LESSON 4

THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHARACTER

Sow a thought, reap an act.
Sow an act, reap a habit.
Sow a habit, reap a character.
Sow a character, reap a destiny.

—anonymous

THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHARACTER

Prework: Ask participants to finish reading *Character is Destiny* and to be prepared to discuss the main theme for each chapter in class.

OBJECTIVES

By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- Identify the three main areas and the major contemporary theories of moral development
- Define the terms *character, virtue,* and *habit*
- Describe the process of developing habits or virtues that creates character
- Cite examples of how real individuals courageously faced ethical dilemmas

OPENING

As we learned in our last session, the essential component of a moral community is the individual who is willing and able to participate in moral dialogue and cooperative argumentation with others. We also recognize that "talking" ethics must be followed by "walking" ethics—that ethical decisions must be followed by action. How does a person develop from early childhood into a "moral being" who can both think ethically and act in accord with those ethics? Today we will explore the major contemporary theories addressing moral development and the thoughts of individuals who have reflected deeply on these issues.

STRATEGIES

If Optional Lesson 3 was used, begin by asking students if they have had an opportunity to use their moral dialogue and cooperative argumentation skills. If so, what were the outcomes of their interactions. If Lesson 3 was not used, after the opening begin introducing the major concepts of moral development using the tri-part model overhead (Reason, Emotion, Behavior) and the readings Moral Development: An Overview, and Perry on Cognitive Development. For more information on these concepts, see the Moral Development bibliography or access Web sites or any good textbook on human development across the life span. See also the overheads included in this lesson for ideas on how to present the concepts in class.

Next move into a group discussion of *Character is Destiny* by first reviewing terms (character, virtue, and habit) using the provided overheads. Assign one or more of the fourteen chapters in Character is Destiny to pairs of students. Ask each pair of students to summarize the most significant ideas of their chapter and describe how the chapter relates to development of college-age adults today. Working their way through the text, ask students to encourage other students to agree, disagree, or comment.

Next show the 20-minute video from the Institute for Global Ethics entitled, *Tough Choices: Three Case Studies for Discussion*. This video presents the real-life stories of three people whose characters were tested by life events and whose destinies resulted from difficult and sometimes painful decisions. Stop the video as indicated for comments and discussion by the group. Questions to ask the students might include:

- What pressures and temptations did the individuals face as they tried to live up to their values?
- How was "being good" hard work or difficult for each individual?
- What specific virtues (see Chapter 7, page 79, of *Character is Destiny*) were exemplified by each individual?
- Who were role models for these people?
- In what ways are these individuals role models for us?

End by reviewing the Self-Observation Week assignment. Provide a due date for completion of the work.

A number of supplemental activities are suggested for this lesson, some of which can be assigned for submission or discussion later in the session.

Key Questions

- What are the three major aspects of moral development?
- How are these aspects interconnected and developed?
- What do major contemporary theories say about the stages of moral development through which we pass from childhood to adulthood?
- What are character, virtue, and habit, and how do they determine one's destiny?
- How do we develop virtues and minimize vices in our daily lives?
- How have people historically made and acted upon ethical decisions?

Closure & Transition

Today we have explored ways in which we as human beings develop into moral agents and how our daily habits determine the final outcome of that growth process. At the base of all of our ethical decisions and actions are our core values. In our next session we will examine our values and define those that we hold in common.

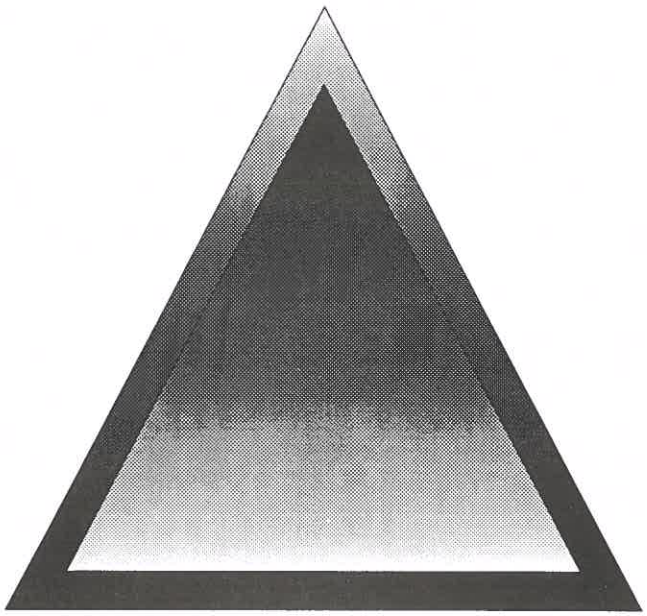
Homework Assignment for Lesson 5

- Read Chapter 3 of *How Good People Make Tough Choices*
- Read the Shared Values reading by John Gardner
- Complete the Shared Values worksheet

Lesson Assessment: Revisions for Next Time

MORAL DEVELOPMENT

REASON



EMOTION BEHAVIOR

—*Rest, James. R. "Background Theory and Research" in* Moral Development in the Professions. *Rest and Harveaz (eds.). 1994.*

Moral Development: An Overview

This overview was prepared by Mary Elizabeth Murray, Department of Psychology, University of Illinois at Chicago. Comments or inquiries for further information should be directed to Professor Larry Nucci, University of Illinois at Chicago.

Researchers and scholars have systematically studied moral development for most of the twentieth century, and educators wishing to attend to issues of moral development and education are making use of what has been learned through that work. The following overview provides an introduction to the main perspectives guiding current work on moral development. Readers interested in gaining an in-depth and up-to-date understanding of research and scholarship in the field may do so by accessing the Web site *http://tigger.uic.edu/~lnucci/MoralEd/index.html* for further information.

Piaget's Theory

Jean Piaget is among the first psychologists whose work remains directly relevant to contemporary theories of moral development. In his early writing, he focused specifically on the moral lives of children, studying the way children play games in order to learn more about children's beliefs about right and wrong. According to Piaget, all development emerges from action; that is, individuals construct and reconstruct their knowledge of the world as a result of interactions with the environment. Based on his observations of children's application of rules when playing, Piaget determined that morality, too, can be considered a developmental process. For example, Ben, a ten-year-old studied by Piaget, provided the following critique of a rule made up by a child playing marbles: "It isn't a rule! It's a wrong rule because it's outside of the rules. A fair rule is one that is in the game." Ben believed in the absolute and intrinsic truth of the rules, characteristic of early moral reasoning. In contrast, Vua, age thirteen, illustrates an understanding of the reasoning behind the application of rules, characteristic of later moral thinking. When asked to consider the fairness of a made-up rule compared to a traditional rule, Vua replied "It is just as fair because the marbles are far apart" (making the game equally difficult).

In addition to examining children's understanding of rules about games, Piaget interviewed children regarding acts such as stealing and lying. When asked what a lie is, younger children consistently answered that they are "naughty words." When asked why they should not lie, younger children could rarely explain beyond the forbidden nature of the act—"because it is a naughty word." However, older children were able to explain, "because it isn't right," and "it wasn't true." Even older children indicated an awareness of intention as relevant to the meaning of an act: "A lie is when you deceive someone else.

To make a mistake is when you make a mistake." From his observations, Piaget concluded that children begin in a "heteronomous" stage of moral reasoning, characterized by a strict adherence to rules and duties, and obedience to authority.

This heteronomy results from two factors. The first factor is the young child's cognitive structure. According to Piaget, the thinking of young children is characterized by egocentrism. That is to say that young children are unable to simultaneously take into account their own view of things with the perspective of someone else. This egocentrism leads children to project their own thoughts and wishes onto others. It is also associated with the unidirectional view of rules and power associated with heteronomous moral thought, and various forms of "moral realism." Moral realism is associated with "objective responsibility," which is valuing the letter of the law above the purpose of the law. This is why young children are more concerned about the outcomes of an act rather than the intentions of the person doing the act. Moral realism is also associated with the young child's belief in "imminent justice." This is the expectation that punishments automatically follow acts of wrongdoing. One of the most famous cases of such childhood thinking was that of the young boy who believed that his hitting a power pole with his baseball bat caused a major power blackout in the New York City area.

The second major contributor to heteronomous moral thinking in young children is their relative social relationship with adults. In the natural authority relationship between adults and children, power is handed down from above. The relative powerlessness of young children, coupled with childhood egocentrism feeds into a heteronomous moral orientation.

However, through interactions with other children in which the group seeks to play together in a way all find fair, children find this strict heteronomous adherence to rules sometimes problematic. As children consider these situations, they develop towards an "autonomous" stage of moral reasoning, characterized by the ability to consider rules critically, and selectively apply these rules based on a goal of mutual respect and cooperation. The ability to act from a sense of reciprocity and mutual respect is associated with a shift in the child's cognitive structure from egocentrism to perspective taking. Coordinating one's own perspective with that of others means that what is right needs to be based on solutions that meet the requirements of fair reciprocity. Thus, Piaget viewed moral development as the result of interpersonal interactions through which individuals work out resolutions that all deem fair. Paradoxically, this autonomous view of morality as fairness is more compelling and leads to more consistent behavior than the heteronomous orientation held by younger children.

Kohlberg's Theory

Lawrence Kohlberg (1969) modified and elaborated Piaget's work, laying the groundwork for the current debate within psychology on moral development. Consistent with Piaget, he proposed that children form ways of thinking through their experiences that include understandings of moral concepts such as justice, rights, equality, and human welfare. Kohlberg followed the development of moral judgment beyond the ages studied by Piaget, and determined that the process of attaining moral maturity took longer and was more gradual than Piaget had proposed.

On the basis of his research, Kohlberg identified six stages of moral reasoning grouped into three major levels. Each level represented a fundamental shift in the social-moral perspective of the individual. At the first level, the preconventional level, a person's moral judgments are characterized by a concrete, individual perspective. Within this level, a Stage 1 heteronomous orientation focuses on avoiding breaking rules that are backed by punishment, obedience for its own sake, and avoiding the physical consequences of an action to persons and property. As in Piaget's framework, the reasoning of Stage 1 is characterized by egocentrism and the inability to consider the perspectives of others. At Stage 2 there is the early emergence of moral reciprocity. The Stage 2 orientation focuses on the instrumental, pragmatic value of an action. Reciprocity is of the form, "You scratch my back and I'll scratch yours." The Golden Rule becomes, "If someone hits you, you hit them back." At Stage 2 you follow the rules only when it is in your immediate interest. What is right is what's fair in the sense of an equal exchange, a deal, an agreement. At Stage 2 there is an understanding that everybody has his or her own interest to pursue and that these conflict, so that right is relative (in the concrete individualist sense).

Individuals at the conventional level of reasoning, however, have a basic understanding of conventional morality, and reason with an understanding that norms and conventions are necessary to uphold society. They tend to be self-identified with these rules, and uphold them consistently, viewing morality as acting in accordance with what society defines as right. Within this level, individuals at Stage 3 are aware of shared feelings, agreements, and expectations that take primacy over individual interests. Persons at Stage 3 define what is right in terms of what is expected by people close to one's self, and in terms of the stereotypic roles that define being good (e.g., a good brother, mother, teacher). Being good means keeping mutual relationships, such as trust, loyalty, respect, and gratitude. The perspective is that of the local community or family. There is not as yet a consideration of the generalized social system. Stage 4 marks the shift from defining what is right in terms of local norms and role expectations to defining right in terms of the laws and norms established by the larger social system. This is the "member of society" perspective in which one is moral by fulfilling the actual duties defining one's social responsibilities. One must obey the law except in extreme cases in which the law comes into conflict

with other prescribed social duties. Obeying the law is seen as necessary in order to maintain the system of laws that protect everyone.

Finally, the postconventional level is characterized by reasoning based on principles, using a "prior to society" perspective. These individuals reason based on the principles that underlie rules and norms, but reject a uniform application of a rule or norm. While two stages have been presented within the theory, only one, Stage 5, has received substantial empirical support. Stage 6 remains as a theoretical endpoint that rationally follows from the preceding five stages. In essence, this last level of moral judgment entails reasoning rooted in the ethical fairness principles from which moral laws would be devised. Laws are evaluated in terms of their coherence with basic principles of fairness rather than upheld simply on the basis of their place within an existing social order. Thus, there is an understanding that elements of morality such as regard for life and human welfare transcend particular cultures and societies, and are to be upheld irrespective of other conventions or normative obligations. These stages (1–5) have been empirically supported by findings from longitudinal and crosscultural research (Power, Higgins, and Kohlberg 1989).

Kohlberg believed a better approach to affecting moral behavior should focus on stages of moral development. These stages are critical, as they consider the way a person organizes their understanding of virtues, rules, and norms, and integrates these into a moral choice (Power, Higgins, & Kohlberg, 1989). In addition, he rejected the relativist viewpoint in favor of the view that certain principles of justice and fairness represent the pinnacle of moral maturity, as he found that these basic moral principles are found in different cultures and subcultures around the world (Kohlberg and Turiel 1971).

The goal of moral education, it then follows, is to encourage individuals to develop to the next stage of moral reasoning. Grounded in Piagetian assumptions of cognitive development, development—in this model—is not merely the result of gaining more knowledge, but rather consists of a sequence of qualitative changes in the way an individual thinks. Within any stage of development, thought is organized according to the constraints of that stage. An individual then interacts with the environment according to his basic understanding of the environment. However, the child will at some point encounter information that does not fit into his or her world view, forcing the child to adjust to accommodate this new information. This process is called equilibration, and it is through equilibration that development occurs. Early moral development approaches to education, therefore, sought to force students to ponder contradictions inherent in their present level of moral reasoning.

The most common tool for doing this was to present a "moral dilemma" and require students to determine and justify what course the actor in the dilemma should take.

Through discussion, students should then be forced to face the contradictions present in any course of action not based on principles of justice or fairness.

Kohlberg also held from very early on that moral education required more than individual reflection, but also needed to include experiences for students to operate as moral agents within a community. Kohlberg and his colleagues developed the "Just Community" schools approach toward promoting moral development (Power et al.). The basic premise of these schools is to enhance students' moral development by offering them the chance to participate in a democratic community that entails full participation of community members in arriving at consensual rather than "majority rules" decision making. Teachers play a crucial leadership role in these discussions, promoting rules and norms that have a concern for justice and community, and ultimately enforcing the rules. This role is not an easy one, as teachers must listen closely and understand a student's reasoning, in order to help the student to the next level of reasoning. This requires a delicate balance between letting the students make decisions, and advocating in a way that shows them the limits in their reasoning. A primary advantage to the Just Community approach is its effectiveness in affecting student actions, not just their reasoning. Students are, in effect, expected to "practice what they preach," by following the rules determined in community meetings.

Carol Gilligan and the Morality of Care

A major critique of Kohlberg's work was put forth by Carol Gilligan in her popular book, "In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development" (1982). She suggested that Kohlberg's theories were biased against women, as only males were used in his studies. By listening to women's experiences, Gilligan offered that a morality of care can serve in the place of the morality of justice and rights espoused by Kohlberg. In her view, the morality of caring and responsibility is premised in nonviolence, while the morality of justice and rights is based on equality. Another way to look at these differences is to view these two moralities as providing two distinct injunctions—the injunction not to treat others unfairly (justice), and the injunction not to turn away from someone in need (care). She presents these moralities as distinct, although potentially connected.

In her initial work, Gilligan emphasized the gender differences thought to be associated with these two orientations. The morality of care emphasizes interconnectedness and presumably emerges to a greater degree in girls, owing to their early connection in identity formation with their mothers. The morality of justice, on the other hand, is said to emerge within the context of coordinating the interactions of autonomous individuals. A moral orientation based on justice was proposed as more prevalent among boys because their attachment relations with the mother, and subsequent masculine identity formation

entailed that boys separate from that relationship and individuate from the mother. For boys, this separation also heightens their awareness of the difference in power relations between themselves and the adult, and hence engenders an intense set of concerns over inequalities. Girls, however, because of their continued attachment to their mothers, are not as keenly aware of such inequalities, and are, hence, less concerned with fairness as an issue. Further research has suggested, however, that moral reasoning does not follow the distinct gender lines that Gilligan originally reported. The preponderance of evidence is that both males and females reason based on justice and care. While this gender debate is unsettled, Gilligan's work has contributed to an increased awareness that care is an integral component of moral reasoning.

Conclusion

This segment was designed to provide an overview of the major developmental theories currently influencing research on moral education. To remain current with new information and approaches in this very active field you should check the Web site *(http://tigger.uic.edu/~lnucci/MoralEd/index.html)* from which this reading was adapted.

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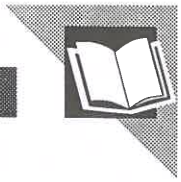
Permission to reprint this abbreviated version of his original article was granted by Larry Nucci, University of Illinois at Chicago.



Perry on Cognitive Development

The following synopsis of Perry's work is quoted from Joanne Kurfiss's Intellectual, Psychosocial and Moral Development in College: Four Major Theories, *pp. 16–20.*

While Piaget chronicles development of the ability to use logical thinking, William G. Perry, Jr., has chronicled the evolution of beliefs about what constitutes knowledge, truth, and fact, and the role of authorities in defining and conveying knowledge. The later positions shift to issues arising from the problems of making commitments in a relativistic context as epistemological reflection generalizes to personal choice and action (Perry 1970). His "positions" share some characteristics with Piaget's stages; for example, they are orderly in their sequence, both logically and psychologically (Kurfiss 1975, 1977). The more advanced the position, the more likely it is to require formal reasoning. The processes that are presumed to stimulate development include disequilibration; more will be said of this shortly.

Although Perry's original work identified nine positions, grouping these into four major periods makes the scheme more manageable and accessible. These periods are somewhat arbitrarily defined, since the positions shade gradually into one another, so for those who intend to pursue the topic further I have indicated specifically which of Perry's positions I am including in the four periods below.

1. *Dualism* (Perry's positions 1 and 2): For the Dualist, knowledge is absolute; there is Truth and Falsity, Right and Wrong, Good and Bad. "For every question there is a simple answer" would be a characteristic Dualist statement. Authorities are those who have the Answers. Disagreement among them is unthinkable—facts are facts! Belief systems are not chosen, they are given—unquestioned, unanalyzed backdrops to the student's experience.

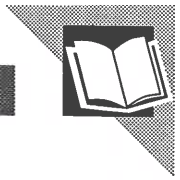
2. *Multiplicity* (Perry's positions 3 and 4 Multiplicity Correlative): Most knowledge is still viewed as absolute, as in Dualism. But in some fields or on some questions, we don't have all the answers—yet. We see a hedging admission that knowledge does have its gray areas, and authorities *may* not be infallible. But the reaction to this realization may be rather antiestablishment. Values? Ideology? Why have any? Just do what seems right at the time. "Go with the flow." In response to a low grade on an essay exam, a student may contend that since there is no one right answer, all we have is opinion, and one opinion is just as good as another. This form of epistemological nihilism is particularly common among sophomores. Liberal educators may realize their greatest potential influence by

developing strategies to overcome the tendency for this belief structure to persist through graduation. A common path out of this position is to attempt to discover and use the "rules of the game" to the students' best advantage. Thus, presentation of a balanced, documented opinion in a paper may become a strategy for managing the gray areas, but one adopted only to satisfy the instructor and get the grade. The irony is that the tools of independent thinking are acquired as the student discovers and seeks to conform to "what the professor wants," as Perry (1970) wryly notes. Regardless of motives, however, the student who can articulate principles for the use of critical thinking processes has already slipped into the next position.

3. *Relativism* (Perry's 4 Relativism Subordinate, 5, and 6): As noted above, and given the right conditions, students will begin to discern patterns or regularities in the way their professors (and others) approach gray areas of knowledge. They may recognize such strategies as analysis of evidence, comparison of interpretations, or designing experiments. At first this recognition may come in a limited area of study, but at some point a flip-flop occurs and the student comes to view the gray areas as the rule rather than the exception. Procedures for negotiating within uncertainty begin to be articulated by the student (e.g., "I try to present a balanced view, look at the evidence on both [or all] sides, and then come to a conclusion that seems most reasonable"). The context within which facts are viewed is recognized as having a bearing on how those facts will be interpreted. Authorities are now recognized as fellow seekers of understanding, different primarily in that they are experienced at making sense of the profusion of knowledge in their fields. During this period, students may feel that belief systems are difficult to think about because so many good arguments exist for any one approach, "no matter how you look at it."

Toward the end of this period (Position 6), they begin to experience the necessity of choosing despite the difficulties involved. They also realize at some point during this period that this state of affairs is relevant to their own life choices, a disconcerting discovery for many.

4. *Commitment in Relativism* (Positions 7, 8, and 9). Skilled in rational (formal operational) processes and drawing upon the accumulated learning and experience of the college years, the student can commit herself to the opinions, ideologies, values, and interests with which she will identify. Recognition of the fallibility of her choices, acceptance of responsibility for their consequences, and willingness to accept others' right to their own choices characterize the Commitments of the Relativist. There is full recognition that choices restrict one from some choices and open the way to others. There may be sadness accompanying specific decisions as well as positive feelings and apprehension about the future. Commitments may not be made all of a sudden, though a gradual realization that a particular direction is being taken may occur. A student may reaffirm or reject old



beliefs; either way, the decision is based on a *conscious* consideration of alternatives as opposed to the blind acceptance of the Dualist.

Throughout these four periods we again see the trends that recur in developmental models: from concrete and simplistic to abstract and complex thought processes, from absolute to relativistic belief systems, and from external to internal control, as the student increasingly reflects upon and takes responsibility for actions, choices, and the selection/formulation of a world view.

What characteristics of college environments contribute to the changes documented by Perry and others? Perry (1970) suggests that student growth is enhanced when we create the sense of being participants in a "community of scholars." In such a community, students observe and engage with faculty in a variety of contexts, all of which encourage critical analysis, empathetic discussion, and reflection on ideas, information, and choices. Many independent colleges provide ideal environments in this respect, and there is considerable evidence that students who participate in this type of community do progress more rapidly, on a variety of measures of maturity, than do students who do not become thus engaged. . . .

Disequilibration is also relevant to the question of transition mechanisms in Perry's model, particularly for students in Dualistic or Multiplicity positions (1 through 4 Multiplicity Correlative). An optimum amount of disequilibrium is generally considered to be induced by stretching the student to consider ideas approximately one position beyond his own. This is termed the "+1 principle" by developmental psychologists. Applying this concept, we hypothesize that for development to occur, Dualists must be helped to discover that authorities disagree and that often there is no single right answer, while students in Multiplicity must discover that although there are not always right answers, authorities do have methods useful in studying and comparing ideas. Relativists can benefit from observing that although commitments are difficult, people do make them and authority figures persist in making judgments and defending them even while tolerating—even welcoming discussion of—the views of those who disagree. They can even remain friends through their disagreements—sometimes! And they can give you an "A" on a well-reasoned paper even if it presents a view completely contradictory to their own.

Creating disequilibrium about such fundamental assumptions requires the counterbalancing influence of supports appropriate to the concerns likely to be salient at each position. This may be especially true for some Dualists who may reject or deny the possibility that truths long held are not absolute, or whose concrete way of thinking may be too limited to handle the complex differentiation of ideas demanded by many college courses. In the later periods, relativism and beyond, disequilibrium may be less important than guidance,

encouragement, objectivity, and support for those facing major life decisions such as choice of a major, or whether to get married, move away from home, or even transfer to another college.

Although Perry's initial study and validating sample drew from a rather restricted population (Harvard males, traditional-aged, during the late 1950s and the 1960s), subsequent research has provided evidence of the relevance of the sequence in other settings. For instance, the sequence and cohesiveness of the positions were experimentally validated using a sample of sophomores and seniors at a large state university (Kurfiss 1975, 1977). Clinchy and Zimmerman (1981) have found the scheme provides a useful framework for studies of women's development in a women's college, although they note some differences from men's experiences.

Progress in other settings may not be as rapid as it was in the Harvard sample, but the assumptions and behavior of students have changed little over the intervening years. Many researchers find modal positions of freshmen at around Position 3, the pivot point from Dualism to Multiplicity; seniors may be Relativists yet not have a strong sense of commitment.

Piaget's Stages of Moral Judgment

Children age 10 and younger

- Rules as fixed and absolute
- Rules handed down by absolute authority
- Moral choices based on consequences or amount of damage

Children older than age 10

- Rules as flexible or negotiable
- Rules as aids to cooperation among humans
- Moral choices based on motives or intentions of the action

KOHLBERG'S STAGES OF MORAL DEVELOPMENT

Preconventional—*Avoid punishment and gain reward*

- Stage 1: Follow rules to avoid punishment
- Stage 2: Follow rules to earn reward from other

Conventional—*Conform to social rules*

- Stage 3: Please other people and conform to rules
- Stage 4: Follow rules to maintain social order

Postconventional—*Follow higher principles of conscience*

- Stage 5: Reevaluate rules and negotiate social contract as necessary
- Stage 6: Follow individual conscience and universal principles even if risk is involved

Carol Gilligan on Moral Development

- Level 1: Individual Survival
- Transition—shift from selfishness to responsibility
- Level 2: Goodness as Self-Sacrifice
- Transition—shift from goodness to truth
- Level 3: Interdependence and Concern for Others

INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENT (PERRY, 1970)

DUALISM—Issues seen as either right or wrong, black or white; no gray areas. Authorities know the answer; right answers exist absolutely.

MULTIPLICITY—Issues seen as diverse and answers as uncertain. All opinions are equally valid; everyone has a right to their own opinion.

RELATIVISM—Issues and knowledge seen as complex and contextual. Answers require support based on critical reasoning before drawing conclusions. Distinction seen between opinions and supported opinions.

COMMITMENT IN RELATIVISM—Despite contextual complexity of knowledge, individual makes commitment to one position among alternatives based on values and personal criteria. Remains open to change in the future.

CHARACTER

The moral structure or essence of a person

—The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language (*1969*)

The sum total of one's habits, i.e., personal virtues and vices or one's customary behavior or habits

—Character is Destiny (*1998*)

"Character is what you are in the dark."

—*Dwight Lyman Moody* (*1837-1899*)

VIRTUE

"A reliable inner disposition to respond to situations in a morally good way"

—*Tom Lickona (1991)*
Educating for Character:
How Our Schools Can Teach Respect

"Ethical excellence comes about as a result of habit" [virtue or good ethical habits ingrained in our character]

—*Aristotle*
The Nichomachean Ethics

HABIT

"A constant, often unconscious inclination to perform some act, acquired through its frequent repetition"

—The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language (*1969*)

Self-Observation and Personal Ethical Standards

For a period of *five days* observe yourself *as if* you were another person documenting your emotions, thoughts, and behaviors. Specifically note and document in a journal or log each time you are faced with a choice of doing what you think is "the right thing" in a particular situation, e.g., in the classroom, with peers, at work, when you are alone, etc. You may or may not be tempted to do anything other than the "right thing"; however, note whatever impulses you do observe in yourself. You will need to set up a chart or table to help you record your responses.

In doing this assignment you will need to learn how to momentarily detach yourself from the situation at hand and observe yourself as objectively as possible. At first this detachment will feel awkward and unnatural, but it will get easier as you practice.

At the end of the five-day period, write a two- to three-page typed essay analyzing the *pattern of your choices, thoughts, and emotions* and exploring ways in which your choices are triggered or influenced by the environment, other people, your conscience and inner beliefs, and your emotions. Answer the following questions in your analysis paper:

1. Were you generally satisfied or dissatisfied with your choices? Why or why not?
2. What about the situations tempted you to choose other than what you believed was the right thing to do?
3. What about the situations helped you to make the "right" choice?
4. What were the consequences for you and others when you made the "right" choice or when you made other than the "right" choice?
5. Were you ever able to stop and do something different to override your automatic or habitual responses to these situations? In other words, could you become conscious of the different impulses within you and influence their expression?
6. What moral values were reflected in your behaviors? What were your actions "saying" about your values?
7. What moral values were not reflected in your behaviors? What was missing?
8. By which moral values do you choose consciously to live your life?

Submit your log of observations and the two- to three-page typed analysis of your patterns of moral behavior on _____.

SUPPLEMENTAL ACTIVITIES

ROOTS OF MORAL DEVELOPMENT (LARGE-GROUP EXERCISE)

Moral development is a lifelong process that begins in infancy within family systems and continues throughout childhood, adolescence, and into adulthood. To help participants grasp the significance of the roots of their own moral development, ask them to trace these roots by thinking back to those people and events that helped them first learn right from wrong and to make conscious ethical choices. Use the format below and ask them to briefly record their thoughts.

Directions: Think in terms of who taught you, at what point in your life, in what setting, and what you learned about being an ethical person.

WHO	WHEN	WHERE	WHAT I LEARNED

EVOLUTIONARY PSYCHOLOGY AND ETHICS DEBATE (HANDOUT)

To what extent ethical behavior in humans is a function of biological, genetic, and evolutionary adaptations for survival versus a function of rational and learned responses has been debated. Divide the class into two groups, one to defend the sociobiological position that human beings have evolved into moral agents and cooperative relationships (altruism) with kin and non-kin who are likely to reciprocate as a way to survive, and the other to defend the philosophical position that human beings learn to become moral agents through reason and rational control over instincts and emotions.

Suggested readings:

- Arnhart, L. (1998). *Darwinian Natural Rights.* New York: SUNY Press.
- Matteo, A. (1996). In Defense of Moral Realism. *Telos,* 106; 64-76.
- Matteo, A. (1999). The Light of Reason. *Science & Spirit,* 10 (2); 14–15, 42.
- Midgley, M. (1994). *The Ethical Primate.* Routledge Press.
- Nitecki, M. & Nitecki, D. (eds.) (1993). *Evolutionary Ethics.* New York: SUNY Press.
- Wilson, E. O. (1998). *Consilience.* Alfred A. Knopf.

*ABC*s of Habit Development Activity

Behavioral science has identified the variables that influence the development of our daily habits. Understanding and applying these concepts to our own habits can allow us to self-manage our previously unconscious behaviors. An excellent resource for learning how to do this is *Self-Directed Behavior: Self-Modification for Personal Adjustment* by D. L. Watson and R. G. Thorpe (8th edition, 2002).

Self-directed analysis begins, Watson and Thorpe say, by identifying what precedes and what follows a specific habitual behavior. Habits (*B*'s) are triggered by antecedents (*A*'s) and reinforced by consequences (*C*'s). An *A* or a *C* can be something happening within the individual (thoughts, self-talk, visualizations, emotions, sensations, beliefs) or something in the external environment (physical setting, other people, sensory input and stimuli). Accurately analyzing the *A*'s and *C*'s of any habit is essential before trying to change a habit. To identify these variables, record the behavior using a simple record-keeping device that you create.

Once the *A*'s and *C*'s are accurately identified, follow these steps to changing the habit: Make a commitment (a signed and witnessed goal), plan a change program, and plan a program for long-term maintenance. Try using this habit-change process on a simple habit for at least six weeks. See if you can notice a difference. Change and modify your plan as necessary to improve results.