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# MORAL REASONING:

MORAL RELATIVISM, KOHLBERG & 3 MORAL  
FRAMEWORKS

# Moral Relativism

- Is the thesis that there are **no moral truths**.
- If **Moral Relativism** is true – there is **no foundation for reason-giving debate** about Moral matters.

## 2 models of thinking

1. The Taste Model
2. The Scientific Model

# Moral Relativism (The Taste Model)

- Julian likes coffee but hates tea.
- Sandy likes tea but hates coffee
- What is the key issue with the Taste Model?



# Moral Relativism (The Taste Model)

There is no room for reason-giving debate !!



# Moral Relativism (The Science Model)


- Julian believes that all swans are white.
- Sandy believes that there are black swans.
- What is the key difference between the Science and the Taste Model?

# Moral Relativism (The Science Model)

- The discussion would hinge on **facts and evidence**
- There is a **recognition of a common standard to apply** – whether the issues under discussion are true or false or merely a matter of taste.
- There is a **truth value**.



## (Examples for Discussion)

- It is wrong to torture animals simply for enjoyment.
  - Slavery is morally right and there was no reason to abolish it.
  - The Holocaust was a great moral good.
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# Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development

## 3 Developmental Stages

- **Stage 1 - Pre-Conventional (Pre-moral):**
  - Focuses on the pursuit of self-interest *i.e. rationale for one's actions lies in the fear of punishment, the pursuit of reward and pleasure.*
- **Stage 2 – Conventional:**
  - The reasons for behaving correctly appeal to Social Rules and Conventions which prevail in a social group *i.e. family, church, society.*
- **Stage 3 - Post-Conventional (Principled):**
  - Conventions are questioned in terms of universal and universalisable principles.



## Premoral Level

Stage 1: Punishment-Avoidance and Obedience	Make moral decisions strictly on the basis of self-interests. Disobey rules if can do so without getting caught.
Stage 2: Exchange of favors	Recognize that others have needs, but make satisfaction of own needs a higher priority.

## Conventional Level

Stage 3: Good boy/Good girl	Make decisions on the basis of what will please others. Concerned about maintaining interpersonal relations.
Stage 4: Law and order	Look to society as a whole for guidelines about behavior. Think of rules as inflexible, unchangeable.

## Principled Level

Stage 5: Social contract	Recognize that rules are social agreements that can be changed when necessary.
Stage 6: Universal ethical principle	Adhere to a small number of abstract principles that transcend specific, concrete rules. Answer to an inner conscience.

## Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development

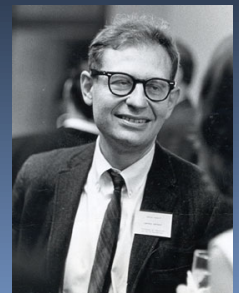
# Kohlberg's Beliefs



- Lawrence Kohlberg believed that individuals could only progress through these stages **systematically**.
- He also believed that individuals could only come to a comprehension of a moral rationale **one stage above their own**.
- According to Kohlberg, **moral development occurs through social interaction** - based on the insight that individuals develop as a result of cognitive conflicts at their current stage
- Hence, it was important to present individuals with **moral dilemmas for discussion** which would help them to see the reasonableness of a "higher stage" morality and encourage their development in that direction.
- **Are there any OBJECTIONS to Kohlberg's Theory?**

# Objections to Kohlberg's theory

- Does **moral reasoning** necessarily lead to **moral behaviour**?
- Is **justice** the only aspect of moral reasoning we should consider?
- Fails to deal with "**special relationships**" between friends/family members.
- **Hypothetical dilemmas** are too sketchy to provide a context for students to develop their own moral perceptions. **Real issues/scenarios** as a better springboard due to the level of detail inherent in them.
- Does Kohlberg's theory **overemphasize Western philosophy**?
- Kohlberg **only surveyed males and not females**. Does this result in skewed inaccuracies?



# 3 Moral Frameworks

## 1. Consequences

- *Note that Consequences themselves are objects of moral evaluation.*

## 2. Motives

- *Tainted Motives with Good Consequences vs. Pure Motives with Bad Consequences*
- *Note that Motives are often mixed.*

## 3. Action-Types/Character

- *E.g. That is Murder and Murder is always wrong/  
That is Lying and Lying is always wrong.*

# Knowing Yourself

## The Domains that Determine Who We ARE:

- Sociological/Historical
- Philosophical/Theological
- Ethical
- Intellectual
- Ideological and Political
- Economic
- Psychological

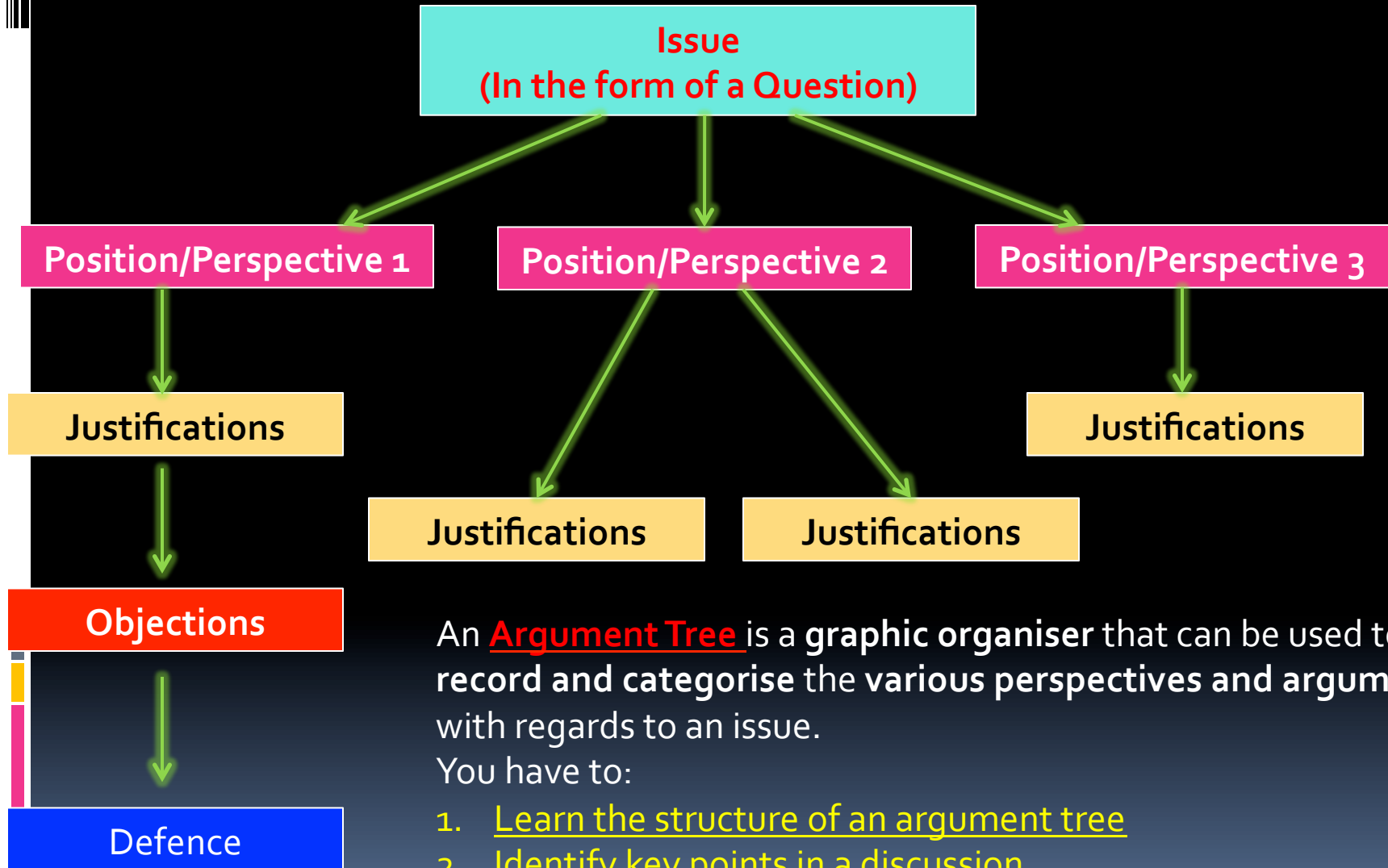
# Sample of Routine Questioning in the Critical Mind:

- *What is the most fundamental issue here?*
- *From what point of view should I approach this problem?*
- *Does it make sense to assume this?*
- *What can I infer from this data?*
- *What is the fundamental concept here?*
- *Is this information consistent with common logic?*
- *How do I check the accuracy of this information?*

# Key Reminders

- Note the difference between **making arguments** and **asserting conclusions** (Strong Arguments are NOT Conclusions).
- The focus is on the **Quality of the Arguments** & NOT the Conclusions (Focus on the **Quality of Thinking** and **avoid Mistakes in Reasoning**).
- **Reasons** are explanations that either:
  1. Appeal to the **Interests of the Agent**
  2. Appeal to **Moral Claims**

## Tools in a COI: Argument Trees



An **Argument Tree** is a graphic organiser that can be used to record and categorise the various perspectives and arguments with regards to an issue.

You have to:

1. Learn the structure of an argument tree
2. Identify key points in a discussion
3. Identify logical links between arguments made.



### Exercise 3

Is it morally permissible to perform scientific experiments on orphaned mentally retarded children

Withholding a Judgement

Yeah, baby

Maybe, Depends.

No way, Jose

Justifications

Justifications

Justifications

Justifications

Objections

Defence

# Exercise 3

Are Designer Babies Ethical?

Withholding a  
Judgement

Yeah, baby

Maybe, Depends.

No way, Jose

Justifications

Justifications

Justifications

Justifications

Objections

Defence

# Your Turn (Designer Babies)

- Technology currently allows parents to choose certain genetic traits for their children.
- 3 Central Mechanisms:
  1. **Selective Abortion**
  2. **Selection of Other Biological Parent**
  3. **Gene Therapy**
- ***ARE DESIGNER BABIES ETHICAL?***

# Designer Babies (FOR)

- Parents should be allowed to do their best for their children *e.g. sending them to the best schools, orthodontistry.*
- Parents have the right to choose the traits of their children *e.g. they already determine the background and upbringing.*
- Freedom of action is a fundamental human right.

# Designer Babies (AGAINST)

- Humans should not interfere with nature **BUT** *how about the use of medical interventions to cure diseases and lessen suffering?*
- Human diversity is important *e.g. potential for social disaster, government abuse.*
- We do not know the consequences for natural selection in society *e.g. technological uncertainty and the fear of the unknown.*

# Designer Babies (MAYBE)

- Society should allow parents to eliminate disabilities BUT not to select advantageous traits and abilities *i.e. the Right to a Normal Life BUT not a Privileged Life.*
- Legislation to prevent abuse