

**Kohlberg L.** The development of children's orientations toward a moral order. I. Sequence<sup>7</sup> in the development of moral thought. *Vita Humana* 6:11-33, 1963.  
[Department of Psychology, University of Chicago, IL]

The paper includes the foundations of Kohlberg's theory: the empirical isolation of sequential stages in the development of moral thought, the study of the relationship of moral thought to conduct, the application of stage analysis to subcultural and deviant differences, and the isolation of social forces required for the sequential development of moral orientations. [The *SSCI*<sup>®</sup> indicates that this paper has been cited in over 250 publications.]

Peter Scharf  
School of Education  
University of Pennsylvania  
Philadelphia, PA 19104  
and  
Institute for Scientific Information  
3501 Market Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19104

June 4, 1987

As many readers of *Current Contents*<sup>®</sup> already know, Lawrence Kohlberg—a man many psychologists regard as one of the major forces in contemporary developmental and moral psychology—died in January 1987. I am pleased to write this commentary as a tribute from a former student, friend, and collaborator. (Kohlberg provided the introduction to the 1978 book *Readings in Moral Education*,<sup>1</sup> which I edited.)

Kohlberg wrote the paper at the University of Chicago well before he gained "notoriety" and made his impact upon the psychology profession. On one level it is a report of thesis findings that he later developed into his comprehensive (and challenged) theory of moral development (Kohlberg's theory). On another level it presents that raw anatomy of theory that dominated the dialogue on moral socialization over the next two and a half decades. For many researchers trained in the 1960s it was the first article available on the subject—this may be one reason it has been cited so often.

For those with an interest in Kohlberg's work, it is fascinating to see the changes in his theory from 1963 to 1987. Like many great thinkers, Kohlberg was able to accommodate the specifics of his theory to later findings and ideas, without changing the fundamental direction of his core insight. For example, what were later called "stages" in the theory are, in the 1963 paper, referred to as Weberian "types." In addition, in many of the examples used in the pa-

per, moral content is hopelessly confused with structure, something Kohlberg would take over 20 years to correct in his scoring systems.

The rather traditional academic writing style used in the paper is striking for Kohlberg's followers to read. He clearly was attempting to assure the reader of the research's academic respectability and its fit with the mainline of contemporary (1963) Piagetian psychology. Later papers would assume more of a combative and then pedagogic stance toward other academic points of view. Not far from the surface of the essay, however, is an academic passion in which he seeks to convince the reader that his concept of moral socialization is at least as compelling as that of the functionalist sociologists who saw moral socialization as a matter of "collective socialization" rather than "developmental interactionism."

Also of interest to those with knowledge of Kohlberg's work is the anticipation in the 1963 paper of later criticisms and applications of his later work.<sup>2</sup> Of the latter there is, for example, an understanding of the implications of the type theory for an understanding of delinquency (Kohlberg and I, as well as others, spent 10 years applying developmental moral theory to the problem of prison reform<sup>3</sup>) and the importance of social role-taking as a dynamic in social education. (Kohlberg's last efforts were in the creation of school-based just communities in which social role-taking was used as an applied educational intervention technique.)

In psychology, as in the other sciences, first steps<sup>4</sup> are perhaps the most important ones in any scientific adventure. On one level, the paper is a promissory note (delivered upon over the next 25 years) in which the discrepancies with later findings are more fascinating because they revealed in Kohlberg an ability to accommodate his theory to research and clinical findings. On another level, the paper is a manifesto of a new direction in psychology, pioneering an interactive view of socialization and a moral perspective from which psychology is to be conducted. Throughout the paper is evidence of an almost obstinate doggedness that marked Kohlberg's life and that allowed him to relentlessly pursue a single question over a 25-year period.

Ironically, the paper is probably one of the least-read of highly cited articles. (It was published in a then relatively obscure Swiss journal—I spent several days tracking it down in 1967 after hearing Kohlberg speak about it.) I hope that in reviewing it, I have marked a friend and colleague's passing and have stimulated a dialogue on the contributions made by this unusual and brilliant individual to the social sciences and philosophy.

1. Scharf P, ed. *Readings in moral education*. Minneapolis, MN: Winston Press, 1978. 307 p.
2. Kohlberg L. *The philosophy of moral development*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981. Vol. 1. 256 p. (Cited 70 times.)
3. Hickey J & Scharf P. Towards a just correctional system: experiments in implementing democracy in prison. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1980. 202 p.
4. Kohlberg L. Early education: a cognitive-developmental view. *Child Develop*. 39:1013-62, 1968. (Cited 160 times.)