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Development during Adolescence : Is it Possible to Support a Developmental View on Social Norms Acquisition ?

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Summary

The cognitive-developmental approach to moral development is currently linked to the description of general stages, like the Kohlberg's sequence. However several sources of variability seem to challenge this approach. Three types of variabilities are presented and discussed. Intra-individual variability may be view as a variation around a modal stage but this variability is also linked to the developmental process and related to context variations. Inter-individual variability is considered first about delinquent youths and care exemplars, secondly from possible differential factors (family, gender and peers). Finally, cultural comparisons emphasize intracultural variability. Theoretical analysis of the reviewed studies leads to a deeper understanding of a constructivist developmental and differential view on moral thinking and behaviour. Moreover, applied consequences are drawn about individual assessment and personal evolution.

Résumé

L'approche cognitivo-développementale du développement moral est habituellement liée à la description de stades généraux comme ceux de la séquence de Kohlberg. Cependant, plusieurs sources de variabilité semblent remettre en cause cette approche. Trois sortes de variabilités sont présentées et discutées. La variabilité intra-individuelle peut être envisagée comme une variation autour d'un stade modal mais cette variabilité est également liée au processus de développement et reliée aux variations de contexte. La variabilité inter-individuelle est illustrée d'abord à propos des jeunes délinquants et des cas de moralité exemplaire, ensuite à partir de facteurs possibles de différenciation (famille, genre et pairs). Finalement, les comparaisons entre cultures soulignent l'importance de la variabilité intraculturelle. L'analyse théorique des recherches citées permet un approfondissement de la perspective constructiviste, à la fois développementale et différentielle, sur la pensée et les actions morales. De plus, des conséquences pratiques sont tirées à propos des évaluations individuelles et de l'évolution personnelle.

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The cognitive-developmental approach to moral development was predominant in the '60s and '70s, when it was based upon the tradition established by Piaget followed by Kohlberg (Piaget, 1932; Kohlberg, 1958, 1963, 1969). This approach had the great advantage of presenting a coherent view of moral development with an ordered succession of integrative stages defining qualitative and general modes of moral reasoning. Children and adolescents were supposed to progress through the stages because of their cognitive evolution and their increasing knowledge. From this follows the possibility to use developmental scales for applied purposes (Colby & Kohlberg, 1987; Gibbs, Basinger, & Fuller, 1992; Rest, 1979), provided that these instruments are well understood from a theoretical perspective.

Recall, for example, Kohlberg's three levels and six stages (Kohlberg & Ryncarz, 1990). The first level is labelled « Pre-conventional »: judgments are not yet governed by common norms or social expectations but by practical concerns. This level comprises two stages. At stage 1 (« Punishment and Obedience »), the individual considers what could happen to him/her in the various situations: it's wise to be quiet, then to avoid punishment and to follow powerful persons and authorities. At stage 2 (« Individual Instrumental Purpose and Exchange »), people are aware of others' interests (e.g. they may be in conflict with one's own ones), and so, making fair deals, in terms of concrete exchange, is a good means of serving one's own and others' needs. The second level « Conventional » stresses common rules and group concerns. Stage 3 (« Mutual Interpersonal Expectations, Relationships, and Conformity ») remains focused on close groups; it's important, now, to share feelings, agreements and expectations with relatives; others' perspectives are considered from others' point of view, and it's up to the individual to play a good and nice role (i.e., loyalty, trust with partners, etc.) which fits in with the expectations of the close group. At stage 4 (« Social System and Conscience Maintenance »), this perspective extends to the whole of society and individuals are considered according to their relations with the whole system; one's duty in society, social order, society welfare are emphasized. The third level is « Post-conventional ». It corresponds to a slow appropriation of moral principles and values, beyond groups' pressure. At stage 5 (« Prior Rights and Social Contract or Utility »), a person is aware of the relative character of rules and law: it's a matter of agreement and social contract. Rules should usually be upheld because they provide overall utility for the greatest number. Sometimes, however, moral and legal points of view are in conflict. In that case, it is difficult to integrate both perspectives. People from Stage 6 (« Universal Ethical Principles ») rely on moral principles which are considered as universal, that is, all the humanity should follow such principles as equality, justice, human rights, life protecting, etc. Social contracts and current laws are evaluated according to these principles.

Note that the commonly accepted « structural properties » of Kohlberg's stages are not really valid. They are not true structures (Lehalle, 1998), with formal description and logical rules of composition, as in Piaget's structuralism after 1932¹. Kohlberg's stages are just general statements which are supposed to summarize a coherent position about social norms. These statements are not a direct transcription of what a person does or decides when facing dilemmas. Instead, they correspond to underlying justifications or motives for actions and decisions.

As a consequence, a given decision may belong to more than one stage. For instance, calling upon the majority's opinion in a group may be relevant to several stages depending on the motives. Moreover, a given stage is not characterized by one single aspect. It is rather a matter

¹ Kohlberg is not a single example of incomplete use of structuralism. Claim for structural properties implies to precise the formal model of these structural properties (Lehalle, 1998).

of multidimensional construct, and several properties may be alternately emphasized. For instance, with stage 3, we may focus either on a conformist aspect (to be a « nice » boy or girl), or on a new level of decentration (to consider close group values), or on social objectives (to search for positive and smooth individual interactions, Edwards, 1982).

In sum, Kohlberg's perspective is a pure developmental theorization, with general and sequential stages. Further studies have raised questions concerning the relevance of this cognitive perspective. For example, the « Narrative Approach » (Day & Tappan, 1996) proposes that we should consider the various dialogues a person maintains with others, instead of conceiving an epistemic subject with rational and deliberate principles. However Lourenço (1996) has strongly criticized this Narrative Approach, mainly because of the need to maintain the universal aspects of moral values. Other researchers have stressed the limits of Kohlberg's proposals. For instance, that he was mainly concerned by pure thinking or judgements, not by real acts or moral behaviours (Blasi, 1980; Killen & Hart, 1995).

In this article, we wish to focus upon this latter concern. Despite the difficulties we have mentioned, Kohlberg's system continues to get empirical support (Walker, 1982; Walker, de Vries, & Bichard, 1984; Walker & Taylor, 1991; Walker, Pitts, Henning, & Matsuba, 1995; Thoma & Rest, 1999) as a general ordered developmental sequence. However, as we shall see, several kinds of variabilities have to be taken into account and these variabilities (intra-individual, inter-individuals and cultural variabilities) lead to certain consequences where both practical and theoretical levels of moral development analysis are concerned.

Intra-individual variabilities

Intra- individual variabilities indicate that a person does not belong to the same level of judgment when she/he is interviewed about several different dilemmas or when the context of the interview is not the same. Both Piaget and Kohlberg were aware of this kind of variability. When Piaget (1932) presents his results about « objective responsibility » (acts are evaluated from material consequences) opposed to « subjective responsibility » (seriousness depends on intent), he carefully makes clear that age level refer to judgments not participants (mean age of 7 years of age for objective *judgments*, mean age of 9 years of age for subjective *judgments*), because a child may vary, from one type to the other one, according to the stories used during the interview. Kohlberg (1969) followed the same pattern. Initially, of course, Piaget and Kohlberg were interested in general developmental trends. Now, it is important to try to emphasize and analyse intra-individual variations.

Intra-individual variability as a variation around a modal stage.

When several dilemmas are presented to participants in order to assess their level of judgment in terms of stages, using, for instance, Colby and Kohlberg's (1987) method or the DIT - *Defining Issues Test* - (Rest, 1979), variations around a modal stage (the most frequent one) are commonly observed (Fischer, 1983).

Teo, Becker, and Edelstein (1995) have re-analysed, in this way, the Colby, Kohlberg, Gibbs, and Lieberman (1983) longitudinal data. They found that participants aged from 10 to 36 years of age mostly reasoned within a single modal stage (i.e. there were very few « bimodal » stages). But, if there is only one modal stage per person, there are also statements coming from others stages and, generally speaking, only one half of the participants' individual issues were scored at the modal stage. There was about 30 to 39% of ½ stage

variation (in each direction from the modal stage). Deviations of 1 stage or more (again in each directions) were more frequent for the younger groups (about 20% among 10-14 year olds) than for the adult groups (less than 10% among 20-36 year olds). Clearly, it is not possible to conceive of moral assessment as the attribution of a single stage to a participant.

From a psychometric perspective, variations may be interpreted as random fluctuations and error measurement. It is very easy to ignore these deviations and to keep the modal stage or some kind of mean score to characterize the level of « development » of a given adolescent. This is an acceptable procedure when moral development is a dependent variable in an experimental design, but it's not really appropriate in the context of an individual assessment. Moreover, as we shall see, intra-individual variations can be analysed beyond the level of random fluctuations.

Intra-individual variability linked to developmental processes.

Walker and Taylor (1991) characterize individuals not by a single stage but by the distribution of all the sequential stages used in the dilemmas from the Kohlberg's Moral Judgment Interview – MJI – (Colby & Kohlberg, 1987). Starting from Snyder and Feldman' (1984) ideas about spatial representation, Walker and Taylor (1991) define five steps which represent the cyclical nature of stage access and transitions and depend on the frequencies of modal and adjacent stages at the successive times. The five transition steps, from a given stage to the next, correspond to a progressive sliding along the sequence : the stages distribution slides when modal stage is growing up to the next modal stage. 70% of the observed patterns of change, in Walker and Taylor's study, are consistent with the theoretical patterns.

Thoma and Rest (1999) have extended this kind of developmental analysis. Using the numerous data obtained with the DIT, they consider intra-individual variations in much the same way as Walker and Taylor (1991), with a distinction between « consolidation » and « transition » periods, along Kohlberg's sequence. However, « consolidation » periods (defined from statistical analysis and interpreted as a peaked profile of stage responses) are supposed to indicate the adequacy of Kohlberg's stages and framework for participants, whereas « transition » periods (defined as all the other cases) may suggest that participants rely on alternative ethical systems. In our opinion, however, most of these proposed « alternative ethical systems » (« religious prescription, social or community norms, professional norms or codes, care, etc. », p. 324) could be coded within Kohlberg's system.

In both pieces of research, the main point is that intra-individual variability should be considered as a necessary property of developmental progress.

Intra-individual variability related to context variations.

Intra-individual variabilities may be analysed at another level : they can be interpreted as a product of variations in contexts, situations or dilemmas. This new step does not disagree with the previous one, since it is likely that more elaborated reasoning appears first in certain specific situations, as Piaget (1941) pointed out, a long time ago, in referring to « horizontal *décalages* ».

The first question here is the following : if we modify a moral dilemma according to predictable variables, does this lead to modifications in participants' decisions and judgments? Sobesky (1983) started from one of the Kohlberg's dilemmas : the famous Heinz

dilemma in which a husband (Heinz) is led to plan a robbery because he failed to gather sufficient money to buy a drug which could save his wife from cancer, but the seller requires too much money for a dose (ten times the price he paid). It is a classic dilemma between legal and moral concerns.

Sobesky (1983) presented four versions of this dilemma to participants from two different age groups (16 years and 19 years). The four versions modified the consequences for Heinz and for his wife. Thus, about the decision (stealing or not), participants are less certain to steal when the consequences are high (prison) for Heinz. Interestingly, participants from age group 19 are more certain than those from age group 16, that they *should* steal the drug... but there is no difference between groups when the question is whether they *would* steal the drug ! Moreover, stealing is more certain when the wife could be saved than if she couldn't. About judgments, the average P score (stage 5 plus stage 6) is higher when consequences for Heinz are low (as if participants needed to strongly justify an unpunished illegal act). Conversely, when consequences for the wife are high, P score is lower (as if there were no necessity to strongly justify an illegal act which is so successful).

Teo, Becker, and Edelstein (1995) did not construct variations on a single dilemma (as Sobesky did), but they examined the various dilemmas used by Colby et al. (1983) and they categorized them according to general criteria. If authoritative issues (i.e. when the matter concerns prescriptions from authorities and institutions) are opposed to non-authoritative issues (i.e. aspects of fairness, needs, and rights of persons), higher stages are observed with non-authoritative issues, among younger groups (10 y.o. and 13-14 y.o.) and there is no difference among older groups. Moreover, if personal dilemmas (which deal with conflicts within personal relations) are opposed to trans-personal dilemmas (where topics stress formal roles, social functions, institutions), the trans-personal dilemmas pull for higher stages, at least for the four « middle » age groups (16-30 y. o.). Note that « higher stage » formula refers to the mean stage score on the 1-6 stages sequence and does not imply that the highest stages (P-score for instance) are activated into one category. In fact, the difference between personal and trans-personal dilemmas could be explained by stages 3 and 4 properties: stage 3 stresses inter-personal relations and stage 4 focuses on the institutional order. It is therefore not surprising that personal dilemmas are pushed to stage 3, while trans-personal dilemmas go to stage 4; as a consequence, the mean score is higher in trans-personal dilemmas.

Scharf's work (quoted by Jurkovic, 1980) produced evidence of a contextual effect, inducing an intra-individual variation. Scharf constructed a series of conflict situations reflecting dilemmas faced by inmates and guards. Then, in a population of inmates, a lower moral score on the prison stories is observed, due to a regression of stage 3 and stage 4, compared with standard « theoretical » dilemmas from Kohlberg.

It is also the case that issues in a dilemma cannot be detached from the personal involvement of participants, that is, how participants experience the situation of the hypothetical characters. Aris (1999) examined this idea, by reviving Sobesky's method (1983) of deliberate local modifications of dilemmas: for instance, if somebody can steal a drug to save his wife (with moral considerations), will the same decision and considerations occur if the question is to save the neighbour ? Adolescents from two age groups (12 y.o. and 14 y.o.) appeared to be very sensitive to this kind of variables. They decided more often to act against norms in the case of personal interest, but they produced more principled justifications in dilemmas without personal interest (as if it was necessary to strongly justify a gratuitous act).

Aris's concerns lead to the more general question of the relation between moral judgments and moral behavior. Morality, of course, is always considered as a property of action, but the problem is to know if moral actions can be linked to moral assessment in hypothetical judgments, like the judgments in Kohlberg's paradigm. Blasi (1980) has reviewed and analysed this topic in depth, mainly from the cognitive-developmental perspective and with strong methodological discussions. Let us consider some of the author's cautious conclusions. Concerning honesty (honest behavior in laboratory situations), he states that «it is not unreasonable to conclude that the hypothesis of a significant positive relation between level of moral thinking and resistance to temptation is supported. Frequently, however, even when statistically significant, the relations are low» (p. 25). Blasi stressed also the fact that relations between moral reasoning and moral actions vary from domain to domain: they represent variability within the intra-individual variability !

As a consequence of these not so coherent findings, it is not surprising that further studies have attempted to define the psychological and cognitive differences between judgment paradigms and action paradigms. According to Saltzstein (1994), moral actions imply the self's personal perspective, whereas judgments are made by an observer considering the actor's decision. Moreover, moral actions involve conflicts between social norms and other kinds of pressures (typically: personal interest, emotion, affective constraints), but moral judgments, at least in Kohlberg's situations, rely on a decision among several normative constraints (typically: legal concerns vs. concerns about principles).

The domain of judgment/action debate appears as an open and burgeoning field (Killen & Hart, 1995), with no really strong theoretical communality. Nevertheless, in their introduction, Hart and Killen (1995) agree with a constructive perspective on moral development (i.e., transformations are not simply determined by environmental or social pressures, there is a «bidirectional» process) and they consider that moral actions are not entirely contextualized (that is depending on variability in circumstances): personal conceptualization, and general principles (despite being largely implicit) play a role, even if we know little about the hypothetical interplay between sensitivity to context and general principles.

It would probably be very useful to distinguish more than one step between «theoretical judgments» and «personal action». From a methodological view, we have two extreme poles : at one pole, Kohlbergian hypothetical stories, at the other, personal actions (e.g. resistance to temptation in laboratory setting or moral evaluation through naturalistic observations). There are, at least, two intermediate levels: choosing hypothetical stories in relation to participant's concerns (e.g. Scharf, quoted by Jurkovic, 1980); using participants' reports about real-life moral dilemmas (Walker, Pitts, Henning, & Matsuba, 1995).

Taken together, intra-individual variabilities in the moral area are not mere random fluctuations. It is now obvious that, in numerous cases, individuals cannot be simply characterized by one single stage. Moreover, variations may be due to contextual variables which can be identified. But, at the same time, intra-individual variabilities are not contradictory to the conceptualization of a general developmental trend along an ordered sequence of stages. Furthermore, these variabilities illustrate the developmental process which take place and they can be considered as a strong determinant of developmental transformations, because of the disequilibrium they may induce (Reuchlin, 1978; Lautrey, 1990).

Inter-individual variabilities

It is commonly accepted that morality may vary among individuals either in terms of « more or less » moral concerns, or in terms of qualitative differentiation. However, a developmental perspective forces us to consider moral characteristics, not as a definitive property of individuals, but as consequences of previous interactions, with possible further transformations in the future. Let us examine some issues concerning specific youth groups or specific sources of differentiation.

Delinquent Youths

As we may expect, experiments on moral judgments have been carried out with young delinquents, but the results are not very clear-cut. From 15 studies (most of them using Kohlberg's interview presented to delinquent adolescents), Blasi (1980) was able to conclude: « The findings support the hypothesis that delinquent individuals tend to use developmentally lower modes of moral reasoning than do matched non-delinquents » (p. 12). This kind of finding does not seem to be very informative... as with results like: lower IQs do not succeed in school! Blasi argues, however, that a range of moral reasoning stages can be present among delinquents. In particular, several studies indicate that substantial numbers of delinquents were scored at Kohlberg's conventional level, which is the most common level among non-criminal adolescents.

Jurkovic (1980) presents a more differentiated picture of the same question. If we compare studies of heterogeneous groups of delinquents with matched non-delinquent groups, most research displays low levels of moral reasoning in delinquent groups. However, it appears that some delinquents can also show high levels of moral reasoning, and some authors failed to find differences in moral maturity between the two groups they interviewed. This leads us to conclude with Jurkovic, first that delinquency as a legal classification does not strictly imply less mature moral reasoning (conversely, a conventional level of morality does not prevent delinquency), and secondly that other variables have to be taken into account (there is a variability in the « delinquent vs non delinquent » variability). In particular, Jurkovic refers to studies which have shown that psychopathic or sociopathic delinquents are scored much more at the pre-conventional level than other delinquents. In other words, there are variabilities in adolescent delinquent groups and « Just as these youngsters differ in their personality and behavioral style, so do they differ in their level of moral judgment » (Jurkovic, 1980, p.716). Moreover, Jurkovic quotes a research by Kohlberg and Freundlich (1973) where older delinquents exhibited more conventional reasoning than younger ones. These mixed results, concerning adolescent delinquent moral assessments, support, again, a constructivist developmental differentiation process in social contexts. Probably most adolescent delinquents have *not yet* achieved an advanced stage in moral development.

Then, if we have to consider moral evolution in adolescent delinquents, studies on more general aspects of social values are of a central interest. For instance, Jacob and Born (1997) have presented longitudinal data which shows that, in the adolescent period, delinquency is not linked with conformist values, a finding which is contrary to what happens some years later, in young adults, where delinquency and conformity are negatively linked.

Juvenile moral commitment

Compared to delinquency domain, there are few studies on exceptionally altruistic adolescents. Following Hart, Yates, Fegley, and Wilson (1995), let us abandon stereotypes about « inner city adolescents » living in « a poor urban area ». Among these marginalized and deprived populations, there are also admirable figures with a great sense of moral commitment and care for others. Hart et al. (1995) have proposed a theoretical analysis of what could differentiate these exceptional adolescents (called « care exemplars »). Data come from two studies (and also from some cases analyses) by the authors. The first was carried out in Camden (New Jersey) and consisted mainly of comparing (on various variables) 15 exemplary youths (African-American and Latino adolescents) with a matched sample of adolescents. The second source of data stems from participants in a school-based community service program (150 African-American adolescents in Washington, D.C.).

In order to reach a better understanding of moral commitment and action, Hart et al. (1995) focus on persons' conceptions of themselves and others, that is, how people conceive self and identity with respect to others' needs and socio-economic situations. From various specific assessments, care exemplar adolescents appear to be different in the following ways: (a) there are more likely to describe themselves in terms of moral personality traits and moral goals; (b) they present more integration of ideal self and parental representations into the self-concept; (c) they have constructed of a kind of self theory which consists of using principles to organize and make sense of the self's characteristics; (d) they show a stronger representation of self evolution, that is, a greater continuity and connection between past and future selves.

All of these personality characteristics support a constructivist view of moral development, since they correspond to successive adjustments of individuals with respect to self and others representations.

Family factors

As we have just seen with the care exemplars, family factors may influence inter-individual moral differentiation.

The first idea, on this topic, could be that there is a very simple direct influence from parents to offspring. If this is the case, correlations between parents' and children's moral reasoning should be positive and strong. In fact, Speicher (1994) found significant but moderate correlations. Moreover, when analyses are computed separately for sons and daughters, and when background variables (like age, IQ, education, etc.) are controlled, results are not so uniform. In the Oakland Growth Study sample (adolescents and young adults), mother and father moral judgements predict daughter moral judgments (age and IQ controlled), but neither parents' moral judgments were a predictor of sons' moral judgements (age controlled). The same was true for Kohlberg's boys' sample : no significant correlation appeared, in 10-18 y.o. participants, between sons' and mothers' or fathers' moral judgments.

Speicher (1994) also notes that parental moral judgment does not limit the adult stage attained by offspring. In the Oakland Growth Study sample, 22% of the adults exceed the moral stage of their parents (53%, in the Kohlberg sample). This is probably due to schooling : all the participants who exceeded the moral stage of both parents were college graduates.

Another idea was to relate parental education and family climate to the further moral development of the children. However, in a longitudinal study on adolescents (14 years old at time 1, 16 years old at time 2), Pratt, Arnold, Pratt and Diessner (1999) found only limited correlations between family predictors and moral scores. For instance, there were no significant correlations between authoritativeness (mother or father) and moral level at time 1 and 2. However, weak but significant positive partial correlations did appear at time 1, for both mother and father, when age, gender and parent education were controlled.

As a consequence of these results, the need for theoretical analysis must be emphasized. Reviving a very ancient perspective (stemming from Baldwin), we have to consider that development does not follow from the mere influence of environmental and social variables. Instead, it consists of the reactions (sometimes long-term reactions) that individuals work out when encountering these environmental and social variables. This is the view taken by Grusec and Goodnow (1994) with regard to internalization of values. In the same way, Feldman and Weinberger (1994) show clearly from their statistical analysis that an adolescent characteristic (self-restraint, i.e. : « tendencies across the life span to inhibit immediate, self-focused desires in the interest of promoting long-term goals and positive relations with others », p.196) mediates family influence on boys' delinquent behavior : parenting practices during childhood predict self-restraint which in turn predicts sons' delinquent behavior in adolescence.

Gender differentiation

Do boys and girls really differ in their moral development ? Some time ago, Gilligan (1977) claimed that Kohlberg's theory is male-oriented because of its focus on justice and legal aspects of morality. She argued that females tend to be oriented toward an ethic of care. Since Kohlberg's stage 4 emphasizes legal and justice concerns, while stage 3 stresses interpersonal relationships and care aspects, the result is that females would be put at a disadvantage in Kohlbergian assessments. This very traditional view has been strongly criticized (Wark & Krebs, 1996), in particular on methodological grounds. Furthermore, Gilligan's research present neither clear nor definitive results (Brabeck, 1983; Wark & Krebs, 1996).

In fact, there is no evidence that gender induces differences in moral maturity because of a supposed methodological bias. See the numerous studies reviewed by Brabeck (1983) and Rest (1979) who concluded : « Whenever sex differences do occur, it would probably be a good idea to check for the influence of other variables, such as IQ, education or SES » (p.7.5).

Perhaps, debate about Gilligan's proposals could be solved by distinguishing between « moral maturity » and « moral orientation » (Wark & Krebs, 1996). The former implies a position on a developmental sequence, such as Kohlberg's. The latter stresses people's concerns, i.e. mainly justice and legal system or mainly care aspects and interpersonal relations. Wark and Krebs' findings (from 19/20 years old students) showed a significant main effect for gender in moral orientation (more care orientations in females) but there was no significant effect for gender in moral maturity. This indicates that one may have a personal orientation with regard to care concerns, but the same person can also take justice and legal aspects arising from Kohlberg's dilemmas into account. Moreover, it is particularly interesting to note that, in Wark and Krebs' study (1996), moral orientation was not split into either justice or care modes. Numerous people, instead, presented both orientations (with a predominance of one, or not). Furthermore, only 9% of the participants showed the same moral orientation in all of the three dilemmas used. This means that intra-individual variations concern not only moral maturity – as we have seen above – but moral orientation as well.

Peer influence

Piaget (1932) was probably the first to stress the positive role of peers in moral development. According to his view, decentration is easier for children with their peers than when facing adults. Peer interactions may stimulate socialization, awareness of others' needs or views, and autonomy (instead of heteronomy). This is a general, not a differential, developmental factor, since peers are merely considered as an impulse for general development.

Further studies (Kohlberg, 1969; Youniss, 1980) have started out with the same general idea. Some researchers, however, have attempted to clarify how the various modalities of integration in peer groups may differentiate moral development. Schonert-Reichl (1999) presents a critical review of these studies. She notes that most researches have operationalized peer relationships in terms of sociometric status or peer acceptance, and they have yielded consistent findings showing a positive and significant relation between peer status and moral reasoning.

Schonert-Reichl's own study (1999) extended the dimensions used to define peer relationships in relation to moral development. Significant correlations (among early adolescents around 12 years of age) did not appear for every dimension she used and they were not very strong. For girls, moral reasoning was positively correlated with leadership status and pro-social behavior. With boys, moral reasoning was positively correlated with leadership status (as for girls) but also... with antisocial behavior, and (negatively) with withdrawn behavior. On the friendship dimensions, moral reasoning was clearly related (both for girls and boys) to the number of close friends (not to the number of friends). With the quality of friendship, boys' moral reasoning was *lower* when conflicts were reported to be resolved quickly and easily. Finally, indicators of friendship activities were positively related to moral reasoning for girls, but not for boys.

These results suggest that peer influence on moral reasoning is due to specific social experiences : conflict resolutions, discussions in close relationships, positive insertion in peer groups (which implies the resolution of conflicts). However, a positive correlation between moral reasoning and antisocial behavior in boys is surprising, because it contrasts with previous investigations. Schonert-Reichl (1999) suggests that we should recognise that, in most previous studies, antisocial behaviors have been obtained via teacher ratings, while in the present research it was via peer nominations. She comments that (a) teachers and adolescent may have not the same conceptualization of « antisocial behaviors », and (b) that it is likely that adolescents sometimes consider antisocial behaviors as a positive value (for instance « starting fights » may be for the « right reason »... a sort of Zorro concerns).

Conclusions on inter-individual variabilities

Results of research on inter-individual variabilities in moral development may lead some doubts. On one hand, both everyday experiences and experimental results support inter-individual variation of moral conceptualization and commitment, on the other hand, correlations between predictive variables and moral assessments are often weak (even when they are significant) and results are quite heterogeneous.

The following remarks require consideration.

- Since significant correlations are consistently weak, moral development must be viewed as a complex developmental function. Many factors have to be considered as « co-acting » on that development. As a consequence, when a given factor is isolated, correlations are necessarily weak, even when some other factors are controlled.
- A differential variable may be just a « label variable », not a « causal factor ». A label variable categorizes individuals according to an objective criterium (like delinquency or gender). When differences appear as a result of a label variable, further and complex analysis are needed to grasp factors and process that may have produced these differences.
- Moral differentiations do seem to come from specific social experiences induced by belonging to a given family or sex, etc. A theoretical and unsolved problem is how to clarify what sorts of social experiences are causally involved in various social contexts. It is likely that, in every social context (family, peers, etc.), moral development is boosted when individuals are confronting by social conflicts, incongruity, injury, injustice, or simply the need to manage some kind of social interaction.
- In the frame of a developmental and differential perspective, it would be a mistake to consider people as definitely belonging to a given category or a given level of moral development. Moral construction is an open process. This means that, if moral factors lie in social experiences, everybody can change when facing a new social experience.

Cultural variabilities

In 1969, Kohlberg had already published data comparing moral development in several countries : USA, Taiwan, Turkey, and Mexico. Despite slight differences between the developmental curves, Kohlberg (1969) stressed the cultural universality of the sequence of stages he found.

Since 1969, numerous other studies have been conducted and Snarey's review (1985) still supports the universality of Kohlberg's general propositions. In particular, Kohlberg's dilemmas appear to be relevant in various cultures, provided that some superficial adjustments are made to fit the specificities of cultural environments. Moreover, the stage sequence seems to be invariant across cultures, since people generally progress along the successive stages and there are very few regressions which can be easily interpreted as measurement errors.

Nevertheless, the cultural dimension of moral development remains a very puzzling problem. On one hand, there is little argument about the idea that cultures might be ordered or differentiated on a moral dimension. Every cultural system includes, at least among some wise persons, socio-moral reflection and thought which can regulate and orientate social interactions. On the other hand, if one starts from the evident cultural diversity in social values and educational forms, one would expect to observe some kind of moral thinking differences to be related to cultural specificities.

This paradox leads to the following remarks. Firstly, Kohlberg's sequence corresponds to a very general developmental trend, especially if we note that post-conventional level is steadily rare. Then, it is not surprising that socialization processes, in every culture, promote social norms support, according to a « conventional » perspective. It does not imply that rules and

laws are all alike everywhere. In fact, the universality of Kohlberg's sequence appears to be due to formal properties: individuals tend towards the approval of their collective mode of functioning, whatever the specific content of these collective rules, while only few people reach post-conventional thinking by questioning the social order.

Secondly, Kohlberg's theory is sometimes considered as reflecting only western culture (Shu-Fang-Dien, 1982), especially because of a focus on individual concerns, in contrast to collective regulation in other cultures. This objection sounds very curious because Kohlberg's sequence stresses the development from personal interest towards collective criteria. Moral principles, in the final stages, are far from individualistic. On the contrary, moral principles correspond to selfless ideals humanity has in common, beyond slavery and the will to get the power. Moreover, it is a mistake to consider western culture as individualistic. At any rate in Europe, culture promotes many kinds of social supports and solidarities, both at institutional and personal levels.

Thirdly, intra-cultural variations may overcome inter-cultural differences. A long time ago, Ainsworth (1977) drew similar conclusions from her observations in Ouganda and in USA (Baltimore) : attachments seem quite different from one child to another, or from one type to another within the same culture, but general patterns and functions are much the same across cultures. Variations in moral thinking can be analysed likewise. Wainryb and Turiel (1995) have discussed this topic. Following Abu-Lughod (1991) – and Malinowski – they consider that individuals are not like « robots programmed with cultural rules » (Abu-Lughod, 1991, p. 158, quoted by Wainryb & Turiel, 1995). Even in traditional societies, there is a range of intra-cultural variability, with respect to social norms and cultural prescriptions (see the Druze example, in Wainryb & Turiel, 1995). Therefore, if culture influences moral thinking and development, it is rather obvious that moral judgments and behaviors are greatly variable among people from the same culture.

Fourthly, and consequently, socio-moral development must be considered from a constructivist perspective. Moral thinking is elaborated through individual reactions to cultural demands and personal experiences. This is an adaptative process (Tietjin, 1986), but « adaptation » does not refer to immediate or personal satisfaction ; it means that individuals need a coherent representation of society and values, which must integrate various sources of influence and experience. Therefore, a transcultural developmental sequence (like Kohlberg's one or any other) can be used, as a dependent variable, to test social influences on developmental trends. For instance, Edwards (1982), studying moral development among youths in Kenya, stressed the importance of such variables as: family modernization, number of years lived away from home (which increase social experience and autonomy), cultural diversity at school (i.e. experience of other modes of thinking and living).

There follows that moral thinking is depending on the informations really available for individuals (Wainryb, 1993; Wainryb & Turiel, 1995). Moral judgment (on abortion, for instance) is determined by what individuals believe and know. If people have no idea and no experience of a legal and institutional order (in a complex system, larger than the close community), there is no necessity to go beyond Kohlberg's stage 3 (see Edwards, 1982, about traditional community leaders in Kenya). As we formulated earlier regarding cross-cultural comparisons (Bril & Lehalle, 1988/1998), moral development is necessary (i.e. it necessarily follows a transcultural sequence),... when it is possible (i.e. if people are informed and experienced inside the given culture).

In sum, further researches are needed to clarify cultural variability and similarity on the various aspects of morality (see for instance: Keller, Edelstein, Schmid, Fu-xi Fang, & Ge Fang, 1998) and to use cultural diversity in order to appraise social determinants on developmental processes (Edwards, 1982; Turiel & Wainryb, 1994).

Conclusion : Is it yet possible to support a developmental view on social norms acquisition ?

Social norms acquisition has been studied from different and complementary theoretical backgrounds. Of course, social psychology is very fruitful and may integrate moral thinking and behavior in the frame of current conceptualizations in the social domain (for a review, see Bègue, 1998). But the various sources of variability in moral thinking do not lead to a definitive rejection of a developmental approach. On the contrary, a constructive view is needed to understand how moral thinking is elaborated through social influences and personal experiences. This perspective implies the following aspects.

The first question is to define what develops (Van Geert, 1991). This is not a trivial problem because, as we noted above, Kohlberg's stages appear multidimensional. In particular, social norms constitute a heterogeneous domain and it is important to know how adolescents categorize this domain. Mc Conville and Furth (1981) have proposed to distinguish five systems of rules : legal, conventional, ascriptive (for instance at school or in the family), « moral » (transgression is wrong even if there are not specific rules prohibiting them), interpersonal (fairness between peers). They found that adolescents (13 to 19 y.o.) can use this categorization in a forced choice situation. But, in case of a free classification (Lehalle, Chapelle, Decaluwé, & Aris, 1998), moral and interpersonal systems are closer, suggesting four categories instead of five : conventions, ascriptive regulations, laws, interpersonal fairness. Probably, development is not synchronous in these various domains and the distinction between these categories may vary with age.

Recently, Narvaez, Getz, Rest, and Thoma (1999) have proposed to use the term « moral thinking » in a broader meaning than « moral judgment ». Moral judgment is defined as the cognitive construction of basic epistemological categories (e.g. justice, duty, legitimate authorities, rights). In parallel with this cognitive construction, « cultural ideology » induces individual socialization. Both moral judgment and cultural ideology are supposed to contribute to « moral thinking », that is the person's views on such issues as abortion, rights of homosexual individuals, religion in public school, women's roles, euthanasia. These two processes, (cognitive construction of categories and socialization in a given culture) are considered as growing in parallel ... which seems a little difficult from a constructivist point of view because cognitive construction comes from social setting and incentives (then it comes from cultural characteristics), and adhesion to cultural ideology supposes an active construction from individual (then it depends on individual cognitive categories). As a consequence, these two processes do not develop « in parallel », but they are instead strongly related.

If moral domain were analysed according to several valid developmental functions like abstraction, categorization, decentration, social functioning awareness, etc. (which is not yet the case), a developmental perspective imposes to maintain the distinction between stages or levels with respect to these functions. But stages or levels are mere landmarks along a developmental process. They serve to appreciate both evolutions and variations, not to characterize every behavior from individuals. As we have seen, individuals generally show

behaviors and decisions from a range of stages, not from a single stage. This sort of findings is normal and does not call for questioning developmental perspective, nor the adequation of a given developmental sequence which stresses the general process at stake beyond variabilities. In this paper, we focused on Kohlberg's sequence because of the numerous studies belonging to this theoretical field. But, following Kohlberg, new stages systems and new assessments methods are proposed (Gibbs, Basinger, & Fuller, 1992) ; in parallel, more specific domains are investigated, like « prosocial development » studied by Eisenberg (Eisenberg, Carlo, Murphy, & Van Court, 1995).

After specifying developmental functions and validating stage systems, a constructivist perspective leads to developmental models which aim at a better understanding of the mechanisms underlying development. Note that these models have to explain both increasing morality and increasing moral deviations, as a product of constructive process in specific environments.

In the cognitive area, modelization constitutes a « dynamic » field, with vivifying debates (Lehalle, 1998). Understanding moral development could benefit from developmental analysis by Elman, Bates, Johnson, Karmiloff-Smith, Parisi, & Plunkett (1996) which are not focused on morality. For instance, moral rules may be the mere product of individual analysis of specific situations. In this case, there is no « abstract rules » per se, but decisions and judgments are simply activated by the characteristic of various situations and dilemmas. Therefore, we may observe intra-individual variabilities and limited generalizations, because response level is strongly determined by actual activations from the context. In this case, individuals process on the context, not on abstract rules.

But, if we establish, in the model, some kind of « *abstraction réfléchissante* » (Piaget, 1977), the next developmental step, after the above mentioned processing on specific situations, could be the possibility to consider abstract rules per se, not through an implicit activation from the given context. In that case, individuals process then on rules, with specific contexts as examples, and we may observe less intra-individual variabilities and more generalizations across contexts. For instance, in Aris' example (1999) one may think that saving a stranger's life is as important as saving his wife's...

Indeed, this is a very puzzling problem to study the possible interactions between abstraction and generalization in adolescents' moral thinking, when moral choices and commitments are getting personally constructed.

On more practical concerns, moral assessments, in the frame of an applied psychology, must take into account all the variabilities stressed above, especially the variability between contexts and the variability coming from the range of stages that one person may present. At the same time, we have to consider the attested general developmental trends which give the possibility of further evolution among individuals.

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