidence of human inclinations, if that is Kohlberg is to provide any support for his claim concerning the content of morality, some logical relationship must be carved between "morality" and "human welfare". As Brian Crittenden has pointed out in his concise statement of the key problems in Kohlberg's theory, it is hard to do this without truncating or distorting our conception of morality.<sup>20</sup> If the moral action is the one which by definition conduces to human welfare, there must be independent, non-moral criteria for determining human welfare, in which case distinctively moral notions are redundant. That Kohlberg himself does not have such criteria is suggested by his claim that stage 6 thought can generate an obligation to kill a mass-murderer like Hitler, notwithstanding its belief in the supreme value of human life. Alternatively, if mature principles provide guidelines for making decisions which, as a matter of fact, promote human welfare, they'll be subject to modification whenever they fail to achieve that goal. While Kohlberg might reject the interpretation of "moral principle" embedded in this dilemma, he provides

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<sup>20</sup>B. Crittenden, Form and Content in Moral Education, Monograph Series 12, The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 1972, 20-21.

little help in making clear the origin of the value of human life, and in turn the necessity of his principle of justice in mature thought.

Just how problematic is his claim concerning the content of mature moral thought is made clear when emphasis is placed upon the stage sequence's development towards universal prescriptivism. In so far as universal prescriptivism embodies a particular belief about the treatment of persons, and in so far as earlier stages increasingly approximate to universal prescriptivism, questions concerning the content of mature moral thought may be illuminated by a re-examination of the mode of stage-ascent. In referring to the stages of moral thought as forms of role-taking, Kohlberg utilizes a theory which has had considerable currency in sociological and psychological theories of action. However, in these theories role-taking is seen primarily as a non-rational process, whereas ascent from one stage to another requires the logical rigour of the child-philosopher. Although successive stages show concern for, and involvement with a greater portion of humanity, Kohlberg denies that the ascent can be explained in terms of a developing ability to empathize. Something like this ability seems to be implied, though, in Kohlberg's affirmation of the psychological unity of role-taking and justice in mature moral thought.

Role-taking reflects an active recognition that others are like me. Stage 2 reciprocity requires recognition that I can bargain with another as an other "myself" in order to further my interests. Certain

theories of the origin of self-consciousness, notably those of "transcendental empathy" argue that the recognition of other persons is bound-up with the ability to use language. A good example of such a position was held by Collingwood<sup>21</sup>

The discovery of myself as a person is the discovery that I can speak, and am thus a persona or speaker; in speaking, I am both speaker and hearer; and since the discovery of myself as a person is also the discovery of other persons around me, it is the discovery of speakers and hearers other than myself. Thus, from the first, the experience of speech contains in itself in principle the experiences of speaking to others and of hearing others speak to me.<sup>21</sup>

The same claim concerning the involvement of reciprocity with the ability to use language is made by Habermas when he criticizes the theory of Gouldner by suggesting that reciprocity is not a "norm" but a presupposition embedded in the ability to use language.<sup>22</sup> On either of these views, the seeds of a universalist ethic are contained in the ability to use language.

Whatever the role of empathic feeling in stage-ascent be, it is clear that contained in stage 2 actions of mutual exchange is the embryonic recognition that others are like me, which through successive re-interpretations leads me to legislate for the totality of persons.

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<sup>21</sup>R. G. Collingwood, The Principles of Art, Oxford University Press, 1938, 248.

<sup>22</sup>J. Habermas, "Moral Development and Ego Identity", Telos, Summer 1975, No. 24, 51.

At stage 6 I have learned to recognize all humanity as worthy of moral concern. In the words of Tillich

the idea of justice, the various forms of equality and liberty, are applications of the imperative to acknowledge every potential person as a person.<sup>23</sup>

While this process leading to a stage 6 egalitarian ethic is intuitively clear, the problem lies with its intelligibility within the formalist framework that Kohlberg constructs with the help of Kant, Hare and Rawls.

Recognizing potential persons as persons, Kohlberg tells us, involves breaking down the factual distinctions between man and man. While a stage 3 thinker shows concern only for his family and friends, because perhaps only these respect his "good" behaviour, in his ascent to stage 6 he learns to shear off the facts which he has previously used to differentiate between one human and another. In terms of universal prescriptivism, this process involves recognizing that any factual grounds that one may use to limit the range of "persons" to whom one universalizes are finally specious. Here, though, we run into the same problem concerning the foundations of universalism encountered in the writings of Hare. If there are neither metaphysical nor factual grounds for attributing "personhood" to a being, it is hard

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<sup>23</sup>P. Tillich, Love, Power & Justice: ontological analyses and ethical applications, London & New York: OUP, 1966, 74.

to explain in virtue of what the stage-ascender recognizes inconsistency in his "non-universalized" judgments. Since recognition of commonality is a pre-condition of discerning "logical" inadequacy, the proscription of possible grounds for such recognition seems to put stage-ascent beyond explanation. While Kohlberg might wish to follow Marx in claiming that our common humanity can only become clear once the divisive lines of class and kin are finally broken down, such a claim would be sheer mystery-mongering within the strictures of universal prescriptivism.

It may appear that this complaint is only levelled at Kohlberg by foisting on him the details of Hare's ethical theory, while Rawls' work provides Kohlberg with greater substance in constructing stage 6 thought. However, it has been argued that the same problems accrue to A Theory of Justice.<sup>24</sup> In so far as "personhood" is not to be established on factual grounds there appear to be no means of gain-saying a perfectly consistent principled thinker who excludes whomever he will from moral status. Within the formalism of Kohlberg's theory, then, there seems to be no commanding reason why the rarified atmosphere of principled thought should not be breathed by the most inhuman villains. Again, from this vantage it is not clear how

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<sup>24</sup>See G. Grant, English Speaking Justice, Mount Allison University Press, 1974, 35.



the "error" of stage 2 thinkers like Kohlberg's son who believed that seals have the same rights as human beings, is to be understood.

If the explanatory tools of Kohlberg's theory are as suspect as we have argued above, and his structuralism/formalism is left aside, the phenomenon of stage-ascent can be approached from a far more obvious direction. What appears to be taking place in the ascent from heteronomous to autonomous, universal thinking, is a complex process of learning, central to which is the gradual acquisition of elusive information concerning what it is to be a human being. To give this process its due, a quite different account of the terminus of moral development is required. Kohlberg recognizes the close relation between his ethical theory and his psychological theory of stage-ascent when he observes that

if stages of moral judgment develop through conflict and reorganization this is incompatible with the notion that moral judgment is the apprehension of natural or non-natural facts. (1971B, p. 185)

To turn this around; if moral judgment does involve the apprehension of natural or non-natural facts, the cognitive-developmental explanation of moral development is false. Before an alternative, "objectivist", interpretation of development is considered, though, it will be helpful to consider more directly the Kohlbergian view of morality to which it is opposed. There is some evidence within Kohlberg's writings of an awareness both that the stage sequence is incomplete, and that the

account of morality within which it is interpreted is inadequate.

In claiming supremacy for the principle of justice, Kohlberg acknowledges that the notion of a supreme principle is only intelligible for a formal deontological view of morality. If morality is autonomous, that is *sui generis*, it must display itself in a form of reasoning. In so far as there are alternative ways of reasoning about moral matters, some display the moral form more fully than others, and are so more morally adequate. That mode of reasoning which best performs "the moral function" fully houses the moral form. Since the resolution of conflicts of obligation is taken to be the central function of morality, and since the principle of justice is supposedly able to perform this task, justice must embody or even be the form of morality. Because justice is taken to be, unlike other principles, purely procedural, Kohlberg goes on to argue that it is, in a sense, content-free.

Much of Kohlberg's polemic against his opponents consists in pointing out that he has been able to provide a positive account of morality, those who reject his formalism have not.

Denial that justice is the central principle of morality thus tends to coincide with a refusal to accept a formal deontological concept of morality, but is not backed by an alternative positive definition of morality.  
(1971B, p. 221)

Of course, charging inability to provide a positive definition of morality is somewhat question-begging since descriptivists deny the autonomy of morality. While, though, the way in which Kohlberg delimits the

moral sphere may be questioned--by many conceptions of morality moral concern extends far beyond the resolution of conflicts of obligation and of interest--it is possible to question the internal adequacy of his account of that thought. As we observed earlier Kohlberg denies that stage 6 has to answer the question "why be moral?" Nonetheless, in examining the possibility of a further stage of moral development, he admits that stage 6 does in fact raise this question but that it is unable to answer it. In examining why it should be necessary to raise the possibility of a 7th stage at all, we may find the key to a complete re-interpretation of the stage sequence.

### III. 7TH STAGE AND THE NOTION OF MORAL MATURITY

The possibility of a 7th stage is introduced in a discussion of the relation of the Kohlberg stages to Erikson's ego stages. Erikson describes a 7th stage which follows Kohlberg's stage 6. This last stage has a "partly ethical but more basically religious" task, which involves developing a balanced sense of integrity and despair. These senses of integrity and despair have a "cosmic" rather than an ethical vantage and concern the meaning of human finitude. Contact with the moral is made in the consideration of the skeptical question, "why be moral?" Kohlberg considers that this question can only be intelligibly raised--in a way that asks anything more than the self-interest of the moral agent--at the post-conventional level. It is hard, though, to see

why the question should not arise in a similarly skeptical way at all levels, particularly since most of the levels represent forms of reasoning seriously recommended by philosophers in history. The issue is made more perplexing when Kohlberg declares stage 6 to have a less satisfactory answer to the question than stage 5 as "there is a sharper contrast between ethical principles and egoistic or hedonistic concerns than there is between the social contract and hedonism". (1973B, p. 74)

Whatever is intended by these counter-currents, it is fairly clear that a stage 6 commitment to universal principles raises the question "why hold these principles?", not least because of the potential conflict of duty and inclination portrayed so harshly by Kant. Kohlberg suggests that the movement towards a 7th stage--which stage has been variously portrayed by metaphysicians from Plato to Spinoza--starts with despair at the meaninglessness of human life in the face of infinity. In the movement towards experiencing the self as part of the whole, a re-interpretation is entered into of the meaning of human action and human suffering. Seen from the cosmic vantage what was hitherto the intolerable fact of anguish is contemplated as a part of the scheme of things. This "development" is one which tends to occur later in life; its relating of moral and religious concern is foreign to the thought of even stage 5 subjects in their twenties. Indeed, because it is rarer even than stage 6 there can be little empirical substantiation of it. Kohlberg attributes something like a stage 7 orientation, though,

to men who are known to have lived and died for their principles, for example, Socrates or Martin Luther King.

While holding such a position to be in some sense a completion of the questioning begun at the level of post-conventional thought, Kohlberg does not take it to be a higher moral stage. The logical structure of this stage is vague, and is probably not "amenable to a structural approach with its philosophic notion of adequacy". Although the projected stage continues the questioning which the entire stage sequence sets in motion, it deals with matters which are not resolvable on purely logical grounds. Because, the argument goes, the purpose of morality is to solve conflicts of obligation, which stage 6 can apparently perform to perfection, there is no sense in which stage 7 could "perform the moral function" better than stage 6. Stage 7 appears to effect an integration of moral with religious and metaphysical questions, so that it no longer displays "the moral form". To deny such a stage continuity with earlier stages on the ground that it does not meet the moral parameters of stage 6 avoids the ad hoc only if the relations of the earlier stages to stage 6 are quite clear. If, as we have tried to show above, there are difficulties in understanding the reasons for ascent of the stages, and in turn in understanding the rationality of stage 6, we may call into question the account of morality within which they are framed.

Stage 7 appears discontinuous with the first six only if it is

taken that its re-interpretation of the place of human beings in the cosmos overturns a stable account of the objects of moral concern expressed in stages 1-6. In fact, that stage 1 is unable to distinguish between laws of nature and ethical imperatives; that a stage 2 reasoner regards animals as equally worthy of moral concern as human beings; that a stage 5 thinker comes to regard moral norms as the product of rational human decision all suggest that development through the sequence involves a changing understanding of the place of moral activity in nature. If stages 1-4 are interpreted in an objectivist way, it will be argued that they can be given continuity with a hypothetical 7th stage, in a way which circumvents the obscurities of Kohlberg's formalist interpretation. Before attempting such a re-interpretation it will be helpful to contrast a literary example of a 7th stage perspective with the stage 6 Kohlberg describes. Since stage 7 is a "saint's stage" there could be no better example than Thomas More, as depicted in Robert Bolt's "A Man for all Seasons".<sup>25</sup>

More provides an interesting case for examination, as Kohlberg himself undertakes an interpretation of More's ethical bearing in his paper on "Moral Psychology and the Study of Tragedy". (1973A) Interestingly Kohlberg depicts More as a stage 6 thinker going to death for his moral principles. We should like to suggest that, while More

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<sup>25</sup>R. Bolt, A Man for all Seasons (New York, Random House, 1960).

undoubtedly goes to his death for his moral beliefs, to declare him a "principled thinker" seriously obscures the contrast between stage 6 "universal principles chosen by conscience" and the quite different bearing to which Kohlberg is pointing in his description of stage 7. That More is not, in some very important senses, a principled thinker at all, is carefully brought to the fore in the dramatic development of the play.

Bolt, in writing of the genesis of his ideas for the play, describes the fascination which More had for him as involving his possession of a fierce sense of self-hood. That a mild-mannered, family-oriented and prudent man should be able, when either his integrity or his life is at stake to dig in his heels, and resist the demands upon him made by king, family and friends, betokens a commitment to his beliefs which is quite extraordinary. That he is able to go to his death, without showing inclination to opt for an ever-ready escape route, and without losing any of his concern for survival within the bounds of the morally possible, suggests a relating of duty and inclination quite different from that described by formalism. More's anguish seems qualitatively different from that of the man who is commanded by reason to undertake an action diametrically opposed to desire. His station seems too to be far from that of beast or god.

In the course of the plot, More's isolation from the world of the court and ecclesiastics, through his increasingly clearly drawn

opposition to the king is mirrored by a no less clearly drawn separation of his moral orientation from those of the world around him.

While the play presents a richly diverse group of characters, the dramatic development displays a homogenizing of all the types of motivation and orientation, save More's. Matthew, the common man of shrewd prudence; Chapuys, the transparent ambassador with singularly pragmatic concern; More's wife, angered and confused at her family's fall, unable to see the need for her husband's disastrous intransigence; Roper, More's "strongly principled" son-in-law, appear increasingly to belong, as moral agents, in the same camp. Put briefly, each of these characters treats morality, in some way, as a means to an end; More does not.

Nothing is more revealing as an indicator of the uniqueness of More's position than his attitude to Roper. In pursuit of the hand of More's daughter Meg, Roper has, at the opening of the play, run headlong into a clash with More. Roper's religious unorthodoxy stands as an insurmountable barrier to the marriage. His hot-headed seriousness allows him no lee-way in compromising to meet More. His "principled" orientation, however, allows him, within the demands of his conscience, to change his stance whenever he discovers an inconsistency in his own reasoning. More's exasperation with him is though mixed with respect; he is as More sees it a man of strong principles. After lashing Roper with the following reminder,



Two years ago you were a passionate Churchman; now you're a passionate--Lutheran. We must just pray that when your head's finished turning, your face is to the front again.<sup>26</sup>

More says to himself the following,

REFLECTS (Warmly) "Nice boy... Terribly strong principles though."<sup>27</sup>

Insistently, More returns to the attack when he tells Roper that he won't "hoist" his daughter "up the mainmast of your seagoing principles! They put about too numbly." Again, in his amusement, he pokes fun at Roper's "principled" behaviour,

(kindly) "Roper, that was harsh: your principles are (He can't resist sending him up) excellent--the very best quality. (Roper bridles. Contritely) No, truly now, your principles are fine."<sup>28</sup>

Does More intend to suggest that Roper is not really principled at all? Clearly not, the object of his mirth is the "principled" orientation per se. Roper's principles are for him, a means to his chosen moral goals. With unerring consistency, he changes his beliefs when he finds out that their pursuit does not have the consequences he had imagined. While Roper would not qualify as a stage 6 Kohlbergian reasoner, we may reasonably suppose, his almost iconoclastic

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<sup>26</sup>Bolt, ibid., Act I, Scene IV.

<sup>27</sup>Bolt, ibid., Act I, Scene IV.

<sup>28</sup>Bolt, ibid., Act I, Scene IV.

autonomy certainly seems to reflect the choosing of principles of conscience.

More's own articulations of his beliefs reflect a strong strain of prudence which he retains to his condemnation. In his brilliant manipulation of the laws he repeatedly expresses attitudes which sound as though they emerge from stage 4 thought. In justifying his clinging to the forms of law he pictures the law as

a causeway upon which, so long as he keeps to it, a  
citizen may walk safely.<sup>29</sup>

At no point does he appear to have transcended his concern for self-protection. Under the duress of a prison-visit from his family, who bend their powerful influence upon him to try to persuade him to sign the oath to save himself, he affirms his need for freedom;

If they'd open a crack that wide (Between finger and  
thumb) I'd be through it.<sup>30</sup>

Yet, even as he faces his wife's non-comprehension and his family's abject poverty he shows no wish to act against his beliefs.

More, as presented in "A Man for all Seasons", can be understood at least partially from the vantage of the ego-theory which first proposed a 7th stage. Habermas, paralleling Erikson, proposes a stage beyond a formalist ethic. At this point the inner nature of the

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<sup>29</sup>Bolt, ibid., Act 2, Scene II.

<sup>30</sup>Bolt, ibid., Act 2, Scene V.

individual overcomes the split between its legitimate and illegitimate parts, duties and inclinations, by interpreting its needs independently of cultural tradition. This active interpretation overcomes the unfreedom which is endemic to a stage 6 opposition of duty and inclination

Ego-identity means a freedom which limits itself through the intention, if not to unite dignity with happiness, at least to make them compatible.<sup>31</sup>

More's repeatedly expressed identification with his beliefs seems to betoken just such a freedom. Having given up hope of making his refusal to acknowledge Henry's break with Rome comprehensible to his friends, he says the following to Norfolk of the theory of the Apostolic Succession

Why, it's a theory, yet; you can't see it; can't touch it; it's a theory. (To Norfolk, very rapidly but calmly) But what matters to me is not whether it is true or not but that I believe it to be true, or rather not that I believe it, but that I believe it... I trust that I make myself obscure?<sup>32</sup>

Perhaps equally well More's bearing can be understood as typifying the integration of moral with religious (and aesthetic?) concerns of Kohlberg's stage 7. The interpretation of human moral activity within the cosmos breaks down the formalist view of norm-making as a free human activity, constrained only by the form of

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<sup>31</sup>J. Habermas, Loc. cit., 54.

<sup>32</sup>Bolt, Loc. cit., Act 2, Scene III.

rationality. Although this viewpoint is only roughly depicted here, and in the nature of the case eludes articulation of the sort given to Kohlberg's stages 1-6, it may be suggested that it is a "descriptivist" view, insofar as human ethical judgments are understood to derive from an interpretation of the while, factual or metaphysical. In so far as such a position provides an answer to the question "why be moral?" it renders intelligible the commitment of mature thinkers to their beliefs in a way that Kohlberg's stage 6 does not.

The two theoretical vantages from which the possibility of a stage 7 can be broached may not be mutually exclusive, and might conceivably admit integration. For our purposes here, however, it is sufficient to have raised both to cast doubt upon the adequacy of Kohlberg's view of moral maturity. In order to pursue the importance of Kohlberg's value-theory for his educational proposals, we shall not take up the possibility of interpreting the stage sequence within an objectivist theory of value. For this purpose, a healthy scepticism concerning Kohlberg's claims, theoretical and empirical, of the ascendancy of formalism over utilitarianism may be allowed. Since this claim is justified with reference to a theory of value which is rejected here, our qualified acceptance of the empirical grounding of the stage sequence (1-4) is permissible. Our hypothetical stage 7, may, at best, allow a sketch of the autonomy of post-conventional thought unburdened by the questionable account of freedom and

commitment provided by Kohlberg.

#### IV. AN OBJECTIVIST INTERPRETATION OF THE STAGE SEQUENCE

Amongst the central complaints made above against Kohlberg's structuralist/formalist interpretation of moral development are the following.

1. The cognitive-developmental explanatory tools are inadequate to the explanation of stage-ascent, in so far as,
2. moving from one stage to another appears to involve complex sorts of learning unaccounted for in the dialectical/interactional model of learning.
3. The role of attitudes and emotions in moral thought and in moral development is not accounted for.
4. Kohlberg's modified formalism makes poor sense of the concern for human life and respect for persons supposedly expressed in mature thought.

It is these problems, more than any other, that the following re-interpretation of moral development addresses itself to.

One of the key points at which formalist and objectivist theories of value divide, is the relation between wants and needs. Theories like Hare's deny any fundamental distinction between them, and regard the range of wants and needs as springing from contingent and variant human inclinations. Because there are no needs which are rationally

justifiable, morality cannot judge the truth or falsity of the competing human interests which spring from them. As such, it is limited to a transient ordering of those interests in a way which preserves social order. In a scheme such as Kohlberg's the name for the supreme adjudicating principle is "justice". A just decision between competing claims cannot, though, judge the truth or falsity of the judgments upon which they rest. The liberal account of justice as fairness, framed by Rawls and Kohlberg, is incompatible with the view that there is any form of knowledge which can support human interests.

Evan Simpson has formulated an objectivist theory of value within which he believes the Kohlbergian stages to be comprehensible.<sup>33</sup> Denying the fact/value distinction and the reduction of needs to wants he proposes to show that ethical judgments can be justified by reference to facts. The facts concerned are social not natural, and so are not susceptible to some of the criticisms levelled under the rubric "naturalistic fallacy". The needs which define these facts are to be contrasted with instrumental needs such as the need for food, in that they are ends. These ends are established by judgment-making attitudes which spring from our common emotional capacities. Because establishing the pertinent facts at the same time justifies an attitude, a quite different relationship between reasoning and feeling

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<sup>33</sup>Private communication from Dr. Evan Simpson.

is suggested than that given by formalism. While for Hare or Kohlberg appropriate attitude at best follows from correct judgment, Simpson integrates affect and cognition in the structure of justification he outlines. It is the recognition that correct judgment can only be ascertained in the open discussion of human needs involving the expression of attitudes that overcomes the formalist's charge that objectivist theories are necessarily authoritarian and elitist.

Simpson provides the following table to illustrate these relationships.

<u>Attitude</u>	<u>Judgment</u>	<u>Need</u>
Wonder	The Object is novel	To know about it
Anxiety	Something threatens	Security
Pride	One has accomplished something	Recognition
Compassion	Someone is suffering	To give comfort
Respect	One has equals	To be just towards them
Sadness	Something has been lost	To recover it

By this scheme, pride is not the false self-esteem of humans pictured by certain theological traditions, but insofar as it arises from genuine achievement (fact) justifies the need for recognition. The desire to know is not an irrational drive shared by certain humans, but a rational desire insofar as certain matters are genuinely novel. Where some issue can be shown to elude our grasp, knowledge is a need.

Most problematic among these claims is that the judgment component is grounded in fact. In contrast to formalism respect for persons is not a universal principle, freely taken up, but an attitude justified by the facts of our equality. Such a matter can only be established in discussion, by appeal to examples and information by which an understanding of the complexities of personhood is fostered. Anxiety, rather than being the irrational by-product of neuro-physiological processes, can be justified if something can be shown to be threatening. Exposing a social environment as non-hostile is to undermine the belief by which anxiety is justified, and to show there to be no need for security. This may be done by appealing to evidence of the good-will of the individuals who compose that environment. Again, to claim that there are facts which establish good-will is to deny the formalist account of judgment. That a vast array of needs--intellectual, physical, moral, religious--is defined in this format of course denies the possibility of a distinctively moral form of reasoning.

Simpson uses the value-theory sketched here to interpret the stage sequence as follows. While the general movement from ego-centric, through ethnocentric to universal concerns is a natural development in learning to reason about values, this process need not take place in the discontinuous way Kohlberg describes. For all the evidence that has been produced to show that inducing "cognitive conflict" best promotes stage-transition, it is perfectly possible to



attribute development to the more integrated types of learning Simpson describes. Transition from stage one punishment avoidance in which one does not deliberate even about means, he points out, can be accounted for by "operant" learning. As part of a complex process of learning one becomes able to effect some control over one's environment. This control makes possible action to satisfy one's desires, so that while still concerned to avoid punishment, one acquires motives which introduce new possibilities into the world of action.

The transition from stage 2 to stage 3 involves what is a major intellectual advance within this interpretation. Developing emotional reasons for action involves acquiring a more integrated capacity for affective-cognitive states such as guilt and pride. This is also a natural step, in that the securing of one's ends requires the respect and trust of others whose antagonism would harm one's interests. While acting on the model of virtue is at this stage only a strategy, learning virtue-words coincides with a capacity for feeling the appropriate emotions. In learning to judge dishonesty, selfishness, humility, fairness and so on, one develops a concern to meet the standards that are discovered.

While for Kohlberg the transition from stage 3 to stage 4 is hard to explain, on this interpretation the development can be easily understood. By taking up given social norms, we become cognizant of a large whole, society at large. Although this discovery promotes

reciprocal action with a greater range of people, and is so a step towards universality of judgment, it involves recognizing that relations outside one's immediate circle of family and friends cannot be as flexible. The result is one's learning, as though by rote, the rules that are needed for harmonious interaction in society. While the rigid conventionality which results is equal to satisfying most of the demands made upon one (it is, after all, the viewpoint of the majority of people) the increasingly fine sensitivity to the nuances of its rules which develops brings the rules closer to critical scrutiny.

As a part of general intellectual development, stimulated by rule-bound studies such as mathematics and natural science, and under the need to ascertain the borders of social approval and disapproval where rules are complex, rules previously accepted uncritically are now brought-up for scrutiny. This development to critical thinking is itself hazardous, since the secure ground of common opinion is now taken away. No doubt in consequence of the discomfort experienced at being unable to find rational standards to replace the given of conventional rules, many post stage 4 reasoners lapse back temporarily to the secure ground of stage 2 instrumental relativism. While Kohlberg notes this phenomenon it is quite unexplained by strict cognitive-developmentalism.

Order is regained when it is recognized that particular conventional rules can be derived from principles which explain and justify

particular rules by reference to the conditions of consensus. Social contract thought sets submission to social authority within a rational tradition. The study of history and anthropology gives an awareness of cultural and historical relativism, and in so doing invites critical questioning of individual commitment to social norms. While commitment to a given authority is itself without justification, critical involvement with the gradual development of social norms, makes submission to the community's experience compatible with the integrity of one's judgment.

Movement towards a 6th or a 7th stage (a universalist perspective), we may add, can be understood from the dynamics which yield stage 5. Involving, as it does, an awareness of the relativism of particular institutions, stage 5 reveals a horizon of humanity at large, within which norms are produced and justified. In demanding that consideration is taken of the limitedness of any societal perspective it suggests an unconditioned perspective whose focus is the realm of sentient beings. While "persons" become a concern of autonomous agents, an understanding of "personhood" is derived not from the mysterious emptying of factual distinctions between men, but from a long process of learning the capacities and needs which are distinctively human. In this process, the study of history, literature, science, etc. and the development of sensitivity through the mastery of moral thought are essential and complementary.

As the process described above involves the correlativity of the study of man and of nature, the autonomous final stage does not subjugate a concern for non-human nature to the vicissitudes of human pragmatics, as Kohlberg's formalism certainly does. Contemplation of the meaning of human purposes within the scheme of things which integrates moral, religious and aesthetic concerns is here opposed to the narrow rationality portraying human interests as arbitrary constructions within an indifferent nature.

Does the experience of Kohlberg and fellow-researchers contradict the model of moral development given above? Much research has been undertaken to gauge the effects of classroom discussion on moral stage. In particular researchers have attempted to determine the effect of the selective introduction of dilemmas; a procedure commensurate with the cognitive-developmental account of learning. As the results discussed in Chapter 2 show, nothing has been established which is in any way prejudicial to the explanation suggested here. That under prolonged serious discussion of moral problems in the relaxed atmosphere of the classroom, a net shift of some significance should occur is hardly surprising. Even if the selection of moral dilemmas reflects a truncated view of moral thought, many of the ingredients of the broader learning environment -- justification of attitudes, use of examples, comparisons, establishing pertinent facts, etc. -- are present here. Again, the need to select specific stimuli for

students at different stages is perfectly understandable from our objectivist perspective; understanding moral problems presupposes the development of capacities to hold certain attitudes.<sup>34</sup>

## V. EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RE-INTERPRETATION

We have suggested from the outset, that the tenability of Kohlberg's interpretation of moral development, and of the educational prescriptions which are derived from it are bound up with the theory of value, and hence view of morality which he holds. The suggestion that moral education can only, legitimately, be the stimulation of ascent through the moral stages has as its backdrop the understanding of moral activity given by Kohlberg's modified formalism. That his complex and unwieldy philosophical and psychological machinery bear the burden of fact he has uncovered very awkwardly, it is hoped our above examination shows. Once the theoretical adequacy of his explanation is called into question, the meaning of educational practices deriving support from his work stands in need of re-evaluation.

According to the competing objectivist interpretation of moral development, ascent through the moral stages is the result of a complex process of learning, integrating various formal disciplines with their varying approaches to the examination of human interests and

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<sup>34</sup>Private communication from Dr. Evan Simpson.

purposes, specific discussion of moral dilemmas in a prepared setting is at best, of doubtful worth. In that the presentation of dilemmas with the intent to promote stage-ascent itself expresses the view of morality as the resolution of conflicts of inscrutable, unassailable human interests, such an exercise subtly inculcates a view of human activity.<sup>35</sup> While educators may with some plausibility claim that this form of education is impartial to particular norms, it must be recognized that it serves to sustain the orthodoxy of consumer society. Though Kohlberg believes an "education for justice" to have radical implications, the view of justice which he believes to be inherent to a mature perspective belies his optimism. If there is no objective standard by which human interests and purposes can be measured, untrammelling the free pursuit of personal inclination seems to be the sole legitimate "moral" concern of education. As such, the dialectical involvement of the school with social progress portrayed by many Dewey-influenced educators seems a pipe-dream.

While Kohlberg's understanding of his empirical inquiry has been called into question above, the alternative provided, with its sharply contrasting implications is offered tentatively. Such a position is in need of considerable development, and as an explanation of moral development must be brought into dialogue, not only with Kohlberg's

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<sup>35</sup>Private communication from Dr. Evan Simpson.

interpretation, but also with the forms of ego-theory mentioned herein. The result of the criticism undertaken above is not, then, an unconditional rejection of the work of Kohlberg and his colleagues. Rather, it is to call attention to the need to undertake the ardours of foundational enquiry, without which the suggestive and important research of Kohlberg and others is susceptible to misunderstanding and misuse.

## CONCLUSION

The cognitive-developmental explanation of moral development is not a contemporary attempt to explain a well-known phenomenon. Quite to the contrary, the notion that there is a form of universal development in human moral thought, is of recent birth, and conflicts with the beliefs of many. Because of this common origin of the factual claim and the psychological-philosophical explanation extreme care is required in examining the relationship of the putative facts to the explanation. If, as we have argued, a wide gap subsists between the establishment of the facts and the establishment of Kohlberg's explanation, the educational implications he draws from his empirical work require close examination.

Insofar as cognitive-developmental psychology involves the idea that ways of filtering experience are to some extent the constructions of human agents, it is compatible with a view of morality as the free construction of human agents, constrained only by the form of their rationality. In a way, then, cognitive-developmental psychology and ethical formalism are mutually supportive. Should the one be countered the other is immediately brought up for question. Where there are



independent reasons for doubting the truth of both, other quite different explanations of the facts of moral development must be attempted.

Although much empirical work has been undertaken in connection with the theory it is not clear that the facts of a universal sequential development have been adequately established. Whether or not they can be, the cognitive-developmental hypothesis has been argued to have questionable explanatory power. Part of the problem is the eclectic nature of its explanatory tools, and the empirical significance of its learning model. The alternative explanation offered is both simpler and better able to integrate the types of learning which appear to be central to stage-ascent.

In a century whose philosophical examinations of morality have included theories which deny cognitive content and even literal meaning to ethical discourse, the theoretical achievements of a form of moral education which proclaims a universal, rational core to moral thought are considerable. That in achieving widespread acceptance in western societies its account of rational action should nevertheless reflect prevailing orthodoxies is hardly surprising. For all the contemporaneousness of cognitive-developmental psychology, there is very little novelty in its concrete recommendations for education. Kohlberg himself recognizes as much; in practice "there is very little new in this--or in anything else we are doing". The orthodoxies reflected alike in Kohlberg's moral theory and his psychology are not

fashions, however, but are perhaps embedded in the development of consumer society.

The denial that human emotions are justified by external realities, given its most primordial expression in the writings of Kant, can be heard in the prevalent forms of values education and has been central to the tenets of modern liberal democracies. The resulting phenomenon in these societies of the loss of opportunity to express and justify emotions and attitudes has been often noted and variously described by philosophers, psychologists and sociologists. Bryan Wilson, for example, takes it to be intrinsic to the organizational development in the transfer from "community" to "society".<sup>36</sup> In describing the world-wide process of secularization, Wilson contrasts the confined affectively-united community, in whose value structure are inherent the tools for appraisal of individual interest, with the open society founded upon individual, atomic rights. In the latter, interests are legally enshrined and are so taken out of the realm of community expectation within which they were formerly appraised. However this process is explained its consequences for moral life in society, and so for the moral education expressive of that society, are profound. Where human interests lie beyond appraisal and attitudes to those

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<sup>36</sup>Suggested in a talk given at McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, in September 1978, entitled "Secularization and Its Discontent".

interests have lost rational justification, a society may only legitimately undertake to enshrine the free pursuit of private interest. Its moral education will attempt to develop in its citizens skills for overcoming clashes of interest. In broad outline, Kohlberg's progressive moral education, understood strictly within the confines of his theorizing, does just this. Justice, the supreme adjudicator will provide a transigent ordering of interests, but cannot speak of their intrinsic worthiness.

Because to oppose the liberal-formalist account of moral activity is to try out the reins of contemporary belief, only an open discussion of the opposing views can determine whether a common conception of the good life can re-assert itself amidst the pluralism of our society. The discussion is as much a direct questioning of whether we have reason to feel what we feel as it is an esoteric dialogue with the metaphysical assumptions of technological society. As such it is neither the province of the few, nor something which can be settled quickly. Rather, it is part of a process of cultural reflection which finds its origin in whatever discontent we may feel at the developments which are shaping our society.

## APPENDIX

### HYPOTHETICAL DILEMMAS

#### (a) The "Heinz Dilemma"

"In Europe a woman was near death from a special kind of cancer. There was one drug that the doctors thought might save her. It was a form of radium that a druggist in the same town had recently discovered. The drug was expensive to make, but the druggist was charging ten times what the drug cost him to make. He paid \$200 for the radium and charged \$2,000 for a small dose of the drug. The sick woman's husband, Heinz, went to everyone he knew to borrow the money, but he could only get together about \$1,000, which is half of what it cost. He told the druggist that his wife was dying and asked him to sell it cheaper or let him pay later. But the druggist said "No, I discovered the drug and I'm going to make money from it". So Heinz got desperate and broke into the man's store to steal the drug for his wife. "

QUESTION: Should the husband have done that? Why?

#### Examples of Responses

- Stage 1 "No. It's not good to steal. " (Why?) "If you steal some other's things one day he will steal yours, there will be a fight between the two and they will just put both in prison. "
- Stage 2 "Yes, because nobody would give him the drug and he had no money, because his wife was dying it was right. " (Wrong not to?) "Yes, because otherwise she will die. "
- Stage 3 "Yes, if he cares for his wife he ~~should~~ should. If he doesn't steal it people will think that he doesn't care for his wife, and is very cruel. " (Wrong not to?) "Yes, because she would die, and people would be sad. And he couldn't replace his wife easily, could he? "

- Stage 4 "He should not have stolen--he should have asked for the drug and they would give him the drug." (They didn't.) "He should go somewhere else." (Nowhere to go.) "He should try to work for the drug." (He can't.) "Then it would be right to steal and not let his wife die because she will die and for that moment it would be right--he had to steal because his wife would die--he had to steal for the first and last time: It is all right to steal when he can't do anything else--for the first and last time and then he should go out to work." (His duty?) "It's not his duty to steal, but it is his duty to feed her."
- Stage 5 "Heinz did only what he had to. Had I been Heinz I would probably have done the same thing. In any event, however, Heinz must be prepared to go to jail for breaking into a store. Breaking into the store was not "right", but the lesser of two wrongs." (Is it his duty?) "Every husband must decide which of the two wrongs--letting his wife go without the drug or stealing--is greater to him. I would steal."
- Stage 6 "Yes, it was right, human life and the right to it are prior to, and more precious than, property rights." (Is it a husband's duty to steal the drug for his wife?) "It is the husband's duty to do so. Any good husband whose ethical values were not confused would do it."

(b) The "Heinz" story is extended to produce the following dilemma

"The drug didn't work, and there was no other treatment known to medicine which could save Heinz's wife, so the doctor knew she had only about six months to live. She was in terrible pain, but she was so weak that a good dose of pain-killer like ether or morphine would make her die sooner. She was delirious and almost crazy with pain, and in her calm periods she would ask the doctor to give her enough ether to kill her. She said she couldn't stand the pain and that she was going to die in a few months anyway."

QUESTION: Should the doctor do what she asks and give her the drug that will make her die? Why?

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