

# Psychological Analysis of Moral Judgment: A Literature Review

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A person's happiness depends on mental health as well as physical health. If an individual's mental health is good, s/he generally tries to come to terms with the environment and establishes normal relations. In other words, the mental health of the individual is very closely related to his/her relations with the environment. Even though people suffer from different levels of problems of adaptation to the social environment in terms of what civilization brings, they nevertheless have to adapt to the environment and regulate their harmony. Moral consciousness and moral behavior develop when the individual and society are in the process of mutual interaction. This process of interaction can be better explained when the characteristics of the parties involved can be set out and distinguished as clearly as possible. The processes of moral thought and consciousness must therefore be examined and defined in order to be able to define and understand moral action, because the moral quality of behavior depends on the ability to make moral judgments. The aim of this research is to examine the concept of moral judgment from a psychological perspective. The findings of the study will be discussed within the scope of the relevant previous literature

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## INTRODUCTION

Morality is the set of beliefs which govern people's relationships among themselves. When we judge our own actions and the actions of others, our moral beliefs have an effect (Öymen, 1975). Haynes (2002) stated that morality is about values. A moral choice is a decision made in the direction of a better alternative; an immoral choice is to decide for the worse alternative. Morality deals with behavior which is the result of a decision about attitudes among and in relation to conscious people. Püsküllüoğlu (2004) defined morality as all of the attitudes and behaviors which a person is born with or acquires later. Hançerlioğlu (1986), on the other hand, defined it as the whole of the rules of individual and social behavior in a certain period of a certain society; it is good-bad and justice-injustice etc. objective reality reflected in a moral, economic and social order. It is a form of social consciousness formed by ethical scientific qualities.

Akarsu (1987) defined morality as "the sum of the rules of moral behavior, laws and principles that regulate the relations of individuals with each other, which have been adopted by certain human communities in a certain period". Alaylioğlu and Oğuzkan (1968) defined it as "the rules of action and behavior that people living in groups have to comply with". Morality was defined in Cevizci's (1999) *Philosophy Dictionary* as "a set of codes of conduct that are generally considered to be absolutely good or originate from a certain understanding of life; the whole of attitudes and behaviors that express a person's good qualities or personality, temperament, the sum of principles or rules which people live by according to themselves.

In the Main Britannica General Culture Encyclopedia (2004), morality is described as the set of rules used to regulate people's behavior in society and their relations with each other, and is the set of criteria used to judge other people's behavior positively or negatively. Mental health can be defined as a person's being at peace with himself and the people around him and the society, and being able to maintain the necessary effort to sustain a constant balance, order and harmony (Köknel, 1989). Sigmund Freud summed up mental health as "loving and working". Mental health is not immutable. When external or internal pressures increase, the balance can be disturbed. The deterioration of mental health affects a person's work, his relationship with the environment, in short, his whole life (Yiğit, 2007). For all these reasons, our ability to adapt to difficult and complex life conditions is only possible with the knowledge of mental health (Yiğit, 2007). A mentally healthy individual is psychologically mature. Individuals must therefore have psychological maturity.

Psychological maturity is the strength to recover from failure or any challenge. Geçtan (2003) pointed out that the level of maturity reached by a person can only be understood by the reactions which s/he shows in the face of difficulties. The ability to recover in the face of difficulties is a criterion of maturity which can be gained through self-confidence. Psychological maturity is not consciously or unconsciously escaping from life's problems, but is being able to evaluate the dimensions of these problems well. This means that the problem encountered should not be underestimated or overestimated. In other words, psychological maturity is not just living with the facts, but also perceiving the facts as they are. There are inevitable obstacles and challenges

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in human life. It might not always be possible to avoid them, and when this happens, one must be able to find new and suitable sources of satisfaction. The core of the democratic personality is the ability of moral judgment. People with developed moral judgment skills also have critical-rational negotiation skills. Instead of immediately opposing and rejecting ideas which do not fit their own ideas, they can listen to them, criticize them, and delay, renew and change their own preliminary thoughts when necessary. Moral judgment ability can be determined in the case of a dilemma in which there are conflicting demands and values, in problems of justice in which the perspective of all demands must be assumed and taken into account, and the most equitable solution will be found from each perspective (Çiftçi, 2003).

Moral judgment is a matter of psychological development. A morally developed individual adapts to the society in which s/he lives in a healthy way. It acts in accordance with the value judgments of the society. It can balance its own interests and needs with the demands of the society. As a result, s/he develops a healthy personality structure (Çağdas & Seçer, 2002:96). Fromm (1993) argued that mental health and happiness depend on moral value judgments, neuroses are symptoms of moral failure, and in many cases a neurotic symptom is a specific expression of a moral conflict. The aim of this research is to examine the concept of moral judgment from a psychological perspective.

## METHOD

This research was designed as a literature-based survey study. After examining the related studies, the acquired information was subjected to descriptive analysis (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2006). In this way, an attempt was made to create a compilation synthesis (Baumeister & Leary, 1997). Review studies are articles which compile information about the subject using different methods and ways (Baştuğ, 2021). In this context, first, a literature review on the subject was carried out. In the second stage, the concept of moral judgment was examined by evaluating, interpreting and synthesizing the findings from the literature.

## CONCLUSION and DISCUSSION

The aim of this research was to examine the concept of moral judgment from a psychological perspective. The findings of the study were discussed within the scope of the relevant previous literature. Keasey (1971) applied Kohlberg's Moral Dilemma Questionnaire to examine the relationship between moral stages and social participation. The social participation variable was also determined by the measure of how many social groups the subjects had belonged to during the previous two years. The findings showed that the subjects with a high amount of social participation reached higher moral stages compared with the others. Haan *et al.* (1976) examined 382 parents and their children aged from 10 to 30 years. The findings showed that familial interaction affected the moral development of children.

Leming (1978), in a study conducted in Madison in the US, found that there is an important relationship between moral judgment and moral thought. The moral judgments of older students were found to be higher than those of younger ones. Turiel *et al.* (1978) found that the acquisition of the stages took place in the order determined in line with Kohlberg's theory. Nisan and Kohlberg (1982) applied Kohlberg's moral dilemma questionnaire to the subjects one-by-one in separate interviews and found that the Turkish villager subjects had a very different traditional culture from that of the subjects who lived in the city. They also found that the moral development of the subjects living in the village was slower than that of those living in the city. Brandon *et al.* (2007) investigated the effect of cognitive moral development on students' ethical decisions and found that those with high moral reasoning made more ethical decisions.

Ambrose *et al.* (2008) investigated the effects of individual moral development and ethical climate on 304 individuals from 73 organizations and found that the ethical values of the organizations affected their employees. They concluded that the ethical values and moral development of employees are important for them to adapt to each other. Ho and Lin (2008) examined the relationship between the cultural values and cognitive moral development of US and Taiwanese accountancy students and found significant differences between the cognitive moral development of the two sets of participants. This shows that cultural values are effective on cognitive moral development.

Karpiak and Baril (2008) investigated the relationship between the moral reasoning and environmental attitudes of 158 university students and found a positive relationship between a pro-environmental attitude and moral reasoning. The findings showed that those with high moral judgment were social-altruistic, had environmental concerns and were sensitive to the environment. Saelen and Markovits (2008) investigated the

relationship between emotion characteristics and moral decisions in 373 adolescents and found that emotional states influenced moral behavior. They concluded that guilt feelings, which are the moral feelings of guilt, compassion, anger and shame, greatly affect moral reasoning. Frimer and Walker (2009) conducted research on self-interest and moral sensitivity and found a significant relationship between an individual's interests and moral concerns. Several suggestions for future research can be made. The moral development stages of individuals with pathological psychological symptoms could be examined. Studies should be conducted in which individuals with low moral judgment skills can improve their moral judgment skills. Individuals can be made aware of whether there is a consistency between their perceived level of moral judgment and their behavior.

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