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# LEARNING GUIDE

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## MORALITY: JUDGMENTS AND ACTION

with Elliot Turiel, Ph.D.

[ 31 minutes ]



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## **Introduction**

### **Turiel's definition of morality:**

Morality consists of judgments about right and wrong in people's relationships. These include judgments about our treatment of others, justice, fairness and rights.

People develop moral judgments from many experiences including religious doctrines and interactions with other people.

This video does not deal with extreme acts such as genocide, mass murder and rape. Those require a separate analysis.

### **Review of pioneers in the psychology of morality**

- Freud saw a duality between the needs of individuals and those of their society
- Parents passed on the norms of their society through emotional interchanges
- Skinner and other behaviorists saw morality as a learned set of behaviors that were shaped by rewards and avoidance of punishment
- Piaget gave a more active role to children. Morality is constructed from social interactions.
- Early morality based on constraint.
- Later on cooperation.
- Kohlberg built a six-stage analysis. His research was based on clinical interviews and the classic Heinz dilemma is illustrated in this video. (A man, Heinz, has a very sick wife who needs a special drug. After trying to get it legally, he faces the dilemma of having to steal it.)

### **Universal applicability of moral judgments**

- Kohlberg's work was challenged by Gilligan who saw it as an over reliance on the concept of justice
- Others have looked at cultural differences in moral judgments
- Domain theory of social judgments look at the differences between three general types of judgments
- Personal judgments have to do with preferences such as friendships, areas of studies, hobbies and taste. What kinds of activities that are categorized as personal vary between cultures.

- Two students talk of their personal judgments as to choice of majors.
- Conventional judgments have to do with cultural practices that are important to a certain group but are not seen as universal. Diet, clothing, ceremonies are examples of these judgments.
  - One student talks of her Muslim dietary restrictions.
  - Another student talks about adapting to dress codes at work.
- Moral judgments have to do with well being, justice, rights and fairness and are not specific to a particular culture. They are found in most cultures around the world.
  - One student talks about her family's charitable activities.
  - Another student talks of the temptation to cheat.
- Moral judgments can cause clashes among people when people feel they are being unjustly treated.

*Moral ideals about avoidance of harm, fairness and justice are universal but they are subject to influences that sometimes distort them*

## **RELATIONSHIP OF MORAL JUDGMENTS TO ACTIONS**

Work of Stanley Milgram in the 1960's

- Subjects were told they were testing the effects of punishment on learning
- In many situations, most subjects administered what they thought were painful shocks to the "learner"
- Conflict between the moral imperative to not harm and the conventions of going along with authorities

Turiel's work with children in real life situations

- Footage of children on a playground and the interviews with them afterwards show that even very young children distinguish between moral judgments and conventional ones.
- Moral judgments are wrong even if authorities give permission.
- Conventions can be changed by authority

*Life presents dilemmas that mix moral and conventional domains. Justifications for moral acts are based on welfare and justice. Justifications for conventions are based on rules and authority.*

## **DEVELOPMENTAL PROGRESSION OF MORAL REASONING**

### **Importance of emotion**

### **Reasoning about morality develops over lifetime**

- Importance of parental influences
- Adults also influenced by younger people

- Adolescents and young people influenced by each other

*Acting on moral beliefs involves balancing personal domain with social conventions and understandings of the moral domain*

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***RELATED FILM***

*Also Available from Davidson Films*

***MORALITY: THE PROCESS OF MORAL DEVELOPMENT*** (1978) 28 minutes