

I. Thinking about problems: Moral reasoning

Famous child psychologists, Piaget and Kohlberg, discovered that the way we think about moral problems develops throughout our lives. As we get older our logic becomes less self-centered and more complex, taking into consideration many factors. Thinking about problems at “higher stages” means that you take long-term consequences seriously, wonder if the actions will impact your character or integrity, respond to your pangs of conscience or feel a duty to care for others coming from deep within. These stages of moral reasoning are sometimes difficult to understand, so let’s take an example and examine the different ways to think about it at the different stages.

Question: Alice has family chores to do on Saturday morning – wash and fold clothes, clean her own room and walk Spot the Scottish Terrier. But this morning, Crystal her best friend is urging her to sneak out and go to the mall since her parents are out looking at new cars. What should Alice do and why?

Stage 1 Reasoning

Alice should stay home and do her chores because her parents could find out that she didn’t obey their rules and punish her. But if they are really busy and she is sure that they wouldn’t even notice, then she could do whatever she wants.

Stage 2 Reasoning

Parents work all day and give her things, like clothes and CDs. Alice should do some work to kind of “pay” for the stuff she has. It’s the least she can do for them.

Stage 3-4 Reasoning

Alice should just do the work. She needs to show appreciation for her parents who work hard to take care of her. She should be grateful to them and get her chores done

before meeting her friend. Besides her conscience would really bother her if she

didn’t and she’ll have to deal with all that guilt when her parents come home and are disappointed. She’ll feel better about herself if she just gets it done quickly. It’s a basic duty. She owes it to them.

Stage 5 Reasoning

If Alice made a promise to her parents then she should keep her word, otherwise people lose trust and more importantly, she loses her own integrity. It’s so important to keep your word and be responsible. Then you become really trustworthy and have a sense of self-respect. I think her friend would understand. The mall will be open all day anyway.

Stage 6 Reasoning

What if everybody just didn’t show up to work one day? Then how would society run its business? The long-term consequences of small, irresponsible actions are devastating, since everybody in a family or society is connected and kind of dependent upon each other. Even the dog needs her to be responsible. Alice should do her chores because this helps the family and society function better.

Discussion/Activities

Which answer most closely represented your way of thinking? Can you see how someone’s way of thinking could impact his or her actions? As you get older, you will see more and more the long-term consequences of your actions and the many ways persons and groups are all connected.

1. Find an example in the newspaper of a crime (stealing, murder, etc.) and write down all the people negatively influenced by this crime. Think of the scope of consequences for:

What are the consequences for the criminal’s family, friends, neighbors?

How does this crime impact the “quality of life” in the community?
In what ways does society pay for the problems of individual members?

2. Find example in the newspaper of someone or some group doing positive things, like volunteering or helping. Why do you think kids or grownups do these kinds of activities?

3. Conscience: Usually people don't like to feel guilt or shame about things they have done. Is guilt a helpful emotion? While sometimes our conscience ‘punishes’ us by giving us pangs of remorse, it also ‘rewards’ us with feelings of self-pride, self-respect and appreciation when we keep our promises or do something for others. Find examples or stories in the newspaper that illustrate one or both functions of conscience in people.

4. Look in the sports section for players who showed good or bad sportsmanship and describe how they might be feeling about themselves.

5. Look for self-help groups that support people in overcoming an addiction to drugs or alcohol, or other personal problem. Why would attendance at a group meeting help people listen to their conscience?

II. How is love like ice cream? **6 qualities of true love**

We experience many different kinds of love: the love you have for your parents, the love you share between your brothers, sisters or friends, the love that your parents have for you, and romantic love. There is also the love we have for animals, especially pets, and nature. To a greater or lesser degree, each of these kinds of love stems from our essential human nature and bodily needs – but especially they reflect the deepest desires of our heart. There are so many things to say about love but one of the most important is involves the moral quality of love. If the “love”

we experience hurts our conscience or our dignity for example, it is not true or sincere. Everybody wants to experience the most generous and beautiful qualities of love. True love is long-lasting, sincere and unselfish. True love is the ideal of ethical love.

It's not always too easy to see the connection between love and goodness! Everybody can agree that parents should love and care for their children. Children depend so much on their parents – it's pretty clear that parents need to be unselfish and keep their love strong for the sake of their children. But how about friendships? When friends betray each other's closely held secrets, for example, each person is deeply hurt and the relationship suffers. We expect our friends to keep their promises. This is an example of the moral or ethical part to the love of close friends.

We can identify at least six essential qualities of true love. While it's hard to describe what ice cream is if you haven't tasted it, you could describe some of its qualities; like, cold, smooth, sweet, etc. If true love is like ice cream, then these are its six qualities that can enhance many different flavors!

1. **True love is for the best interests of others.** It is by nature unselfish; the other's welfare is the primary concern. The “what's in it for me” thoughts are minimal. For example, parents live to benefit their children, doing whatever they can to help their children grow up safely and make the most of their talents.

2. **True love is unconditional.** It does not demand anything in return—there are no “hidden agendas” within this quality of love. The other person's welfare is reward enough. Yet this does not mean blind love that is excessively indulgent; in its trueness there is wisdom about what sort of caring is actually helpful.

3. **True love is serving and sacrificial.** Love has the peculiar property that the more it is

given, the more the giver is filled—and the more joy returns.

4. True love is constant and everlasting. It endures because it is not negated by the whims of feelings, convenience, or circumstance. A good friend stays at his pal's side in good times and bad. Devoted sons and daughters care for their parents when they are old and frail.

5. True love is forgiving. A loving friend is truly forgiving, knowing that no one is perfect! A good friend has compassion even on his enemies knowing that they are people just like him, only as yet unable to overcome their insecurities, ignorance and fears.

6. True love is ethical. Since true love places the benefit of others above the needs of the self, it follows that mastery over the self is a prerequisite for growing our ability to love others. To become capable of true love, a person cultivates self-control and other virtues of good character. This is done through facing many challenges in life.

Discussion/Activities

1. Below are some descriptions of the adventures of three friends, now famous in the recent movie, Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone. Try to identify which quality of true love is involved with the behavior of the characters. Or choose one or more of the character qualities listed below that are associated with each situation. There may be more than one answer so discuss carefully! Good luck!

CARING
THINKING OF LONG-TERM
CONSEQUENCES
BRAVERY
THINKING OF OTHERS FIRST
PUTTING ONESELF AT RISK FOR A GOOD
PURPOSE
PERSEVERANCE
OVERCOMING TEMPTATION

Ron decides to complete the wizard's chess game that will open the way for Harry to find the Sorcerer's stone.

Harry's parents put money in the wizard's bank for their child.

Professor Dumbledore asks Harry not to look into the magic mirror again.

Hermoine distracts Professor Snape from spell casting by lighting his cape on fire.

Harry resists Lord Valdemort's offer to join his quest for power.

Harry challenges Draco Malfoy to return Neville's 'rememberall'.

Using your newspaper

1. Find a story of a hero – someone who showed bravery that helped others by risking his or her own life.

2. Read the obituaries and pick out one or two that describe the person as caring.

3. Do advertisers try to use some qualities of true love to get you interested in their product?

Do they distort images of true love into false ones?

Examine the ads in your newspaper and analyze them using the 6 qualities of true love.

III. Eight degrees of charity

In the twelfth century Maimonides, the greatest Jewish scholar of the middle ages formulated eight 'degrees' of charity. Starting with the lowest, they are:

1. Giving grudgingly.
2. Giving willingly but less than you could.
3. Giving only when you have been asked.
4. Giving before you have been asked.
5. The receiving person knowing who has given but the giving person not knowing who has received.
6. The giving person knowing whom they are giving to but the receiving not knowing who has given.
7. The giving person not knowing whom they are giving to and the receiving person not knowing who has given.

8. Giving in such a way as to make the receiving person independent and never in need of charity again.

When you think about "giving" -- do you think about gifts or physical things? Isn't spending time with someone also giving? How about paying close attention and listening with compassion?

1. What kinds of behaviors or things are easier to give than others?

2. Assess your attitude on Maimonides' scale. Describe what goes through your mind when you give to others.

IV. Which values are the best?

I know that some people say... different civilizations and different ages have had quite different moralities. But this is not true... If anyone will take the trouble to compare the moral teaching of, say, the ancient Egyptians, Babylonians, Hindus, Chinese, Greeks and Romans, what will really strike him will be how very like they are to each other and to our own...

Think what a totally different morality would mean. Think of a country where people were admired for running away in battle, or where a man felt proud of double-crossing all the people who had been kindest to him. You might just as well try to imagine a country where 2 plus 2 equals 5. Men have differed as regards what people you ought to be unselfish to—whether it was only your own family, or your fellow countrymen, or everyone. But they have always agreed that you ought not to put yourself first.

— C. S. Lewis

This comment by British writer C. S. Lewis argues that certain moral values are in fact universal. Yet, it is commonly held that, "Nobody's values are absolute, every morality is relative, so there is no universal standard for right and wrong." Some people claim that

values are just "made up" and have little authority over their lives.

While it is difficult if near impossible to *prove* that values exist as objective fact, in the sense that the sun and the moon actually exist, we can ask ourselves another question: What makes other people *value* a relationship and want to be a lifelong friend?

Is it our financial capability – how much money we can enjoy together?

Is it our good looks – well, handsome is as handsome does but everybody sooner or later gets wrinkles!

Is it our winning personality – what about when a bad mood hits? Will they no longer want to be with us?

How about our talents, social status or prestigious accomplishment?

Most couples that have been married or good friends for a long time find that the most important things that they value in the other person are things like their ability to care, be patient, be trustworthy, respectful, humorous, etc. These things are called values and they are human traits that are found in every culture, so we call them universal.

People everywhere cherish them: East and West, North and South. They are valid today, they were valid in the past, and they will be valid in the future. They apply to the whole person, linking their outside self with their inside self.

Think about a common idea: "Treat others as you would have them treat you." Most people's common sense tells them that this is a reasonable and right way to behave.

This idea is "valuable" because it produces results that are desirable in people. More than likely your friend would never complain that you are too unselfish, considerate or caring!

Likewise, a person has value if other people like her, respect her, and want to be her

companions. Everyone in a company values the diligent, helpful employee. Like a diamond, she is desirable because she embodies valuable qualities. So values should be things we do not just think about or believe in.

Socrates once said, **“Make yourself the kind of person that you want people to think you are.”**

A lived moral value is called a virtue. A virtue is attained when its value is practiced consistently and continually. For example, Mary who has grown up a spoiled child may believe that caring is an important value to believe in, but until she consistently practices it; she is not a person of virtue. Mary must take her belief in caring and put into practice in her unselfish sharing and respect she shows friends.

Discussion/Activities

1. Find a story about someone who has committed a crime. What values did the person violate in his unlawful actions? Was he caring too much about himself over the welfare of others? Was she or he angrily showing disrespect for the law? Think about the impact of criminal behavior on

Family and/or friends

Neighborhood or area where the crime was committed

2. Find an article on the role of the United Nations in an international conflict. What values need to guide the U.N. in helping to resolve a major conflict? First think about why each side is fighting and identify the problem. If you were the U.N. representative, what issues would involve the long-term solution to the problem as well as the short-term solution?

3. Look at the advertising for jewelry in the newspaper. Why do people want to symbolize their love with gold, rubies or diamonds? What qualities do these natural

minerals and gems have that symbolize the kind of love that people desire?

4. Find as many as possible of the following terms (you may add other terms related to values) in the newspaper and write down their meaning or use in the article or advertisement.

Care

Values

Better

Free

Rights

Blame

Responsibility

5. Leadership and universal values: What kinds of qualities do people around the world appreciate and desires their leaders to have? Whether president, prime minister or king, do similar qualities exist in the character of a ‘good leader’?

a. Find an example of good leadership in business, government, community or family and identify the values that guide his/her life.

b. Find an example in the newspaper of bad leadership or a situation where employees, community people or groups are complaining about their leader? Are there common negative qualities of bad leadership?

V. Poor, Better, Best Moral Choices

Is it good to lie to your parents about why you were one hour late coming home from the party after the football game?

Is it okay to lie to your friend that her haircut looks “great” even though you really think it’s a ridiculous style because she looks kind of down and the white lie might boost her spirits?

While the answer to the first question might be easy to surmise but harder to put into practice, the answer to the second question might depend on many factors.

Generally speaking, most everyone would agree that liars aren't good to have for friends and parents get really upset when their children tell lies. Habitually lying (even though the lies might be "innocent") often lowers our resistance to lie on bigger matters. We create the environment in our heart that lying is part of who we are – sometimes before you know it, one lie follows another and part of you is now a chronic liar!

On the other hand, life is complex and it is sometimes difficult to tell what is the worst, better, best thing to do, especially in moral matters. Philosophers can help us out here! There are four widely recognized philosophical 'tests' for determining whether a particular moral choice or value is good, better or best.

When you are unsure of 'which road to take' concerning a moral choice or conflict, ask yourself the following four moral choice questions:

1. Is it a "reversible" choice? If I do something to you how would I feel if it were done to me? Respecting another person's property and not taking what does not belong to one meets this test. Also, would I want to be told a white lie just to spare my feelings? Would this lead me to feel greater appreciation for my friend or would I eventually lose trust in his opinions?
2. Is it a "generalizeable" choice? Would it be good if everyone did it? If everyone in the world felt and acted out of compassion, for instance, then surely this would be a better world.
3. Does it produce good consequences in the long run for the individual and others?
4. Does the choice satisfy my conscience? Is my reasoning ringing true to intuition as well as to reason? Even young children understand values when they cry out for justice in the schoolyard: "He hit me first!"

Instinctively, they know that the provocateur is considered the guiltier party.

Discussion/Activities

Study the following story and decide on the best course of action. Use the above questions to consider whether the choice is poor, better or best!

Tom needed money badly. That's why he was tempted to steal the CD player that was left on the seat near to him in the assembly hall. He could sell it for some quick cash or keep it himself. Nobody was around as the classes had been dismissed ten minutes ago. Tom had to go back to the empty room to look for his backpack. Nobody would suspect that he would steal something! He'd never even thought this way before. Immediately Tom began to feel conflicting emotions and different thoughts ran through his mind, "Go ahead, take it -- you could get at least ten dollars for this! Nobody's going to find out." and "Just bring it to the office -- somebody will miss this by the end of the day."

Which direction should Tom listen to? Are there other options? Discuss and describe the poor, better and best choices for Tom using the questions above.

Using the Newspaper

Find an article in the newspaper where people are making personal moral choices. Using the four moral choice questions as guidelines, decide whether the people have made poor, better or best moral choices. Write a paragraph expressing your opinion of their choice and how they could have improved it.

Find an article in the newspaper where an important decision maker is making a choice that will affect other people or the nation. Can the four moral questions be applied to their decision? In your opinion, did they make a poor, better or best moral choice?