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## PSYCHOLOGY OF DEVELOPMENT OF MORAL REASONING: PROBLEM-ORIENTED OVERVIEW OF THE FIELD

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*Abstract.* First and foremost, this paper provides a short historical reminder of the emergence of the field of psychology of development of moral reasoning. In the second part of the paper, the author offers a problem-oriented overview of the field, that is, one possible classification of particular groups of problems for empirical research. This overview does not only point out to the problems that were more and that were less studied (e.g. evaluative moral judgment and reasoning, distinguishing between moral and extra-moral rules and norms) and to those that were relatively neglected (i.e. understanding moral situations), but also to the problems that psychologists did not even recognise as research problems. Such are the problems of development of moral concepts, meaning of moral words etc. Finally, the author also points out to the fact that this classification could be taken as one way to define the field, that is, the way to determine the boundaries of its subject of studying.

*Key words:* evaluative and non-evaluative moral reasoning, moral concepts, Piaget, Kohlberg, Turiel.

### *Short historical overview of the field*

The history of psychological studying of the development of moral reasoning is only somewhat shorter than the history of psychology as a science. However, although empirical studies of moral judgments and values appeared for the first time as early as in the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Johnson, 1962; Pittel & Mendelsohn, 1972), and although, what is more, their findings have been confirmed later in broad outline – still, the true beginning of this field of developmental psychology will come only at the beginning of the 1930s with the appearance of Piaget’s book “The Moral Judgment of the Child” (Piaget, 1977/1932). There are several reasons justifying this historical judgment. First, earlier research was not backed up by a developed theory, and Piaget’s was. Second, besides theory, Piaget also offered a solid method. Third, the theory that we are talking about was not cut out

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exclusively for the field of development of moral reasoning; on the contrary, the theory was originally shaped for a far wider field of intellectual development (to say the least), and its author applied it himself this time and examined it in this particular field. Fourth, together with the theory, the findings served as a very strong inspiration for new and various research studies, and even more than that – for the new and methodologically and theoretically different research orientations. Piaget was an inspiration both for the followers and for the “renegades”. It should be mentioned, indeed, that during the first twenty years or so since the publishing (in 1932), this work of Piaget attracted attention of an only insignificant number of researchers and that the true flourishing of research studies inspired by it occurs later, in the middle of the 1950s. However, in spite of that first period without response, this assessment does not lose anything of its credibility: the psychology of development of moral reasoning was grounded and born precisely by the early work of Jean Piaget.

The first wave of research which, as it was said, commenced strongly in the middle of the 1950s and continued to develop strongly by the middle of the 1980s – is not sufficient, despite a large amount of papers and an offered theoretical framework, to justify the conclusion that one field (or sub-field) of developmental psychology emerged. Namely, that wave is comprised of research that either only repeats Piaget’s (in new subpopulations, with somewhat changed methodology etc.) or, on the basis of the obtained findings, critically reflects on this or that individual claim of the original theory. All this taken together gives us the right to say only that there is one theory of development of moral reasoning that is effective (which is being confirmed, tested or partially disputed in research). There is a theory of development of moral reasoning – Piaget’s – but there is still no field that is called “the psychology of development of moral reasoning”. And there is even less than that: in 90% of the cases, the wave we are talking about consisted of research studies focused on only one of the topics from Piaget’s book – the topic of development of conception of responsibility (from objective to subjective), while other topics were either not tackled by research at all (for example, understanding of collective responsibility, conception of penal justice) or were researched rarely (such as conception of “positive” or distributive justice, see Damon, 1975; Nisan, 1984; McGillicaddy-DeLisi, 1994; understanding of justice as immanent, see Najarian-Svajian 1966). In other words: in comparison with Piaget’s book, where we find one theory and wider scope of problems (topics) that were studied, the first wave of papers, instead of expanding it, narrows down the scope of problems, thus stepping away from constituting the field.

It was the work of Lawrence Kohlberg, although it also originated in the 1950s, that made the decisive step that marks the transition from a theory to a field (Kohlberg, 1963; Kohlberg 1982). There are two main differences that separate the work of Kohlberg from that of Piaget: one is of methodological nature (instead of the method of stories in couples, he used the method of one story containing a moral dilemma), and the second one is theoretical (instead of two processes – moral heteronomy and autonomy – that alternate during the development, now we have the development in the form of six stages, that is, three levels). Someone might say that this difference is far too small and that it cannot justify the statement that the transition from the state with one theory to the state that already constitutes the field had occurred here: namely, Kohlberg's theory did not step out of Piaget's framework. And that is correct. What is more, what Kohlberg did was to apply the general Piaget's theory on the development of moral reasoning, and not to apply Piaget's theory of moral development to the empirical material collected by a different methodological procedure. In certain sense, Kohlberg has proved to be a bigger Piaget than Piaget himself in this field.

However, although it seems insignificant, the change introduced by Kohlberg is still sufficient, in our opinion, to enable us to say how the transition from theory into field occurred. First, Kohlberg did not suppress and replace Piaget's theory by his own work: for a long number of years both one and the other have been used in research parallel with one another. Second, with the addition of his part, the general theoretical framework has remained the same (cognitive-developmental approach), but within that general framework there are two separate methodological practices and two separate theories used for explaining research findings. Even such a small plurality of methods and theories is still enough to justify the statement that we no longer have one method and one theory – but that we have a field of research and theory instead.

Still, if some doubts still remain in this respect regarding the role of Kohlberg's work in the emergence of the field (i.e. its transformation from state with one theory to state with full field status), they will completely disappear less than a decade later, by the entrance of new theories, theoretical and methodological approaches. What should be mentioned first according to timeline is Bandura's theory of social learning (Bandura & McDonald, 1963; Bandura, 1969), and then attribution approach (Shaw & Sulzer, 1964; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1973; Harris, 1977; Fincham & Jaspars, 1979). Soon these were followed by the theory of information integration (Birnbaum, 1972; Surber, 1977; Anderson & Butzin, 1978; Grueneich, 1982), the approach of Eliot Turiel (Turiel, 1983), the theory of symbolic interactionism (Walton, 1985) etc.

*Problem of field and subfield*

And so, there is no dilemma now. The field of psychology of development of moral reasoning has existed for a number of decades already. In this field, there is not only one theory or only one model that is effective, even not only one approach (cognitive developmental); for researching individual phenomena in that field, different methods are used (although story method predominates), in it various theories are measured as competitive – etc. In a nutshell: we find a full plurality of theoretical approaches, theories, models and methods. Furthermore, what also occurred is a divergence of thematic (partly also theoretical) orientations, and then also the research of “female” morality, that is, the morality oriented towards care (Gilligan, 1977), of pro-social moral reasoning (Eisenberg-Berg, 1979), whereby the dispersion of the field was further increased.

What remains to us, however, is to provide answers to two questions before we continue. The first question refers to the wider field to which this (sub)field belongs, and the second is the question of its delimitation.

For a long time now, in overview papers about the state of affairs in the fields of developmental psychology one can find the titles such as “Moral development” (see Hoffman, 1970; Turiel, 1998); in those, besides emotional and behavioural side of human morality, the cognitive side is shown as well, that is, the illustration of the situation in theory and research of the development of moral judgment and reasoning. The same solutions will be found in textbooks of developmental psychology as well. Authors of those texts, obviously, classify that (sub)field into the wider field of psychology of moral development, and not into the wider field of psychology of cognitive development, and such a solution can be substantiated by the fact that human morality is one and unique psychological entity. On the other hand, real psychological studies that are performed almost never treat morality in that way, although, as a rule, they are followed by declarative statements in favour of the integrality of the phenomenon. What we want to say is that researchers divided morality into aspects (cognitive, behavioural and emotional) and treat them separately. In brief, although it is completely logical that studies of development of moral reasoning enter the field of moral development, the dominant features of the situation in research practice entitle us to classify this (sub)field into the psychology of cognitive development as well.

That, however, does not imply that this field is clearly delimited by its scope of problems or by its precise and generally accepted definition of the basic phenomenon to which it owes its name (morality). On the contrary. It must be said that psychology of development of moral reasoning is not en-

closed, that it does not have its clear boundaries, that it (that is, its subject of studying) is not determined either by the classification of problem fields or by a generally accepted definition of both morality and moral reasoning. The latter was suggested and is suggested especially by the cognitive developmental theorists such as Lawrence Kohlberg (subsuming moral under justice; see Colby and Kohlberg, 1987) or Eliot Turiel (emphasising that the whole philosophical thought considers justice and welfare central for morality; see Turiel, 1998: 903). Their suggestions, however, were not accepted, and so the unity and delimitation of the field have not been achieved by one generally accepted definition. On the other hand, nobody even tried to offer an inventory or classification of the problems.

It would be better if the unity of the field were achieved by one good definition, which would also be theoretically neutral, but psychology is far from that – and, by all indications, even further and further – not only in this field of studying. Therefore, it seems that even that first solution (provided in the form of a well-laid out inventory of problems) would serve the purpose well, and its advantage would be that it would provide an elaborated picture of the problem field stretching in front of the researchers. On top of that, the inventory of problems would be even more useful in the degree in which it would indicate not only the problems that were more and that were less studied, but also the problems that have been completely neglected or, even, not registered as problems; asking them explicitly would then also serve as an incentive for their empirical studying. Finally, one should also bear in mind the fact that until now, in our knowledge, this field has not been considered as a separate one, and therefore this paper has served its purpose even if it only encouraged thinking in this direction.

In the remainder of this paper offers precisely that – an overview, inventory (or classification) of the basic research problems (that is, groups of problems) that can serve to delimit the field that is called psychology of development of moral reasoning.

### *Overview of research problems*

The offered overview or classification is independent from the existing theoretical-methodological orientations in the field of developmental psychology, it is also independent from the fact how much and if at all certain classes are covered by the published empirical studies, and it also does not depend on the fact whether certain categories of research subjects make the same differences in their moral reasoning as in classification or do not (for example, it can be expected that evaluative moral reasoning of some sub-

jects is so fused with non-evaluative that no clear difference between the one and the other can be perceived). Although this overview does not involve research results (that is, findings), we consider it to be of use either to those who want to obtain an initial insight into the problem field of psychology of development of moral reasoning, or to those who decide to undertake a certain research study of one of its narrower or wider problems. Finally, besides all that, it can be useful to those who are thinking of covering this field by systematic research on long-term basis.

Moral reasoning can first be divided into two basic classes, in such a way that one consists of evaluative, and the other of non-evaluative moral reasoning.<sup>1</sup> Psychology initially started to deal with evaluative moral reasoning and it is today the most present field of research and theorising as well. Furthermore, when one says “moral reasoning”, it is most often referred precisely to evaluative. In brief, we are dealing with judgment (evaluation, valuing, estimation) and/or account of what is morally right or good (that is, not right or wrong), what is just or unjust. In this class of moral-psychological problems, psychological science is mostly indebted to Jean Piaget (Piaget, 1977/1932) and Lawrence Kohlberg and his associates (Colby & Kohlberg, 1987). The most famous researchers of evaluative moral reasoning in Serbia are Popović and his associates (Popović & Miočinović, 1977), and Stojiljković (1998).

The class of evaluative moral reasoning can further be divided according to several different criteria. Let us take as a first example the “object of judgment”. According to that criterion, one subclass would be comprised of those objects that are linked with an individual (his/her actions, personality features, motives, feelings or a person as a whole), while the other one would be compounded of social groups as the object of judgment (for example, nations, ethnic groups, professions etc.). The object of judgment for the largest number of psychological studies in this class were the actions of individuals (predominantly fictional characters in fictional stories), while we can say that other objects of judgment (not only social groups, but individual characteristics as well – motives, personality features, feelings etc.) have been highly neglected as far as research and theory work are concerned.

The second criterion of classification of the problem of evaluative moral reasoning would consist simply of listing individual topics that it is pos-

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<sup>1</sup> There are some reasons for the initial division into two classes to be performed differently: into thinking and meaning. Then the class of meaning would, naturally, also comprise concepts – or the whole problematics of meaning would in fact be reduced to moral concepts, that is, be subsumed under the development of moral concepts. This further leads to empirical attempts to examine one of the theories of concept development in the context of the concepts of this kind (which was exactly what we did with the concept of lie, see footnote 5 below).

sible to find as subjects of discussion in philosophical literature for centuries now. In that way, the difference can be made between judgments about lie, promise, justice (commutative, penal and distributive), deceit, insult, supere-rogation (actions beyond the call of duty), violence – etc. In all likelihood, that is also how Piaget acted when he commenced his work in this field (although his “list” of topic-subjects is narrowed down). Numerous problems out of those mentioned have remained not dealt with, and even some of those that were present in Piaget’s work. Such are the problems of penal justice and collective responsibility, for example.<sup>2</sup> Finally, thematic division could be made in one more way, so that pro-social moral reasoning belongs to one group, with the remark that it is not completely clear how other groups would be determined (it is only certain that there are several of them).

The second basic class consists of non-evaluative moral reasoning. What should be said right away is that this basic class, in comparison with the previously mentioned one, has been relatively neglected in psychological studies; several groups of problems belonging to this class have not drawn any attention until now, and it seems as though there is still no awareness of the existence of such problems either.

In the lack of a more suitable way, the class of non-evaluative moral reasoning will be elaborated in such a way as to only provide the list of certain groups of problems, of course, committing oneself to the completeness of that list. Therefore, the class of non-evaluative moral reasoning is comprised of the following groups of topics or problems.

- *Distinguishing between moral and extra-moral field of judgment.* Somewhere else (Mirić, 2001) this subgroup of problems has been named a classification moral judgment, and that referred to distinguishing between moral field (moral norms or rules) and conventions and personal field (see Miočinović, 1992). Empirical studies of these problems are relatively numerous, mostly owing to Eliot Turiel<sup>3</sup> and his associates (Smetana, 1981; Nucci & Nucci, 1982; Turiel, 1983; Yau & Smetana, 2003).

- *Moral concepts and their development* form the second group of problems within this class. Unfortunately, it has to be said that so far there has been no empirical research devoted to moral concepts, let alone their

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<sup>2</sup> The development of collective responsibility was studied in one graduate paper in our country (Vukmirović, 1997), and conception of penal justice in another one (Papić, 2004).

<sup>3</sup> Actually we should give credit to Eliot Turiel for this, because by starting to delimit the moral field from other fields, in certain sense he started something that is continued in this paper. However, as it was mentioned above, he did not pursue that direction to list the problems within that field, but instead turned towards providing the definition of morality (see also Turiel, 1983: 36-42).

systematic studying. Some researchers dealt with the concept of lie along the way (Piaget, 1977/1932: 136-37; Wimmer, Gruber & Perner, 1984 and 1985) – and that is all. This is an opportunity to mention here that several years ago, together with the students of the Department of Psychology of the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade, we began trying out the possible ways of researching the development of moral concepts. Ten moral concepts (honour, theft, lie, dignity, honesty, robbery, slander etc.) were studied by the method of defining, and that attempt did not yield usable findings (primarily because it was not possible to single out with certainty all explicitly expressed semantic features in one definition). Story method proved out to be far more successful, for now only with the concept of lie. Those findings revealed a developmental sequence that, indeed, was not explained completely, but its first part takes place in this way: at youngest ages, children think that both things and plants and animals and people can lie (that is, the whole existing world can lie), then they reject the possibility of lying for things, and keep it for plants and everything else, then they reject plants, then animals, in order to finally leave people as the only subjects that the possibility of being able to lie is connected with (see Kostić, 2006).<sup>4</sup> The development of the concept of lie does not stop there, but new studies are necessary in order to see which qualitative points are contained in a higher part of the sequence; for example, one point is made up of identification of a lie with a false statement (lie is still not understood as dishonesty, that is, it is yet not understood that one can lie by using a true statement as well), the highest point probably consists of the concept of lie placed in conceptual system (which assumes distinguishing between a lie and a deceit, unfulfilled promise etc.)

- It is possible to classify in this class of problems even some concepts that have drawn a large amount of attention of researchers of various orientations; what it is referred to in the first place is the concept of responsibility, which was the subject of studying of not only Piaget and his followers, but attribution theorists as well. We still think that it is justified to speak about a separate group of problems – let us call it *inframoral field* – because besides responsibility (objective and subjective, individual and collective) it is also possible to include here the conceptualisation of freedom and free will, which was something that did not attract the attention of researchers.

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<sup>4</sup> Construction of the sequence that was tested on data roughly corresponds to Vygotsky's theory of conceptual development, with the remark that we bore in mind that moral concepts are characteristic (inseparable from the subject, because of which, namely, the stage of syncretism had to be reinterpreted – not as an influence of the subjective, but as a complete objectivisation instead).



• *The problem of meaning of moral words and judgments* (we are primarily referring to the words “good” and “bad” in moral judgment), the central problem of meta-ethics, did not draw any attention on the part of psychologists – researchers. What should indeed be mentioned is that Piaget’s concept of moral realism points out to this problem and so does the concept of reification, introduced by one of the critics of Turiel’s theoretical assumptions (Gabenreich, 1990). However, at present, it can be said not only that the problem was not even seriously set up in front of researchers, but also that it is not even possible to discern the method for its systematic research on different levels of complexity of moral reasoning (that is, judgment, tenet, normative-ethical conception etc.). Unlike psychologists, in arguing certain meta-ethical problems philosophers sometimes appeal to the so-called ordinary moral awareness, referring by that to the kind of meaning attributed to moral words by laymen (see Stojanović, 1971). Of course that it would be better for them if they could be backed by conducted empirical studies – which should be performed by psychologists. Let us just state several individual questions related to the problem of meaning. Relying on the findings from other fields of intellectual development, it can be assumed that in the beginning of the development moral words are understood as though they had a descriptive meaning (cognitive) and that it were comprehensive, and even wider from what Piaget encompassed by the concept of moral realism. However, we do not even know when one overcomes descriptivism, whether it remains in some segments longer than in others, is it present in adults<sup>5</sup> – etc.

• *Understanding moral rules and norms and their differentiation from simpler “units”* such as prohibitions and commands on the one hand, and on the other, from more complex ones such as principles, supreme laws and values. This problem, a very big one for developmental psychology of moral has also not been subjected to systematic empirical research. At which age it is possible to exactly understand the Golden rule, how Kant’s categorical imperative is understood, how implications of utilitarian supreme measure of utmost happiness are understood, how moral values are conceptualised – those are only some of the individual questions from this subgroup.

• *Understanding*, that is, defining the situation which causes problems for evaluative moral judgment. Respondents do not define equally the situations in stories that are used for studying evaluative moral reasoning (for

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<sup>5</sup> It can be said with certainty that one does not completely overcome descriptivism with growing up. Therefore, for example, a fellow passenger in the bus says for himself “I am a good man!”, whereby he bases that statement on the assessments of several mutual acquaintances, apparently assuming that his goodness is the matter of factual knowledge, that is, description.

example, the one in the story “Heinz” from Kohlberg’s instrument). The only thing we came across in literature on the subject is the mentioning of the research that found a positive correlation between the definition of the situation (in the stories from Kohlberg’s instrument) and the level of development of evaluative moral reasoning (see Walker, 1986). Besides, researchers did endeavour to find out something about the understanding of the situation through estimations of putting oneself in somebody else’s position (most often the position of the harmed or damaged party, see Dunn, Brown & Maguire, 1995), but putting oneself in somebody else’s position (role taking) is not the same as understanding the whole situation. However, everyday experience tells us about the importance of this problem, either when we are dealing with simple situations (where an individual faces an ordinary temptation, that is, the choice between a clear moral rule and self-fish desire) or with complex (where two moral rules or two values are confronted): on one occasion we can see that the simplest moral feeling does not exist, the second time we see that concepts are lacking, the third time both one and the other – and all that remains for new researchers to find out. It should be mentioned that Rest (1984) is the one who was aware of the problem (see also Miočinović, 1988: 125-132; 2004: 116-119; Stojiljković, 1998: 81-87).

• *The problem of consistence.* Ordinary experience tells us that most often one can perceive more than one tenet that people use in their moral judgments (inconsistence), as well as that, not rarely, when applied to actual situations, principles that have been somewhat earlier emphasised as their own are violated (inconsistence). It is difficult to find a man who is consistently a retributivist or utilitarian when judging about punishment, and even criminal codes are not more consistent: what we can read in them are also utilitarian justifications and specific retributivism in deciding about the ratio between the offence and the severity of the punishment. Once this problem is transferred into the developmental perspective, it most definitely gets more complex in more than one way. It is difficult, especially at earlier ages, to expect either consistence or inconsistence at the level of the most general supreme criteria, in the same way in which it is also difficult to expect the awareness of inconsistence, simply because those criteria are still cognitively unavailable. The question of consistence-inconsistence can therefore be asked at the level of more simple, content-defined and less general criteria. However, what is important for the field of psychology of development of moral reasoning is not only the problem of consistence, but, even more, the problem of awareness of (in)consistence. Is it even necessary to mention that this problem did not find its researchers either?

After this overview of problem field of psychology of development of moral reasoning, it is possible to point out to an abundance of new questions that might open up and lie dormant for now “below the threshold of consciousness”. However, at this place, we would only like to point out to one such new question that remained not dealt with and that would be raised only if we started to study the now neglected phenomena.

Namely, the existing studies of evaluative moral reasoning use story technique, as it has already been said. The examples of moral actions described in stories are always such that they remain clearly within the boundaries of concepts that comprise those actions: at all ages the action of lying will be understood as a lie, the described action of promising as a promise, etc. However, as far as content is concerned, it is possible to describe the action of lying in the story in such a way to make it step outside the boundaries of conceptualisation (concept) at the given age or age range (for example, to describe the action of lying as pronouncing a true statement) and administer it in the procedure of studying the evaluative moral reasoning itself (regardless of whether it would be a part of one confrontation story or of stories in couples). Are the findings about evaluative judgment, familiar from studies made so far, going to be called into question or not in this case as well? We believe they will. Anyhow, it is only one “dark spot” that we can arrive at by a simple crossing of evaluative and non-evaluative aspect of moral reasoning in development.

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ПСИХОЛОГИЈА РАЗВОЈА МОРАЛНОГ МИШЉЕЊА:  
ПРОБЛЕМСКИ ПРЕГЛЕД ОБЛАСТИ  
*Анстракт*

У овом раду најпре се даје кратак историјски подсетник о настанку области психологије развоја моралног мишљења. У другом делу рада аутор нуди проблемски преглед области, односно једну могућу класификацију посебних група проблема за емпиријска истраживања. У томе прегледу не указује се само на проблеме који су више и који су мање истраживани (напр. евалуативно морално суђење и мишљење, разликовање моралних од ванморалних правила и норми), те који су релативно запостављени (напр. схватање моралне ситуације), него се указује и на проблеме које психолози чак нису ни препознали као проблеме за истраживање. Такви су проблеми развоја моралних појмова, значења моралних речи итд. Најзад, аутор указује и на то да би ова класификација могла да се узме и као један начин дефинисања области, односно начин одређивања граница њеног предмета проучавања.

*Кључне речи:* вредносно и неврдносно морално мишљење, морални појмови, Пијаже, Колберг, Туриел.

Јован Мирич  
ПСИХОЛОГИЈА РАЗВИТИЈА НРАВСТВЕННОГ МЫШЛЕНИЯ:  
ПРОБЛЕМНЫЙ ОБЗОР ОБЛАСТИ  
*Резюме*

В статье сначала излагается краткий очерк становления области психологии развития нравственного мышления. Во второй части статьи автор предлагает

проблемный обзор данной области, в частности одну из возможных классификаций отдельных групп проблем для эмпирических исследований. В этом обзоре указывается не только на проблемы, которые более или менее изучены (например, эвалюативное нравственное суждение и мышление, различение нравственных и вненравственных правил и норм), или на проблемы, которые до сих пор слабо разрабатывались (например, понятие о нравственной ситуации), но и на те проблемы, которые психологами даже не были выявлены в качестве объектов исследования. Таковыми являются проблемы развития нравственных понятий, значения нравственных слов и т. п. Автор указывает и на то, что данная классификация может послужить и в качестве инструмента определения данной области, т. е. способа определения пределов предмета изучения.

*Ключевые слова:* ценностное и неценностное нравственное мышление, нравственные понятия, Пиаже, Кольберг, Туриель.