

A Critical Assessment of “Social-Cognitive Domain Theory” concerning Moral Development

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Abstract

There are a considerable number of psychological research studies which explore moral phenomena (moral judgment, moral behavior, and so forth). Among the recent theories in this field is the "social-cognitive domain theory". While this theory is developed by some unsympathetic responses to Lawrence Kelberg's views, it is now supported by a wide range of empirical enquiries. In the present paper, reviewing its central claims about moral knowledge and moral development, the ambiguities or drawbacks of the theory are examined and explained based on empirical views and theoretical considerations. The basic claim of this theory is that the three domains of "morality, contract, and personality" are set apart in infancy, and each goes through its own growth path. This theory emphasizes the lived experiences of children for moral development, and it refers to the factors such as interaction with peers, interaction with parents, and interactions between the domains. The process of the child's interaction with the environment (including parents) is seen dialectically. Despite its strengths, this theory suffers from serious disadvantages which include "rational understanding of morality and moral judgment", "inadequacy of criteria for distinguishing between realms", and "insufficient conception of religious norms".

Keywords

Moral development, moral psychology, social-cognitive domain theory, factors of moral development

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