

## **Compare and contrast two theories that account for the child's development of morality.**

Jean Piaget is recognised as the pioneer researcher of moral development in children. His cognitive developmental approach to morality begins with the assumption that the child's mind has its own structure. Piaget also assumed that this structure was unique within each child and proceeded through a precise sequence or order. According to Piaget the early stages focus on what the child can see and hear, whereas the later stages involve the ability to sense in a non-figurative way about possible events that would never occur. Piaget believed that children build their own framework of moral and judgmental constructs centred on their sense of justice.

Piaget began to develop his ideas about moral reasoning by playing marbles with children of different ages. By playing marbles with the children he was mainly concerned about how well the children comprehended the rules of marbles, how important they thought it was to oblige by the rules and so on. This observation however led him to propose the Piaget's theory of moral development. They were classified into three stages.

The first stage he developed was the pre moral stage (0-5 years). It was noticed that in this stage the children have very little understanding of rules or other aspects of morality. By referring to the marbles game Piaget concluded that children between 0-5 years of age would begin to understand the concept of the game and the child would think that it is part of morality hence it's a rule to play the game, the child would think that if he does not play then he would get punished.

The second stage (5-10 years) was called the heteronomous stage that is grounded in respect for parental or adult authority and respect for the rules that authority figures impose. At this stage the children are inflexible in their thinking. Here they think that rules are rules no matter what the situation. Children at this stage think that the rules are made by important people mainly adults or older children and they depend on the adults to determine what is right or wrong for them. Piaget argued that heteronomous reasoning is egocentric. Egocentric is when the child assumes that their feelings are being shared by everyone and that the child does not appreciate the fact that others see the situation in a different perspective therefore it can be said that children at this stage cannot consider more than one persons perspective. Piaget said that the children would believe in "expiatory punishment" and "immanent justice". Expiatory punishment is when the behaviour of the child is proportional to the punishment. Saying this I mean if the child misbehaves severely than the punishment he would receive would be equal to the behaviour. Secondly children in this stage strongly favour notion of fairness. Therefore the child would think every time they misbehave they would get punished. It can be said that heteronomous morality tends to maintain a state of equilibrium that requires no resolution and that would result in a lack of personal growth. Referring to the marbles game Piaget realised that the children would begin to take this game more socially. The children would know the rules but due to the authority figures they would not be able to change the rules of the game.

The third stage (10 years up) of moral development is called autonomous morality. Autonomous morality is developed through peer relationships and cultural influences as the child grows into adolescence. Children begin to think in more flexible manner about moral issues. The children begin to understand that moral rules develop from human relationships and that different individuals would have different standards of morality therefore they realise that it is no longer determined by authority figures. Since they realise this, the children begin to understand that some of moral rules can be broken. For example if “ if a violent man demands to be told where your mother is” then the child would say a lie and this would be acceptable by authority figures.

By comparing the heteronomous stage and the autonomous stage for the behaviour of the child it can be said that there are three major differences that take place between the two stages. Firstly the child now thinks that the wrongness of an action depends far more on his/her intentions than on the consequences of their behaviour. Secondly children believe in the view that the punishment should fit the crime (reciprocal punishment) rather than expiatory punishment. The final stage that Piaget mentioned was that the children have learnt that people do often behave in a bad manner but they manage to avoid the punishment hence they no longer believe in immanent justice. Looking back at the marbles game in this stage Piaget said “that the rules were seen as binding because they allowed children to play with one another in a meaningful and regulated way”. Also Piaget noted that the children tended to become more mature because if they the children themselves wanted to change the rules of the game they could do that as long as everyone playing mutually agrees. They children became more mature because mutual respect for one another and also because there was no authority figure to interfere with their rational rules. Therefore it can be said that this form of morality tends to create states of disequilibrium that are resolved while creating personal growth in a culturally impacted scenario.

The way Piaget came to the above conclusions was mainly by telling the children some short stories and he would ask them for their opinion about them. They would be “the story of the broken cup” or “the story of roll and the ribbon” etc.

However Piaget was not the only one who undertook research in moral development. There were other psychologists as well for example Kohlberg, Gilligan, Freud etc. however I will discuss the theories that Sigmund Freud came up with moral development in children.

Sigmund Freud