Resolving Conflicts in Friendship:  
*The Development of Moral Understanding in Everyday Life*

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This chapter deals with the morality of intimate interpersonal relationships. It analyzes the emerging interpersonal-moral understanding of conflict in a friendship. Friendship is seen as a paradigmatic relationship in which we can study the developmental roots of interpersonal morality. Moral development is seen as the development of a “moral orientation.” This “moral orientation” encompasses various aspects including an awareness of the moral aspects of situations, the consequences of the violation of obligations (moral feelings), and the necessity for moral discourse as well as the necessity for justification and restitution in the case of violation of obligations.

These aspects of a moral orientation are analyzed developmentally in children’s practical and moral reasoning about a friendship conflict.(1)

Recent years have witnessed a shift of interest within moral development research in the cognitive-structural tradition from the structure of deontic judgment to the justification of responsible action in social situations. Following Kohlberg (1976), moral development research in the 1970s viewed morality mainly in terms of justice and fairness. More precisely, researchers focused mainly on changing structures of deontic judgments, that is, judgments involving rights and duties (Frankena, 1973). Such judgments of obligations are “absolute”: They define what is right for any person under the conditions of a specified, hypothetical dilemma and are based on the notion of universal moral principles. For Kohlberg, following Rawls (1971), the principle of justice takes precedence over other principles because it represents the highest degree of structural elaboration and, therefore, of assimilatory adequacy.

Recently, however, researchers have begun to focus on moral judgment structures in terms of their relevance to or function in practical moral decisions. This focus has broadened the scope of moral development research in several ways. Blasi (1980, and Chap. 7 in this book) has shown how judgments of responsibility (i.e., the obligations accepted by a moral self in action) mediate between abstract moral judgment and actual moral decision making (see also Chap. 4). Gilligan (1980), deeply concerned with practical moral decision making in highly stressful real-life situations, attempted to base an alternative conception of morality on an ethics of care; for her, the pivotal concepts are concerns and responsibilities rather than rights and obligations (see Chap. 19). As opposed to the public and abstract issues in the dilemmas of traditional moral research, Gilligan’s dilemmas depict highly concrete, particular, and intimate situations in self-other relationships.

These approaches all have in common an attempt to contextualize moral judgment—in various types of social interaction, specific self-other relationships, and differing performance conditions of the self. Within such a framework, types of moral dilemmas that have been neglected in the Kohlberg tradition emerge. Whereas the classical moral dilemma calls for the resolution of a conflict of duties, these dilemmas often depict a situation in which desires conflict with obligations. This is the structure of many morally relevant conflicts of everyday life. Furthermore, these approaches broaden the scope of morality from morality as justice to a morality of the good life (Frankena, 1973) involving principles of supererogation. These dilemmas deal with nonobligatory acts that are oriented toward the welfare of others (Eisenberg, 1982). Such acts go beyond what is required by principles of duty (Rawls, 1971; Richards, 1971). In contrast to a tradition uniquely concerned with deontic judgments, sympathetic concern and altruism are perceived to be morally relevant from this perspective.

**THE MORALITY OF INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS**

The research presented here is related both to Kohlberg’s work and to the other approaches mentioned. It addresses the development of a morality of interpersonal relationships that can, at the same time, be conceptualized as the development of a moral self. By moral self, we refer to the awareness of the moral aspects of interpersonal relationships, a “moral orientation” (Melden, 1977; Richards, 1971) toward others with whom the self is seen to stand in a moral relationship.
Interpersonal conflicts in everyday life relate to morality whenever they involve the evaluation of self’s and others’ behaviors, motives, and feelings with regard to rules and principles about what is right and reasonable in terms of justice or fairness and what is good in terms of ideals of self and relationships. Thus, within interpersonal relationships, ethics deal with how interests and claims “should be pursued and whether they sometimes should not be pursued, remembering always their pursuit in a world of relationships” (Emmet, 1966, p. 53).

The morally relevant expectations that govern people’s interactions arise in self-other relationships and can be seen as products of the developmental transformations of the self-other relationship. Therefore, the cognitive and affective understanding of relationships and the naive theories about what it means (morally) to stand in a relationship (Hamlyn, 1974) are seen to form the basis for the development of an understanding of concepts of obligations and responsibilities in relations. Given the intricate connection between the system of moral rules and the system of interpersonal relationships, it appears plausible to investigate the developmental origins of moral rule systems within particular, intimate, and affectively meaningful relationships. Among these, friendship has a special status.

Blum (1980) characterizes friendship as a special moral relationship of “concern, care, sympathy and the willingness to give oneself to the friend which goes far beyond what is characteristic and expected of people generally. The caring within a friendship is built upon a basis of knowledge, trust and intimacy. … In genuine friendship one comes to have a close identification with the good of the other person” (p. 69).

The developmental literature on friendship convincingly shows that qualities of friendship as described by Blum are a relatively late achievement in development (Damon, 1977; Selman, 1980; Youniss, 1980). An understanding that the self is part of an ongoing relationship that involves deep mutual emotional sharing, caring, and concern for another person appears to be an achievement of early adolescence (Selman, 1980).

Astonishingly enough, friendship has received little attention from a moral perspective. This holds true for moral philosophy as well as for moral development research. Only recently, Youniss (1981) has argued that friendship represents a prototypic relationship in which the development of rules of fairness and of sympathetic concern can be studied. In agreement with Piaget (1932/1962), he sees friendship as a symmetric relationship that, in contrast to parent-child relationships of unilateral constraint, allows for the development of a morality of reciprocity.

The aim of the research presented here is to analyze the normative aspects of interpersonal relationships, using friendship as the specific example. Our approach is indebted to Kohlberg, as our moral dilemma involves justice as fairness. Yet, the concept of justice only partially covers the range of morally relevant aspects of relationships, which is why Gilligan’s work presents a challenge. In addition, our research derives from Selman’s (1980) work on perspective-taking and friendship. We share with Selman the notion of a deep structure of self-other relationships as elaborated in his concept of perspective-taking. The developmental levels of friendship described by Selman (1980) provide a general framework for the analysis of the normative and moral implications of friendship emerging from a situation of conflict between friends. Instead of centering on the descriptive understanding of friendship, however, we focus on the development of moral awareness—the ability to see the moral implications of an interpersonal conflict in a relationship. It is the ability, to paraphrase Thomas (1932), to define a situation as moral and deal with the consequences of such definition.

MORAL DEVELOPMENT AS DEVELOPMENT OF A “MORAL ORIENTATION”

According to Melden (1977) and Richards (1971), moral development can be seen as the formation of a “moral orientation.” It is an orientation

in which we exhibit appropriate sensitivities in thought, feeling and action towards others out of a concern for them as we go about in our affairs in ways that affect their and our own interests. It is this moral concern for others as persons, rather than principles and priority rules, which provides us with a rationale for resolving many or most of the moral conflicts that arise, easily and without hesitation. [Melden, 1977, p. 18]

The development of a “moral orientation” involves both cognitive and affective-motivational aspects. On the cognitive side, it presupposes knowledge of the moral rules and principles that are relevant for social interaction. Reuss (Note 1), referring to Hare (1952), points out the role of imagination in morality. The cognitive component of imagination relates to the anticipation of consequences of one’s morally relevant decisions for self and others. In this sense, imagination is based on social cognitive abilities. It further includes the development of a repertoire of interaction strategies to compensate for consequences resulting from the violation of obligations and responsibilities toward others.

The affective-motivational component of imagination relates to the extent to which anticipated consequences of the self’s actions for others are emotionally meaningful for the self or, more generally, to the extent to which the self is
willing to deal with others’ interests and concerns as if they were his or her own. It also includes a motivation to compensate for the violation of obligations and responsibilities. Thus, as various authors have pointed out, feelings of sympathy and concern for others form an important motivational base for the moral regulation of actions (Blum, 1980; Hoffman, 1977, and Chap. 16 in this book). Similarly, Peters (1979) has argued that morality encompasses broad dimensions of a “moral self,” including motives, emotions, attitudes, and dispositions. Thus, we can see moral awareness or a moral orientation as a response to other persons in which we take the others’ weal and woe into account.

COMPONENTS OF A MORAL ORIENTATION

From a constructivist point of view and, particularly, in the tradition of symbolic interactionism (Mead, 1934), the development of a moral orientation involves a variety of processes: first, the process of defining situations with regard to the moral rules and principles they contain; second, moral feelings, or the awareness of consequences when obligations or responsibilities have been violated; and third, moral discourse, which is the process of negotiating conflicting claims, obligations, expectations, and interests.

1. The moral definition of the situation. In most moral development research the interpretation of the situation in terms of the moral rules and principles involved has been taken for granted. But given that situations of everyday life are ambiguous in principle (Turner, 1962), actors must reconstruct them in terms of their moral and nonmoral meaning (Cooney, 1978; Damon & Gerson, 1978). The implications of such a constructivist approach become even stronger when situations are less idealized and pure than Kohlberg-type dilemmas with regard to the conflicting values and principles involved. The interpretation of the situation involves aspects of social-cognitive, moral, and ego functioning. As Denzin (1980) has pointed out in response to the “over-cognitive conception of man” in symbolic interactionism, the process of defining the situation involves interpretations based on intense feelings as well as on deliberate cognitive interpretations.

2. Awareness of the consequences of violating obligations and responsibilities: moral feelings. The development of a moral attitude also implies certain forms of feelings where others have been treated unfairly or where self has violated other’s rights or failed in responsibility to other persons. Whether such violation results from “competing moral considerations or from factors for which the person may or may not be directly responsible, the person must bear the appropriate moral burden and show an appropriate concern towards the other person” (Melden, 1977, p. 20). This concern involves feelings of remorse and regret. Feelings of shame are related to the failure to live up to one’s self ideal and identity (Richards, 1971; Thrane, 1979). They lead to the blaming of the self and thus stimulate the self to act differently on other occasions. Feelings of guilt can be seen as related to the act of having violated reciprocity principles and thereby having treated others unfairly. Guilt feelings thus become the basis for compensation and moral restitution to those who have been treated unfairly and irresponsibly.

3. The Negotiation of Conflicting Claims: Moral Discourse. The negotiation of conflicts in relationships requires the application of moral rules and principles under the constraints of practical situations. It implies taking into account the psychological particularities of the situation and of the persons dealing with one another in conflicts of interest, goals, expectations, and obligations and considering the moral and practical consequences of self’s and other’s decisions for their ongoing relationships. Thus, the process of weighing priorities in light of possible consequences in the course of practical decision making is an integral part of moral reasoning. Again, both cognition and affect are involved.

The process of moral decision making in which the moral actor hypothetically takes the perspective of others in order to find (morally) adequate solutions to everyday situations involves others with whom the actor can join in a moral discourse in order to find a solution that is acceptable to all parties concerned. The capacity to engage in moral discourse can thus be seen as a significant part of moral development that has only recently emerged as a topic of interest (Gilligan & Murphy, 1979; Youniss, 1981).

Moral discourse involves justifications whenever practical decisions violate obligations. According to Singer (1958), this justification means giving reasons that outweighs obligations. Such justifications can be used in a moral dialogue in which the practical decision is negotiated. But they can also be used as practical explanations following moral transgressions (Döbert & Nunner-Winkler, 1978; Sykes & Matza, 1957). In all cases, justifications can be used as defensive maneuvers whether serving to deny the negative consequences of the act (justification) or to reject personal responsibility (excuses) (Keller, in press).

Moral discourse may also involve action strategies designed to make up for violations and thus to restore the moral relationship between self and other by asking forgiveness or by offering various forms of material or psychological compensation. Selman (1980) has described such forms of compensation as strategies of conflict resolution.
DEVELOPMENT OF A MORAL ORIENTATION IN REASONING ABOUT A FRIENDSHIP CONFLICT: THE EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

The developmental levels of moral orientation presented in the following section have been derived from preliminary analysis of selected cross-sectional and longitudinal data from 140 children between 7 and 13 years old. The scoring of the complete data set according to the system presented here is currently underway.

The conflict situation presented to the child is a slightly modified version of Selman’s (1980) friendship story and involves conflicting interpersonal moral norms as well as hedonistic needs and desires. The hero of the story has promised to see his or her best friend on a given day. The hero, however, is tempted to accept an invitation to a movie coming from a third child. The movie happens to be exactly at the same time as the scheduled visit promised to the friend. The story gives further details on which the child can focus selectively: The friendship has a long history; it is an intimate friendship. The two friends have a special arrangement to meet on a particular day every week. The promise given was for this special, day. The friend wants to play records and talk some things over with the hero (there are hints that the friend may be experiencing some trouble). The new child who invites the hero to a movie and to hot dogs and soda has only recently moved into the neighborhood and has not yet made friends. The hero and the new child seem to like each other, but the old friend does not like the newcomer.

Structurally, the story can be analyzed in terms of both the conflicting interpersonal moral norms it contains and the basic moral principles underlying the situation. Specifically, three norms are involved:

1. Contractual norms, represented here by the moral institution of promising.
2. Norms of particular interpersonal relationships, represented here by the particular, intimate relationship of friendship.
3. Norms of general interpersonal relationships, referring here to general obligations such as altruism.

In addition, three fundamental moral principles apply to the situation (Rawls, 1971; Richards, 1971):

1. The principle of fairness or reciprocity as a principle of duty, seen here in the issue of keeping or breaking a promise.
2. The principle of truthfulness (Habermas, 1976) as a principle of duty, seen here as the issue of whether or not to lie when an obligation has been violated.
3. The principle of beneficence as a principle of supererogation, seen here as the responsibility to help someone in need.1

The structure established by these principles constitutes the conflict background built into the story. After reading the story to the child, the researcher conducted a semistructured interview lasting about 45 minutes. Its purpose was to evaluate how children define the situation, giving their naive theoretical assessments of decision, reasons for decision, consequences of decision, and consequences of consequences. The overall goal was to evaluate:

1. The child’s spontaneous sensitivity for the interpersonal-moral aspects of the situation.
2. The components of the child’s moral orientation as revealed in how children try to maintain, reestablish, or subvert a moral balance in an ongoing relationship while weighing moral and nonmoral concerns.

The cognitive-developmental analysis presented in the following sections describes the emerging rule system of interpersonal moral obligations seen in these interviews. The analysis addresses the question of how the growing awareness of what is morally good and right influences practical argumentation about actions in a hypothetical conflict. The rule system described was inferred from those normative aspects of actor’s and other’s situation that the child takes into account when thinking about action choices, the reasons he or she gives for these choices, the consequences derived from these choices in terms of moral feelings, the nature of justifications and restitutions, and the evaluation of practical decisions in terms of moral adequacy.

DEVELOPMENTAL LEVELS OF INTERPERSONAL MORAL REASONING

In the following section the levels of interpersonal moral understanding are described. An overview of these levels is given in Table 8.1. The description follows the order of the columns in the table. Developmental changes in the
following aspects are discussed in turn: (1) the definition of the situation; (2) the reasons given for the practical decisions; (3) the consequences of violating friendship obligations for the friend; (4) the consequences of violating friendship obligations for the actor (moral feelings); and (5) aspects of an imagined “moral discourse” between the friends, for example, strategies of justification and restitution to make up for or avoid the consequences of violating obligations. In the column on the left side, Selman’s (1980) levels of friendship are presented. They form the framework for the interpretation of the levels of interpersonal moral reasoning elaborated here.

There are two types of moral conceptualization of the situation possible at all the levels above Level 0; The first is the interpretation of the dilemma in terms of the conflict between duty and desire where an obligation toward the friend is perceived as conflicting with a desire related to the hedonistic quality of the offer from the new child; the second is the interpretation in terms of conflicting obligations (conflict of duties) that result from the relationship with the friend or the promise given as well as from the relationship with the new child (helping). These two types of conceptualization are constructed in specific ways at each developmental level.

### TABLE 8.1. Levels of Interpersonal Moral Reasoning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Friendship</th>
<th>Interpretation of Situation</th>
<th>Consistent with Friendship Obligation</th>
<th>Inconsistent with Friendship Obligation: Desire; Obligation</th>
<th>Consequences of Violation for Other or Relationship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0. Physicalistic</td>
<td>Self’s desire</td>
<td>Self’s hedonistic desires</td>
<td>Desire: self’s hedonistic desires</td>
<td>Object-related feelings (left out from fun)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Unilateral</td>
<td>Self’s desires of other’s desires or feelings</td>
<td>Anticipated consequences of action for friend</td>
<td>Desire: weighing of choices in terms of hedonism; obligation: avoidance of negative feelings</td>
<td>Interpersonal feelings (left out from interaction); termination of interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Fair-weather cooperation</td>
<td>Self’s obligation or other’s expectation (quality of relationship)</td>
<td>Self’s obligation related to promise; friendship</td>
<td>Desire: exceptionality of situation (good opportunity) obligation: obligation to help</td>
<td>Violation of expectations (feeling betrayed); termination of friendship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Intimate friendship</td>
<td>Self-other relationship of mutual concern over time, trust, loyalty (psychological particularities of situation)</td>
<td>Self’s obligation related to moral self and ideal of friendship (being a trustworthy person or friend)</td>
<td>Exceptionality in context of relationship (hypothetical role switch) desire: opportunity obligation: to integrate into friendship</td>
<td>Betraying as violation of friendship loyalty; moral evaluation of actor’s personality; diminution of friendship</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Level Zero**

At this first level, there is no awareness of an obligation of the self toward another (friend) to whom the self is bound interpersonally and morally through friendship and promise. The definition of the situation is premoral. The choices are perceived from a purely hedonistic perspective (fun quality of the offers). The situation is predominantly perceived in terms of objects and actions and not in terms of relationships. The actor’s self-centered desires and wants (related to the hedonistic offers) are the main elements of the situation. Sometimes the concept of an intentional subject having choices is not yet established.

These hedonistic desires become reasons for the decision. The decision involves weighing the desire to see the toys or the pleasure of playing with the toys or with the friend against the desire to get soda and hot dogs or to have a party.
Children at this first level are aware of the consequences of the decision to go to the movie for the friend. They know that the friend will feel bad if the actor does not come to visit. But these negative feelings are not related to the violation of an obligation. They are, rather, interpreted as resulting from the frustration of the friend’s hedonistic wants (feeling bad over not getting to go to a movie or over being bored at home). Also, the negative consequences of such a decision for the friend are not yet an integral part of the actor’s decision making; they are simply seen as its inevitable consequences. Consequences of the decision to go to the movie for the actor (self’s perspective) again are not yet related to the violation of an obligation. With a decision to go to the movie the actor feels basically good (because he or she gets to go to a movie), or he or she may have pragmatic concerns over the adequateness of the choice in terms of fun (maybe the movie was not so good).

As there is no awareness of the violation of a moral norm, there is no need to justify the decision in the full meaning of the concept as “giving reasons that outweigh an obligation.” The decision to go to the movie is seen as unproblematic. There is neither a need to hide the action or the reasons for the action from the friend nor any perceived need for restitution of the balance in the relationship.

Level One

At this level, the relationship of friendship becomes part of the definition of the situation. The conflicting interests of the friends are perceived against the background of such a relationship. The actor is now situated in an interpersonal world where the interacting subjects have their own needs, interests, goals, and feelings. A concern for other’s “inner world,” not present at Level 0, emerges. The main elements of the situation are now perceived as conflicting desires, needs, interests, and feelings (as consequences of choices). There is now a clear sense of subjectivity and agency in the sense that decisions are made with a growing awareness of consequences for self and other. Other’s wants and feelings are considered, if only as obstacles to one’s own intentions.

Thus, the reasons for the decision to visit the friend are no longer the purely hedonistic ones as at Level 0. It is rather aspects arising from the relationship itself (liking the friend, liking to be with the friend, the fact of being friends) that gain the status of reasons for decision. To this are added interpersonal concerns such as the friend’s invitation or the avoidance of negative consequences for the friend (not leaving the friend out, not making the friend stay alone). Relationships, however, are defined by their affective quality rather than in obligational terms. If hedonistic desires become the motive for the decision to go to the movie, there is an explicit weighing of choices in terms of fun for the self (it is so much fun to go to a movie, much more than to see toys). But in contrast with Level 0, these reasons are not used as justifications to the friend. In addition, aspects of the new child’s situation now may emerge as reasons for decision. These can be nonmoral qualities (interest in the new child, wanting to get to know the new child), quasi-moral qualities (the appropriateness of accepting the new child’s invitation), or interpersonal concerns related to the new child’s psychological situation (he or she is alone, not wanting to exclude the new child). In these quasi-moral concerns, we see a rudimentary beginning of weighing priorities. The situation is now interpreted as a conflict of interests and expectations. But this process of weighing is still insufficient and unbalanced with regard to obligations toward the friend.

The consequences of going to the movie for the friend are now interpreted in terms of the relationship between actor and friend. That the friend would feel bad or sad because he or she has invited the actor and wants the actor to come or has prepared everything and is looking forward to the visit (concept of expectation) is now considered. The awareness of the frustration of the friend’s interests is linked to an anticipation of friend’s physical retaliation (hitting, not playing with the actor anymore). This awareness of the other’s interests and feelings as well as the other’s external reactions toward the self ties in with the judgment of consequences for the actor (self) related to the decision of going to the movie. The actor may become empathetically concerned over the consequences of his or her decision for the friend (feels bad about the decision because friend is home alone). Another type of predominant concern relates to the consequences for the self (the friend will be angry with the actor, will hit him or her, be his or her enemy, or not play anymore).

An awareness appears that the action of going to the movie, whether for hedonistic or for altruistic reasons, is at least partly problematic and violates the interpersonal balance in the ongoing relationship with the friend. This awareness goes along with a perceived need for acts of restitution. Such strategies of conflict resolution tend to be “physicalistic,” compared with the more psychological strategies at higher levels (e.g., inviting the friend to a movie next time).

The awareness of the problematic aspects of the decision to go to the movie for hedonistic reasons can lead to an intentional attempt to conceal the action from the friend. The two predominant motives for such a strategy are the avoidance of the friend’s interference with the decision (friend would start arguing and then actor would miss the movie) and the avoidance of negative consequences for the self after the action has been performed (not telling anything because friend would be so angry). When the situation is constructed such that the friend asks about the course of events, the
action may be reported in a rather “factual way” (he or she went to a movie) without reference to one’s egoistic wants as at Level 0. Use of these strategies can be seen as an indication of the awareness of the moral inadequacy of the action of going to the movie (especially if the motive for the decision is hedonistic).

Level Two

At Level 2, the friendship as an ongoing interaction over time is part of the definition of the situation. Children begin to take into account the special nature of the friendship by picking up psychological details of the story presented: The friends have known each other for a long time; it is their special meeting day; the old friend does not like the new child. These aspects of the situation have a special meaning with regard to expectations and obligations in a friendship. It is only at this level that the promise comes in the focus of the argumentation as an obligational commitment of the self to the friend.

The promise gains special salience on the background of general friendship expectations. Only at this level is there a beginning understanding of the reciprocal nature of promising as outlined in theories of morality. There is an awareness now that through giving a promise an obligation is created. This obligation gain furthers importance in the context of the specific situation given, as defined by the interpretation of the psychological details of the relationship mentioned earlier. Thus, the friend not only wants the actor to come (as at Level 1) but also expects the actor to come. Not living up to this obligation is now perceived as betrayal.

The actor’s commitments as well as the expectations resulting from these commitments can become reasons for the decision to visit the friend: One does not want to betray or cheat the best friend one has known for such a long time and to whom one has made a promise. Other types of reasons have to do with the anticipated consequences for the actor or the friend of the violation of obligation.

Awareness of the obligations and expectations related to friendship and promising creates a motivational “press” to justify a decision that violates the perceived obligations. Earlier, this aspect was noted as “giving explanations that outweigh the obligations.” Yet by Level 2 mere reference to hedonistic needs is no longer accepted as sufficient reason in such a case. The decision to go to the movie is now justified by the exceptionality of the situation (e.g., such a good opportunity, the movie plays only this day). These justifications are also used in moral discourse as practical explanations given to the friend as legitimate reasons for the decision to go to the movie.

Again, prosocial or altruistic motives can form another group of reasons for the decision to go to the movie (conflict of duties). In such cases the special neediness of the new child is taken into account and interpreted as an obligation to help someone who is lonely and has not yet established friendship. Even when recognizing the special obligations toward the friend, the subject may grant priority to altruistic obligations that are implicitly understood as outweighing the promise given to the friend. (In these cases—which are rather few—intense conflict over the choice is observed.)

The consequences for the friend that result from violating obligations are now interpreted in a more interpersonal and moral way than at Level 1: The betrayal of friendship makes the friend feel hurt, disappointed, and left out. The friend is seen as morally disapproving of the decision to go to the movie because of the obligation contracted through the nature of the friendship, the promise given, or his or her aversion toward the new child. The friend’s anger or sadness over this decision is based on his or her disapproval of the betrayal. As a consequence, the friend is seen as considering terminating the friendship.

The consequences of the decision for the actor are now conceptualized as interpersonal and moral feelings. The self’s feelings are tied to the representation of the other in the self. The actor is concerned about the other’s feelings (empathic concerns) and is worried over a possible loss of the relationship with the friend. But at this level we also observe the beginning of self-evaluation: a moral self evaluating its own actions according to moral criteria (feeling bad over having cheated). Besides the awareness of violating obligations and responsibilities, another source of moral feelings emerges at this level: a beginning awareness of the norm of truthfulness as an obligation not to lie to the friend about one’s intentions or actions. Violation of this norm leads to guilt feelings (actor feels bad because he or she did not tell the friend about going to movie).

The awareness of the moral inadequacy of betraying the friend again leads to rebalancing by performing acts of restitution. The strategies used here indicate a more psychological understanding of the situation than seen in Level 1. They include asking forgiveness, strategies of integration (bringing the friend together with the new child), or making the friend understand the action by giving reasons, although compared with Level 3 the latter is still limited. But again there is an alternative strategy as well: The awareness of the moral inadequacy of the action may lead to a tendency to conceal the action from the friend. The Level 1 strategy of concealing the action is supplemented by giving nonveridical reasons, that is, by explicitly lying (I had to go downtown with my mother). This is a form of justification by which responsibility is denied and the moral balance subverted. A predominant motive for such strategies is fear of the
consequences, at this level tied to the loss of friendship. Guilt feelings related to lying are an indication of the awareness of the obligation to be truthful.

Level Three

As at Level 2, the friendship relation is part of the definition of the situation at Level 3. But now friendship is seen as a system of shared expectations involving mutual commitments over time, implying trust, reliance, and a special concern for each other’s needs and feelings at a much deeper level than at Level 2. More subtle particularities of the friend’s psychological situation are taken into account as meaningful criteria for practical decision making: That the friend wants to talk to the actor receives the interpretation that he or she has special needs that are emotionally significant for the actor. Within the definition of friendship as intimate mutual concern, the friend’s needs and feelings represent special obligations to the actor.

In comparison with Level 2, where the structuring of the situation is guided implicitly by moral obligations, at Level 3 these obligations become more explicit. Actions can be evaluated from a “third-person” perspective (Selman, 1980), implying the notion of what one morally ought to do (Mead, 1934). A moral self is established such that the child takes a prescriptive attitude toward actions. This moral orientation refers to rules of fairness and to self ideals of how good, loyal, and trustworthy persons or friends should act toward each other. The keeping of the promise to the friend is seen as an obligation that cannot be changed arbitrarily. Thus, reasons for decision to visit the friend are stated as “moral” reasons referring to expectations deriving from friendship and promise (if hero has promised the friend, he or she must go, it would be unfair not to go). Reasons for action are tied to a moral self, to one’s self ideal (not wanting to be a traitor or promise breaker), and to the anticipated moral feelings if obligations were violated (hero would feel guilty, have a guilty conscience). Another type of reason for this decision relates to the concept of “trust” (friend would not trust hero anymore if he or she would not go to him or her).

With regard to consequences, a violation of the obligation toward the friend is now conceptualized as betrayal of trust, confidence, and loyalty. Moral feelings arising from such anticipated violation of obligation are feelings of guilt (resulting from the breach of trust) and shame (resulting from acts that are inconsistent with one’s moral self-ideal). It is only at this level that children spontaneously make use of the concept of a “guilty conscience.” The actor is conceptualized as taking a moral perspective on his or her action (hero is thinking about what he or she did right or wrong). The violation of the obligation no longer goes along with the anticipation of a termination of the friendship but rather signals an attrition of the degree of friendship (being less good friends, trusting each other less).

Given the understanding of friendship as intimate sharing of feelings at a much deeper level than at Level 2, the general understanding of the promise as morally binding again gains special ascendancy. There is a definite moral awareness of the necessity of communication with the friend about any change of intentions, implying that not keeping the promise presupposes agreement of the promise (the friend). This moral awareness often leads to a spontaneous proposal for a moral discourse with the friend to negotiate the keeping of the promise and to find common solutions that integrate the needs of all parties involved. Such discourse now takes into account the particularities of the friend’s situation and personality (how friend reacts to talking to him or her, what kind of person he or she is). Attempts are made to assure the friend of affection and solidarity and of the value of the ongoing relationship. The justifications given for wanting to go to a movie with the new child define exceptionality within the context of the friendship. The child may make use of a more flexible role switch as a means of considering possible actions and reactions from the viewpoint of others (e.g., asking friend, What would you do? What would you have done in this situation?). Justifications are designed to establish consistency between action and obligation. Thus, the self’s hedonistic desires may be interpreted as one’s rights (it should be possible to go to such a good movie once, or to accept such a good offer). The same type of justification is given in the case of altruistic motivation, where an appeal is made to the friend to accept the exceptionality of the situation because of the obligation to integrate a newcomer into a network of friendship. Both forms are based on the possibility of a mutually shared understanding of each other’s perspectives. They go along with various types of conflict resolution strategies, which are all based on communication as a means toward finding a solution that is acceptable to everybody involved or capable of reestablishing trust and intimacy.

Even though truthfulness toward the friend is the predominant strategy at this level, there are forms of nontruthful interaction as well. These consist of conscious attempts to hide the violation of trust and reciprocity by lying to the friend. Although the same type of justification may be offered the friend as at Level 2 (had to go downtown with my mother), another type of practical explanation that functions as an excuse (the friend would have done the same, or everyone would have acted like this) emerges. Thus the actor denies responsibility for the action (Keller, 1984). As a result of the awareness of the moral inadequacy of such behavior, rather intense feelings of guilt and shame may arise. They may even take the form of psychosomatic reactions (tummy ache). They need not lead to any restructuring of the
action, however. Rather, it seems that despite theoretical knowledge about standards of friendship, such standards remain external and are not applied to the self as obligatory (Blasi, 1980).

**Level Four**

There are some aspects in our data that point to the direction of what would have to be conceptualized as a Level 4, but there are not yet enough data to justify fully describing this level. It seems that only at that level can concerns be weighed against each other systematically according to priorities (if the friend really needs the hero, then he or she must go, but if the situation is not that urgent, the friend should accept that the hero visits friend later). The *legitimacy* of the friend’s needs is weighed against the legitimacy of one’s own needs, defined as one’s rights on the basis of the relationship and one’s obligations that transcend the intimate friendship. There is an assumption of mutual understanding for each other’s claims and obligations that can be negotiated in a “rational” way. This understanding implies a beginning conception of autonomy, where persons are seen as having complex needs and being embedded in multiple networks of relationships. The friends must take each other’s needs into account as well as their obligations toward each other and toward third persons. Thus, the friend would also have to give up what might be his or her “rights” in the light of legitimate claims of the self or more legitimate claims of another person. The friend then is seen as having a moral obligation to take the other’s situation into account.

**CONCLUSION**

The developmental levels described here were constructed on the basis of children’s reasoning in discussing the dilemma. Although data analysis is not yet complete, it is clear that there are both general age-related trends and large individual differences. Future empirical analysis will have to deal with the issue of structural consistency within the various components of the moral attitude. Theoretically, we would postulate an underlying deep structure of organization that ties the components together in an equilibrated system. This consistency would result from the *unity of the situation* the child is dealing with. All the components analyzed represent different aspects of one course of action. This assumption differs significantly from cognitive-developmental research, where “domains of experience” (Turiel, 1978, and Chap. 15 in this book) or “issues” (Selman, 1980) have been seen as relatively independent achievements. Given the theoretical assumption of structural consistency, we will have to understand empirical inconsistency as cases of *disequilibrium*. This imbalance, then, represents the dynamic side of development, a side not evident in the structural analysis. This disequilibrium provides the motivational force for cognitive reorganization.

I will summarize by focusing on some of the aspects mentioned that we consider necessary elements of a more encompassing conception of morality. The theoretical analysis shows that the definition of the situation is clearly related to the child’s structural level of interpersonal and moral understanding. There appears to be a systematic relationship between the level of under standing and those normative aspects of the situation that the child takes into account spontaneously. To put it differently, touching on and elaborating certain aspects of the conflict presented is in itself an indicator of a certain level of interpersonal moral understanding or the normative construction of self-other relationships.

Across developmental levels there is growing awareness of the psychological meaning of situations. The psychological particularities of situations and persons are elaborated, and consequences of practical decisions are taken into account when making choices. Extrapolating from the empirical data base to mature forms of moral decision making, moral rules, or principles are increasingly considered in the light of the particularities of the situation in which self’s and other’s interests and claims have to be weighed.

The achievement of Level 3 appears to be a milestone in this development. The reflexive role-taking that constitutes Level 3 becomes the basis for the development of a moral self in the form of “How will I appear to others?” The self is regarded in terms of moral rules that are no longer external to itself but that have become part of self-expectation. Thus, morality has become part of the self-definition (see Chaps. 6 and 7). This is a milestone in development because particular experiences and expectations within particular relationships are transcended. An awareness emerges of an objective interpersonal system outside the subjective self that has claims on the person. This system consists of rules of fairness and ideals of self and of friendship.

The understanding achieved at Level 3 is taken to be the basis for the perceived necessity of “moral dialogue” as the means for solving moral conflicts as well as for reestablishing moral balance when obligations have been violated. In the mature form of this dialogue others are seen as having the same moral responsibility that the self has. Thus, the promisee, despite the right conferred on him or her through the promise given, is credited with the obligation to reflect this right in the light of the particular situation at hand. He or she must be prepared to give up his or her rights for claims that are entitled to enjoy precedence. At the same time, he or she also has a responsibility to forgive the violation of obligations if the situation warrants it. Thus, Level 3 seems to be the point in development where the
particular is beginning to be linked to the universal. Yet clearly the universal emerges from particular experience, although, dialectically,

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NOTES

1The two principles of duty relate to a moral institution or a social practice that is of benefit to everyone. They are fundamental to the regulation of social interaction in terms of mutual orientation and trust in relationships. The failure to act according to these principles therefore is a violation of a relationship of trust. The third principle refers to nonobligatory acts of sympathy and kindness toward others. According to Richards (1971, p. 205), these acts range from kindness toward others as part of daily routines to the benevolence of a personal friendship. Assuming a moral attitude, in all cases of violation of these principles the mature moral actor has to bear his or her burden of guilt or shame and the obligation to restore the relationship.

2The situation is never interpreted as an obligation toward the new child conflicting with a hedonistic offer (toys) from the friend.

REFERENCES


**REFERENCE NOTE**