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# Lawrence Kohlberg: Pursuing John Dewey's Vision

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The tremendous impact of Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development on North American education is easy to document.<sup>1</sup> Two major projects, one in Canada and one in the United States, illustrate this point. The Mackay Commission Report in 1969 advocated a moral education program for the entire Ontario public school system. This report, "Religious Information and Moral Development: The Report of the Commission on Religious Education in Public Schools of the Province of Ontario," embraced Kohlberg's views on moral development and equated character development (viewed as a primary task of public education) with the ability to reason morally.<sup>2</sup> The Carnegie Mellon Social Studies Curriculum Project (1976) outlined curricular and instructional strategies for adapting Kohlberg theories to the teaching

of social studies.<sup>3</sup> With few exceptions educational psychology texts present uncritically Kohlberg's theory and illustrate how his theory can be applied to moral development and classroom discipline. Kohlberg is more than a passing educational fad.

The Christian community has also felt the impact of Kohlberg's ideas. Church education curricula have adopted Kohlberg's assumptions about moral development and have incorporated his suggestions for moral education. In social studies, religion, and senior level Christian life courses, many Christian schools have used strategies generated by the Carnegie Mellon Social Studies Curriculum Project. Perhaps for the Christian community, the appeal of Kohlberg's model of moral development is that it offers specific strategies to Christians who for the

last two decades have increasingly doubted the effectiveness of their education programs to influence the life style of their students. Several studies and articles have indicated that Christian schools have influenced the attitudes and behavior of their students little more than public schools have.<sup>4</sup> Many Christian educators have felt vulnerable to Kohlberg's attacks on what he has labeled the authoritarian indoctrination in the traditional bag-of-virtues approach to moral education, and have opted for Kohlberg's alternative.

### **Kohlberg's Alternative Theory of Moral Development**

Kohlberg acknowledges that his model of moral development finds its roots in both John Dewey's and Jean Piaget's models of moral development. Dewey described three stages of development: 1) a pre-conventional level in which behavior is motivated by biological need and social rewards and punishment; 2) a conventional level in which one tends to conform, usually uncritically, to the standards of the group, society, or state; and 3) an autonomous level in which one makes individual moral choices based on a rational decision-making process, choices that do not always conform to conventional standards.<sup>5</sup> Piaget focused on the cognitive growth process that leads to the ability to make rational moral choices.

Piaget perceived cognitive growth as a disequilibrium-equilibrium process. Simply stated, Piaget believed that anytime a person confronts something new in the environment, that person experiences disequilibrium and seeks cognitively to reach once again a state of equilibrium. A person re-establishes equilibrium by either assimilating the new experience into his/her present scheme of thinking or accommodates to the new experience by re-ordering that scheme of thinking. Moreover, one progresses through stages of development in his/her ability to assimilate and accommodate new experiences. The stages represent different modes of

thinking, progressing in an invariant sequence from egocentric, sensory-bound "thinking" ("responses" would be more accurate) to the highest level of thinking which would involve all the operations required in formal logic. Piaget assumed that moral development not only parallels cognitive development but is integrally related to cognitive development. Kohlberg built on that assumption.

John Dewey's initial model for moral development and Piaget's refinement of the cognitive process associated with that model were not the only motivation for Kohlberg's pursuing the elaboration of a scientifically based model of moral development. Two other sources of motivation must be noted: 1) John Dewey's vision of education for a democratic society—a vision that has become increasingly frustrated by the divergent belief systems found in a pluralistic society, and 2) the need for an alternative to other prevalent theories of moral development.

John Dewey articulated two basic aims of education:

The aim of education is growth or development, both intellectual and moral. Ethical and psychological principles can aid the school in the greatest of all constructions—the building of a free and powerful character.<sup>6</sup>

Citizens of "free and powerful character" are necessary for the survival of a democracy. In the tradition of Thomas Jefferson and Horace Mann, Dewey believed that public schools must assume the task of producing for society literate and moral citizens. Kohlberg embraces that same tradition when he writes:

In terms of my own theory, we might say that a minimal civic literacy for graduates of our public schools should ideally be the capacity to sign the social contract, represented for

instance by the Constitution and the Declaration, with informed consent. . . and [awareness] of the idea of a social contract establishing government to preserve basic human liberties.<sup>7</sup>

But such moral, civic education must do justice to the divergency found in a pluralistic society. What religious belief system will become the basis for such education? Kohlberg acknowledges the problem:

We are a pluralistic society, not a society with a single shared religion or view of the ultimate. Therefore we cannot or should not teach a single vision of the ultimate, not even the vision of "secular humanism" or the "American Dream." . . . [M]oral and civic education must remain a separate dimension of education clearly distinct from religion.<sup>8</sup>

### **Perhaps Christians have also failed to account for the multi-dimensional character of justice and have inadvertently accepted a definition that allows them to talk about justice in the same impersonal, abstract terms in which Kohlberg speaks.**

With this refreshing awareness of competing religious life-views, Kohlberg, nevertheless, has attempted to create a model of moral development that will still implement Dewey's vision of education that "schools would make citizens who were more just and democratic, and who would then make schools and the society more just in a progressive spiral."<sup>9</sup>

Having embraced Dewey's vision of education, Kohlberg also felt it necessary to challenge other theories of moral development with a more viable model for achieving that vision. Kohlberg finds serious weaknesses in at least four different approaches to moral development: 1) moral indoctrination in universally accepted virtues, 2) Freud's explanation of the formation of conscience, 3) behaviorists' explanations

of the socialization process through conditioning and reinforcement, and 4) values clarification's emphasis on the authentic self-awareness and definition of ethical values. Not only does Kohlberg doubt the effectiveness of the indoctrinative model, but he finds that the definitions usually provided for the "Boy Scout bag of virtues" extremely vague and abstract, often reinforcing the conventional mores of the moment.<sup>10</sup> Both Freud and the behaviorist divorce moral action from rational thought and make morality relative to the results of either unconscious processes or social conditioning.<sup>11</sup> Kohlberg rejects a relativistic position on morality, and for this reason he also has problems with values clarification's premise that there are no right or wrong answers to life's moral dilemmas.<sup>12</sup>

To combat a relativistic position on morality, Kohlberg defines morality in terms of justice. Justice for Kohlberg is simply giving all people their due when conflicts

arise between people. The rational principles for deciding what is justice in a particular conflict or dilemma are derived from Immanuel Kant's "categorical imperative." Two basic principles are involved: 1) treating others with human dignity and not as means to an end, and 2) acting as if one's action would become a universal law of nature, binding all people, including oneself, in similar circumstances. To let such principles determine one's moral decisions requires mature rational judgment. To be able to universalize a situation, to be able to role play conceptually conflicting interests, to be able to consistently synthesize one's analysis into a decision—these are operations involved in formal logic.<sup>13</sup> Morality becomes for Kohlberg moral reasoning, and unless moral reasoning is

behind any action there are no grounds for declaring that action as moral or good.<sup>14</sup> Neither is it automatic that all people are capable of such moral reasoning. According to Piaget many people never reach the cognitive level of formal logic, and so one must account for levels of moral development that fall below the Kantian ideal.

By categorizing the responses of children and adults to a variety of moral dilemmas, Kohlberg has deduced six stages of moral development that parallel Piaget's stages of cognitive development. Like Piaget's stages, Kohlberg's stages form an invariant sequence in which all people progress one stage at a time through a hierarchy of different modes of moral thought. Here is his description of the six stages:

#### I. Preconventional level

At this level, the child is responsive to cultural rules and labels of good and bad, right or wrong, but interprets these labels either in terms of the physical or the hedonistic consequences of action (punishment, reward, exchange of favors) or in terms of the physical power of those who enunciate the rules and labels. The level is divided into the following two stages:

##### Stage 1: The punishment-and-obedience orientation.

The physical consequences of action determine its goodness or badness, regardless of the human meaning or value of these consequences. Avoidance of punishment and unquestioning deference to power are valued in their own right, not in terms of respect for an underlying moral order supported by punishment and authority (the latter being Stage 4).

##### Stage 2: The instrumental-relativist orientation.

Right action consists of that which instrumentally satisfies one's own needs and occasionally the needs of others. Human relations are viewed in terms like those of the marketplace. Elements of fairness, of reciprocity, and of equal sharing are present, but they are always interpreted in a physical, pragmatic way. Reciprocity is a matter of "you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours," not of loyalty, gratitude, or justice.

#### II. Conventional level

At this level, maintaining the expectations of the individual's family, group, or nation is perceived as valuable in its own right, regardless of immediate and obvious consequences. The attitude is not only one of *conformity* to personal expectations and social order, but of loyalty to it, of actively *maintaining*, supporting, and justifying the order, and of identifying with the persons or group involved in it. At this level, there are the following two stages:

##### Stage 3: The interpersonal concordance or "good boy—nice girl" orientation.

Good behavior is that which pleases or helps others and is approved by them. There is much conformity to stereotypical images of what is majority or "natural" behavior. Behavior is frequently judged by intention—"he means well" becomes important for the first time. One earns approval by being "nice."

##### Stage 4: The "law and order" orientation.

There is orientation toward authority, fixed rules, and the maintenance of social order. Right behavior consists of doing one's

duty, showing respect for authority, and maintaining the given social order for its own sake.

### III. Postconventional, autonomous, or principle level

At this level, there is a clear effort to define moral values and principles that have validity and application apart from the authority of the groups or persons holding these principles and apart from the individual's own identification with these groups. This level also has two stages:

**Stage 5: The social-contract, legalistic orientation,** generally with utilitarian overtones. Right action tends to be defined in terms of general individual rights and standards which have been critically examined and agreed upon by the whole society. There is a clear awareness of the relativism of personal values and opinions and a corresponding emphasis upon procedural rules for reaching consensus. Aside from what is constitutionally and democratically agreed upon, the right is a matter of personal "values" and "opinion." The result is an emphasis upon the "legal point of view," but with an emphasis upon the possibility of changing law in terms of rational considerations of social utility (rather than freezing it in terms of Stage 4 "law and order"). Outside the legal realm, free agreement and contract is the binding element of obligation. This is the "official" morality of the American government and constitution.

**Stage 6: The universal-ethical-principle orientation.** Right is defined by the decision of conscience in accord with self-chosen *ethical*

*principles*: appealing to logical comprehensiveness, universality, and consistency. These principles are abstract and ethical (the Golden Rule, the categorical imperative); they are not concrete moral rules like the Ten Commandments. At heart, these are universal principles of *justice*, of the *reciprocity* and *equality* of human rights, and of respect for the dignity of human beings as individual persons.<sup>15</sup>

Because moral reasoning is the key to morality and to producing moral citizens for a democratic society, Kohlberg wants moral education to become process oriented. Educators should be concerned with the form and structure of moral reasoning, not the content. Their goal should be to facilitate students in their progress through the stages of moral development. Kohlberg concluded from his research that most people are capable of understanding the structure of moral reasoning one step above the stage at which they are currently operating. Using Piaget's dis-equilibrium-equilibrium model of cognitive development, Kohlberg suggests that educators expose students to moral dilemmas that pose problems and contradictions to their current moral structure. The disequilibrium produced by these dilemmas should lead to a dissatisfaction with their present mode of moral reasoning and result in a need for accommodation to the next higher step of moral development. By suggesting appropriate alternative ways of thinking about the dilemma and subtly implying the "notion that some judgments are more adequate than others,"<sup>16</sup> the educator makes such accommodation quite likely.

Kohlberg stresses the importance of maintaining an atmosphere of open Socratic dialogue for the discussion of moral dilemmas. There should be a free exchange of ideas and moral views; conflicting views should be handled in a non-judgmental, open manner. Influenced again by Dewey's thinking, Kohlberg argues that a school

which is structured on democratic principles provides the best educational environment for moral growth. What better way exists for exposing students to moral dilemmas, than to involve them through a democratic process in making decisions on the moral dilemmas that occur in a school setting. Kohlberg is convinced that if educators would promote moral reasoning as a prerequisite to democratically student-made decisions, "higher-stage thinking by students would win out. . . , avoiding the disasters of mob rule."<sup>77</sup>

While Kohlberg's emphasis on educational programs has focused on the secondary level where students are often capable of the higher levels of moral reasoning, many elementary educators have applied Kohlberg's theory to classroom management and discipline. Determining the moral stage at which each student is operating becomes the key to good discipline. For example, if stage one students persist in always cutting in front of others in the lunch line, the teacher would deter such inappropriate behavior by threatening to make the students eat lunch *after* the rest of the class has finished theirs. But the teacher would also suggest that if they didn't cut in line in front of others the other students might start treating them differently and include them in their lunch-hour playground activities (suggesting a stage two alternative for appropriate behavior). If stage three students in grade six persist in interrupting other classmates during class discussion, the teacher might remind those students that to be accepted by their fellow students and viewed as sixth graders (not as little primary kids) they must try to refrain from interrupting others. The teacher would also remind those students that one of the rules that were spelled out by the teacher the first day of school was that students never interrupt each other or the teacher and that they have an obligation to obey that rule (suggesting a stage four alternative for appropriate behavior). Such strategies have been popularized in educational workshops across the continent.

## Criticism in the Public Market Place

Criticism of Kohlberg's theory of moral development and plan for moral education has ranged from technical critiques of his research methodology, to challenges of his psychological and philosophical presuppositions, to pragmatic and ethical concerns for pedagogical goals, to charges of cultural bias and sexism. Anne Conroy and John Burton have noted that Kohlberg's research has involved the use of three different scoring instruments; yet the reported results are often combined as if one instrument were used. They also discovered in their review of research done under Kohlberg that the same moral dilemmas were not always used with each participant and that training for interviewers was minimal and of questionable effectiveness. Often no prescribed language has been demanded of interviewers, raising serious questions as to the validity of such research.<sup>16</sup>

Critics have also focused on Kohlberg's psychological and philosophical assumptions. Richard Peters faults Kohlberg for his uncritical acceptance of Piaget, charging that Kohlberg, like Piaget, neglects that affective side of moral development and ignores such concepts as guilt, concern for others, and remorse.<sup>19</sup> Edmund Sullivan further notes that such a psychological bias also neglects the role of the imagination in moral development.<sup>20</sup> Most criticism of Kohlberg's philosophical position has centered on what has been labeled a thought-action dichotomy. By equating morality with moral reasoning, Kohlberg has reduced morality and justice to a disinterested abstract principle.<sup>21</sup> Edmund Sullivan traced Kohlberg's belief in the merits of such a view back to the liberal conceptions of natural law that gave birth to the French Revolution and eventually were refined by Kant. He writes: "Kohlberg demonstrates . . . the unreflective secularism of the enlightenment. He shares with Piaget an unreflective myth of 'liberal progress.'"<sup>22</sup> Sullivan argues that such a liberal ideology, while it theoretically

advocates human freedom and autonomy, in practice becomes a rationalization for exploitation, and notes that embarrassingly Communism has made this same case in its criticism of liberal democracy.<sup>23</sup> One senses the validity of Sullivan's point when Kohlberg declares his faith in two "scientifically grounded" processes: "the process of development and the process of democracy."<sup>24</sup>

Don Locke also questions the assumption that improving moral reasoning will automatically improve moral action. Playing the cynic, he argues the opposite:

. . . that the more sophisticated our moral thinking, the more sophisticated it is liable to be; that given man's enormous capacity for hypocrisy, self-deception and special pleading, the more adept he will be at finding some way of avoiding those claims and duties which happen not to suit him.<sup>25</sup>

Conroy and Burton provide us with a chilling reminder of Locke's point. They quote two separate remarks made by Adolf H. Eichman:

I tried to live by the categorical-imperative principle but of course I admit that man is not perfect and does not always fulfill his intentions. . . .

Whether they were bank directors or mental cases, the people who were loaded on these trains meant nothing to me.<sup>26</sup>

Even if one accepts Kohlberg's theory of moral development, questions from critics concerning his plan for moral education still remain unanswered. Kohlberg speculates that only 10 percent of the population reaches postconventional moral reasoning (stages 5 and 6). One has to ask how much higher is the percentage of teachers who

operate on the postconventional level. Even if the percentage is significantly higher, how are those teachers who are still performing below stage 5 going to help students reach the ideal that Kohlberg seeks—especially if they are to suggest alternatives one level above the stage at which their students are operating. Furthermore, how could qualified postconventional teachers do justice to the divergency of stages within a class. For which stage would teachers accommodate their teaching in a given classroom situation?<sup>27</sup>

Conroy and Burton also speculate that Kohlberg's plan for moral education will encourage more labeling than morality.<sup>28</sup> Kohlberg himself falls into this trap in labeling political figures. Of Richard Nixon he writes this:

No public or private word or deed of Nixon ever rose above Stage 4, the "law and order" stage. His last comments in the White House were of wonderment that the Republican Congress could turn on him after so many Stage 2 exchanges of favors in getting them elected.<sup>29</sup>

Students might well find Kohlberg's stages of moral development a convenient way of labeling their teachers and parents.

Kohlberg has also not escaped those critics who are sensitive to cultural and sexual biases. Kohlberg has claimed that his cross-cultural research in moral development has discovered that post-conventional morality is markedly lacking in non-Western and primitive cultures. Conroy and Burton argue that such findings reflect a Western cultural bias.<sup>30</sup> Kohlberg not only reveals a Western cultural bias, but becomes vulnerable to charges of sexism by implying that females are less developed in their moral reasoning than males:

While girls are moving from high school or college to motherhood, sizeable proportions of them are



remaining at stage three, while their male mates are dropping Stage 3 in favor of the stages above it. Stage 3 personal concordance morality is a functional morality for housewives and mothers; it is not for businessmen and professionals.<sup>31</sup>

Perhaps this observation accounts for dominance of active male characters in Kohlberg's moral dilemmas.

**He (Kohlberg) wants public schools to produce citizens who will perfect our democratic way of life. Christians must strive to create schools that produce citizens for the Kingdom of God, citizens who will be radical disciples of Christ in word and deed.**

Kohlberg's critics have addressed a wide range of issues in moral development and education. They have not, however, addressed an audience of equally wide range. Much of their writing has been in journals read only by colleagues in higher education and graduate students. Few teachers or undergraduate students in education have been confronted with these criticisms.

#### **Alarm Within the Christian Community**

A number of Christian critics, however, have voiced their concerns about Kohlberg's impact on moral education and their audience has included classroom teachers and church educators.<sup>32</sup> Craig Dykstra in attempting to articulate an alternative for moral education in the church raises three basic criticisms concerning Kohlberg's theory: 1) his reductionistic view of justice, 2) his restrictive view of human beings, and 3) his restrictive model for psychological research.<sup>33</sup>

Dykstra demonstrates from Scripture that questions concerning justice cannot be all reduced to rational claims. Justice is more than the rational articulation of one's motivation to action. We are more than what we think and sometimes like Job we come to know the justice of God experien-

tially. Justice involves a covenantal relationship with God that results in personal and communal piety. Dykstra also questions whether Kohlberg's view of human beings accounts for their development or actions. Our decisions are not always rooted in conscious rational deliberation but are always shaped by our religious vision of the world.<sup>34</sup> We are more complicated than cognitive processors. Dykstra also points out Kohlberg's failure to deal with the

imagination in our ability to grow in our response to the world. Not only does Kohlberg, according to Dykstra, reduce human beings to cognitive processors, but he assumes that human beings can be fully understood by objective scientific analysis. For Kohlberg all of reality, including human beings, is a coherent set of quantifiable data. This view of reality restricts the research that one uses to investigate areas of psychology.<sup>35</sup> For Kohlberg this means that "the best and only adequate way to study . . . moral development. . . is to observe and analyze people's verbally expressed judgments about situations in which people have claims on one another."<sup>36</sup> Dykstra questions the validity of research that assumes people's morality is determined by their responses and justifications for decisions made about hypothetical dilemmas.

Many other issues have been addressed by critics from the Christian community.<sup>37</sup> Most have noted Kohlberg's optimistic view of humanity and the power of education—an optimistic view that fails to account for the reality of sin's permeation of all of creation.<sup>38</sup> Wolterstorff asks, "Do we accommodate ourselves to children's moral misconceptions, assuming that they will eventually emerge from darkness into the

true light of morality?"<sup>39</sup> Others have pointed out Kohlberg's own religious belief in rationalism with its corollary belief in human beings as autonomous rational individuals. They have noted that for Kohlberg obedience implies the acceptance of Stage 4 thinking. Vitz angrily charges that this assumption is nothing more than ideological atheism.<sup>40</sup> And Christians should be angered at Kohlberg's analysis of the response of a boy named Richard to mercy killing. Richard's reply:

I don't know. In one way, it's murder, it's not a right or privilege of man to decide who shall live and who should die. God put life into everybody on earth, and you're taking away something from that person that came directly from God, and you're destroying something that is very sacred; it's in a way part of God and it's almost destroying a part of God when you kill a person. There's something of God in everyone.<sup>41</sup>

And Kohlberg's analysis:

Here Richard clearly displays a Stage 4 concept of life as sacred in terms of its place in a categorical moral or religious order. The value of human life is universal; it is true for all humans. It is still, however, dependent on something else, upon respect for God and God's authority; it is not an autonomous human value. Presumably if God told Richard to murder, as God commanded Abraham to murder Isaac, he would do so.<sup>42</sup>

Christians should indeed be critical of Kohlberg's theory of moral development and wary of educational programs that seek to implement that theory. But are Kohlberg's observations about moral development totally invalid? Is not the behavior of young children often motivated by fear of punishment (Stage 1)? And is not the behavior of

many adults often motivated by their desire to win the approval and acceptance of other adults (Stage 3)? Do Kohlberg's stages of moral development provide insight into how some "Christians" define their view of God? Are there not people who perceive God as a powerful tyrant who dispenses punishment against those who disobey him (Stage 1)? Are there not also people who perceive God as the giver of arbitrary laws that must be blindly obeyed (Stage 4)? And those who perceive God as the source of Platonic reason which enables rational moral decisions (Stage 6)? Perhaps it is necessary to distinguish between what Kohlberg thinks he is describing and what he actually is describing. Dykstra starts to address this question when he postulates that Kohlberg is really describing the development of social reasoning rather than moral reasoning.<sup>43</sup> For Christians, however, to evaluate Kohlberg adequately and to do justice to the educational problems raised by Kohlberg, they must first evaluate their own position on morality and justice and must ascertain the effectiveness of their own educational programs. Only then will Christians be able to use Kohlberg's research and be able to incorporate any valid insights from his work into their own new wineskins.

### Toward Structuring New Wineskins

Christians must never lose sight of the biblical framework of creation, fall, and redemption in exploring any area of God's creation, including the development and growth of children. We must recognize that sin has distorted and broken what God had originally intended for his creation and the role his image bearers were to play in that creation. We must use his inscripturated Word and creation to discover how children were intended to grow to be caretakers of each other and of God's creation. We must be aware that because of sin that growth process has become distorted, but that through Christ's redemption we can begin to restore that growth process to that which

God intended it to be. In this context Kohlberg can help us to understand how sin affects our walk before the Lord and how we often “obey” for the wrong reasons. The response of Christians, however, will lead in a different direction than Kohlberg would indicate. By the grace of God we will try to combat wrong conceptions of obedience in our children, rather than perpetuate such wrong conceptions. Neither will we encourage our children to exchange one wrong conception for another—an exchange that Kohlberg would perceive as an advancement to a higher level of moral development.

Christians must also examine their beliefs about morality, law, and justice. Often our concept of morality assumes a dichotomy between knowing and doing. To be a moral person is to do the right thing after one knows the facts. Therefore our teaching becomes a matter of imparting neutral facts and concepts and then making a moral application. This dichotomy which can be traced back to the influence of Greek philosophy on the early Christian church is contrary to a Biblical understanding of knowing and doing.<sup>44</sup> In the Scriptures knowing and doing are inseparable. True knowledge is responding obediently to our God-given task in creation (Ps. 111:10). Knowledge that isolates facts and concepts from their creational context is just as disobedient as any action. Christians have often been guilty of the same thought-action dichotomy that Kohlberg has been criticized for, and thus Kohlberg’s theory provides a mirror for seeing the consequences of our false dichotomy more clearly.

As much as Kohlberg’s stage 4 demeans submitting to a higher authority and thus offends Christians, we must scrutinize our treatment of God’s law and commandments. Too often we convey to our children that obeying God’s commands is something that is done for its own sake—an obligation that is performed because one loves the Lord or because one fears the consequences of disobedience. The commands themselves become arbitrary and unrelated to creation,

and often children perceive them in a negative context. Who has not heard of the child who feels God does not want kids to have fun on Sunday because he gave the rule that you could not play on that day? God’s laws are not arbitrary rules imposed just to test our love of God or to teach us good discipline. God’s laws show us how to live harmoniously with his creation, with others, and with our Creator. The Ten Commandments informed the Israelites about a way of life in which God’s people could experience the rich blessings of living in his Creation—a way of life they were prevented from living during their Egyptian captivity. The Psalmist who delightfully meditates on God’s law day and night is not contemplating a series of arbitrary rules but is growing in his knowledge of what creation is all about. God’s law provides us with a positive vision of what we can be through the redemptive power of Jesus Christ. Kohlberg is not content with a Stage 4 view of law; neither should Christians be, but for radically different reasons.

Kohlberg’s concept of justice has been criticized for being too narrow in scope and for excluding important dimensions that should be considered in defining justice. Perhaps Christians have also failed to account for the multi-dimensional character of justice and have inadvertently accepted a definition that allows them to talk about justice in the same impersonal, abstract terms in which Kohlberg speaks. The biblical references to the word “justice” are always synonymous with the word “righteousness.”<sup>45</sup> Both words connote a variety of nuances: “legal judgment, correctness of life, a natural sense of right, statutes and commandments, radical salvation, mercy, lovingkindness, clemency, benevolence, that which is due, divine or human rule.”<sup>46</sup> All of these meanings contribute to a description of righteousness and justice in which God’s people in a covenantal relationship with their Creator seek to live according to God’s laws for creation. In a sinful world this means seeking through the redemptive

power of Christ to give evidence of what the new (restored) earth will be all about. It is a commitment to bring healing to a broken world so that we know experientially what it is to "look forward to new heavens and a new earth, the home of justice" (II Peter 3:13, New English Bible).

Many Christians, however, have tended to create sharp distinctions between the meanings of righteousness and justice. They tend to spiritualize and theologize righteousness (a status we have through Christ's atonement) and secularize justice (government's power of the sword to restrain crime and maintain public order). Righteousness is something we embrace and accept with our heart, soul, and mind, and justice is something we elect governments to carry out. Christians have accepted a new kind of dichotomy which closely parallels the faith-action dichotomy previously discussed. Christianity becomes a cerebral process that fails to turn the world upside down with examples of radical Christian discipleship. Our Christian schools perpetuate the same dichotomy and then we become distressed on how little the schools influence the life style of our students. So we look elsewhere for solutions, including to Kohlberg's plan for moral development.

Kohlberg wants to pursue John Dewey's vision for a democratic society. He wants public schools to produce citizens who will perfect our democratic way of life. Christians must strive to create schools that produce citizens for the Kingdom of God, citizens who will be radical disciples of Christ in word and deed. In surveying the results of his research and work in education, Kohlberg writes,

There is very little new in this—or in anything else we are doing. Dewey wanted democratic experimental schools for moral and intellectual development 70 years ago. Perhaps Dewey's time has come.<sup>47</sup>

There is very little new in the educational

challenge that Christians face today. Christ confronted people with the radical call to be his disciples over 2000 years ago. Perhaps the time for Christian schools to implement that call in their instruction of Christian young people has come.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Anne R. Conroy and John K. Burton, "The Trouble with Kohlberg: A Critique," *The Educational Forum*, 45, No. 1 (Nov. 1980), p. 43.

<sup>2</sup>Edmund V. Sullivan, *Moral Learning* (New York: Paulist Press, 1975), p. 8.

<sup>3</sup>For an example of a publication produced by this project see Ronald E. Balbraith and Thomas M. Jones, *Moral Reasoning* (Minneapolis, MN: Greenhaven Press Inc., 1976).

<sup>4</sup>Henry Holstege, "Christian and Public Schools Are Not Significantly Different," *The Christian Educators Journal*, 11, No. 3 (May 1972), p. 8.

<sup>5</sup>Lawrence Kohlberg, "The Cognitive Developmental Approach to Moral Education," *Phi Delta Kappan*, 56, No. 10 (June 1975), p. 670.

<sup>6</sup>John Dewey, "What Psychology Can Do for the Teacher," in *John Dewey on Education: Selected Writings*, ed. Reginald Archambault (New York: Random House, 1964), cited in Kohlberg, "The Cognitive-Developmental Approach to Moral Education," p. 670.

<sup>7</sup>Lawrence Kohlberg, "Moral Education: A Response to Thomas Sobol," *Educational Leadership*, 38 (Oct. 1980), p. 19.

<sup>8</sup>Kohlberg, "Moral Education: A Response to Thomas Sobol," p. 23.

<sup>9</sup>Lawrence Kohlberg, *The Meaning and Measurement of Moral Development* (Worcester, Massachusetts: Clark University Press, 1981), p. 51.

<sup>10</sup>Kohlberg, "The Cognitive-Developmental Approach to Moral Education," p. 673.

<sup>11</sup>Richard H. Hersh, Diana Pritchard Paolitto, and Joseph Reimer, *Promoting Moral Growth* (New York: Longman, 1979), pp. 43-44.

<sup>12</sup>Kohlberg, "The Cognitive-Developmental Approach to Moral Education," p. 673.

<sup>13</sup>Hersh, Paolitto, and Reimer, *Promoting Moral Growth*, p. 80. One should note that in terms of a Kantian ideal, the moral actions of the mentally handicapped and children will always be suspect because they are not cognitively capable of such morality.

<sup>14</sup>Kohlberg, *The Meaning and Measurement of Moral Development*, p. 36.

<sup>15</sup>Lawrence Kohlberg, *The Journal of Philosophy*, October 25, 1973, cited in Kohlberg, "The Cognitive-Developmental Approach to Moral Education," p. 671.

<sup>16</sup>Kohlberg, "The Cognitive-Developmental Approach to Moral Education," p. 674.

<sup>17</sup>Kohlberg, "The Cognitive-Developmental Ap-

proach to Moral Education," p. 67o.

<sup>16</sup>Anne R. Conroy and John K. Burton, "The Trouble with Kohlberg: A Critique," *The Educational Forum*, 45, No. 1 (Nov. 1980), pp. 46-47.

<sup>17</sup>Richard S. Peters, "A Reply to Kohlberg: Why doesn't Lawrence Kohlberg do his homework?" *Phi Delta Kappan*, 56, No. 10 (June, 1975), p. 678.

<sup>18</sup>Edmund V. Sullivan, "A Study of Kohlberg's Structural Theory of Moral Development: A Critique of Liberal Social Science Ideology," *Human Development*, 20 (1977), p. 370.

<sup>19</sup>Sullivan, "A Study of Kohlberg's Structural Theory of Moral Development: A Critique of Liberal Social Science Ideology," p. 360.

<sup>20</sup>Sullivan, "A Study of Kohlberg's Structural Theory of Moral Development: A Critique of Liberal Social Science Ideology," p. 373.

<sup>21</sup>Sullivan, "A Study of Kohlberg's Structural Theory of Moral Development: A Critique of Liberal Social Science Ideology," pp. 360 and 362.

<sup>22</sup>Kohlberg, "Moral Education: A Response to Thomas Sobol," p. 20.

<sup>23</sup>Don Locke, "Cognitive Stages or Developmental Phases? A Critique of Kohlberg's Stage—Structural Theory of Moral Reasoning," *Journal of Moral Education*, No. 3 (May, 79), p. 179.

<sup>24</sup>Conroy and Burton, "The Trouble with Kohlberg: A Critique," p. 52.

<sup>25</sup>Jack R. Fraenkel, *How to Teach About Values: An Analytic Approach* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1977), p. 74.

<sup>26</sup>Conroy and Burton, "The Trouble with Kohlberg: A Critique," p. 50.

<sup>27</sup>Kohlberg, "The Cognitive-Developmental Approach to Moral Education," p. 674.

<sup>28</sup>Conroy and Burton, "The Trouble with Kohlberg: A Critique," p. 48.

<sup>29</sup>Kohlberg, cited in Burton and Conroy, "The Trouble with Kohlberg: A Critique," p. 48.

<sup>30</sup>Not all Christians who have written about Kohlberg have written about him critically. See Robert Craig, "Teaching Justice," *The Christian Educators Journal*, 15, No. 4 (May 1976), pp. 4-5; and Robert Craig, "Lawrence Kohlberg and Moral Development: some Reflections," *Educational Theory*, 24, (Spring 1974).

<sup>31</sup>Craig Dykstra, *Vision and Character: A Christian Educator's Alternative to Kohlberg* (New York: Paulist Press, 1981). One wonders how Kohlberg would explain the action of the soldier who instantly without rational deliberation gives up his life by covering a hand grenade with his body in order to save the lives of his army comrades.

<sup>32</sup>Kohlberg evidently senses in some vague way the validity of the criticism that we are affected by a more ultimate religious vision, for he has written about a Stage 7, "an ontological or religious" stage which integrates the universal principles of justice with "a perspective on life's ultimate meaning." Tragically,

Dykstra notes that Kohlberg's Stage 7 is nothing more than the human self metaphorically projecting such religious meaning out of its own consciousness. Dykstra, pp. 25-26.

<sup>33</sup>For an excellent critique of the impact of empiricism in psychological research see Mary Stewardt Van Leuwen, "The Unfulfilled Apprenticeship of North American Psychology," *Christian Scholar's Review*, 11, No. 4 (1982), pp. 291-315.

<sup>34</sup>Dykstra, p. 8.

<sup>35</sup>See Allen D. Curry, "The Claims of Lawrence Kohlberg: Grand or Grandiose?" *The Christian Educators Journal*, 15, No. 4 (May 1976), pp. 8-11; Harro Van Brummelen, "Moral Education in the Schools," *The Christian Educators Journal*, 21, No. 1 (Oct./Nov. 1981); Paul C. Vitz, "Secular Humanism and Morality," *New Oxford Review*, 48 (July/Aug. 1981); Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Educating For Responsible Action* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980).

<sup>36</sup>It is interesting that Sullivan raises the same problem in his critique of Kohlberg. He describes the problem, however, as an insufficient treatment of "moral blindness," noting that the Apostle Paul calls it sin and Marxists call it "false consciousness." Sullivan, "A Study of Kohlberg's Structural Theory of Moral Development: A Critique of Liberal Social Science Ideology," pp. 371-372.

<sup>37</sup>Wolterstorff, p. 99.

<sup>38</sup>Vitz, p. 16.

<sup>39</sup>Lawrence Kohlberg, "The Child as a Moral Philosopher," in *Readings in Values Clarification*, ed. Sidney B. Simon, and Howard Kirschenbaum) Minneapolis, MN: Winston Press, Inc., 1973), p. 56.

<sup>40</sup>Kohlberg, "The Child as a Moral Philosopher," p. 56.

<sup>41</sup>Dykstra, p. 28.

<sup>42</sup>For a brief but excellent sketch of the historical roots of this dichotomy and the problems it creates for the Christian see John Van Dyk, "The Relation Between Faith and Action: An Introduction," *Pro Rege*, 10, No. 4, (June, 1982).

<sup>43</sup>I am indebted to Rev. Sidney Rooy, missionary to Argentina, for his biblical insights on righteousness and justice. In reading a Spanish version of the Bible he first noted how these two words were used interchangeably. His investigation of passages in the original Hebrew and Greek languages confirmed the accuracy of the Spanish translation. For a powerful and challenging sermon on the biblical meaning of righteousness and justice see Sidney Rooy, "Righteousness and Justice," in *Justice in the International Economic Order*, (Second International Conference of Institutions for Christian Education) (Grand Rapids, MI: Board of Publications of the Christian Reformed Church, 1980).

<sup>44</sup>Rooy, p. 2.

<sup>45</sup>Kohlberg, "The Cognitive-Developmental Approach to Moral Education," p. 677.