

Personal Dilemmas

Read the situations described below, and answer the questions that follow. Be prepared to share and explain your rationale for responses.

Jonathan is a junior in high school and has many decisions to make in his life. He wants to go to college very much but is unable to pay for it. He has missed the deadline for qualifying for financial aid. He feels he will excel at any college he attends, but he needs an academic scholarship. Although his grade point average is good, it is not high enough to earn him the desired scholarship. Knowing this, he thinks about boosting his scores by cheating on his mid-term exams.

Jonathan has other decisions to make. His girlfriend is very possessive, and he would like to date others without upsetting her. Mindy, his girlfriend, attends a different high school. There is a big dance coming up at his school, and he is thinking of asking a girl from his psychology class. He is afraid that Mindy will find out and get angry.

Jonathan has other problems to face. While Jonathan was on a school field trip, Tim, his best friend, asked if he could use his locker. Jonathan didn't quite see the necessity of this but told Tim it was okay. A few days later, the school searched the student lockers looking for illegal drugs. Jonathan's locker was identified as one of those possessing drugs. He was called to the principal's office and asked to explain. He was told that the police had been called.

1. Should Jonathan cheat? Why or why not?
2. Should Jonathan ask his classmate to go to the dance with him? Why or why not?
3. Should Jonathan implicate his best friend? Why or why not?
4. Review your answers for each situation presented. Is your rationale for the solution to Jonathan's problems the same in each case? If there are differences in your reasoning, explain why you used a different rationale for each situation.

Kohlberg's Stages of Moral Development

Part A.

Read and study the stages of moral development as described by Lawrence Kohlberg.

Stage 1—Preconventional

Moral decisions are based on the consequences of the action. "Will I be punished?"

Stage 2—Preconventional

Moral decisions are decided on the benefits derived from the action. "Will I get what I want?" In this stage, decisions are also made on the principle of reciprocity. "Does the victim deserve it?"

Stage 3—Conventional

Moral decisions are determined by evaluating the action in terms of love and approval of family and friends. "Will my family or friends get mad at me?"

Stage 4—Conventional

Moral decisions are based on the precepts of law and/or religion. "Is it right according to the law?"

Stage 5—Postconventional

Moral decisions are based on fairness, justice, and truth. Oftentimes, civil law is superceded by a higher moral law as determined by conscience. "Is there a higher good that can come from the action I do?"

Part B.

For each situation, decide in which stage of Kohlberg's theory the person is responding. On a different piece of paper, write the stage and the reason for your response. Be prepared to explain your rationale for choosing a particular stage.

1. Tamara has five tests in one day. She is a good student but did not have time to study for her French test. She knows the person who sits next to her in French class is also a good student. This girl has copied from Tamara on occasion. Tamara decides to look at the other girl's test for the questions she doesn't know. Besides, thinks Tamara, "I never should have five tests in one day anyway."
2. Scott thought about leaving school early and going to a baseball game. He stayed in school because he was afraid of getting caught.
3. Juanita's friends were at the mall, and someone suggested they do a little shoplifting just to see if they could get away with it. Juanita wouldn't participate and said stealing is wrong.
4. Muhammed lives with his mother in a poor section of the city. His mother is quite ill and needs outpatient services daily at a hospital some miles away from their home. Muhammed steals a car to take his mother to the hospital.
5. Martina, a young woman living in a war-torn region of the world, distributes food to orphans living in the streets. This activity is actually against the law. She frequently has to deceive the authorities in order to keep these children alive.
6. Grant wants to spend time after school volunteering at the hospital. However, he is a good basketball player, and practice interferes with this volunteer program. The coach and other teammates pressure him to play. Grant decides to play with the team.

Moral development. This may be called honesty, ethics, or morals, but it is a basic orientation we all must form in dealing with our fellow humans. It involves a complex series of behaviors, including reasoning, feeling or emotion, and action. At birth we are without morals and ethics, so our family is really our first source of values. As children, our moral standards differ quite a bit from those of our parents—we are rather self-centered. However, as our ability to think improves and as we gain experience in dealing with other people, our patterns of moral behavior also develop.

The most complete theory about how we develop our sense of morals is that of Lawrence Kohlberg. He suggests that there are three levels of moral reasoning, each of which has two stages—less, and more sophisticated. Box 3-2 contains a moral dilemma such as any of us might sometime face. Read the situation, and then respond to the question at the end. Be prepared to defend your decision.

According to Kohlberg, we can either agree or disagree with the husband's actions, but the *reasoning* we apply in defending our decision determines our level of moral development. Table 3-1 lists the six stages of moral development, along with a brief sample of the logical train of thought that would illustrate each level. Notice how the theory is not *tied* to one's age. Although development of moral reasoning does seem to be *related* to one's age, not all people achieve the highest levels of moral development. Clearly, our skill in thinking is also involved. The higher levels of moral development are much more abstract. On the other hand, the lowest levels are mainly based on whether or not one is likely to get caught!

Feature

3-2 MAKING A MORAL JUDGMENT

Suppose you found yourself in the following dilemma: If this were you, would you do what the husband did? Be prepared to justify your answer.

"In Europe, a woman was near death from cancer. One drug might save her, a form of radium that a druggist in the same town had recently discovered. The druggist was charging \$2,000, ten times what the drug cost him to make. The sick woman's husband

went to everyone he knew to borrow the money, but he could only get together about half of what it cost. He told the druggist that his wife was dying and asked him to sell a cheaper or let him pay later. But the druggist refused to budge down his price. The husband, being desperate, then broke into the man's store to steal the drug for his wife. Should the husband have done that? Why or why not?

Evaluation

Evaluate Lawrence Kohlberg's theory by completing the following items. Be prepared to share your responses.

1. List three reasons why you think Kohlberg's theory is an accurate explanation of moral development. Be able to explain your reasoning.
2. List three reasons why you think Kohlberg's theory is a not an accurate explanation of moral development. Be able to explain your reasoning.
3. List one alternative approach to how moral decisions are made. Be able to explain your alternative.
4. After compiling this information, write an essay that supports or refutes the Kohlberg approach to moral development. Include an alternative approach to moral growth in your essay.

Table 3-1 Kohlberg's six stages of moral judgment

LEVEL	STAGE	SAMPLE OF REASONING
PREMORAL	Stage 1	<p>Yes: "If you let your wife die, you will get in trouble. There'll be an investigation of you and the druggist."</p> <p>No: "You shouldn't steal the drug because you'll be caught and sent to jail if you do. If you do get away with it, your conscience will bother you."</p>
	Stage 2	<p>Yes: "If you do happen to get caught, you could give the drug back, and you wouldn't get much of a sentence. You might have a short jail sentence, but you'd have your wife afterwards."</p> <p>No: "He may not get much of a jail term for stealing, but his wife will probably die before he's out, so what good will it do him?"</p>
CONVENTIONAL	Stage 3	<p>Yes: "No one will think you're bad if you steal the drug, but your family will think you're inhuman if you don't. If you let your wife die, you'll never be able to look anyone in the face again."</p> <p>No: "Not only the druggist, but everyone else will think you're a criminal. Afterwards you won't be able to face anybody thinking about the dishonor you've brought on your family."</p>
	Stage 4	<p>Yes: "If you have any sense of honor, you won't let your wife die just because you're afraid to do what will save her. You'd have a choice: Do your duty or forever feel guilty for not doing so."</p> <p>No: "You're desperate and you know you're doing wrong when you steal the drug. You'll know how wrong you were after you're punished and sent to jail. You'll always feel guilty for your dishonesty and lawbreaking."</p>
PRINCIPLED	Stage 5	<p>Yes: "You'd lose other people's respect, not gain it, if you don't steal. If you let your wife die, it would be out of fear, not out of reasoning it out. You'd lose self-respect, and probably the respect of others, too."</p> <p>No: "You'd lose your standing and respect in the community and violate the law as well. You'd lose your self-respect if you forget the long range point of view because you're carried away by emotions."</p>
	STAGE	SAMPLE OF REASONING
	Stage 6	<p>Yes: "If you don't steal the drug and your wife dies, you'd always condemn yourself for it. You wouldn't be blamed, but you wouldn't have lived up to your own standards of justice."</p> <p>No: "If you stole the drug, you wouldn't be blamed by other people, but you'd condemn yourself. You wouldn't have lived up to your own conscience and standards of honesty."</p>

