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## PERSONALITY CHARACTERISTICS AND MORAL JUDGEMENT

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**Abstract.** *The cognitive-developmental approach to morality represents a wider theoretical framework of this research. The study had as its objective to determine the relative contribution of some personality characteristics to moral judgement at different developmental levels. More precisely, moral judgement is connected with an individual's intellectual abilities, empathy and Eysenck's basic dimensions of personality. Moral judgement was examined by Rest's Defining Issues Test that consists of six stories, similar to Kohlberg's moral dilemmas. The usual psychometric means were used for intelligence assessment. The Emotional Empathy Scale (Mehrabian and Epstein, 1972) and Eysenck's EPQ were also used. The research sample consisted of 506 pupils, aged 16-17. Factor analysis and canonical correlation analysis were applied to the gathered data. The results confirmed that there is a relation between moral judgement and cognitive abilities, especially on the postconventional level. Some noncognitive properties of personality (empathy, extroversion, neuroticism) are of some importance for the conventional forms of moral thinking. The findings suggest that moral judgement is not in its nature an exclusively cognitive process which can be thoroughly explained by the Ethics of justice principles. In short, moral judgement is the act of a Person as a whole. Moral person cannot be reduced to a moral thinker and Homo Justitiae. All in all, the results show that a cognitivistic approach cannot offer a complete explanation of the moral judgement processes.*

**Keywords:** *psychology of morality; cognitive-developmental approach; moral judgement; personality characteristics; Ethics of justice*

### 1. THEORETICAL CONTEXT

The cognitive-developmental approach to morality and the theory originated by

Lawrence Kohlberg represents a wider theoretical framework of this research. Kohlberg's theory presupposes certain stages of moral development, or more precisely, moral development occurs through an invariant upward-moving sequence of hierarchical stages. Kohlberg pointed out three levels and six stages in the moral development process: I Preconventional level: Stage 1 - Heteronomous morality, punishment and obedience orientation, Stage 2 - Individualism, instrumental purpose and exchange; II Conventional level: Stage 3 - Mutual interpersonal expectations and conformity, "good boy - nice girl" orientation, Stage 4 - Social system and conscience, "law and order" orientation; III Postconventional, autonomous, or principled level: Stage 5 - Social contract and welfare, individual rights, Stage 6 - Universal ethical principles. These stages can be found in all cultures (the assumption of cultural universality) although there are some differences as to their progression speed and culminating point in development (Kohlberg, 1976).

The basic form of morality, from the cognitivistic standpoint, is moral thinking (this means that the emotional and behavioral aspects of morality were disregarded by the cognitivists). One of the fundamental theoretical assumptions is that of parallelism between the cognitive and the moral domain. That means that cognitive and moral development are closely related. However, though cognitive development is necessary, it is not a sufficient condition for the development of morality. Moral thinking is best studied on the basis of moral judgement analysis of hypothetical situations which offer a moral dilemma. The study of this problem has to consider the analysis of moral thinking from the aspect of formal-procedural justice. The concept of justice refers to the system of rules pertaining to interpersonal relations within a community; more precisely, it refers to the ways in which interpersonal relations are regulated. The concept of justice has developed in each of the previously mentioned stadiums of development, becoming differentiated, integrated and universal forms. To put it more simply, the concept of justice differs in each stadium of development and enables a more adequate regulation of interpersonal relations from the aspect of equality and reciprocity (more concerning this theory in Kohlberg, 1986).

The cognitivistic viewpoint has been the most influential theoretical conception in the psychology of morality since the sixties and has continued to be so up to the present date. In spite of its advantages and contribution to the study of morality, the cognitivistic approach is a typical example of the so-called *error of splitting* in the field of morality (Popović, 1992). This term represents a phenomenon which, instead of studying the morality of a person as a whole, focuses its attention only on some of its aspects, while it disregards others or the entity of which they are a part. More precisely, the cognitivistic approach is considered to be a narrowing of the morality domain because all morality is reduced to moral judgement from the aspect of judicial standpoint. Also the equalization of a moral person with that of a moral thinker and Homo Justitiae is regarded as unacceptable in recent literature (more about that in: Miočinović, 1988; Popović i Ristić, 1989; Rich, 1986; Simpson, 1976; Stojiljković, 1995a).

## 2. PROBLEM

It has been mentioned that the cognitivists, in their study of moral reasoning, emphasize it is primarily cognitive in nature. Since we cannot agree with the fact that a

person judges particular acts to be merely correct /moralno ispravan/ only by means of his cognitive abilities, this research has been carried out with the purpose of determining what role some noncognitive personality properties play in moral judgement as well. More precisely, *the basic aim* of our research was *to determine the relative contribution of cognitive and noncognitive personality properties to moral reasoning at different levels of development*. In other words, instead of dealing only with the cognitive side of the person who makes moral judgements - as the cognitivists are doing, we have at the same time included its emotional side and the basic personality dimensions as well (in agreement with the theory of Hans Eysenck). It was our intention to examine in detail a person in a moral dilemma so as to take just a step towards overcoming the error of splitting in the psychology of morality.

The subject of this research can be more easily grasped if it is broken down into the following questions:

*What is the relation* between moral judgement and the following personality characteristics:

- a) intellectual abilities (verbal, spatial and perceptual),
- b) emotional empathy (defined as an affective response to somebody else's emotional experience),
- c) the basic personality dimensions (extroversion, neuroticism and psychoticism, including a tendency towards conformism)?

Are there any *sex differences* regarding the relation between these personality characteristics and moral judgement?

### 3. METHOD

#### *Subjects*

The sample consisted of 506 secondary school pupils (240 males and 266 females), aged 16-17. Eight personality tests and five moral judgement scales were administered to this subject sample.

#### *Instruments*

KOG 3 - (Wolf, Momirović and Džamonja, 1992) - battery for cognitive abilities measurement, composed of three tests: IT-1 (perceptual ability), AL-4 (verbal ability), S-1 (spatial ability)

EPQ - Eysenck's Personality Questionnaire - consisted of four scales: E (extroversion-introversion), N (emotional stability-neuroticism), P (psychoticism) and L (lying and social desirability of responses, indirectly shows a tendency towards conformity)

SEE - Emotional Empathy Scale (Mehrabian and Epstein, 1972) - for the assessment of empathic sensitivity

DIT - Defining Issues Test (Rest, 1986) - for the moral judgement assessment, composed of six stories: Heinz and the Drug, Escaped Prisoner, Newspaper, Doctor's Dilemma, Webster, Student Take-over.

#### *Data analysis*

From the methodological point of view the research problem represents an attempt to

establish the connection between two sets of variables.

*The set of personality variables* was composed of three cognitive (perceptual, verbal and spatial abilities) and five noncognitive varieties (empathy, extroversion, neuroticism, psychoticism and tendency towards conformism). In order to reach greater accuracy the scores on each test were defined as projections of the subjects to the first principal component of standardised and normalised items. The obtained data was analyzed for males and females respectively since some sex differences were expected regarding the research problem.

Considering the fact that Rest's test had not yet been standardized for use in our country, the factor analysis procedure (Principal component analysis, Varimax rotation) was applied to the moral judgement data. Five interpretable factors were extracted from both male and female subject groups. These factors did not confirm Rest's scales on the whole. Nevertheless, items clustering basically reflects the different moral development levels which is in accordance with Kohlberg-Rest's stages (see my paper "The factorial structure of a morality test", 1995b). The mentioned factors, as well as the stages of development they correspond to, are shown in tables 1 and 2. These factors made up *the moral judgement variables set*.

Table 1. Moral judgement factors extracted from Rest's test in males

<i>moral j. factors</i>	<i>stages of m. development</i>
F1 "member of society" perspective and inclination towards the "greatest good for the greatest number" orientation	4+5A
F2 postconventional, autonomous and principled moral reasoning	5A+5B+ 6
F3 mutual interpersonal expectations and conformity, "good boy" orientation	3
F4 strict "law and order" orientation, fixed rules and social duties	4
F5 "law and order" orientation with slight inclination towards the greatest good for the greatest number" orientation	4+5A

Table 2. Moral judgement factors extracted from Rest's test in females

<i>moral j. factors</i>	<i>stages of m. development</i>
F1 strict "law and order" orientation, fixed rules and social duties	4
F2 postconventional, autonomous and principled moral reasoning	5A+5B+ 6
F3 "law and order" orientation and inclination towards the "greatest good for the greatest number" orientation	4+5A
F4 mutual interpersonal expectations and conformity, "nice girl" orientation, some indication of emotionally aroused rebellion	3+A
F5 mutual interpersonal expectations and conformity, putting oneself in another person's shoes	3

The relation between moral judgement and personality variables was determined by means of Hotelling's method of *canonical correlation analysis* (Hotelling, 1936). This method is the most appropriate one when studying the degree of association between the two sets of variables and the way in which they are connected. The canonical correlation analysis yields the maximum possible linear correlation between the two sets of variates.

RESULTS

Two canonical dimensions were extracted from a set of 8 personality variables and also from a set of 5 moral judgement factors in both subject groups. According to the logic of the canonical correlation method these dimensions create two statistically significant canonical pairs. Two coefficients of canonical correlation were statistically significant in males and females respectively (table 3). About 30% of the total variance of personality and moral judgement variables can be attributed to these two canonical pairs.

Table 3. Canonical correlation between variables of personality and moral judgement in males and females\*

canonical root	canonical correlation	determination	significance level
1	0.465	0.463*	0.0001
2	0.288	0.279*	0.0590

According to the findings, two mechanisms were perceived which could account for the relations between the variables of personality and moral judgement in both boys and girls. The first pair of canonical dimensions refers to the relation between the high cognitive abilities and the nonconformistic orientation of adolescents on the one hand and the postconventional stages of moral reasoning on the other hand; while the second pair refers to the relation between the noncognitive characteristics of personality and the conventional stages of moral reasoning. These pairs are schematically presented in table 4 (research results are given in detail in my doctoral dissertation).

Table 4. Scheme of canonical pairs

The first pair of canonical dimensions	
<i>Males</i>	
high cognitive ability	an increase in postconventional/principled reasoning
low conformity	a decrease in conventional reasoning
<i>Females</i>	
high cognitive ability	an increase in postconventional/principled reasoning
low conformity	a decrease in conventional reasoning
The second pair of canonical dimensions	
<i>Males</i>	
extroversion	conventional moral reasoning
emotional empathy	(stages 3 and 4)
<i>Females</i>	
emotional empathy	conventional moral reasoning
emotional stability-neuroticism	(stages 3 and 4)

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Analysis results lead us to make several integrating conclusions regarding the research problem. Generally, the results show that a *connection between personality characteristics and moral reasoning really does exist*, just as we had expected. The

intensity of this connection is not very high, but it is important from the theoretical point of view. Let us look into the results, keeping in mind the previously posed questions.

*Moral judgement is connected with the intellectual abilities* of our subjects. The intensity of that connectedness is not high, which is in accordance with former empirical data, since cognitive development is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for moral development. A high general intelligence is one of the conditions for forming mature moral judgements, and this, on the adolescent level, means the development of postconventional forms. Conventional moral reasoning is common and characteristic in adolescence, while postconventional moral reasoning represents the level which should be reached in future development. At this age level, the qualitative jump is formed by the possibility to separate "the member of society" perspective (stage 4) from the perspective of a rational being, one who critically examines social norms and understands that universal human values are more important than blind loyalty to the social system.

*Emotional empathy* does have some effect on moral reasoning of the conventional level type. This also holds true for some basic dimensions of personality, and that for *extroversion and emotional stability-neuroticism*. This can be explained in the following way. The acceptance of another person's point of view and their interests, as well as the system-defined norms and rules, are essential characteristics of conventional morality. The ability of empathically putting oneself in another person's shoes can help one more easily recognize another's expectations and requirements and accept the "member of society" perspective. This can more easily be achieved by extroverts, who more frequently turn to others and who, therefore, more readily accept society's norms.

Moral judgement - as we have assessed it - is insufficiently explained by the personality variables that have been taken into account. The relation between postconventional morality and intelligence is more fully explained than the relation between conventional morality and empathy and the basic personality dimensions. This shows that the *relative contribution of the cognitive variables is greater than that of the noncognitive traits*. If more representative variables are included, the number and strength of the personality-moral domain relations might possibly be greater (which follows from the logic of the canonical correlation analysis).

The results show that there are *certain specificities in the relations* between the personality variables and moral judgement *in the male and female subjects*. The connection between the cognitive abilities and postconventional morality in both boys and girls was almost identical. For conventional forms of moral reasoning in girls empathy and emotional stability play a major role, while in boys, in addition to empathy, extroversion appears as well (see table 4).

The results of this research are not so impressive in themselves; far more important are their *implications*. Most importantly, the results express *doubt as to the cognitivist model's explicability of morality*, bringing into question some of the suppositions of this approach. Firstly, although a connection between intelligence and moral judgement has been shown, *its intensity is not such as to clearly confirm the thesis of paralelism between the cognitive and the moral domain*. Secondly, even though the relative contribution of empathy and the basic personality dimensions is small, it shows that *moral reasoning is not an exclusively cognitive process in nature*. It then follows that the person who solves a moral dilemma applies not only its rational capacity but also the affective-conative aspect of its personality. Therefore, the *description of a moral person in the future should*

include the stable personality traits (which the cognitivists have neglected to do) in order to overcome the limitations of the cognitivistic explanation.

Everything mentioned so far goes *against the equalization of a moral person with that of a Moral thinker and Homo Justitiae*. Furthermore, the cognitivistic view of "the original moral position" needs to be questioned; it requires the putting on of "the veil of ignorance" and the denial of one's own identity in order to, by applying reason, achieve impartiality of judgement in situations which provoke moral dilemmas. In fact, the denial of one's own identity is impossible and logically contradictory. Thus, it follows that a person who is involved in a moral dilemma behaves as a whole being, meaning that *moral judgement is the result of a person who is "more than a sum of its components"*.

There is some indication that *culture could influence the moral judgement process*. That is concluded from the fact that the factorial structure of Rest's test in our sample does not match Rest's original one. Moral reasoning is really based on justice considerations but it cannot be thoroughly explained by the Ethics of rights and justice principles. *Ethics of rights and justice* could not be the only one explanatory principle of morality. One of the possible complementary criterions is that of the *Ethics of care and responsibility* (more about that in: Gilligan, 1977; Nunner-Winkler, 1984). The performed analysis shows that the cognitivistic approach does *not offer a complete explanation of the moral judgement forming process*, much less that of morality development as a whole.

Finally, we would like to emphasize that the research findings have some important *implications for the theory and practice of moral education*. In short, moral education cannot be based only on a person's rational sphere. The educator has to address both a person's rational and emotional-conative traits; in other words, the person in its entirety. Since it is known that there is a connection between moral judgement and moral behaviour, future research should explore their relations so that some improvement can be made in this field. Such results should bring about a greater efficiency in the work of moral educators. Today, this problem, it must be admitted, is gaining more in significance; thus, there are ample reasons to search for a more complete picture of a moral person.

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## OSOBINE LIČNOSTI I MORALNO RASUĐIVANJE

Snežana Stojiljković

Širi teorijski okvir ovog istraživanja predstavlja kognitivno-razvojni pristup moralnosti. Cilj istraživanja bio je da se utvrdi koliki je relativni doprinos pojedinih osobina ličnosti u moralnom rezonovanju različitog razvojnog nivoa. Preciznije, moralno rasuđivanje dovedeno je u vezu sa intelektualnim sposobnostima, empatijom i Ajzenkovim bazičnim dimenzijama ličnosti. Moralno rasuđivanje ispitano je Restovim testom DIT (Defining Issues Test), koji se sastoji od šest priča nalik na Kolbergove moralne dileme. Inteligencija je merena uobičajenim psihološkim testovima. Takođe su primenjeni Skala emocionalne empatije (Mehrabian and Epstein, 1972) i Ajzenkov upitnik ličnosti EPQ. Uzorak ispitanika činilo je 506 učenika srednjih škola u Nišu, uzrasta 16-17 godina. Za obradu podataka korišćene su metode faktorske analize i kanoničke korelacijske analize. Rezultati istraživanja potvrđuju da postoji povezanost moralnog rasuđivanja i kognitivnih sposobnosti, naročito kad je reč o postkonvencionalnim formama. Nekognitivne osobine ličnosti (empatija, ekstraverzija, neuroticizam) imaju određenu ulogu u moralnom rasuđivanju konvencionalnog nivoa. Nalazi ukazuju da moralno rasuđivanje nije isključivo kognitivne prirode i da se ne može u potpunosti objasniti načelima Etike pravde. Ukratko, moralno suđenje je delo Osobe u celini. Neopravdano je izjednačavanje celokupne moralne osobe sa moralnim misliocem i Homo Justitiae. Sve u svemu, nalazi upućuju na to da kognitivistički pristup ne pruža zadovoljavajuće i potpuno objašnjenje moralnosti.

**Ključne reči:** psihologija morala; kognitivno-razvojni pristup; moralno rasuđivanje; osobine ličnosti; Etika pravde