INDOCTRINATION VERSUS RELATIVITY IN VALUE EDUCATION

by Lawrence Kohlberg

The first point I want to make is that the problem raised by my title, "Indoctrination versus Relativity in Value Education," requires coming to grips with morality and moral education. I hope I will be able to make moral education a somewhat less forbidding term by presenting my own approach to it. My basic task, however, is not to convince you of my approach to moral education but to convince you that the only way to solve the problems of relativity and indoctrination in value education is to formulate a notion of *moral development* which is justified philosophically and psychologically.

While moral education has a forbidding sound to all who are teachers, for example, they constantly practice it. They tell children what to do, make evaluations of children's behavior, and direct children's relations in the classrooms. Sometimes teachers do these things without being aware that they are engaging in moral education; but the children are aware of it. As an example, my second-grade son told me that he did not want to be one of the bad boys. Asked "Who were the bad boys?" he replied, "The ones who don't put their books back where they belong and get yelled at." His teacher would have been surprised to know that her concerns with classroom management defined for her children what she and her school thought were basic moral values, or that she was engaged in value indoctrination.

Most teachers are aware that they are teaching values, like it or not, and are very concerned as to whether this teaching is unjustified indoctrination. In particular, they are uncertain as to whether their own moral opinions should be presented as "moral truths," whether they should be expressed merely as personal opinion, or should be omitted from classroom discussion entirely. As an example, an ex-

perienced junior high school teacher told us, "My class deals with morality and right and wrong quite a bit. I don't expect all of them to agree with me; each has to satisfy himself according to his own convictions, as long as he is sincere and thinks he is pursuing what is right. I often discuss cheating this way but I always *get defeated,* because they still argue cheating is all right. After you accept the idea that kids have the right to build a position with logical arguments, you have to accept what they come out with, even though you drive at it ten times a year and they still come out with the same conclusion." This teacher's confusion is apparent. She believes everyone should "have his own ideas" and yet she is most unhappy if this leads to a point where some of these ideas include the notion that "it's all right to cheat." In other words, she is smack up against the problem of relativity of values in moral education. Using this teacher as an example, I will attempt to demonstrate that moral education can be free from the charge of cultural relativity and arbitrary indoctrination which inhibits her when she talks about cheating.

COP-OUT SOLUTIONS TO THE RELATIVITY PROBLEM

To begin with, I want to reject a few cop-outs or false solutions sometimes suggested as solving the relativity problem. One is to call moral education "socialization." Sociologists have sometimes claimed that moralization in the interests of classroom management and maintenance of the school as a social system is a hidden curriculum; that it performs hidden services in helping children adapt to society.[1] They have argued that since praise and blame on the part of teachers is a necessary aspect of the "socialization" process, the teacher does not have to consider the psychological and philosophic issues of moral education. In learning to conform to the teacher's expectations and the school rules, the child is becoming "socialized," he is internalizing the norms and standards of society. I have argued at length elsewhere why this approach is a cop-out.[2] In practice it means that we call the teacher's yelling at her students for not putting their books away "socialization." To label it "socialization" does not legitimate it as valid education nor does it remove the charge of arbitrary indoctrination from it. Basically, this sociological argument implies that respect for social authority is a moral good in itself. Stated in different terms, the notion that it is valid for the teacher to have an unreflective hidden curriculum is based on the notion that the teacher is the agent of the state, the church, or the

social system, rather than being a free moral agent dealing with children who are free moral agents. The notion that the teacher is the agent of the state is taken for granted in some educational systems, such as that of the Russians. However, the moral curriculum is not hidden in Russian education; it is done explicitly and well as straight indoctrination.[3] For the moment I will not argue what is wrong with indoctrination but assume that it is incompatible with the conceptions of civil liberties which are central not only to American democracy but to any just social system.

Let us turn now to the second cop-out. This is to rely upon vaguely positive and honorific sounding words like "moral values" or "moral and spiritual values." We can see in the following statements how a program called "Teaching Children Values in the Upper Elementary School" relies on a vague usage of "moral and spiritual values":

Many of our national leaders have expressed anxiety about an increasing lack of concern for personal moral and spiritual values. Throughout history, nations have sought value systems to help people live congenially. The Golden Rule and the Ten Commandments are examples of such value systems. Each pupil needs to acquire a foundation of sound values to help him act correctly and make proper choices between right and wrong, truth and untruth. The teacher can develop a sound value system in the following ways:
  1. Be a good example.
  2. Assist young people to assess conflict situations and to gain insight into the development of constructive values and attitudes. Situations arise daily in which pupils can perceive praise which will reinforce behavior that exemplified desired values.
  3. Show young people how to make generalizations concerning experience through evaluation and expression of desirable values.
  4. Help students acquire an understanding of the importance of values that society considers worthwhile.
  5. Aid children to uphold and use positive values when confronted by adverse pressure from peers.[4]

The problem, however, is to define these "positive values," We may agree that "positive values" are desirable, but the term conceals the fact that teachers, children, and societies have different ideas as to what constitutes "positive values." While Carr and Wellenberg cite the Ten Commandments and the Golden Rule as "value systems sought by nations," they also could have used the code of the Hilter or of the Communist youth as examples of "value systems sought by nations."

We raise the issue of the "relativity of values" in this context because the words "moral," "positive," and "values" are interpreted

by each teacher in a different way, depending upon the teacher's own values and standards.

This becomes clear when we consider our third cop-out. This is the cop-out of defining moral values in terms of what I call a bag of virtues. By a bag of virtues I mean a set of personality traits generally considered to be positive. Defining the aims of moral education in terms of a set of "virtues" is as old as Aristotle, who said: "Virtue . . . [is] of two kinds, intellectual and moral. . . . [The moral] virtues we get by first exercising them, . . . we become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts."[5]

The attraction of such an approach is evident. Although it is true that people often cannot agree on details of right and wrong or even on fundamental moral principles, we all think such "traits" as honesty and responsibility are good things. By adding enough traits to the virtue bag, we eventually get a list which contains something to suit everyone.

This approach to moral education was widely prevalent in the public schools in the 1920s and 1930s and was called "character education." The educators and psychologists who developed these approaches defined character as the sum total of a set of "those traits of personality which are subject to the moral sanctions of society."[6]

For Hartshorne and May these traits included honesty, service (willingness to sacrifice something for a group or charitable goal), and self-control (persistence in assigned tasks).[7] For Havighurst and Taba they included honesty, loyalty, responsibility, moral courage, and friendliness.[8] As noted, Aristotle's early bag of virtues included temperance, liberality, pride, good temper, truthfulness, and justice. The Boy Scout list is well known—a scout should be honest, loyal reverent, clean, and brave.

As can be seen from the different lists of virtues mentioned, one difficulty with this approach to moral character is that everyone has his own bag. However, the problem runs deeper than the composition of a given list of virtues and vices. While it may be true that the notion of teaching virtues, such as honesty or integrity, arouses little controversy, it is also true that a vague consensus on the goodness of these terms conceals a great deal of actual disagreement over their definitions. What is one man's "integrity" is another man's "stubbornness," what is one man's honesty in "expressing your true feelings" is another man's insensitivity to the feelings of others. This is evident in controversial fields of adult behavior. Student protesters view their behavior as reflecting the virtues of altruism, idealsim, awareness, courage. Those in opposition regard the same behavior

as reflecting the vices of irresponsibility and disrespect for "law and order." Although this difficulty can be recognized clearly in college education, it is easier for teachers of younger children to think that their judgments in terms of the bag of virtues are objective and independent of their own value biases. However, a parent will not agree that a child's specific failure to obey an "unreasonable" request by the teacher was wrong, even if the teacher calls the act "unco-operative," as some teachers are prone to do.

For these reasons, children who would actually make serious at-tempts to live by the various virtues we have listed would be caught in Charlie Brown's plight:

You're a good man Charlie Brown, you have humility, nobility and a sense of humor that are very rare indeed. You are kind to all the animals and every little bird, with a heart of gold you believe what you're told, every single solitary word. You bravely face adversity, you're cheerful through the day, you're thoughtful, brave, and courteous. You're a good man Charlie Brown — you're a prince and a prince could be a king, with a heart such as yours you could open any door — if only you weren't so wishy-washy.[9]

If, like Charlie Brown, we define our moral aims in terms of virtues and vices, we are defining them in terms of the praise and blame of others, are caught in the pulls of being all things to all men, rather than being guided by stable principles, and end up being "wishy-washy."

We have summarized three cop-outs from the relativity problem and rejected them. We found that socialization, teaching positive values, and developing a bag of virtues all left the teacher where she was — stuck with her own personal value standards and biases to be imposed on her students. There is one last cop-out to the relativity problem. That is to lie back and enjoy it or encourage it. In the new social studies this is called value clarification.

As summarized by Engel this position holds that:

In the consideration of values, there is no single correct answer but value clarification is supremely important. One must contrast value clarification and value inculcation. Inculcation suggests that the learner has limited control and hence limited responsibility in the development of his own values. He needs to be told what values are or what he should value.

This is not to suggest, however, that nothing is ever inculcated. As a matter of fact, in order to clarify values, at least one principle needs to be adopted by all concerned. Perhaps the only way the principle can be adopted is through some procedure which might best be termed inculcation. That principle might be stated as follows: in the consideration of values there is no single correct answer. More specifically it might be said that the adequate posture both for students and teachers in clarifying values is openness.[10]

While the basic premise of this value clarification approach is that "everyone has his own values," it is further advocated that children can and should learn (1) to be more aware of their own values and how they relate to their decisions, (2) to make their values consistent and to order them in hierarchies for decisions, (3) to be more aware of the divergencies between their value hierarchies and those of others, and (4) to learn to tolerate these divergencies. In other words, although values are regarded as arbitrary and relative, there may be universal, rational strategies for making decisions which maximize these values. Part of this rational strategy is to recognize that values are relative. Within this set of premises, it is quite logical to teach that values are relative as part of the overall program.

An elaboration of this approach can be found in *Decision Making: A Guide for Teachers Who Would Help Preadolescent Children Become Imaginative and Responsible Decision Makers.*[11] In a portion of this book, modern social scientific perspectives are used to develop a curriculum unit entitled "Why Don't We All Make the Same Decisions?" A set of classroom materials and activities are then presented to demonstrate to children the following propositions: (1) We don't all make the same decisions because our values are different. (2) Our values tend to originate outside ourselves. (3) Our values are different because each of us has been influenced by different important others. (4) Our values are different because each of us has been influenced by a different cultural environment.

The teacher is told to have the children discuss moral dilemmas in such a way as to reveal those different values. As an example, one child might make a moral decision in terms of avoiding punishment, another in terms of the welfare of other people, another in terms of certain rules, another in terms of getting the most for himself. The children are then to be encouraged to discuss their values with each other and to recognize that everyone has different values. Whether or not "the welfare of others" is a more adequate value than "avoiding punishment" is not an issue to be raised by the teacher. Rather, the teacher is instructed to teach only that "our values are different."

Indeed, acceptance of the idea that *all* values are relative does, logically, lead to the conclusion that the teacher should not attempt to teach *any* particular moral values. This leaves the teacher in the quandary of our teacher who could not successfully argue against cheating. The students of a teacher who has been successful in communicating moral relativism will believe, like the teacher, that "everyone has his own bag," and that "everyone should keep doing his thing." If one of these students has learned his relativity lesson,

when he is caught cheating he will argue that he did nothing wrong. The basis of his argument will be that his own hierarchy of values, which may be different from that of the teacher, made it right for him to cheat. While recognizing that other people believe that cheating is wrong, he himself holds the "value" that one should cheat when the opportunity presents itself. If the teacher wants to be consistent and retain his relativistic beliefs, he would have to concede.

Now I am not criticizing the value clarification approach itself. It is a basic and valuable component of the new.social studies curricula, as I have discussed elsewhere.¹² My point is rather that value clarification is not a sufficient solution to the relativity problem. Furthermore, the actual teaching of relativism is itself an indoctrination or teaching of a fixed belief, a belief which we are going to show is not true scientifically or philosophically.¹³

A TYPOLOGICAL SCHEME ON THE STAGES OF MORAL THOUGHT

In other words, I am happy to report that I can propose a solution to the relativity problem that has plagued philosophers for three thousand years. I can say this with due modesty because it did not depend on being smart. It only happened that my colleagues and I were the first people in history to do detailed cross-cultural studies on the development of moral thinking.

The following dilemma should clarify the issue:

In Europe, a woman was near death from a very bad disease, a special kind of cancer. There was one drug that the doctors thought might save her. It was a form of radium that a druggist in the same town had recently discovered. The drug was expensive to make, but the druggist was charging ten times what the drug cost him to make. He paid $200 for the radium and charged $2,000 for a small dose of the drug. The sick woman's husband, Heinz, went to everyone he knew to borrow the money, but he could get together only about $1,000 which was half of what it cost. He told the druggist that his wife was dying, and asked him to sell it cheaper or let him pay later. But the druggist said, "No, I discovered the drug and I'm going to make money from it." Heinz got desperate and broke into the man's store to steal the drug for his wife.

Should the husband have done that? Was it right or wrong? Is your decision that it is right (or wrong) objectively right, is it morally universal, or is it your personal opinion? If you think it is morally right to steal the drug, you must face the fact that it is legally wrong. What is the basis of your view that it is morally right, then, more than your personal opinion? Is it anything which can be agreed upon? If you think so, let me report the results of a National

Opinion Research Survey on the question asked of a representative sample of adult Americans. Seventy-five percent said it was wrong to steal, though most said they might do it.

Can one take anything but a relativist position on the question? By a relativist position I mean a position like that of Bob, a high school senior. He said: "There's a million ways to look at it. Heinz had a moral decision to make. Was it worse to steal or let his wife die? In my mind I can either condemn him or condone him. In this case I think it was fine. But possibly the druggist was working on a capitalist morality of supply and demand." (I went on to ask Bob, "Would it be wrong if he didn't steal it?")

Bob replied, "It depends on how he is oriented morally. If he thinks it's worse to steal than to let his wife die, then it would be wrong what he did. It's all relative, what I would do is steal the drug. I can't say that's right or wrong or that it's what everyone should do."

But if you agree with Bob's relativism, you may not want to go as far as he did. He started the interview by wondering if he could answer because "he questioned the whole terminology, the whole moral bag." He continued, "But then I'm also an incredible moralist, a real puritan in some sense and moods. My moral judgment and the way I perceive things morally changes very much when my mood changes. When I'm in a cynical mood, I take a cynical view of morals, but still whether I like it or not, I'm terribly moral in the way I look at things. But I'm not too comfortable with it." Bob's moral perspective was well expressed in the late Joe Gould's poem called "My Religion." Brief and to the point, the poem said, "In winter I'm a Buddhist, in the summer I'm a nudist."

Now Bob's relativism rests on a confusion. The confusion is that between relativity as the social science fact that different people *do* have different moral values and relativity as the philosophic claim that people *ought* to have different moral values; that no moral values are justified for all men.

To illustrate, I will quote a not untypical response of one of my graduate students to the same moral dilemmas. She said, "I think he should steal it because if there is any such thing as a universal human value, it is the value of life, and that would justify it."

I then asked her, "Is there any such thing as a universal human value?" and she answered, "No, all values are relative to your culture."

She began by claiming that one ought to act in terms of the

universal value of human life, implying that human life is a universal value in the sense that it is logical and desirable for all men to respect all human life, that one can demonstrate to other men that it is logical and desirable to act in this way. If she were clear in her thinking she would see that the fact that all men do not always act in terms of this value does not contradict the claim that all men ought to always act in accordance with it. Because she made this confusion, she ended in total confusion.

What I am going to claim is that if we distinguish the issues of universality as fact and the possibility of universal moral ideals we get a positive answer to both questions. As far as facts go, I will claim just the opposite of what Dodder and Dodder claimed to be basic social science truths. I will claim:

1. We often make different decisions and yet have the same basic moral values.
2. Our values tend to originate inside ourselves as we process our social experience.
3. In every culture and subculture of the world both the same basic moral values and the same steps toward moral maturity are found. While social environments directly produce different specific beliefs (e.g., smoking is wrong, eating pork is wrong), they do not engender different basic moral principles (e.g., "consider the welfare of others," "treat other people equally," etc.).
4. Basic values are different largely because we are at different levels of maturity in thinking about basic moral and social issues and concepts. Exposure to others more mature than ourselves helps stimulate maturity in our own value process.

All parents know that the basic values of their children do not come from the outside, from the parents, though many wish they did. For example, at the age of four my son joined the pacifist and vegetarian movement and refused to eat meat because, he said, it is bad to kill animals. In spite of his parents' attempts to dissuade him by arguing about the difference between justified and unjustified killing, he remained a vegetarian for six months. However, he did recognize that some forms of killing were "legitimate." One night I read to him from a book about Eskimo life which included a description of a seal-killing expedition. While listening to the story he became very angry and said, "You know, there is one kind of meat I would eat, Eskimo meat. It's bad to kill animals so it's all right to eat Eskimos."

This episode illustrates (1) that children often generate their own moral values and maintain them in the face of cultural training, and (2) that these values have universal roots. Every child believes it is bad to kill because regard for the lives of others or pain at death is a natural empathic response, though it is not necessarily universally and consistently maintained. In this example the value of life led both to vegetarianism and to the desire to kill Eskimos. This latter desire comes also from a universal value tendency: a belief in justice or reciprocity here expressed in terms of revenge or punishment (at higher levels, the belief that those who infringe upon the rights of others cannot expect their own rights to be respected).

I quoted my son's response because it is shockingly different from the way you think and yet it has universal elements you will recognize. What is the shocking difference between my son's way of thinking and your own? If you are a psychoanalyst, you will start thinking about oral cannibalistic fantasies and defenses against them and all that. However, that is not really what the difference is at all. You do not have to be cannibalistic to wonder why it is right for men to kill and eat animals but it is not right for animals or even men to kill and eat men. The response really shows that my son was a philosopher, like every young child: He wondered about things that most grown-ups take for granted. If you want to study children, however, you have to be a bit of a philosopher yourself and ask the moral philosopher's question, "Why is it all right to kill and eat animals but not men?" I wonder how many of you can give a good answer. In any case, Piaget started the modern study of child development by recognizing that the child, like the adult philosopher, was puzzled by the basic questions of life: by the meaning of space, time, causality, life, death, right and wrong, and so on. What he found was that if you listened to the child, he asked all the great philosophic questions, but he answered them in a very different way from the adults. This way was so different that Piaget called the difference a difference in stage or quality of thinking, rather than a difference in amount of knowledge or accuracy of thinking. The difference in thinking between you and my son, then, is basically a difference in stage.

My own work on morality started from Piaget's notions of stages and Piaget's notion that the child was a philosopher. Inspired by Jean Piaget's pioneering effort to apply a structural approach to moral development,[14] I have gradually elaborated over the years a typological scheme describing general stages of moral thought which can be defined independently of the specific content of particular

moral decisions of actions. In our study of seventy-five American boys from early adolescence on, these youths were continually presented with hypothetical moral dilemmas, all deliberately philosophical, some found in medieval works of casuistry. It was on the basis of their reasoning about these dilemmas at a given age that we constructed the typology of definite and universal levels of development in moral thought.

The typology contains three distinct levels of moral thinking, and within each of these levels are two related stages. These levels and stages may be considered separate moral philosophies, distinct views of the social-moral world.

We can speak of the child as having his own morality or series of moralities. Adults seldom listen to children's moralizing. If a child throws back a few adult clichés and behaves himself, most parents — and many anthropologists and psychologists as well — think that the child has adopted or internalized the appropriate parental standards.

Actually, as soon as we talk with children about morality we find that they have many ways of making judgments which are not "internalized" from the outside and which do not come in any direct and obvious way from parents, teachers, or even peers.

The preconventional level is the first of three levels of moral thinking; the second level is conventional; and the third postconventional or autonomous. While the preconventional child is often "well behaved" and is responsive to cultural labels of good and bad, he interprets these labels in terms of their physical consequences (punishment, reward, exchange of favors) or in terms of the physical power of those who enunciate the rules and labels of good and bad.

This level is usually occupied by children aged four to ten, a fact well known to sensitive observers of children. The capacity of "properly behaved" children of this age to engage in cruel behavior when there are holes in the power structure is sometimes noted as tragic (*Lord of the Flies, High Wind in Jamaica*), sometimes as comic (Lucy in *Peanuts*).

The second or conventional level also can be described as conformist, but that is perhaps too smug a term. Maintaining the expectations and rules of the individual's family, group, or nation is perceived as valuable in its own right. There is a concern not only with conforming to the individual's social order but in maintaining, supporting, and justifying this order.

The postconventional level is characterized by a major thrust

toward autonomous moral principles which have validity and appli-
cation apart from authority of the groups or persons who hold them
and apart from the individual's identification with those persons or
groups.

Within each of these three levels there are two discernible stages.
The following paragraphs explain the dual moral stages of each
level just described.

DEFINITION OF MORAL STAGES

I. Preconventional Level

At this level the child is responsive to cultural rules and labels of
good and bad, right or wrong, but interprets these labels in terms of
either the physical or the hedonistic consequences of action (punish-
ment, reward, exchange of favors) or in terms of the physical power
of those who enunciate the rules and labels. The level is divided into
the following two stages:

Stage 1. The Punishment and Obedience Orientation. The physical
consequences of action determine its goodness or badness regardless
of the human meaning or value of these consequences. Avoidance of
punishment and unquestioning deference to power are valued in
their own right, not in terms of respect for an underlying moral
order supported by punishment and authority (the latter being stage
4).

Stage 2. The Instrumental Relativist Orientation. Right action con-
sists of that which instrumentally satisfies one's own needs and occa-
sionally the needs of others. Human relations are viewed in terms
like those of the marketplace. Elements of fairness, of reciprocity,
and equal sharing are present, but they are always interpreted in a
physical, pragmatic way. Reciprocity is a matter of "you scratch my
back and I'll scratch yours," not of loyalty, gratitude, or justice.

II. Conventional Level

At this level, maintaining the expectations of the individual's fami-
ly, group, or nation is perceived as valuable in its own right, regard-
less of immediate and obvious consequences. The attitude is not only
one of conformity to personal expectations and social order, but of
loyalty to it, of actively maintaining, supporting, and justifying the
order and of identifying with the persons or group involved in it. At
this level, there are the following two stages:

Stage 3. The Interpersonal Concordance or "Good Boy—Nice Girl"
Orientation. Good behavior is that which pleases or helps others
and is approved by them. There is much conformity to stereotypical
images of what is majority or "natural" behavior. Behavior is

frequently judged by intention—"he means well" becomes important for the first time. One earns approval by being "nice."

Stage 4. The "Law-and-Order" Orientation. There is orientation toward authority, fixed rules, and the maintenance of the social order. Right behavior consists of doing one's duty, showing respect for authority, and maintaining the given social order for its own sake.

III. Postconventional, Autonomous, or Principled Level

At this level, there is a clear effort to define moral values and principles which have validity and application apart from the authority of the groups or persons holding these principles and apart from the individual's own identification with these groups. This level again has two stages:

Stage 5. The Social Contract Legalistic Orientation. This level generally has utilitarian overtones. Right action tends to be defined in terms of general individual rights and in terms of standards which have been critically examined and agreed upon by the whole society. There is a clear awareness of the relativism of personal values and opinions and a corresponding emphasis upon procedural rules for reaching consensus. Aside from what is constitutionally and democratically agreed upon, the right is a matter of personal "values" and "opinion." The result is an emphasis upon the "legal point of view," but with an emphasis upon the possibility of changing law in terms of rational considerations of social utility (rather than freezing it in terms of stage 4 "law and order"). Outside the legal realm, free agreement, and contract, is the binding element of obligation. This is the "official" morality of the American government and Constitution.

Stage 6. The Universal Ethical Principle Orientation. Right is defined by the decision of conscience in accord with self-chosen ethical principles appealing to logical comprehensiveness, universality, and consistency. These principles are abstract and ethical (the Golden Rule, the categorical imperative); they are not concrete moral rules like the Ten Commandments. At heart, these are universal principles of justice, of the reciprocity and equality of the human rights, and of respect for the dignity of human beings as individual persons.

To understand what these stages mean concretely, let us look at them with regard to two of twenty-five basic moral concepts or aspects used to form the dilemmas. One such aspect, for instance, is "Motive Given for Rule Obedience or Moral Action." In this instance, the six stages look like this:

1. Obey rules to avoid punishment.

2. Conform to obtain rewards, have favors returned, and so on.

3. Conform to avoid disapproval, dislike by others.

4. Conform to avoid censure by legitimate authorities and resultant guilt.

5. Conform to maintain the respect of the impartial spectator judging in terms of community welfare.

6. Conform to avoid self-condemnation.

In another of these twenty-five moral aspects, the value of human life, the six stages can be defined thus:

1. The value of human life is confused with the value of physical objects and is based on the social status or physical attributes of the possessor.

2. The value of human life is seen as instrumental to the satisfaction of the needs of its possessor or of other persons.

3. The value of human life is based on the empathy and affection of family members and others toward its possessor.

4. Life is conceived as sacred in terms of its place in a categorical moral or religious order of rights and duties.

5. Life is valued both in terms of its relation to community welfare and in terms of life being a universal human right.

6. Belief in sacredness of human life as representing a universal human value of respect for the individual.

I have called this scheme a typology. This is because about 50 percent of most people's thinking will be at a single stage, regardless of the moral dilemma involved. We call our types stages because they seem to represent an invariant developmental sequence. "True" stages come one at a time and always in the same order.

All movement is forward in sequence and does not skip steps. Children may move through these stages at varying speeds, of course, and may be found half in and half out of a particular stage. An individual may stop at any given stage and at any age, but if he continues to move, he must move in accord with these steps. Moral reasoning of the conventional or stages 3-4 kind never occurs before the preconventional stage 1 and stage 2 thought has taken place. No adult in stage 4 has gone through stage 5, but all stage 5 adults have gone through stage 4.

While the evidence is not complete, my study strongly suggests that moral change fits the stage pattern just described.

As a single example of our findings of stage sequence, take the progress of two boys on the aspect "The Value of Human Life." The first boy, Tommy, is asked, "Is it better to save the life of one important person or a lot of unimportant people?" At age ten he

answers, "All the people that aren't important because one man just has one house, maybe a lot of furniture, but a whole bunch of people have an awful lot of furniture and some of these poor people might have a lot of money and it doesn't look it."

Clearly Tommy is stage 1: He confuses the value of a human being with the value of the property he possesses. Three years later (age thirteen) Tommy's conceptions of life's values are most clearly elicited by the question, "Should the doctor 'mercy kill' a fatally ill woman requesting death because of her pain?" He answers, "Maybe it would be good to put her out of pain, she'd be better off that way. But the husband wouldn't want it, it's not like an animal. If a pet dies you can get along without it – it isn't something you really need. Well, you can get a new wife, but it's not really the same."

Here, his answer is stage 2: The value of the woman's life is partly contingent on its instrumental value to her husband, who cannot replace her as easily as he can a pet.

Three years later still (age sixteen) Tommy's conception of life's value is elicited by the same question, to which he replies, "It might be best for her, but her husband – it's human life – not like an animal; it just doesn't have the same relationship that a human being does to a family. You can become attached to a dog, but nothing like a human you know."

Now Tommy has moved from a stage 2 instrumental view of the woman's value to a stage 3 view based on the husband's distinctively human empathy and love for someone in his family. Equally clearly, it lacks any basis for a universal human value of the woman's life, which would hold if she had no husband or if her husband did not love her. Tommy, then, has moved step by step through three stages during the age ten to sixteen. Tommy, though bright (IQ 120), is a slow developer in moral judgment. Let us take another boy, Richard, to show us sequential movement through the remaining three steps.

At age thirteen, Richard said about the mercy killing, "If she requests it, it's really up to her. She is in such terrible pain, just the same as people are always putting animals out of their pain," and in general showed a mixture of stage 2 and stage 3 responses concerning the value of life. At sixteen, he said, "I don't know. In one way, it's murder, it's not right or privilege of man to decide who shall live and who should die. God put life into everybody on earth and you're taking away something from that person that came directly from God, and you're destroying something that is very sacred, it's in a way part of God and it's almost destroying a part of God when you kill a person. There's something of God in everyone."

Here Richard clearly displays a stage 4 concept of life as sacred in terms of its place in a categorical moral or religious order. The value of human life is universal; it is true for all humans. It is still, however, dependent on something else—upon respect for God and God's authority; it is not an autonomous human value. Presumably if God told Richard to murder, as God commanded Abraham to murder Isaac, he would do so.

At age twenty Richard said to the same question, "There are more and more people in the medical profession who think it is a hardship on everyone, the person, the family, when you know they are going to die. When a person is kept alive by an artificial lung or kidney it's more like being a vegetable than being a human. If it's her own choice, I think there are certain rights and provileges that go along with being a human being. I am a human being and I have certain desires for life and I think everybody else does too. You have a world of which you are the center, and everybody else does too, and in that sense we're all equal."

Richard's response is clearly stage 5, in that the value of life is defined in terms of equal and universal human rights in a context of relativity ("You have a world of which you are the center, and in that sense we're all equal"), and of concern for utility or welfare consequences.

At twenty-four, Richard says, "A human life, whoever it is, takes precedence over any other moral or legal value. A human life has inherent value whether or not it is valued by a particular individual. The worth of the individual human being is central where the principles of justice and love are normative for all human relationships."

This young man is at stage 6 in seeing the value of human life as absolute in representing a universal and equal respect for the human as an individual. He has moved step by step through a sequence culminating in a definition of human life as centrally valuable rather than derived from or dependent on social or divine authority.

In a genuine and culturally universal sense, these steps lead toward an increased morality of value judgment, where morality is considered as a form of judging, as it has been in a philosophic tradition running from the analyses of Kant to those of the modern analytic or "ordinary language" philosophers. The person at stage 6 has disentangled his judgments of—or language about—human life from status and property values (stage 1); from its uses to others (stage 2); from interpersonal affection (stage 3); and so on; he has a means of moral judgment that is universal and impersonal. The

stage 6 person's answers use moral words like "duty" or "morally right," and he uses them in a way implying universality, ideals, impersonality: He thinks and speaks in phrases like "regardless of who it was," or "I would do it in spite of punishment."

UNIVERSAL INVARIANT SEQUENCE OF MORAL DEVELOPMENT

When I first decided to explore moral development in other cultures, I was told by anthropologist friends that I would have to throw away my culture-bound moral concepts and stories and start from scratch learning a whole new set of values for each new culture. My first try consisted of a brace of villages, one Atayal (Malaysian aboriginal) and the other Taiwanese.

My guide was a young Chinese ethnographer who had written an account of the moral and religious patterns of the Atayal and Taiwanese villages. Taiwanese boys in the ten to thirteen age group were asked about a story involving theft of food. A man's wife is starving to death but the store owner would not give the man any food unless he could pay, and he cannot. Should he break in and steal some food? Why? Many of the boys said, "He should steal the food for his wife because if she dies he'll have to pay for her funeral and that costs a lot."

My guide was amused by these responses, but I was relieved: They were of course "classic" stage 2 responses. In the Atayal village, funerals were not such a big thing, so the stage 2 boys would say, "He should steal the food because he needs his wife to cook for him."

This means that we have to consult our anthropologists to know what content a stage 2 child will include in his instrumental exchange calculations, or what a stage 4 adult will identify as the proper social order. But one certainly does not have to start from scratch. What made my guide laugh was the difference in form between the children's stage 2 thought and his own, a difference definable independently of particular cultures.

Figures 1 and 2 indicate the cultural universality of the sequence of stages which we have found. Figure 1 presents the age trends for middle-class urban boys in the United States, Taiwan, and Mexico. At age ten in each country, the order of use of each stage is the same as the order of its difficulty or maturity.

In the United States, by age sixteen the order is the reverse, from the highest to the lowest, except that stage 6 is still little used. At age thirteen, the good-boy, middle stage (stage 3) is not used.

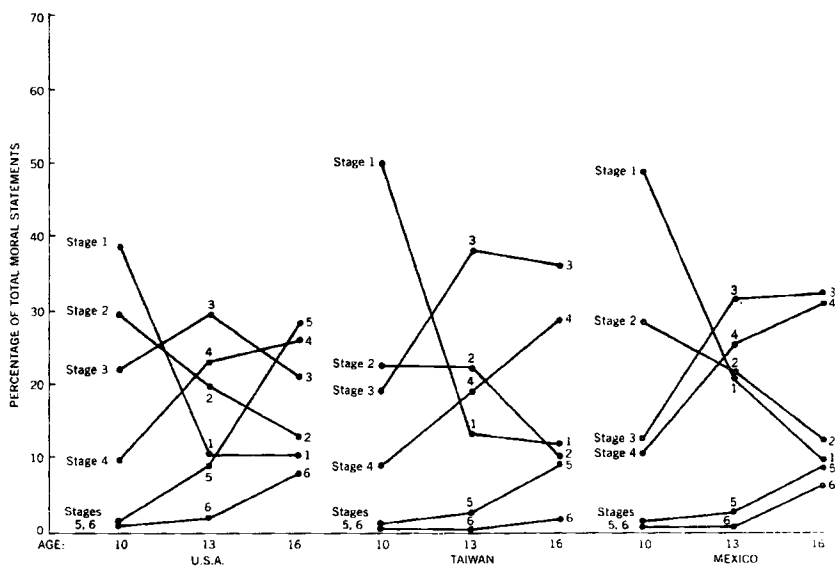The results in Mexico and Taiwan are the same, except that

Fɪɢ. 1. — Middle-class urban boys in the United States, Taiwan, and Mexico

development is a little slower. The most conspicuous feature is that at the age of sixteen, stage 5 thinking is much more salient in the United States than in Mexico or Taiwan. Nevertheless, it is present in the other countries, so we know that this is not purely an American democratic construct.

Figure 2 shows strikingly similar results from two isolated villages, one in Yucatan, one in Turkey. While conventional moral thought increases steadily from ages ten to sixteen it still has not achieved a clear ascendancy over preconventional thought.

Trends for lower-class urban groups are intermediate in the rate of development between those for the middle-class and for the village boys. In the three divergent cultures that I studied, middle-class children were found to be more advanced in moral judgment than matched lower-class children. This was not due to the fact that the middle-class children heavily ignored some one type of thought which could be seen as corresponding to the prevailing middle-class pattern. Instead, middle-class and working-class children move through the same sequences, but the middle-class children move faster and farther.

This sequence is not dependent upon a particular religion, or any religion at all in the usual sense. I found no important differences in the development of moral thinking among Catholics, Protestants,
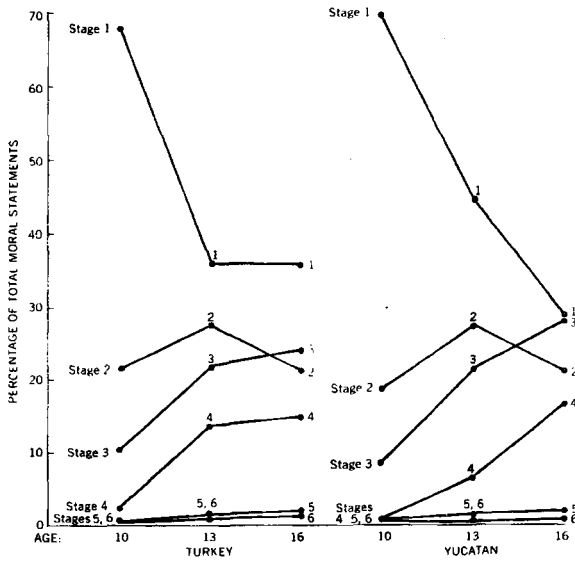
Fig. 2. — Two isolated villages, one in Turkey, the other in Yucatán, show similar patterns in moral thinking.

Jews, Buddhists, Moslems, and atheists. Religious values seem to go through the same stages as all other values.

In summary, the nature of our sequence is not significantly affected by widely varying social, cultural, or religious conditions. The only thing that is affected is the rate at which individuals progress through this sequence.

Why should there be such a universal invariant sequence of development? In answering this question, we need first to analyze these developing social concepts in terms of their internal logical structure. At each stage, the same basic moral concept or aspect is defined, but at each higher stage this definition is more differentiated, more integrated, and more general or universal. When one's concept of human life moves from stage 1 to stage 2, the value of life becomes more differentiated from the value of property, more integrated (the value of life enters an organizational hierarchy where it is "higher" than property so that one steals property in order to save life), and more universalized (the life of any sentient being is valuable regardless of status or property). The same advance is true at each stage in the hierarchy. Each step of development, then, is a better cognitive organization than the one before it, one which takes account of everything present in the previous stage, but making new distinctions and organizing them into a more

comprehensive or more equilibrated structure. The fact that this is the case has been demonstrated by a series of studies indicating that children and adolescents comprehend all stages up to their own, but not more than one stage beyond their own.[15] And importantly, they prefer this next stage.

We have conducted experimental moral discussion classes which show that the child at an earlier stage of development tends to move forward when confronted by the views of a child one stage further along.[16] In an argument between a stage 3 and stage 4 child, the child in the third stage tends to move toward or into stage 4, while the stage 4 child understands but does not accept the arguments of the stage 3 child.

Moral thought, then, seems to behave like all other kinds of thought. Progress through the moral levels and stages is characterized by increasing differentiation and increasing integration, and hence is the same kind of progress that scientific theory represents. Like acceptable scientific theory — or like any theory or structure of knowledge — moral thought may be considered partially to generate its own data as it goes along, or at least to expand so as to contain in a balanced, self-consistent way a wider and wider experiential field. The raw data in the case of our ethical philosophies may be considered as conflicts between roles, or values, or as the social order in which men live.

The social worlds of all men seem to contain the same basic structures. All the societies we have studied have the same basic institutions — family, economy, law, government. In addition, however, all societies are alike because they are societies — systems of defined complementary roles. In order to play a social role in the family, school, or society, the child must implicitly take the role of others toward himself and toward others in the group. These role-taking tendencies form the basis of all social institutions. They represent various patternings of shared or complementary expectations.

In the preconventional and conventional levels (stages 1-4), moral content or value is largely accidental or culture bound. Anything from "honesty" to "courage in battle" can be the central value. But in the higher postconventional levels, Socrates, Lincoln, Thoreau, and Martin Luther King tend to speak without confusion of tongues, as it were. This is because the ideal principles of any social structure are basically alike, if only because there simply are not that

many principles which are articulate, comprehensive, and integrated enough to be satisfying to the human intellect. And most of these principles have gone by the name of justice.

Now let me point out that justice is not a character trait in the usual sense. You cannot make up behavior tests of justice, as Hartshorne and May did for honesty, service, and self-control. One cannot conceive of a little set of behavior tests that would indicate that Martin Luther King or Socrates were high on the trait of justice. The reason for this is that justice is not a concrete rule of action, such as lies behind virtues like honesty. To be honest means do not cheat, do not steal, do not lie. Justice is not a rule or a set of rules; it is a moral principle. By a moral principle we mean a mode of choosing which is universal, a rule of choosing which we want all people to adopt always in all situations. We know it is all right to be dishonest and steal to save a life because it is just, because a man's right to life comes before another man's right to property. We know it is sometimes right to kill, because it is sometimes just. The Germans who tried to kill Hitler were doing right because respect for the equal values of lives demands that we kill someone who is murdering others in order to save their lives. There are exceptions to rules, then, but not exceptions to principles. A moral obligation is an obligation to respect the right or claim of another person. A moral principle is a principle for resolving competing claims — you versus me, you versus a third person. There is only one principled basis for resolving claims, justice, or equality. Treat every man's claim impartially regardless of the man. A moral principle is not only a rule of action but a reason for action. As a reason for action, justice is called respect for persons.

How to Teach Virtue

Our claim is that knowledge of the moral good is a virtue. We now will try to show that virtue in action is knowledge of the good. We have already said that knowledge of the good in terms of a bag of virtues that comes from opinion or conventional belief is not virtue. An individual may believe that cheating is very bad, but that does not predict that he will resist cheating in real life. Espousal of unprejudiced attitudes toward Negroes does not predict actual action to assure civil rights in an atmosphere where others have some prejudice. However, true knowledge, knowledge of principles of justice, does predict virtuous action. With regard to cheating, the

essential elements of justice are understood by both our stage 5 and stage 6 subjects. In cheating, the critical issue is recognition of the element of contract and agreement implicit in the situation and the recognition that while it does not seem so bad if one person cheats, what holds for all must hold for one. In a recent study, one hundred sixth-grade children were given experimental cheating tests and our moral judgment interview. The majority of the children were below the principled level in moral judgment; they were at our first four moral stages. Seventy-five percent of these children cheated. In contrast, only 20 percent of the principled subjects, that is, stages 5 or 6, cheated. In another study conducted at the college level only 11 percent of the principled subjects cheated in contrast to 42 percent of students at lower levels of moral judgment.

In the case of cheating, justice and the expectations of conventional authority both dictate the same behavior. What happens when they are opposed?

An experimental study by Stanley Milgram involved such an opposition.[17] Undergraduate subjects were ordered by an experimenter to administer increasingly more severe electric-shock punishment to a stooge victim in the guise of a learning experiment. In this case, the principles of justice involved in the stage 5 social contract orientation do not clearly prescribe a decision. The victim had voluntarily agreed to participate in the experiment, and the subject himself had contractually committed himself to perform the experiment. Only stage 6 thinking clearly defined the situation as one in which the experimenter did not have the moral right to ask them to inflict pain on another person. Accordingly, 75 percent of stage 6 subjects quit or refused to shock victim as compared with only 13 percent of all the subjects at lower stages.

A study of Berkeley students carries the issue into political civil disobedience. Berkeley students were faced with the decision to sit in the Administration Building in the name of political freedom of communication. Haan, Smith, and Block administered moral judgment interviews to over two hundred students.[18] Again the situation was like the Milgram situation. A stage 5 social contract interpretation of justice, which was held by the university administration, could take the position that a student who came to Berkely came with foreknowledge of rules and could go elsewhere if he did not like them. About 50 percent of the stage 5 subjects sat in. For stage 6 students, the issue was clear-cut, and 80 percent of them sat

in. For students at the conventional levels, stages 3 and 4, the issue was also clear-cut, and only 10 percent of them sat in. These results will sound very heartwarming to those of us who have engaged in protest activities. Protesting is a sure sign of being at the most mature moral level. However, there was another group almost as disposed to sit in as the stage 6 students. These were our stage 2 instrumental relativists, of whom about 60 percent sat in. From our longitudinal studies, we know that most stage 2 college students are in a state of confusion. In high school most were at the conventional level, and in college they kick conventional morality searching for their thing, for self-chosen values, but cannot tell an autonomous morality of justice from one of egoistic relativism, exchange, and revenge. Our longitudinal studies indicate that all of our middle-class stage 2 college students grow out of it to become principled adults.

I make the point to indicate that protest activities, like other acts, are neither virtuous nor vicious; it is only the knowledge of the good which lies behind them which gives them virtue. As an example, I would take it that a stage 6 sense of justice would have been rather unlikely to find the Dow Chemical sit-in virtuous. The rules being disobeyed by the protesters were not unjust rules, and the sit-in was depriving individuals of rights, not trying to protect individual rights. Principled civil disobedience is not illegitimate propaganda for worthy political causes; it is the just questioning of injustice.

Having, I hope, persuaded you of one view of virtue, let us briefly consider how it may be taught. In a sense, this view implies that knowledge of the good is always within but needs to be drawn out. In a series of experimental studies,[19] we have found that children and adolescents prefer the highest level of thought they can comprehend. Children comprehend all lower stages than their own, often comprehend the stage one higher, and occasionally two stages higher, although they cannot actively express these higher stages of thought. If they comprehend the stage one higher than their own, they tend to prefer it to their own. This is basic to moral leadership in our society. While the majority of adults in American society are at a conventional level, stages 3 and 4, leadership in our society has usually been expressed at the level of stages 5 and 6, as our example of Martin Luther King suggests.

Returning to the teaching of virtue as a drawing out, the child's preference for the next level of thought shows that it is greeted as

already familiar, that it is felt to be a more adequate expression of that already within, of the latent in the child's own thought. If the child were responding to fine words and external prestige he would not pick the next stage continuous with his own, but something else. The problem is to draw the child's perceptions of justice from the shadows of the cave step by step toward the light of justice as an ideal form. This last example indicates a truth not indicated by our experimental example—the truth that the child initially turned from the dark images of the cave toward the light still convinced that his dark images best represent the truth. The child is initially quite confident of his moral knowledge, of the rationality and efficacy of his moral principles. The notion that the child feels ignorant and is eager to absorb the wisdom of adult authority in the moral domain is one which any teacher or parent will know is nonsense. Let me give another example. Following a developmental timetable, my son moved to an expedient stage 2 orientation when he was six. He told me at that time, "You know the reason people don't steal is because they're afraid of the police. If there were no police around everyone would steal." Of course I told him that I and most people did not steal because we thought it wrong, because we would not want other people to take things from us and so on. My son's reply was, "I just don't see it, it's sort of crazy not to steal if there were no police."

The first step in teaching virtue, then, is the Socratic step of creating dissatisfaction in the student about his present knowledge of the good. This we do experimentally by exposing the student to moral conflict situations for which his principles have no ready solution. Second, we expose him to disagreement and argument about these situations with his peers. Our view holds that if we inspire cognitive conflict in the student and point the way to the next step up the divided line, he will tend to see things previously invisible to him.

In practice, then, our experimental efforts at moral education have involved getting students at one level, say stage 2, to argue with those at the next level, say stage 3. The teacher would support and clarify the stage 3 arguments. Then he would pit the stage 3 students against the stage 4 students on a new dilemma. Results of this method with junior high and high school groups indicated 35 percent of the students moved up one stage. In comparison, only 5 percent of the control groups moved up one stage in the four-month period involved.[20]

Obviously the small procedures I have described are only a way station to genuine moral education. As my earlier comments suggested, a more nearly complete approach means full student participation in a school in which justice is a living matter.

NOTES

1. P. W. Jackson, *Life in the Classroom* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1968).

2. Lawrence Kohlberg, "Education for Justice: A Modern Statement of the Platonic View," in *Moral Education*, ed. T. Sizer (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970), pp. 57–84.

3. U. Bronfenbrenner, "Soviet Methods of Upbringing and their Effects: A Social-psychological Analysis (paper read at a conference on Studies of the Acquisition and Development of Values, National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, Washington, D.C., May 23, 1968).

4. D. B. Carr and E. P. Wellenberg, *Teaching Children Values* (Freeport, Calif.: Honor Your Partner Records, 1966), p. 11.

5. Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* 1103a14 – 15, 32 – 33; 1103b1 – 2.

6. R. J. Havighurst and H. Taba, *Adolescent Character and Personality* (New York: John C. Wiley & Sons, 1949).

7. H. Hartshorne and M. A. May, *Studies in the Nature of Character*, 3 vols. (New York: Macmillan Co., 1928– 30), vol. 1, *Studies in Deceit;* vol. 2, *Studies in Self-Control;* vol. 3, *Studies in the Organization of Character.*

8. See n. 6.

9. Lawrence Kohlberg, "The Child as a Moral Philosopher," *Psychology Today* (September 1968), p. 25.

10. P. Engel, unpublished address, as quoted in Sidney Simon, "Value-Clarification vs. Indoctrination," *Social Education* 35 (1971): 902.

11. Clyde Dodder and Barbara Dodder, *Decision Making* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968).

12. Lawrence Kohlberg and A. Lockwood, "Cognitive-Developmental Psychology and Political Education: Progress in the Sixties" (paper delivered at the Social Science Consortium Convention, Boulder, Colo., June 2, 1970).

13. Lawrence Kohlberg, "From Is to Ought: How to Commit the Naturalistic Fallacy and Get Away with It," in *Cognitive Development and Epistemology*, ed. T. Mischel (New York: Academic Press, 1971).

14. Jean Piaget, *The Moral Judgment of the Child* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1948 [Originally published 1932]).

15. James Rest, "Hierarchies of Comprehension and Preference in a Developmental Stage Model of Moral Thinking," in *Recent Research in Moral Development,* ed. Lawrence Kohlberg and E. Turiel (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, in press).

16. M. Blatt and Lawrence Kohlberg, "The Effects of a Classrom Discussion Program upon the Moral Levels of Preadolescents," in *Recent Research in Moral Development,* ed. Lawrence Kohlberg and E. Turiel (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, in press).

17. Stanley Milgram, "Behavioral Study of Obedience," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 67 (1963): 371–78.

18. N. Haan, M. B. Smith, and J. Block, "Political, Family, and Personality Correlates of Adolescent Moral Judgment," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 10 (1968): 183 – 201.

19. James Rest, E. Turiel, and Lawrence Kohlberg, "Level of Moral Development as a Determinant of Preference and Comprehension of Moral Judgments Made by Others," in *Recent Research in Moral Development*, ed. Lawrence Kohlberg and E. Turiel (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, in press).

20. See n. 16.