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Lawrence Kohlberg between Jean Piaget and George Herbert Mead¹⁾

Kohlberg characterizes himself as standing in the tradition of the "cognitive-developmental" approach. As the main representatives of this approach he sees James Mark Baldwin, John Dewey, George Herbert Mead, and Jean Piaget. Piaget, undoubtedly, is of much greater influence on Kohlberg than Mead. But Mead is important as proponent of the concept of "role taking" or "taking the attitude of the other". For Kohlberg, moral development is dependent on the competencies of logical reasoning and role taking. Role taking, in this sense, is an additional factor of moral development. It is something like a bridge between the logical stages of Piaget and the sphere of the moral stages (see Kohlberg 1976, p. 49).

The problems I would like to feature are the two following ones: First, in the context of Piaget the competence of role taking is more or less an extension of the development of the cognitive function in general, that is, it is not a separate sphere of development and ^{not a} phenomenon that needs separate principles of explanation. Consequently, Kohlberg's reference to the concept of role taking is a step out of the Piagetian context and needs a set of additional theoretical assumptions. This is my second point. My argument is that Kohlberg, leaning on the concept of role taking and therefore being in need of some additional theoretical instruments, is not really taking up the theoretical

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potential of G.H. Mead. Rather than trying to integrate the theories of Piaget and Mead, Kohlberg accentuates their differences. I shall be very short on my first point and ^{then} focus on the second one.

It often has been recognized that the competence of role taking, seen in the context of the Piagetian approach, is merely a function of the over^{all} cognitive development of the child (see Keller 1976; Waller 1978). Feffer, e.g., explains the competence ^{of} role taking with the concepts of decentering (Feffer 1959) and equilibration (Feffer 1970). The child is capable of ^{taking} role ^{inasmuch} as he is transcending his initial state of egocentrism (see Flavell et al. 1968, p. 5). Yet, cognitive development is conceived by Piaget as a self-regulating system that stays in a kind of interaction with its natural environment (see Piaget 1974a). Social interaction and language are treated by Piaget as rather unimportant factors of cognitive development. Development is seen basically as the product of the activities of an "epistemological subject", interacting instrumentally with his physical surroundings. When Kohlberg treats role taking as a second factor of moral development, he clearly transcends the Piagetian approach.

An additional indicator of Kohlberg's transcending Piaget is his idea of cognitive-moral stimulation. Kohlberg says that moral development can be stimulated by confrontation of a child with a moral argumentation one step higher than his own level. But that is impossible in the perspective of Piaget. There is

no possibility to grasp the arguments of anybody who is talking beyond one's own cognitive abilities. Sure, there is introduction of a kind of disequilibrium in such cases, but there is no comprehension of the other person. Again, Kohlberg is referring to theoretical concepts beyond the Piagetian frame.

Now, my second point is exactly this reference to some other theoretical concepts in Kohlberg's theory. It could be supposed that G.H. Mead would be the most potent candidate for such an enlargement of the Piagetian frame. Because Mead has formulated a developmental theory of the role taking skill that is not built on a monadic or monological conception of a single subject interacting with his physical environment. Rather on the contrary, the cognitive competencies evolve as a function of social interaction, strictly speaking of communication. The communication of "gestures" is the basis of the development of language, which in its turn is the condition of role taking.

We are, especially through the use of the vocal gestures, continually arousing in ourselves those responses which we call out in other persons, so that we are taking the attitudes of the other persons into our own conduct. The critical importance of language in the development of human experience lies in this fact that the stimulus is one that can react upon the speaking individual as it reacts upon the other.

(Mead 1972 a, p. 69)

Communication is the fundamental antecedent of the development of cognitive competencies (the "mind") and the individual's self. Mead says, "... the process of thought ... is taking the attitudes of others, talking to other people, and then replying in their language" (1972 b, p. 376). And, further,

As result:

The individual experiences himself as such, not directly, but only indirectly, from the particular standpoints of other individual members of the same social group, or from the generalized standpoint of the social group as a whole to which he belongs. For he enters his own experience as a self or individual, not directly or immediately, not by becoming a subject to himself, but only in so far as he first becomes an object to himself just as other individuals are objects to him or in his experience; and he becomes an object to himself only by taking the attitudes of other individuals toward himself within a social environment or context of experience and behavior in which both he and they are involved.

(Mead 1972 a, p. 138)

Now, what can we find of this social conception of cognition and self in Kohlberg's writings? First, I need to emphasize some general aspects of the approaches of Piaget and Mead respectively. Concerning Mead it is obvious that his argumentation is embedded in a functional context. The doctrine of evolution was very important to him, not only scientifically but also personally (Miller 1973), whereby the focus of his interest was not so much the details of explaining evolution but the idea of seeing life as a totality and a process (Mead 1972 b, p. 166). This process model is transferred by Mead to the social sphere. Human individuals are part of a social process inasmuch as organisms are part of a biological and evolutionary process. Consequently, the "social act" is conceived by Mead as a process of a cooperative exchange by a social group with its surroundings. Language, mind, consciousness, and self are functionally related to this cooperative social process.

On the other hand, Piaget is much more a structuralist, and this certainly is the dominant interpretation of his theory. But, Piaget's argumentation is functional, too. He sees

intelligence as adaptation par excellence (Piaget 1978, p. 130), as he says. The cognitive development is embedded in the biological structure of the organism. It is a "natural" development, whose foundation is "life itself" (Piaget 1974 b, p. 6). He says, "... the origin of (the) logicomathematical structures should be sought in the activities of the subject, that is, in the most general forms of coordinations of his actions, and, finally, in his organic structures themselves" (Piaget 1970, p. 706 - emphasis added). The central category of his theory, namely equilibration, is seen by Piaget as an expression of the biological need to adapt. "... adaptation is equilibration", he says (Piaget 1974 a, p. 207 - emphasis added). Adaptation is reached by processes of self-regulation. Piaget says, "Life is essentially self-regulation" (Piaget 1974 a, p. 27). Equilibration, then, is nothing else than "a sequence of self-regulations" (Piaget 1970, p. 725). The cognitive structures, therefore, are functions of this biological need of the organism to adapt to his environment. Intelligence is the continuation and perfection of these processes of organismic self-regulation on a higher, symbolic level (see Piaget 1976). This biological and functional orientation is the reason why Piaget can claim to have formulated an "embryology of mind" (Piaget 1974 a, p. 14, 1976, p. 26). He sees the development of the cognitive stages by analogy with the development of the stages in embryogenesis. He says, "... the development of cognitive functions is a part of the epigenesis that leads from the first embryological stages to the adult state" (Piaget 1970, p. 729). Certainly, Piaget is structurally

mind~~ed~~, but, he is not a structuralist per se. His approach is something like "structural functionalism" or "functional structuralism".

It is exactly this point, where Kohlberg not only transcends Piaget but modifies him. Kohlberg is cleaning Piaget's theory of all functional moments. Let me give four examples.

First, Kohlberg's methodology is different from Piaget's. Piaget always did his investigations in real life situations; Kohlberg uses hypothetical situations. Piaget usually linked the verbal reports of his subjects to an observation of their behavior. Kohlberg refers only to verbal reports. The differences are of the same nature. Piaget's methodology makes possible the comprehension of the functional aspects of cognitive structures or consciousness, whereas Kohlberg's methodology is tied to the structural aspects of cognition only.

Second, Kohlberg formulates unambiguously an endstate of moral development, whereas Piaget never says with similar vigour that the stage of formal operations is really an absolute endpoint of cognitive development. Stage 6 is conceived by Kohlberg as "an ultimately adequate, universal, and mature conception of morality" (Kohlberg 1971, p. 153). And, "... stage 6 is the most adequate exemplification of the moral ..." (a.a.O., p. 218).

Third, Kohlberg dispels the concept of adaptation which is an important one to Piaget. When Kohlberg characterizes the higher stages of moral development he never speaks of them as

more adaptive, but only as more differentiated and integrated (see e.g. Kohlberg 1971, p. 184, 216, 224). He explicitly says, "Obviously ... moral development cannot be justified as adaptive by standards of survival or of conformity to cultural standards" (Kohlberg & Mayer 1972, p. 484). His favoured examples, namely Socrates, Gandhi, ^{Martin} Luther King, clearly indicate this non-adaptation of the highest stages of moral development.

Fourth, Kohlberg's terminology already demonstrates his standing aloof from any functional orientation. He speaks of "structuralists", the "structural tradition", the "structural approach", the "structural model", the "structural theory" etc. (see e.g. Kohlberg 1968, 1973).

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As ^{we} see, Kohlberg changes Piaget's "structural functionalism" to a pure structuralism. And we can see also why G.H. Mead never appears as a potent candidate for helping to satisfy Kohlberg's theoretical needs. When Kohlberg does clean all functional aspects of Piaget, then Mead's much cruder functionalism must be out of his horizon all the more. But why this inclination to a pure structuralism?

In my opinion, the reason for this structuralistic bias is Kohlberg's concept of a postconventional morality. As just indicated before, a postconventional morality cannot be conceived by a functional theory. There is no possibility of a system, instrumented with adaptive potentials only, getting to a stage where it must be prepared for its own destruction.

Kohlberg is fairly explicit concerning this point. He repeatedly says that the postconventional morality is achieved in a somewhat different ^{manner} than the stages before. He says, "... the sense in which the individual constructs the stage of principled moral reasoning for himself is somewhat different than the sense in which he constructs earlier stages for himself" (Kohlberg 1973, p. 194). Whereas the movement between the earlier stages is a "natural" process, "(t)he movement from conventional to principled morality is one which must be considered as a matter of personal choice and as a choice of a self in a sense not true of earlier moral stages" (a.a.O., p. 199 - emphasis added). Principles are "personally chosen" or "freely chosen by the individual" (Kohlberg 1975, p. 673). Stage 6, especially, is defined as "... the decision of conscience in accord with self-chosen ethical principles ..." (Kohlberg 1971, p. 165 - emphasis omitted).

Kohlberg is next to a concept that he could find as a dominant theme of G.H. Mead's, namely the self. But again, he does not refer to Mead. But he also leaves Piaget. For , the impossibility of conceiving of a postconventional morality in terms of a functional theory means at the same time not being able to use the concept of equilibration as an explanatory category. So, we have a situation where Kohlberg on the one hand is not willing to appeal to Mead, and on the other hand is not able to appeal to Piaget. But what does he do?

He refers to an idea that can be found as a rather ambiguous^u one with Piaget, namely an isomorphism between the cognitive development and an immanent logical relation of the cognitive stages. Usually Piaget differentiates clearly between these two aspects of development. He says, e.g.,

"When we are dealing with a psychological analysis we are always obliged to reconcile two systems: that of awareness and that of behavior or psychophysiology. On the plane of awareness we have to do with implications, while on the behavioral or psychophysiological plane we have to do with causal series. I can say that the reversibility of operations, i.e., of logico-mathematical structures, is the property of the structures on the plane of implication, but in order to understand how genesis leads to these structures we must have recourse to causal language. It is here that the concept of equilibration as I have defined it enters in as a system of progressive compensations. When the compensations are achieved, i.e., when equilibrium is attained, the structure is constituted in its reversible state" (Piaget, quoted in Furth 1969, p. 172).

The concept of equilibration is an explanatory construct on the behavioral "plane", and the logical relations are systems of implications on the "plane" of awareness. Now, what is Kohlberg^{doing} v^d with this Piagetian notion?

He takes up the idea of a logical description of developmental stages and their sequence. But, then, he makes a rather dubious inference. He says, "This (logical order within a stage and between stages) provides an explanation for the fact that movement in moral thought is usually irreversibly forward in

direction, an explanation which does not require the assumption that moral progression is wired into the nervous system or is directly caused by physical natural forces. It also helps explain why the step-by-step sequence of stages is invariant" (Kohlberg 1971, p. 186 f. - emphasis added). What Kohlberg does is to treat the idea of a logical order of development as an explanatory concept. And this, in my opinion, is Kohlberg's only explicitly formulated "solution" of the problem of finding an explanation for the possibility of reaching a postconventional level of moral reasoning. Kohlberg is not willing to refer to Mead and he is not able to refer to Piaget's original approach. So he takes up the Piagetian notion of an isomorphism between development and logic, and provides this logic with an explanatory power.

Accordingly, we have an answer to our question why Kohlberg is so eager to reduce Piaget to a structuralist per se. A logical "explanation" of development means a purely structuralist argumentation, cleaned of any functional contamination. When it can be shown that Piaget himself was a structuralist then the program of a logical developmental theory would have a much better foundation than without this Piagetian support.

But I neither believe that it is possible to reduce Piaget to structuralism per se, nor that there is a sound scientific basis for thinking of a logical order of any phenomenon as an explanatory construct. In my opinion it would be much better to try to really integrate the approaches of Piaget and Mead,

and to look for a self-theory (see Herzog 1982). A human being with a "real" and integrated self would have at his disposal the "inner force" to really take the step from conventional to postconventional morality. This also would mean a psychological explanation of moral development, and not the rather mysterious logical interpretation which Kohlberg seems to favour.

To sum up my argument, let me say that I am not criticizing Kohlberg's stage scheme as such. I agree with the philosophical side of his theory, but I have problems with its psychological side. Again, not necessarily with the whole range of the scheme, but with the last two stages. I cannot see what is Kohlberg's psychological explanation for reaching the postconventional level of morality. Kohlberg does not lean on Piaget, because it is impossible to explain postconventional morality in the frame of an equilibration model. Nor does he lean on Mead's self theory. So, it seems to me that there is lacking - at least on the post-conventional level - the psychological side of the isomorphism between ethics and moral development.

My argument is similar in a certain respect to the critical part of two papers by John Gibbs (see Gibbs 1977, 1979), who modifies Kohlberg's scheme to a two-phase model. Accordingly, stages 1 to 4 are said to be "naturalistic" ones, framed in a Piagetian model, whereas stages 5 and 6 are "existential" ones, transcending the Piagetian frame. I do not agree with Gibbs insofar as his reconstruction leads to an eclecticism, a mere addition of a natural developmental phase and an "existential" one. In my opinion we should go in the direction suggested by Augusto Blasi (see his paper presented at this conference), that is, looking for a theory in which the moral sphere is integrated in the self-structure of the individual. The blueprint of such a theory could be found in the writings of G.H. Mead.

Neither can I defend here this proposal (but see Herzog 1982 b) nor do I have any data to sustain such an approach. But at least there is some evidence from the psychoanalytical field, especially from the theory of narcissism. There it is shown that a disturbed self means not being able to go ahead in the moral development. A narcissistic disturbed personality usually functions on a stage 3 level, a morality embedded in a crude exchange ethics.

But the aim of my paper was not to solve problems, but to point to one of them. So, I stop here.

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