

Moral development

[Religion](#), [Buddhism](#)



Culture and Moral Development Another criticism of Kohlberg's view is that it is culturally based. A review of research on moral development in 27 countries concluded that moral reasoning is more culture-specific than Kohlberg envisioned and that Kohlberg's scoring system does not recognize higher-level moral reasoning in certain cultural groups (Snarey, 1987). Examples of higher-level moral reasoning that would not be scored as such by Kohlberg's system include values related to communal equity and collective happiness in Israel, the unity and sacredness of all life-forms in India, and the relation of the individual to the community in New Guinea. These examples of moral reasoning would not be scored at the highest level in Kohlberg's system because they do not emphasize the individual's rights and abstract principles of justice. One study assessed the moral development of 20 adolescent male Buddhist monks in Nepal. This issue of justice, a basic theme in Kohlberg's theory, was not of paramount importance in the monks moral views, and their concerns about prevention of suffering and the role of compassion are not captured by Kohlberg's theory. According to moral development theorist and researcher Damon (1988), where culturally specific practices take on profound moral and religious significance, as in India, the moral development of children focuses extensively on their adherence to custom and convention. In contrast, Western moral doctrine tends to elevate abstract principles, such as justice and welfare, to a higher moral status than customs or conventions. As in India, socialization practices in many third world countries actively instill in children a great respect for their culture's traditional codes and practices. In Shweder's (1991) view of culture and moral development, three ethical

orientations or worldviews appear: (1) an ethic of autonomy (dominant in Western cultures), (2) an ethic of community (prominent in cultures that emphasize communitarian values and tradition), and (3) an ethic of divinity (characteristic of cultures in which morality is mainly derived from religious prescription). In sum, although Kohlberg's approach does capture much of the moral reasoning voiced in various cultures around the world, as we have just seen there are some important moral concepts in particular cultures that his approach misses or misconstrues (Santrock, 2005).