

Kohlbergs moral stage theory

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Moral Development, according to Kohlberg & Hersh (1977), does not merely envisage an increase in the "knowledge of cultural values" through which a person understands ethics but it also encompasses all the changes that occur in an individual's "form or structure of thought" (p. 54). This notion mainly emerges from the fact that culture varies in societies and hence study of the "cultural values" cannot inform on how individuals interact in their social environments or how they solve their problems in a social context (p. 54). On the other hand, an examination of "developing structures" through which an individual makes moral judgments will enable us to understand moral development (p. 54). I agree with Kohlberg's Moral Stage Theory, and judging by its tenets of moral development I will place myself at Stage 5.

At this stage, the sense of morality in me has bloomed to its full development, where I have attained the constructs of "social contract" and "legalistic orientation" and I perceive right action in terms of the alignment of citizens' right with the behavioral standards as prescribed by the society (p. 55). Through my education as well as insights from personal experience, at this stage I have been able to obtain necessary awareness of the "relativism of personal values and opinions" and the need to adhere to relevant rules before a specific action (p. 55). Thus, when I take an action, I do not merely consider the legal aspects when deciding its propriety but also the rights of others as well as the impacts of my action on them, though it may not legally violate their rights.

As a person involved in the study of criminal justice, I also have understood that I must be "especially sensitive" towards ethics in my personal and

academic life as well as professional life in future (Pollock, 2011, p. 4). In this context, law enforcement officers are endowed with a lot of power and if they use it indiscriminately, it can lead to misuse of official authority that entails in violation of human rights. However, I understand that even if police officers have immunity in most cases in respect of action against them, they should not indulge in any act that may violate the rights of citizens. On the other hand, I also know that police officers have an explicit responsibility to “uphold and enforce” laws, in the process of which, sometimes they may not be able to fully comply with principles of protecting the rights of others. In such a situation, it demands an ethical sense of the police officer to enable him to make a judicious decision.

My education has now provided me a clear understanding of the need to respect human rights while enforcing the laws for the protection of the citizens. Thus, I will be able to make ethical decisions when I work in law enforcement or other related fields in the future. I perceive this ability as a consequence of my moral development, as suggested by Kohlberg as a result of my cultural background, grooming from my home as well as my education through this course. I also believe that as purported by Kohlberg, “structure, not content” is the motivator of cognitive development at each stage, because responses of an individual to a situation are not determined by his or her knowledge but the “underlying organization of thought” (Robinet, 2008, p. 468). Thus, the organization of my thoughts, which enabled me to attain the understanding of social construct and legalistic orientation, aligns with Stage 5 proposed by Kohlberg. However, I will be able to acquire a “universal-ethical-principle orientation” that characterizes Stage 6, with more exposure to real life professional and personal situations

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and resultant experiences I glean out of them (Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977, p. 55).

References

Kohlberg, L. & Hersh, R. H. (1977). Moral development: A review of the theory. *Theory into Practice*, 16(2), 53-59.

This article by the proponent of Kohlberg's Moral Stage Theory clearly delineates each state of moral development in an individual. This will provide both students as well as the professional practitioners of criminal justice a clear idea of the development of ethical sense in individuals.

Pollock, J. M. (2011). *Ethical Dilemmas & Decisions in Criminal Justice* (7th edn). Belmont, CA: Cengage Learning.

This book examines the ethical dilemmas and issues that law enforcement officers may encounter during their professional practice in the US criminal justice system. It clearly illustrates the moral and ethical aspects of policing profession and delineates the decision making process in an ethical manner. This source will be highly useful for both students and professionals in the criminal justice field.

Robinett, T. L. (2008). A Comparison of Moral Reasoning Stages Using a Model of Hierarchical Complexity. *World Futures*, 64, 468-479.

This research article, based on an empirical study, generates a Model of Hierarchical Complexity, with a reliability rate of .97 and it illustrates how Kohlberg's proposition is validated through this. This can be a useful tool for both academicians and others who require an in-depth understanding of moral development.