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Author	坂上, 道子(Sakagami, Michiko) 並木, 博(Namiki, Hiroshi)
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Structure of Prosocial Moral Judgement¹⁾

Michiko Sakagami and Hiroshi Namiki²⁾

Abstract

Using short stories to simulate real life situations where one experienced a moral conflict, the present study explored the internal structure of children's moral judgement. One hundred and fifty-nine fifth-graders responded to two forms of questionnaire, subjective and objective, administered one week apart, each of which was composed of the same four short stories. The objective form was analysed in terms of 22 scales derived from Eisenberg-Berg's moral consideration categories. The subjective form was composed of the same scale, to which Ss were asked to respond after reading each short story. Only data obtained from the objective form was subjected to factor analysis, and resulting factors were examined in relation to a theory of moral reasoning. Three factors were obtained which underlay the moral judgement made by Ss. As a result, it was found that empathic considerations played an important role in deciding moral judgement of Ss even at this age level.

Altruism as a principle of action is, by definition, devotion to the welfare of others, regard for others. Altruistic behaviors, therefore, should be directed toward the goal of reducing others' pain, or increasing others' pleasure. But it appears that, for example, young children's concept of kindness and reasoning about their apparently altruistic, or prosocial behaviors do not always meet criteria for the above definition of altruism.

Baldwin and Baldwin (1970) found that young children judged an act done by others as more

kind when they observed that it was rewarded by someone. According to several researches on children's reasoning about their own prosocial behaviors, one type of reasoning most frequently used by young children could be labeled as hedonistic and reciprocity-oriented (Ugurel-Semin, 1952; Dreman and Greenbaum, 1973; Eisenberg-Berg and Neal, 1975). The same holds true for adults, and our altruistic behaviors sometimes motivated by the desire for social approval, personal profits gained through reciprocity, and concern for the de-

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Requests for reprint should be sent to Mrs. Michiko Sakagami, 4-24-9, Kumegawa, Higashimurayama, Tokyo, # 189, Japan.

mands by others with whom one identifies himself. Piliavin and Piliavin go further to assume that all human behavior is egoistically motivated although the assumption might sound too exaggerated (Piliavin and Piliavin, 1972; Piliavin, et al., 1969, 1975, 1976). Hoffman also argues that people help others to reduce their own aversive state which may be evoked by witnessing the painful emotional state, and he named the former an empathic distress (Hoffman, 1975, 1976).

On the other hand, school-age children's definition of kindness becomes very similar to the above definition of altruism; they view an act as less kind if it benefits the benefactor, and as more kind if it is done despite potential cost to self and despite social obligation (Baldwin and Baldwin, 1970). In the above mentioned studies on the development of prosocial moral judgement, one of the most frequently observed types of reasoning could be classified as an empathic consideration. This result suggests that even young children often help others solely for altruistic reasons. Moreover, the most salient aspect of adolescents' moral judgement is an empathic concern and conformity to social norms (Kohlberg, 1969, 1971; Eisenberg-Berg, 1979). Still more, Batson, et al. (1978) wrote in this connection as follows; "Truly a social animal, man's behavior may at times be directed not toward maximizing his own pleasures and minimizing his own pains, but toward maximizing the pleasure and minimizing the pain of others."

It is evident from the above discussion, therefore, that even a seemingly altruistic behavior might have at least two apparently conflicting motives, namely, hedonistic and reciprocity-oriented vs. empathic and altruistic in the true sense of the word. To understand the underlying mechanism of this complicated altruistic behavior, it is necessary first of all to search into and differentiate among many possible motives which might contribute to the determination of altruistic behaviors.

It may safely be assumed that truly altruistic behavior is developmentally the final goal of prosocial behavior. Stated thus, the developmental study of prosocial moral reasoning is

expected to shed much light on the underlying mechanism of altruistic behavior. Many researches on reasoning of prosocial behaviors have been done along this line, and Piaget's works are well known among them (Piaget, 1965). Kohlberg's stages of moral judgement, a theoretical extension of Piaget's theory to the problem of moral development, have provided valuable information regarding the types of prosocial moral dilemmas (Kohlberg, 1969, 1971). Eisenberg-Berg has done a series of studies defining prosocial moral reasoning as reasoning about conflicts in which the individual must choose between satisfying his wants or needs and those of others in a context where the role of laws, punishment, authorities, formal obligations, and other external prohibition are irrelevant or deemphasized (Mussen and Eisenberg-Berg, 1977; Eisenberg-Berg, 1979a, 1979b; Eisenberg-Berg and Hand, 1979; Eisenberg-Berg and Roth, 1980). Thus, she delineated a descriptive, age-related sequence of the development of judgement about prosocial behaviors with middle-class American children. In sum, according to the results obtained from the above studies, children's motives for their sharing and helping behaviors appear to become more consistent with mature conceptions of altruism as they grow older.

The purpose of the present research was to explore the internal structure of children's prosocial moral judgement using short stories to simulate everyday life situations where one is forced to make a choice among possible response alternatives to solve an ethical conflict. The second author tried in a series of experiments to examine the usefulness of short stories as an experimental tool to study moral judgement, and found that they were sensitive enough to capture the subtle process of moral reasoning (Namiki and Naito, 1975; Namiki et al., 1976). Moreover, the fact that similar methods using short stories are now widely used by many researchers guarantees the usefulness of this method as a research tool in this area.

Short stories used in the present experiment were constructed to obtain full information that would be relevant to substantiate a theo-

retical model of moral judgement proposed by Murai (1978). According to the theory, our judgement on "goodness" constitutes a mechanism composed of four basic claims. In other words, in the moral realm, something that is considered as "good" with regard to behavior is explained as a composite of four basic and natural human claims. They are intersubjectivity, logical consistency, utility, and beauty. They are explained as follows:

- (1) Intersubjectivity: Human beings cannot help giving consideration to the relationship between oneself and others.
- (2) Logical consistency: Human beings claim to be logically consistent in view of, for example, time, space, cause-effect relationships, etc.
- (3) Utility: Human beings claim to maximize utility for personal maintenance and development.
- (4) Beauty: A final decision is attained through the realization of "beauty" which is inseparably related to the above three claims. That is, "beauty" is perceived as an overall balancing factor which forms the apex of a pyramidal structure composed of three claims mentioned above.

In short, the decision of our social act is made to maximize its utility and logical consistency, giving consideration at the same time to the relationship between oneself and others, finally to realize so called "beauty." Mainly based on the moral consideration categories proposed by Eisenberg-Berg (1979), the authors tried to verify this hypothesis.

Method

Subjects

Subjects were 137 fifth-graders (68 males and 69 females). As has been suggested by Piaget (1965), the integration of behavior and moral judgement is made possible at this age. That is the reason why they were chosen as subjects.

Measures

Four short stories were used as moral situations where any kind of ethical conflict was

aroused. Two of them were the same stories as used by Eisenberg-Berg (1979), and the remaining two were constructed by the authors. Each of these contained an ethical conflict between the hero's (or heroin's) own needs or desires and those of others. After reading each stories, subjects were asked to answer two questions: (1) What should the hero (or heroin) in the story do? (2) Why has he (or she) had to do so?

One example of these stories is as follows:

(Story 3)

One day, as 5th-grader Toshihiko happened to pass along the back of the school grounds, he came upon three 6th-grade bullies who were beating and kicking a 4th-grade boy. When the harassed boy saw Toshihiko who was standing nearby, he cried for help. But the three bullies were all bigger, stronger-looking, and older than Toshihiko. The thought that he himself might also take a beating made him very frightened as to what to do. Should Toshihiko try to help the 4th-grade boy? Why?

Below are the themes of other three stories:

- (1) A girl has to choose between helping another girl who has fallen down and hurt her leg and going to a friend's birthday party.
- (2) Poor farmers in a village are asked to spare their scanty food for the people in a flooded town.
- (3) A college student is asked to accommodate a friend with money whose mother is critically ill. The money has been saved up in order to buy an article which the student has long dreamed of purchasing.

Two forms of questionnaire, subjective and objective, were constructed. In the subjective form, Ss were asked to answer the second question by writing down the reason why they thought so with regard to the first question. The objective form was composed of 22 items which exactly corresponded to each of 22 moral consideration categories originated by Eisenberg-Berg. Items for Story 3 with its instruction are listed as follows. Item numbers correspond to the order of original categories (cf. Table 1).

To what degree is the reason for your

answer given above related to the 22 reasons listed below? Choose several by encircling the number before each reason and place a check mark on the proper position on the five point scale provided after each reason which best represents the degree of importance or unimportance of that reason.

Toshihiko should help the boy because :

1. Toshihiko would be punished if his teacher saw him not doing anything to help.
2. Toshihiko would gain the teacher's favor if his teacher knew that he had helped.
3. the 4th-grade boy would help him should Toshihiko find himself in a similar situation.
4. the boy that was being beaten was one of Toshihiko's playmates in his neighborhood.
5. Toshihiko would be praised by everyone if he helped the weak.
6. it would become a serious matter if the boy suffered any injuries.
7. the boy seemed to be terrified.
8. it is a common cause when someone is being harassed by an upper-grade pupil.
9. it is nice to help.
10. it is only natural to help.
11. Toshihiko was asked by the boy for help.
12. he would be able to become good friends with the boy.
13. he felt sorry for him.
14. if Toshihiko had been in his place, he would want someone to help him.
15. Toshihiko would feel relieved knowing that he had helped.
16. Toshihiko would feel good knowing that he had done a good deed.
17. Toshihiko would feel guilty if by chance the boy was injured.
18. if he didn't help, he would regret not doing an act of kindness.
19. people in trouble should be helped.
20. the boy's safety should be protected.
21. people should help each other.
22. if everyone helped each other, the world would be a lot better.

Toshihiko should not help the boy because :

1. no teachers are around and he would not be punished.
2. even if he did, nobody would praise him.

3. the boy would not help if Toshihiko was in a similar situation.
4. the boy that was being beaten was not Toshihiko's friend.
5. he should try to find someone stronger than himself or a teacher for help.
6. it seemed like the boy was in no danger whatsoever of being injured.
7. the boy didn't seem to be that terrified.
8. Toshihiko is a 5th grader, and 4th graders should not be of his concern.
9. he shouldn't get involved.
10. it is not right to help.
11. the boy did not formally ask him for help.
12. he probably wouldn't become good friends out of it anyway.
13. the boy is not considered pitiful at all.
14. Toshihiko wouldn't want anyone to help him if he was in the same situation.
15. it does not matter if the boy was injured or not.
16. even if he helped, he wouldn't think of it as having done a good deed.
17. even if the boy was hurt, Toshihiko would not think that he had done anything wrong.
18. even if he didn't help, he wouldn't regret later about not helping.
19. there is no obligation to help people in trouble.
20. there is no need to protect the boy's safety.
21. people do not have to help each other.
22. even if everyone helped one another, the world would not get any better.

As is clear from the above example, two kinds of items, positive and negative, (in Story 3, for example, should help and should not help) were prepared depending on the subject's response to the first question. Ss were asked to choose several items among 22 items of one of two kinds, (positive and negative), and check on the 5 point scale attached to each item.

Procedure

The subjective form was administered one week earlier than the objective form.

Results and Discussion

The percentages of negative response (for example, "should not help" in Story 3) were

very low; in the subjective form, 1.7 for males and 3.6 for females, and in the objective form, 3.0 for males and 3.6 for females, respectively. Contrary to expectation, written reasons obtained from the subjective form were often too short and ambiguous to make sense out of them. Two raters tried to score these written reasons on the same 22 scales as used in the objective form, but the agreement of rating made by these two raters was relatively low even when the scale value was not taken into account (less than 60%). In the present experiment, information from interview could not be made available to supplement the insufficient information obtained from the subjective form. Consequently the subjective form was excluded from further analysis, and

only the objective form was subjected to statistical analysis. Because the percentage of negative response was negligibly low, the following analysis was performed only with positive response. Thus, resulting number of cases for which complete data for four stories had been obtained in positive response was 137.

Each scale value (0-4) on 22 scales were summed over four stories, and thus the range of the summed score was 0 to 16. Intercorrelations among 22 scales were calculated with these summed scores, and then factor analysed by principal component method. Table 1 shows varimax rotated factor matrix based on the first three factors. Category names in this table are Eisenberg-Berg's moral consideration categories, from which items and scales attached to

Table 1. Varimax rotated factor matrix and 22 moral consideration categories by Eisenberg-Berg.

Category	Factor I	Factor II	Factor III
1. Obsessive and/or magical view of authority and/or punishment.	-.168	-.600	.115
2. Pragmatic, hedonistic gain to the self.	-.001	-.674	.002
3. Direct reciprocity.	-.300	-.607	.128
4. Affectional relationship.	-.211	-.463	.312
5. Hedonistic pragmatism with a socially acceptable rationalization.	-.028	-.634	.193
6. Concern for others' physical and material needs.	-.477	-.082	.492
7. Concern for others' psychological needs.	-.407	-.291	.607
8. Reference to and concern with humanness.	-.605	-.250	.226
9. Stereotypes of a good or bad person.	-.565	-.134	.293
10. Stereotyped images of majority behavior.	-.720	-.077	.162
11. Stereotyped images of others and their roles.	-.270	-.416	.504
12. Approval and interpersonal orientation.	-.270	-.551	.451
13. Sympathetic orientation.	-.540	-.078	.567
14. Role-taking.	-.449	-.168	.523
15. Simple internalized positive affect and positive affect related to consequences.	-.411	-.222	.645
16. Internalized positive affect from self-respect and living up to one's value.	-.236	-.244	.662
17. Internalized negative affect over consequences of behavior.	-.132	-.062	.710
18. Internalized negative affect due to loss of self-respect and/or not living up to one's value.	-.223	-.201	.728
19. Internalized law, norm, and value orientation.	-.740	-.091	.302
20. Concern with the rights of others.	-.681	-.206	.440
21. Generalized reciprocity.	-.677	-.129	.217
22. Concern with condition of society.	-.422	-.138	.074

them were constructed, as already mentioned. Each of three factors thus obtained were interpreted in terms of the factor pattern, and tentatively named as follows:

Factor I: reciprocal claim as internalized norms.

Factor II: hedonistic and pragmatic claim.

Factor III: affective and empathic claim.

Both Factor I and III were nearly perfectly independent of the pragmatic and hedonistic category, and closely related to reciprocal considerations. Factor I, however, implied more logical and intellectual aspect of reciprocity, and Factor III more affective and emotional aspect of it. Factor II had its largest loadings on pragmatic and hedonistic categories, and thus its interpretation was straightforward.

Factor I and Factor III together explained 75% of total variance (67% for Factor I and 8% for Factor III), and thus it may safely be stated that reciprocal and empathic considerations play an important role in prosocial moral reasoning examined in the present study. Both Factor I and III closely correspond to Inter-subjectivity of Murai's theory, and the former represents the logical side and the latter emotional side of it. Moreover, Factor II is evidently related to Utility in this theory. Therefore, the theory could be at least partly supported by these factors obtained in the present study, although the theory itself is not so well-formulated to be directly subjected to empirical verification.

In view of the high percentage of positive response observed in the present experiment, we can visualize the typical picture of fifth-graders who are willing to help others when asked for help from others in trouble without expecting any reward from the act, and still more, knowing that the act could cause disadvantageous consequences to themselves. To put it in relation to the theory, they minimized their regard for self-profit (Utility), considering others' sad plight (Intersubjectivity), and at the same time, searching for what is best and optimal in the situation (Logical-consistency and Beauty).

The above description is, however, based on moral judgement made by fifth-graders in an

imaginary moral conflict. The question still remains for solution whether moral reasoning done in simulated situations can predict actual deeds in real life situations or not. Staub (1978a, 1978b) has presented a theoretical model that explains and predicts a positive relationship between a strong prosocial motivation and helping acts under a specifiable condition. He says that the larger the number of characteristics of persons and situations we take into account, the better will our prediction be, but the smaller the number of individuals to whom such predictions apply. A research project is under way by the present authors that focuses on the relationship between moral judgement and actual choice of behavior from the stand point of a person-situation interaction.

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