

Moral dilemma

Experience, Human Nature



Moral Dilemma The question of ethics and morality is one that has been debated since at least Greek antiquity. Philosophers and thinkers have debated what constitutes moral action and whether humans innately tend towards moral actions. With the advent of psychology, theories of development emerged that explored aspects of morality and intellectual understanding. Two prominent theorists in these regards were Jean Piaget, who seminally presented a theory of cognitive development, and Lawrence Kohlberg, who established a theory of moral development. Today these theories remain prevalent tools in understanding human psychology. This essay implements both of these theorists' perspectives, in characterizing the moral development of an eleven-year-old child named Jeremy.

Jeremy is an eleven-year-old child who has been faced with a moral dilemma surrounding his actions on a test. The specific scenario is that Jeremy, who has struggled in math, has been promised an increase in weekly allowance if he improves in math by one letter grade. During a math exam, he decided to look on a couple of his peers' papers and change his answers accordingly. He ended up getting a perfect score, raising his grade by a letter grade, and receiving an increase in allowance. While Jeremy has been successful in his pursuit of a higher grade, it's clear that his actions constitute moral impropriety.

As established, Jeremy's actions in cheating on his test represent morally improper actions. Still, the question remains whether such immorality is an aberration or is an age appropriate indication of Jeremy's stage of moral and cognitive development. These concerns have been examined by both Piaget and Kohlberg. Both of these theorists implement a developmental model

with stages of the individual passes through (Douglas 1993). Kohlberg's theory of moral development functions within the overarching context of Piaget's theory of cognitive development (Douglas 1993). In considering Kohlberg's theory of moral development within the context of Jeremy's situation, it's clear that Jeremy is acting at an age appropriate level. Perhaps the prominent consideration in terms of Jeremy's development is what Kohlberg terms the pre-conventional stage of development. For individuals at Jeremy's age, the age appropriate level is the second stage of the pre-operational stage. According to Kohlberg & Lickona (1976) this stage is characteristic of acting in ways that directly benefit the self without disregard for larger moral concerns. It's clear that Jeremy is acting within this context of understanding when he chooses to cheat on his math exam. Ultimately, it's clear that according to Piaget and Kohlberg Jeremy is at an age-appropriate level of moral development.

In conclusion, this essay has considered the specific moral development of an eleven-year-old child named Jeremy. In these regards, following the moral development theory of Kohlberg, and Piaget's theory of moral development, Jeremy is in the second stage of pre-conventional development. Ultimately, this indicates that Jeremy is at an age appropriate level of development.

References

Douglas, James. (1993). *Piaget and Developmental Theory*. New York: Templeton Press.

Kohlberg, Lawrence; T. Lickona, ed. (1976). "Moral stages and moralization: The cognitive-developmental approach". *Moral Development and Behavior: Theory, Research and Social Issues*. Holt, NY: Rinehart and Winston.