

Morality from *is* to *taught*: Review of “How to Teach Morality” by Georg Lind

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Humans are extraordinarily social beings. From a young age, children concern themselves with the well-being of others and want to see others being helped and treated fairly. The breadth of prosocial behaviors in early childhood is certainly impressive. At the same time, we hesitate to ascribe to young children the full range of the moral attributes that adult human beings (can) show: Treating others with respect, holding others and being held accountable, enforcing as well as following social norms, and reasoning with others about the right and wrong course of action. In short, what young children lack and what mature human adults develop is moral competence.

Competence is different from capacity. Humans may be born with a (pro)social sense but whether and how this translates into judgments and moral behavior is a different matter. In his book, Georg Lind gives a detailed and insightful account of how he and his colleagues assess moral competence by presenting adults, as well as children, with moral dilemmas. By its nature a dilemma does not have a single definite best solution. Individuals may have spontaneous intuitions about which course of action the protagonist in a dilemma should take. What is far more difficult and requires competence is to both differentiate between weak (one should avoid punishment) and strong (uphold ethical standards) arguments for one’s own opinion as well as between weak and strong argument for the alternative course of action.

Georg Lind and his colleagues have pioneered an empirical tool, a test of an individual’s moral competence. In his latest book, Lind provides a comprehensive review of the results obtained from applying the Moral Competence Test (MCT) to participants of various ages and diverse backgrounds. Chapter 4, *Meaning and measurement of moral competence*, provides readers with several example calculations of MCT-test scores which illustrate that the MCT provides an objective measure of the structure of individuals’ moral competence. One of the most striking results of applying the MCT is that moral judgment competence can decline and does not steadily increase from our prosocial tendencies evident in early childhood. Rather, what is needed is careful and targeted education.

The main thrust of ‘How to Teach Morality’ is a detailed and diligently laid out account of how to design, plan, conduct, and evaluate educational programs that foster participants’ moral competence. In part 2 of the book, readers are presented with insightful and illustrative anecdotes, carefully outlined instructions, and, most crucially, empirical data demonstrating the effectiveness of interventions on improving participants’ judgment scores. The effectiveness of such interventions are best illustrated by the results Lind and his colleagues achieve through administering the *Konstanzer*

*Methode der Dilemma Diskussion (KMDD)*, a structured participatory peer group dilemma discussion method. In Lind's book, readers are provided with a blueprint of how to carry out an effective intervention method so as to engage participants in constructive dilemma discussion. The outcomes Lind and colleagues achieve from these brief, one-time, interventions are striking.

The ideas that Georg Lind lays out in 'How to Teach Morality' are very much in the spirit of a democratic conception and implementation of moral education. In Lind's intervention programs the teacher remains in the background and intervenes only to remind participants of the rules of conduct to ensure that participants treat each other as equals with fairness and respect. *How to Teach Morality*, then, is not about which specific values to teach but rather how to create environments in which peers come together as equals and learn to not only express and find arguments for their own views but rather to also acknowledge, respect, and incorporate arguments of alternative, even opposing, points of view.

*How to Teach Morality* is an encouragement to actively engage our peers and children in moral education. A particularly exciting avenue for future research is to investigate how individuals' improved moral judgment translates into moral behavior more generally. Such examples may include helping others, enforcing moral norms, and treating others fairly. It is now up to the readers including policy makers, teachers, and parents to draw the right conclusions from this book and to provide new empirical data on the short-term and long-term benefits of moral education.

Lind, Georg: "How to Teach Morality" (Berlin, Logos Publisher, 2016)

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