Moral Reasoning: The Moral Dilemma of “Heinz”

In Europe, a lady was dying because she was very sick. There was one drug the doctors said might save her. This medicine was discovered by a man living in that same town. It cost him $400 to make it, but he charged $4000 for just a little bit of it. The sick lady’s husband, Heinz, tried to borrow enough money to buy the drug. He went to everyone he knew to borrow the money. But he could only borrow half of what he needed. He told the man who made the drug that his wife was dying, and asked him to sell the medicine cheaper or let him pay him later. But the man said “No, I made the drug and I am going to make money from it.” So Heinz broke into the store and stole the drug.

- Should Heinz have stolen the drug?
- Why or why not?

In Kohlberg’s work the answer to whether Heinz should have stolen the drug is NOT what matters. For Kohlberg, the explanation for their decision is the important issue that is critical for understanding moral reasoning.
Moral Reasoning: Lawrence Kohlberg

According to Kohlberg, there are 3 levels with 2 stages each of moral reasoning. Each stage is defined by the reason/motive for your behavior.

Level 1: Preconventional: No internalization of morals (reasons are external to the individual)
- Stage 1 (Punishment and obedience)
- Stage 2 (Individual self-interest)

Level 2: Conventional: Intermediate internalization of morals
- Stage 3 (Seeking approval or avoiding disapproval)
- Stage 4 (Law and order)

Level 3: Postconventional: full internalization of morals
- Stage 5 (Interpretation of the law)
- Stage 6 (Universal ethical principles)

In Kohlberg’s theory of moral reasoning your decision is not the critical issue—it is the reasons for your decision. These stages unfold in an age-related step-by-step fashion, much like Piaget’s stages of cognitive development.
Preconventional Morality

**Level 1:** Preconventional: no internalization of morals (reasons are external to the individual)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage 1</th>
<th>Stage 2</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Punishment and Obedience)</td>
<td>(Individual self-interest)</td>
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People base their moral decisions of right and wrong by what is punished. They act on the fear of punishment and behave to avoid punishments. Right and wrong is determined by what is rewarded, gained, or profited. One’s actions are based on what they will get, or their inaction occurs because there is nothing to be gained.

**Examples:**
- Children obey because adults tell them to obey or they will get spanked.
- I’ll help you because if I don’t, I’ll get in trouble.
- I won’t cheat because I will get caught and get detention.
- I won’t steal because I will go to jail.
- I won’t speed because I will get a ticket.

**Examples:**
- Children obey when it is in their best interest to obey because they get rewards from their parents (attention, candy, praise, etc.)
- I will cheat because I will get a better score on the exam.
- I won’t tell mom you broke the vase if you don’t tell on me for stealing candy.
- I will help you if I get to play with your Wii.
- I’m not going to help you if because there’s nothing in it for me.
# Conventional Morality

**Level:2:** Conventional, Intermediate internalizations of morals

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<tr>
<th>Stage 3</th>
<th>Stage 4</th>
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<tr>
<td>(seeking approval or avoiding disapproval)</td>
<td>(Law and Order)</td>
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Right and wrong is determined by seeking approval or avoiding disapproval of people who are close to you (such as your parents and friends).

Right and wrong is determined by society’s rules, and laws, which should be obeyed rigidly to maintain law and order through formal or informal codes of conduct.

**Examples:**
- I won’t cheat on the test because my parents will be ashamed of me.
- I will steal because it will make me look cool in front of my friends.
- I will tell mom you lied because it makes me look better.
- I will give to charity because everyone will think highly of me.
- Break the speed limit? Why not you dork?
- Vandalizing the road sign makes you look cool and defiant.

**Examples:**
- You must not shoplift because it is illegal.
- You shouldn’t jaywalk because it is against the law.
- Since death penalty is legal, so it is okay to have the government kill someone (but some consider it immoral).
- We must follow the workplace rules so there is order at the job.
- It is okay for large corporations to make shell companies off in Bermuda to avoid paying taxes because it is legal (it may not be “ethical”)
Post Conventional Morality

**Level 3:** Post conventional level, full internalization of morals

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<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Stage 5</strong> (Interpretation of the law)</th>
<th><strong>Stage 6</strong> (Universal ethical principles)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Right and wrong is determined by society’s rules, which are viewed as fallible, rather than absolute. Unlike stage 4, a stage 5 person is more willing to break the law because as a member of society, you have certain obligations to fulfill that might not be contained within the current law. The person understands that laws are important to protect society and individuals and should be changed or not followed if they fail to do so. In some instances, the law may not apply to a particular situation, especially if it violates some values such as freedom and individual or property rights.</td>
<td>Right and wrong is determined by universal ethical abstract principles that emphasize equality, justice and preservation of life regardless of culture or situation.</td>
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<td>• When faced with a dilemma between law and conscience, a personal, individual conscience is followed.</td>
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<td>• Behavior is directed by self-chosen ethical principles that tend to be general, comprehensive, or universal; high value is placed on justice, dignity and equality.</td>
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**Examples:**
- Piracy of movies in China should not be done because (stage 4: it is illegal), (stage 5: it infringes upon

**Examples:**
- Lying to the Nazis about the Jews in the basement is all right if it is going to save an innocent life. (appealing to all
| Intellectual property rights), (stage 6: it isn’t fair to the owner put all the work into producing it and not having any profit to show) | Life is sacred over the law) |
| Lying to the Nazis about the Jews in the basement is all right if it is going to protect their rights of due process. (appealing to right of due process of the law). | Stealing breaks the law, but what Heinz did was reasonable because he saved a life. (appealing to all life is sacred over the law) |
| It is important for everyone to contribute their tax money to the government, so it is moral [and is legal] for companies to have shell companies in the Cayman Islands to avoid paying taxes, so they can have the freedom to run a business as they chose. (appealing to freedom) | It is important for everyone to contribute their tax money to the government, so it is immoral for companies to have shell companies in the Cayman Islands to avoid paying taxes, even though it is legal. (appealing to fairness / justice over the law) |
| Speeding laws are useful in town, but in rural areas, they violate my freedom to choose the speeds I wish to drive. | Saving a life comes before financial gain, even if it is the person is a stranger. |
Criticisms of Kohlberg’s theory of moral development

- Kohlberg’s early research was conducted with male subjects and became a basis for moral reasoning for men and women. In addition, most of the dilemmas involve a male to be resolved by a male with a woman being a subordinate.
- Carol Gilligan claims Kohlberg’s model is based on an ethic of individual rights, which is more common perspective for men. Gilligan developed a model of women’s moral development that is based on an ethic of care and responsibility.
  - Women tend to stress the importance of maintaining interpersonal relationships and responding to the needs of others, rather than focusing on individual rights.
  - However, when men and women are matched in terms of education level, they respond in a similar manner.
- Kohlberg’s model of moral development reflects the values of western culture (and hence not universal) of individual rights, harm and justice. A man in New Guinea said, “If no one helped Heinz, then we are all guilty of a crime”
- It is very easy to give a “highly moral reason”, yet engage in a behavior that reflects a lower level of moral reasoning. The behavior doesn’t match your words.
  - We say education is important, but we won’t fund it.
o We say equality is important, but give preference to certain races, religions or genders.