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Moral Competence

A “New” Paradigm for Promoting Global Democracy and Peace

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Foreword

Some questions for the audience

1. Who believes that most, if not all people, desire to be good?
 2. Do you, yourself, desire to be good?
 3. Are you always acting as moral, as you desire yourself?
- “2” minus “1” = Pluralistic Ignorance
 - “3” minus “2” = Virtue or Moral Competence
- Next

People Lack Democratic Competence ...

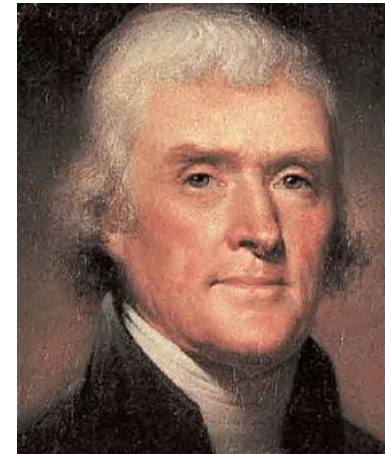
"The great advantage of representatives is, their capacity of discussing public affairs. For this the people collectively are extremely unfit, which is one of the chief inconveniences of a democracy."

Baron de Montesquieu (1689-1755)



... we Should Educate them!

"If we think [people] not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them, but to inform their discretion by education."



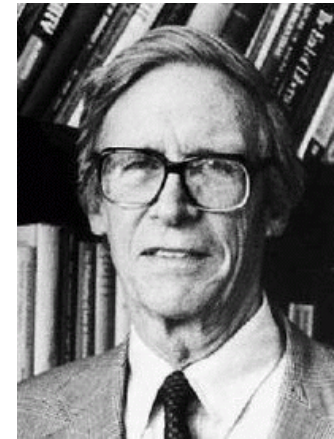
Thomas Jefferson (1820)

Letters to William C. Jarvis. ME 15:278

Democracy as Government by Deliberation and Discussion ...

"The definitive idea for deliberative democracy is the idea of deliberation itself. When citizens deliberate, they exchange views and debate their supporting reasons concerning public political questions."

(p. 579-580)



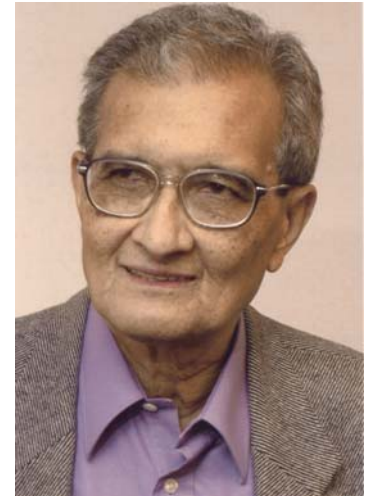
John Rawls (1999).

Collected Papers. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press

... Is a Difficult Task for the Citizens

"There is a need for reasoned argument, with oneself and with others in dealing with conflicting claims..." (p. x)

and a need for "engagement in reasoning about a subject on which it is ... very difficult to speak." (p. 4)

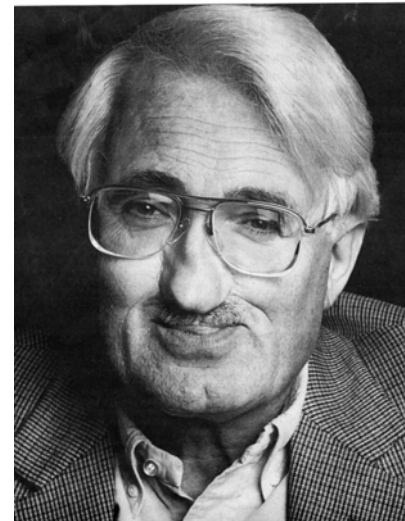


Amartya Sen (2009). The idea of justice.

... It Requires Moral Discourse Competence

... Is the ability to solve a conflict between people and group of people through moral discourse rather than violence and power.

Habermas, J. (1990). Moral
Consciousness and Communicative Action



Our Questions

- Is Montesquieu right? Do people possess only little moral-democratic competence?
- Is Jefferson right? Can we use education to foster people's moral-democratic competence?
- Or are those right, who believe that people do not even possess the moral ideals of democracy, justice and peace, but that these orientations must be imposed upon them through social force by their parents and teachers (Bandura & Zimbardo, 2005; Zimbardo, 2007)?

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② The Global Desire of Being Good and Just

"Plato's view that to see the Good is to choose it."

Thomas E. Wren, from: Caring about morality. Philosophical perspectives in moral psychology. London: Routledge, 2001, p. 155

"The most important human endeavor is the striving for morality in our actions."

Albert Einstein, from Letters to a minister, 1950.

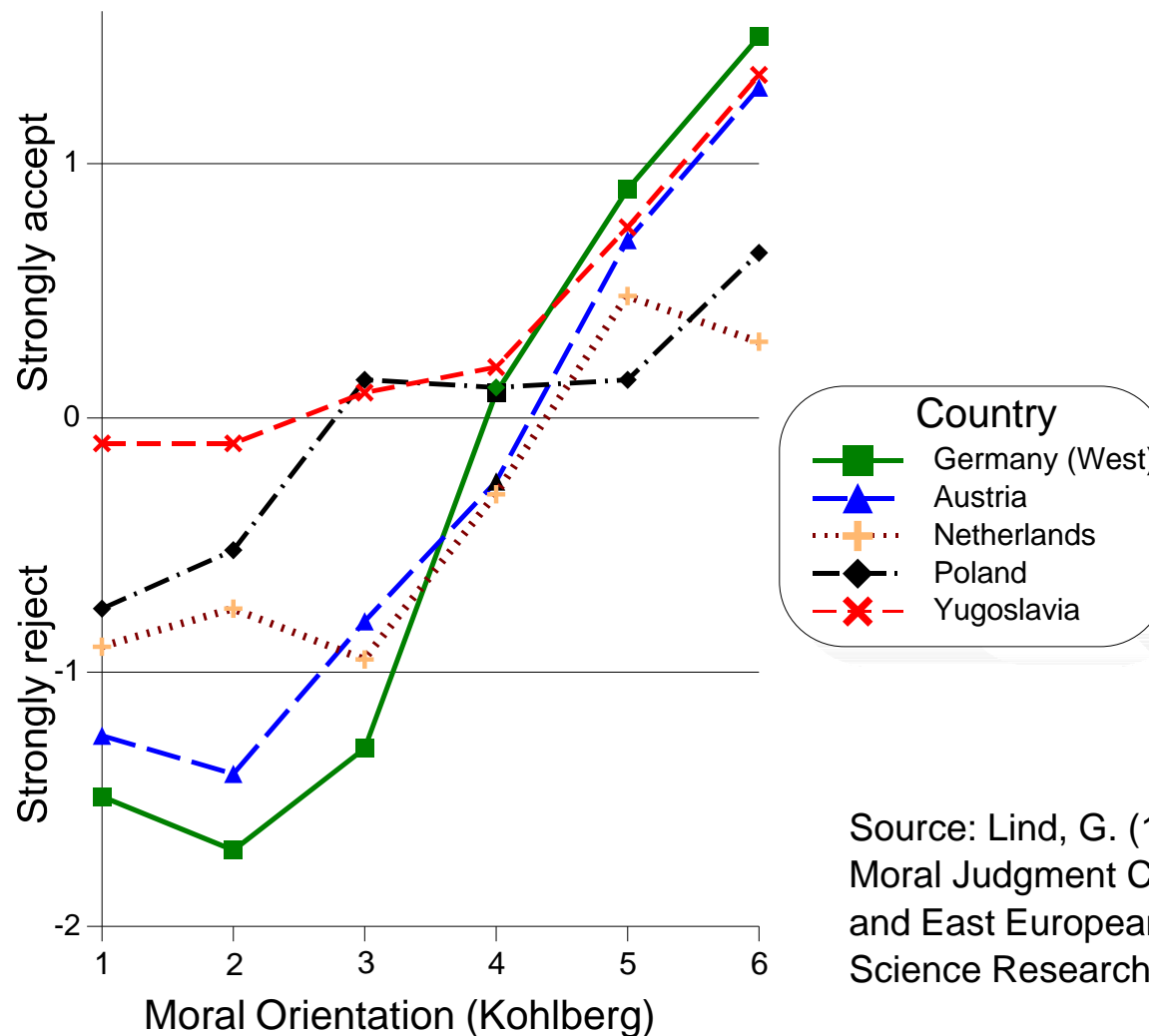
Democracy as a Global Moral Value

“Democracy as an international norm is stronger today than ever, and democracy itself is widely regarded as an ideal system of government. Democracy also has near-universal appeal among people of every ethnic group, every religion, and every region of the world.” (p. 148).
“Survey data suggest that support for democracy is robust and at relatively similar levels in every region of the world.”

McFaul (2004, p. 152)

Moral Orientations: Universal Hierarchy of Preferences

N = 4055, first Semester University Students; only Doctor Dilemma (Median)



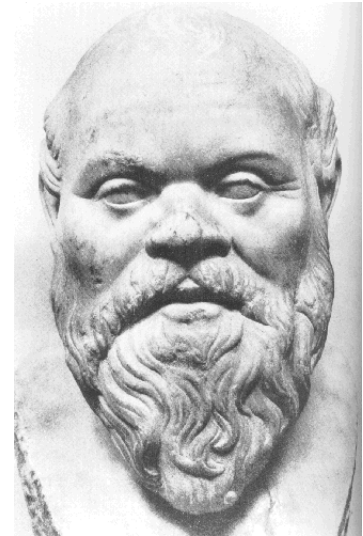
Source: Lind, G. (1986). Cultural Differences in Moral Judgment Competence? A study of West and East European University Students. Behavior Science Research, 21 (4), 208-255.

Moral Desire and Competence

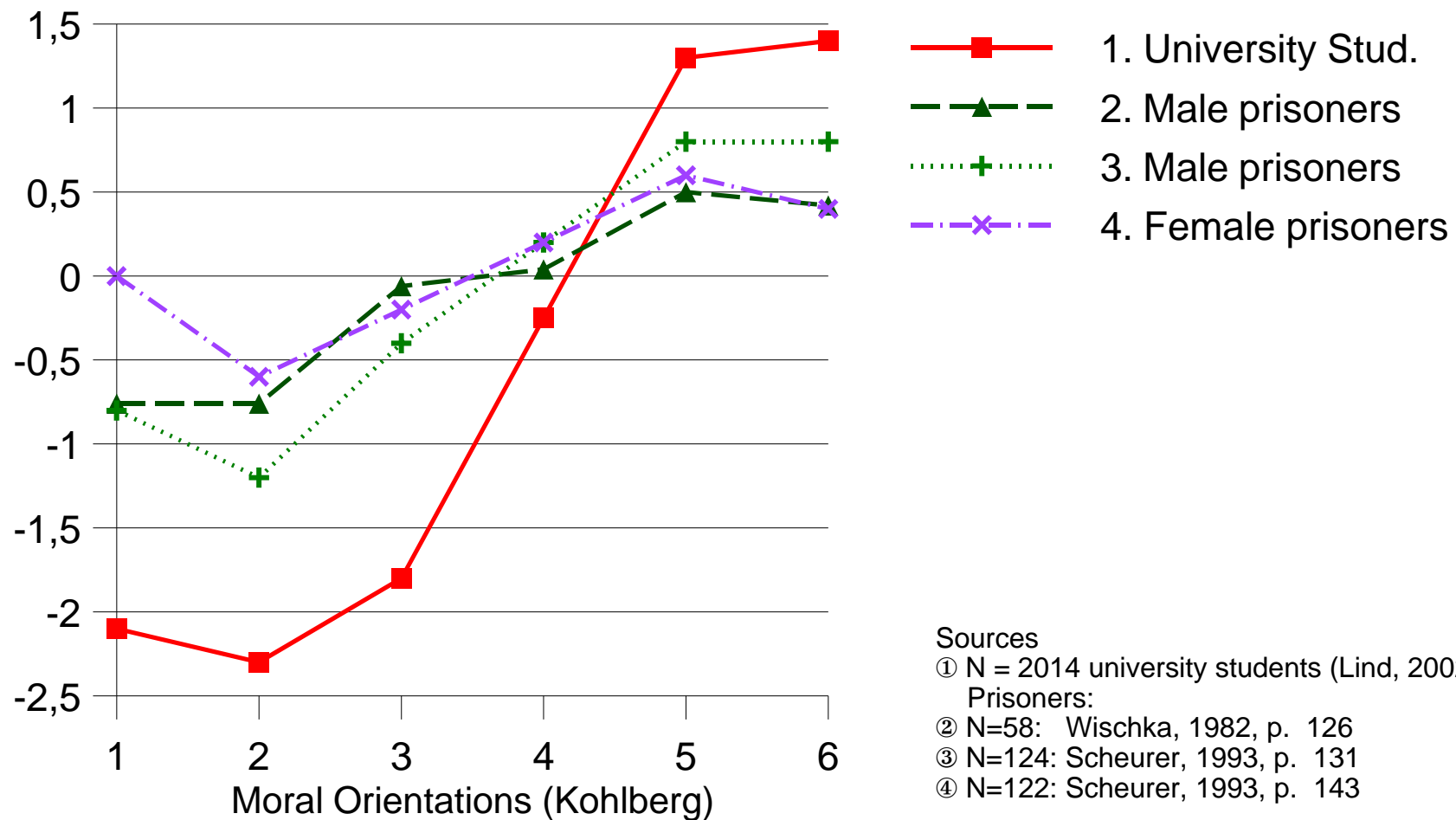
Socrates: And if one man is not better than another in desiring good, he must be better in the power of attaining it?

Socrates: Then, ..., virtue would appear to be the power of attaining good?

Plato: Socrates' dialogue with Meno



Criminals also Have Good Moral Orientations



To Live by Moral Ideals and Principles Is not Easy

- ▶ Because moral feelings can come in conflict with each other (moral dilemma)
- ▶ Because they are mostly vague and must be re-constructed and specified through reasoning
- ▶ Because we are aroused by the critical scrutiny of our decisions (*from others and ourselves*)
- ▶ And because moral choices require knowledge about facts and technical skills

The Two Aspects of Moral Behavior

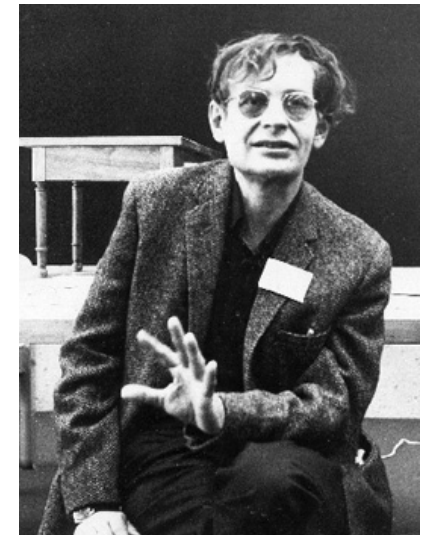
- A *moral orientation*, ideal, attitude etc. is assessed through a person's evaluative reactions toward stimuli (typically objects or statements). ➡ *Affective aspect*.
- A *moral competence*, ability etc. is assessed through the observation of a person's coping with a *pertinent moral task*. The most often used moral task is *reasoning and discussion about dilemmas* (not necessarily the solution of a dilemma because we mostly lack criteria for judging the “moral goodness” of such solutions). ➡ *Cognitive aspect*.



Moral Judgment Competence...

is "the capacity to make decisions and judgments which are moral (i.e., based on internal principles) and to act in accordance with such judgments."

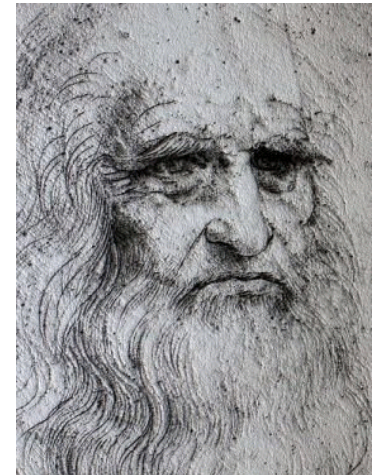
Lawrence Kohlberg (1964, p. 425)



④ How to Observe Moral Competence?

"The depth and strength of a human character are defined by its moral reserves. People reveal themselves completely only when they are thrown out of the customary conditions of their life, for only then do they have to fall back on their reserves."

Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519)



2. Doctor's Dilemma

A woman had cancer and she had no hope of being saved. She was in terrible pain and so weakened that a large dose of a painkiller such as morphine would have caused her death. During a temporary period of improvement, she begged the doctor to give her enough morphine to kill her. She said she could no longer endure the pain and would be dead in a few weeks anyway. The doctor complied with her wish.

20. Do you disagree or agree with the doctor's behavior?

**I strongly
disagree**

**I strongly
agree**

-3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3

How acceptable do you find the following arguments *in favor* of the doctor? Suppose someone said he acted *rightly* . . .

**I strongly
reject**

**I strongly
accept**

Pro-Arguments

21. because the doctor had to act according to his conscience. The woman's condition justified an exception to the moral obligation to preserve life.

-4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4

22. because the doctor was the only one who could fulfill the woman's wish; respect for her wish made him act as he did.

-4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4

23. because the doctor only did what the woman talked him into doing. He need not worry about unpleasant consequences.

-4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4

24. because the woman would have died anyway and it didn't take much effort for him to give her an overdose of a painkiller.

-4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4

25. because the doctor didn't really break a law. Nobody could have saved the woman and he only wanted to shorten her suffering.

-4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4

26. because most of his fellow doctors would presumably have done the same in a similar situation.

-4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4

Contra-Arguments

	he need not worry about unpleasant consequences.								
24.	because the woman would have died anyway and it didn't take much effort for him to give her an overdose of a painkiller.	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3 +4
25.	because the doctor didn't really break a law. Nobody could have saved the woman and he only wanted to shorten her suffering.	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3 +4
26.	because most of his fellow doctors would presumably have done the same in a similar situation.	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3 +4
<hr/>									
How acceptable do you find the following arguments <i>against</i> the doctor? Suppose someone said that he acted <i>wrongly</i> ...		I strongly reject			I strongly accept				
27.	because he acted contrary to his colleagues' convictions. If they are against mercy-killing the doctor shouldn't do it.	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3 +4
28.	because one should be able to have complete faith in a doctor's devotion to preserving life even if someone with great pain would rather die.	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3 +4
29.	because the protection of life is everyone's highest moral obligation. We have no clear moral criteria for distinguishing between mercy-killing and murder.	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3 +4
30.	because the doctor could get himself into much trouble. They have already punished others for doing the same thing.	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3 +4
31.	because he could have had it much easier if he had waited and not interfered with the woman's dying.	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3 +4
32.	because the doctor broke the law. If one thinks that mercy-killing is illegal, then one should refuse such requests.	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3 +4

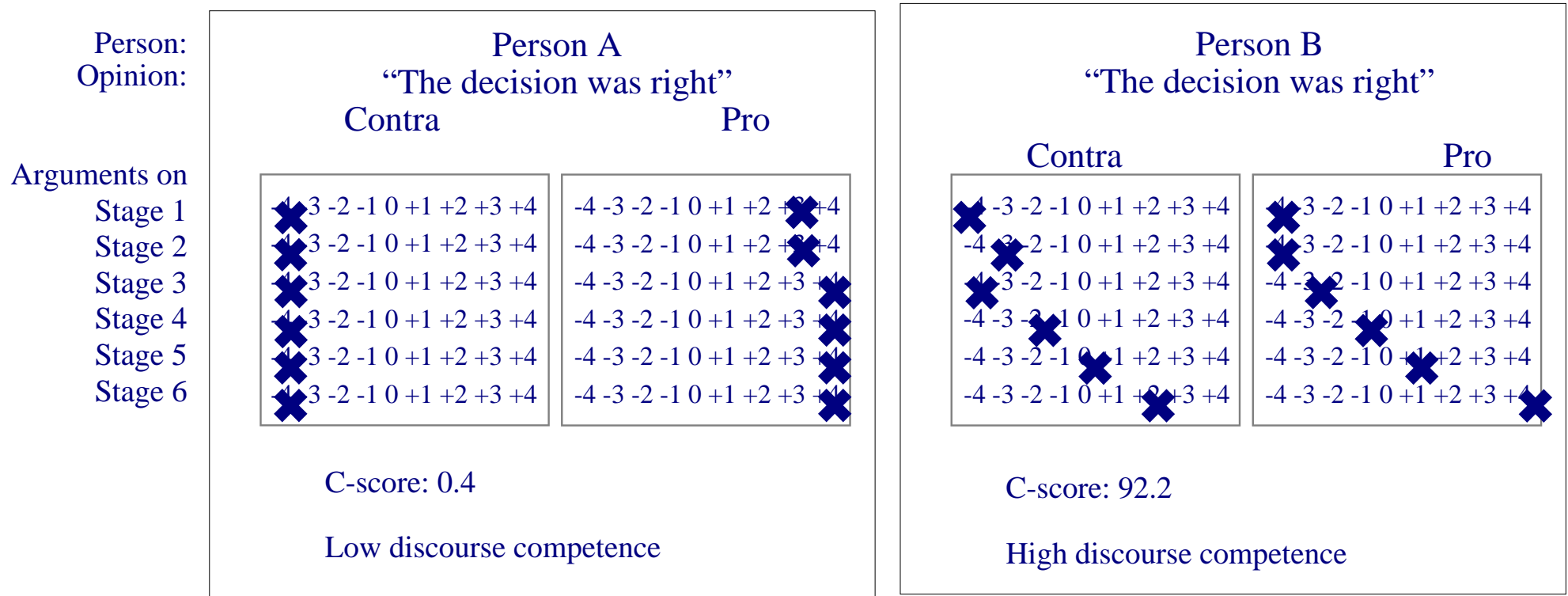
Thank you!

Experimental Measurement through the *Moral Judgment Test* (MJT)

- The moral task & measurement object: The ability to discern the moral quality of arguments in a controversial discussion about moral dilemmas
- Criterion behavior: Pattern of ratings of arguments for and against a decision on a moral dilemma on a 9-point scale (from "strongly reject" to "strongly accept")
- Multivariate diacritical experiment with a 2 x 2 x 6 design:
 - ▶ Two dilemmas (workers, doctor)
 - ▶ Pro- and contra-arguments
 - ▶ Six moral orientations (quality of reasoning sensu Kohlberg)

Moral Discussion Experiment

The Response-Pattern of Two Fictitious Participants (Type 2 and 3) Yielding Different Competence-Scores



Levels of Moral Competence and Specific Reaction Pattern

1. Cannot differentiate between arguments and opinion on an issue

- ▶ The participant gives his/her opinion on the actor's decision but refuses to respond to any arguments, or gives erratic responses.

2. Can see arguments only as instrumental for defending one's opinion about an issues ("rationalization")

- ▶ P. rates all supporting arguments indiscriminately very positive ("+4") and all counter-arguments very negative ("-4").

3. Is able to discern the moral quality of supporting arguments

- ▶ P. accepts only appropriate arguments but rejects others

4. Understands that arguments are important to scrutinize an issue or a decision

- ▶ P. rejects good counter-arguments less strongly, or even accepts them if they represent a good point

C-Score

0

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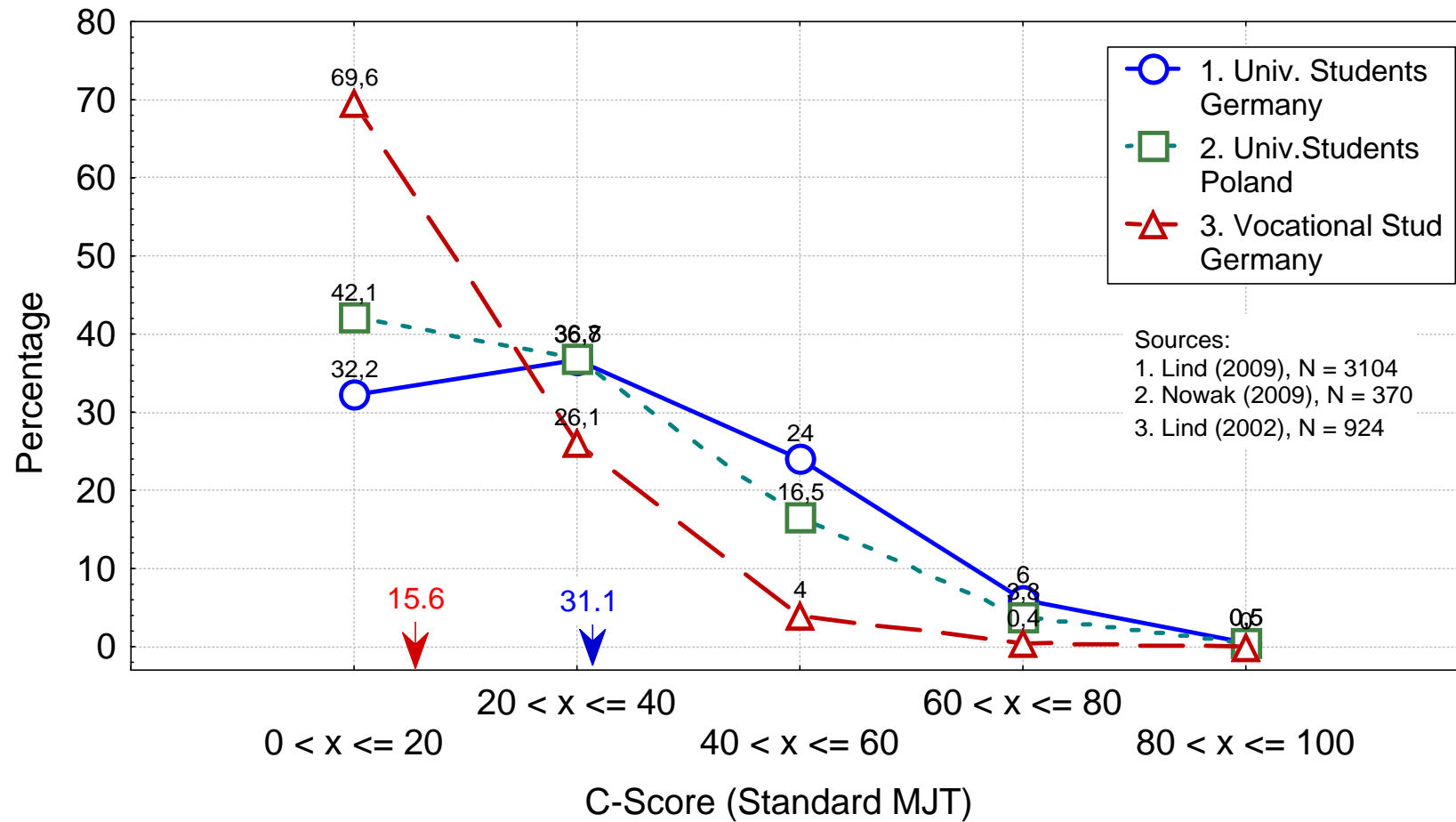
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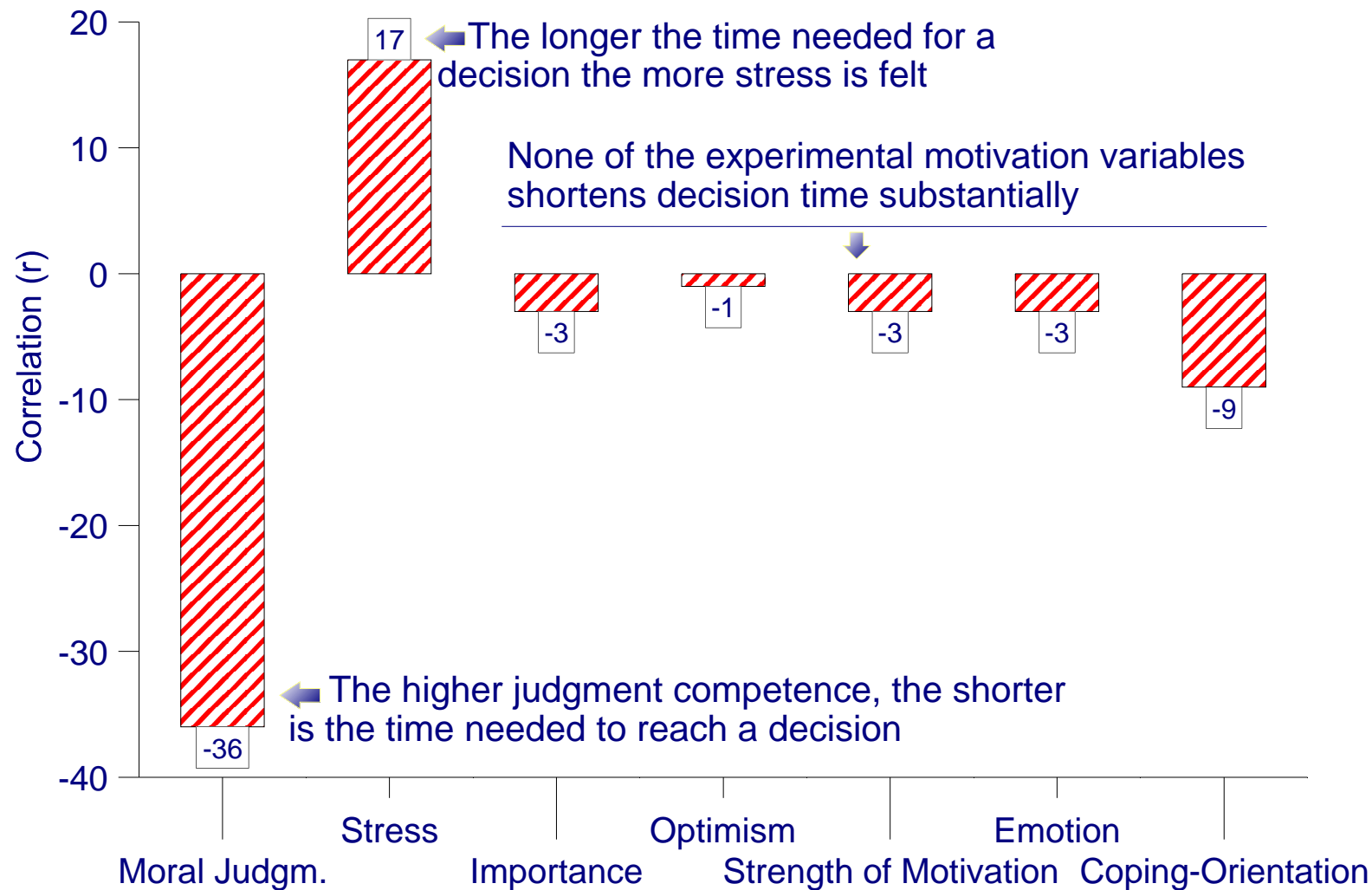
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Distributions of Moral Judgment Competence



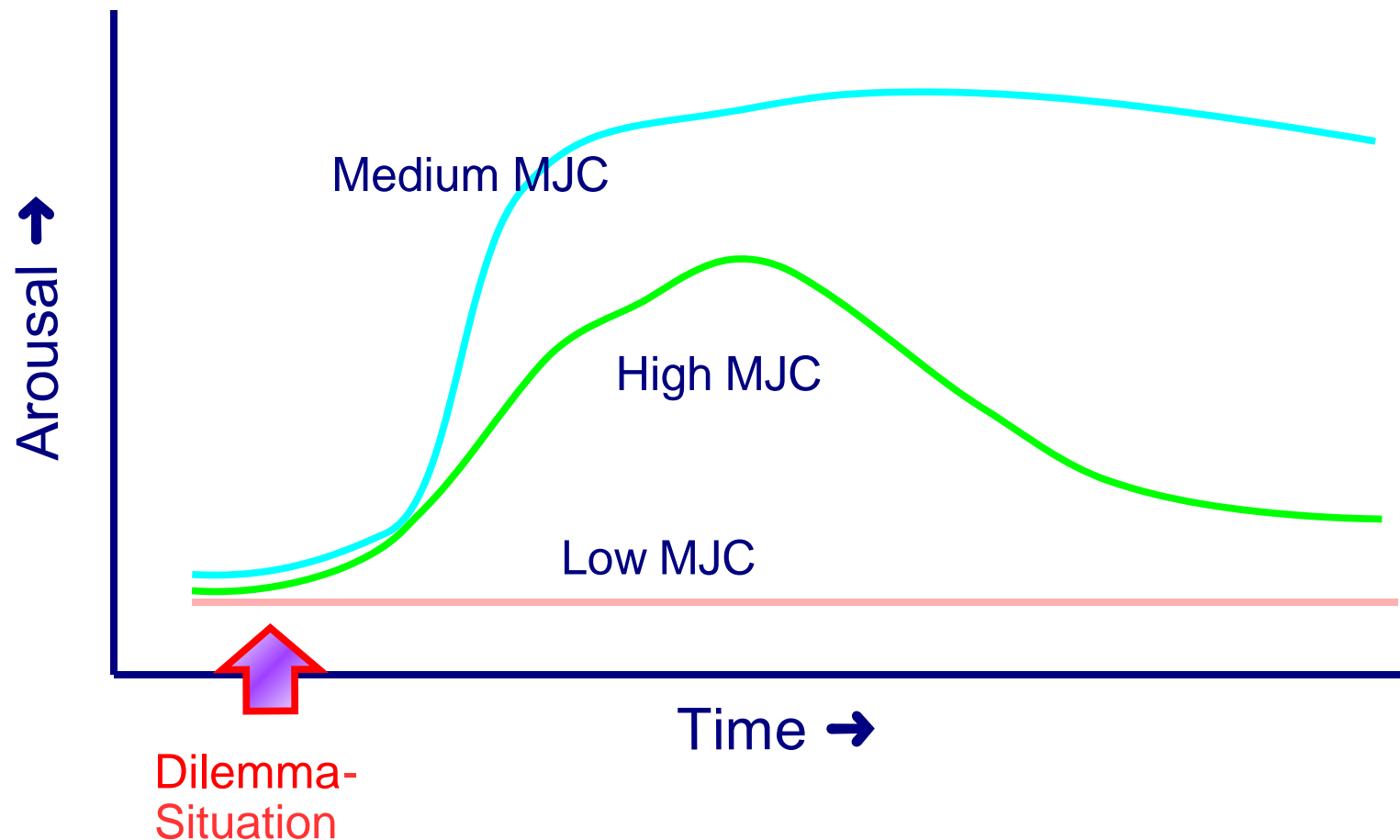
Greater Decision-Making Ability



Source: Mansbart, F.-J. (2001). Motivationale Einflüsse der moralischen Urteilsfähigkeit auf die Bildung von Vorsätzen [Motivational influences of moral judgment competence on the formation of intentions.] (Master thesis, University of Konstanz)

Devolution of Arousal and Coping with a Dilemma by Level of Moral Judgment Competence (MJC)

A Theoretical Model

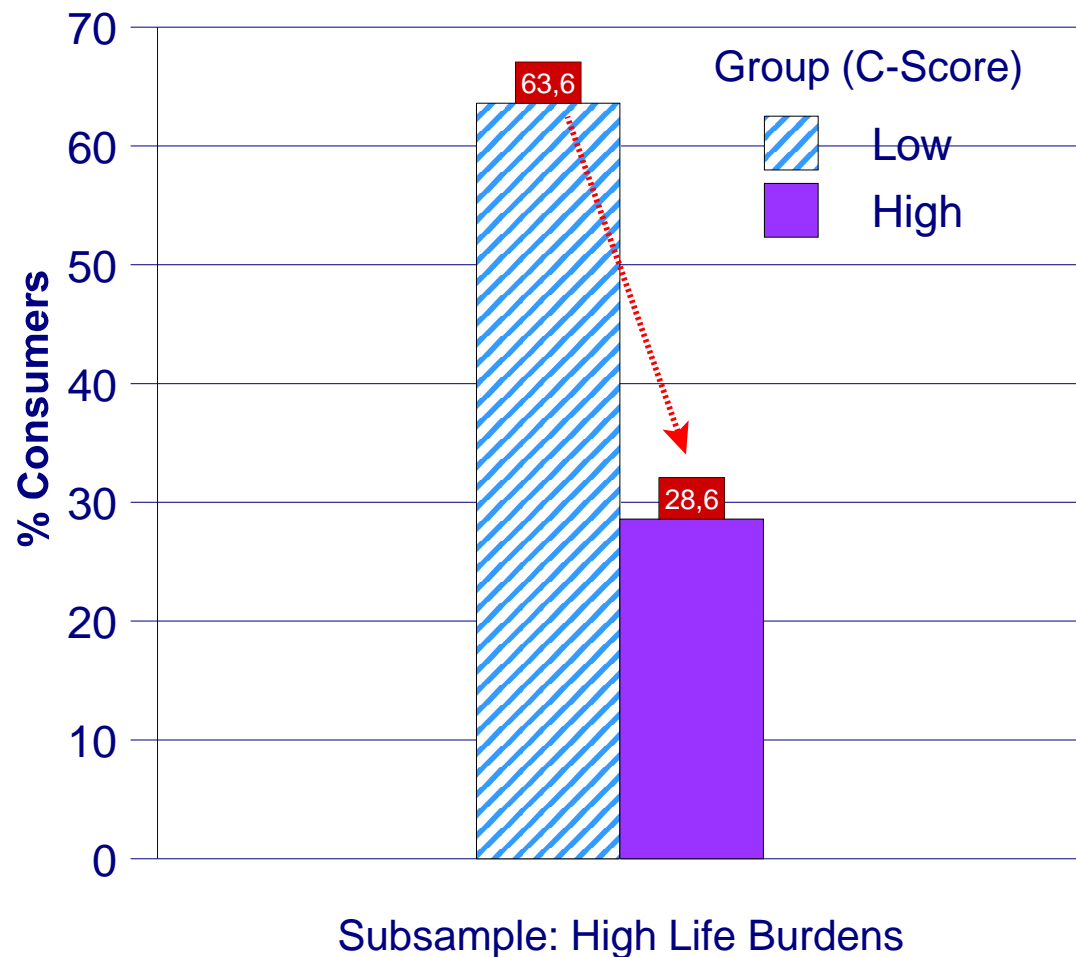


⑤ Moral Agency: Just and Peaceful Behavior

- Resisting the Temptation to Unjust Behavior
- Helping
- Civil Protest
- Resisting Immoral Orders
- Demonstrating for Democratic Rights
- Learning (Memorizing to Applying the Learned)
- Resisting Drug Use under Heavy Life Burdens

Prevention of Drug Consumption in Youth with High Life Burdens

- Behavior: Percentage drug consumer
- Factors:
 - Moral judgment competence
 - Life burdens
- Participants: 9th graders
- Source: Lenz, B. (2006).
Moralische Urteilsfähigkeit als
eine Determinante für
Drogenkonsum bei
Jugendlichen. [Moral judgment
competence as a determinant
of drug consumption in youth.]
Unpubl. Master thesis,
University of Konstanz.

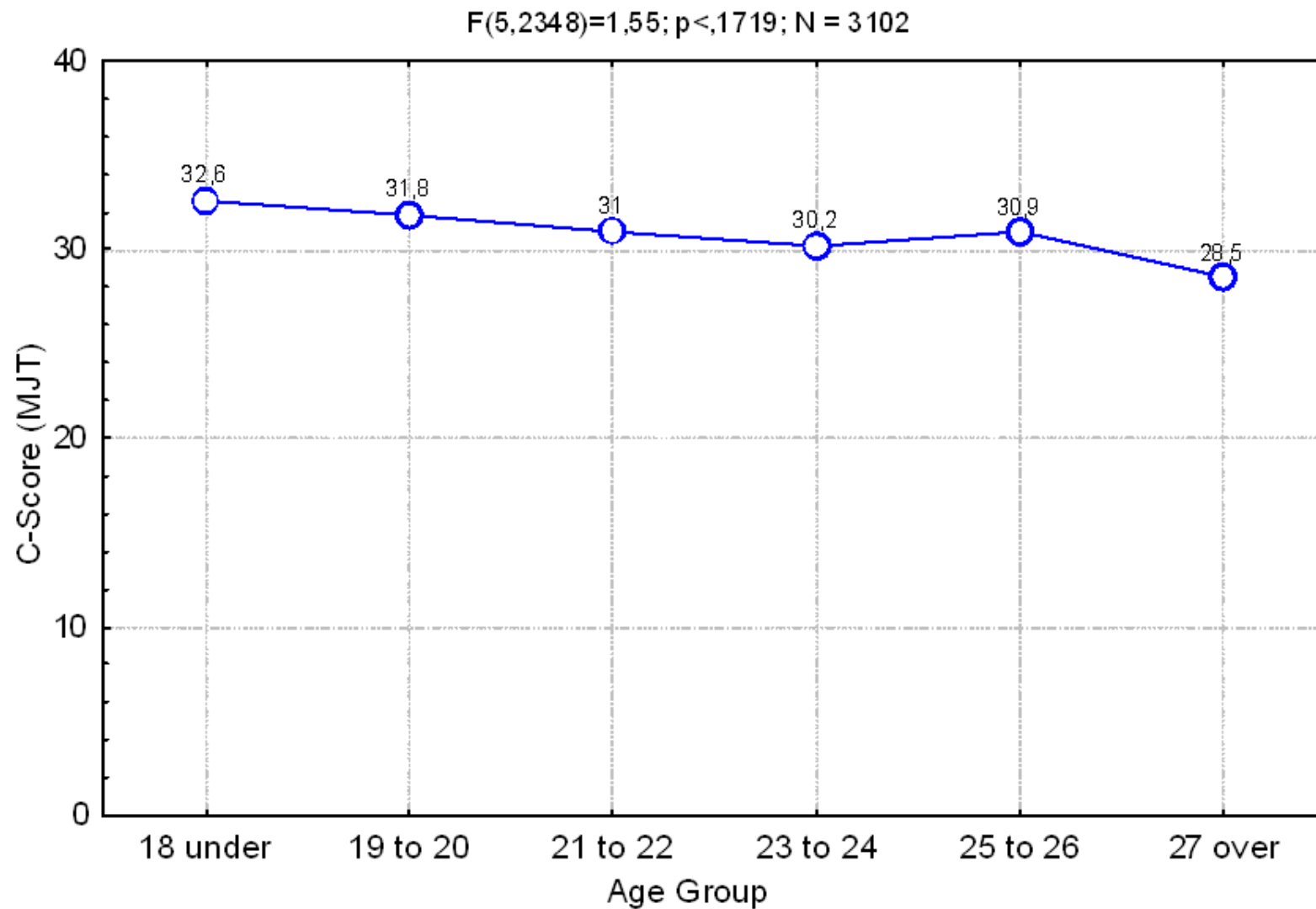


Fostering moral competence with the *Konstanz Method of Dilemma Discussion* (KMDD)® - Conception

- To use and foster their moral judgment and discourse competens, participants are confronted with specially designed semi-real dilemma situations
- The KMDD assists their learning process through four teaching principles:
 - ▶ Modelling democratic, peaceful discourse
 - ▶ Re-construction and co-construction of moral feelings
 - ▶ Enhancing self-control of affective arousal
 - ▶ Improvement of teaching through self-evaluation (ITSE)

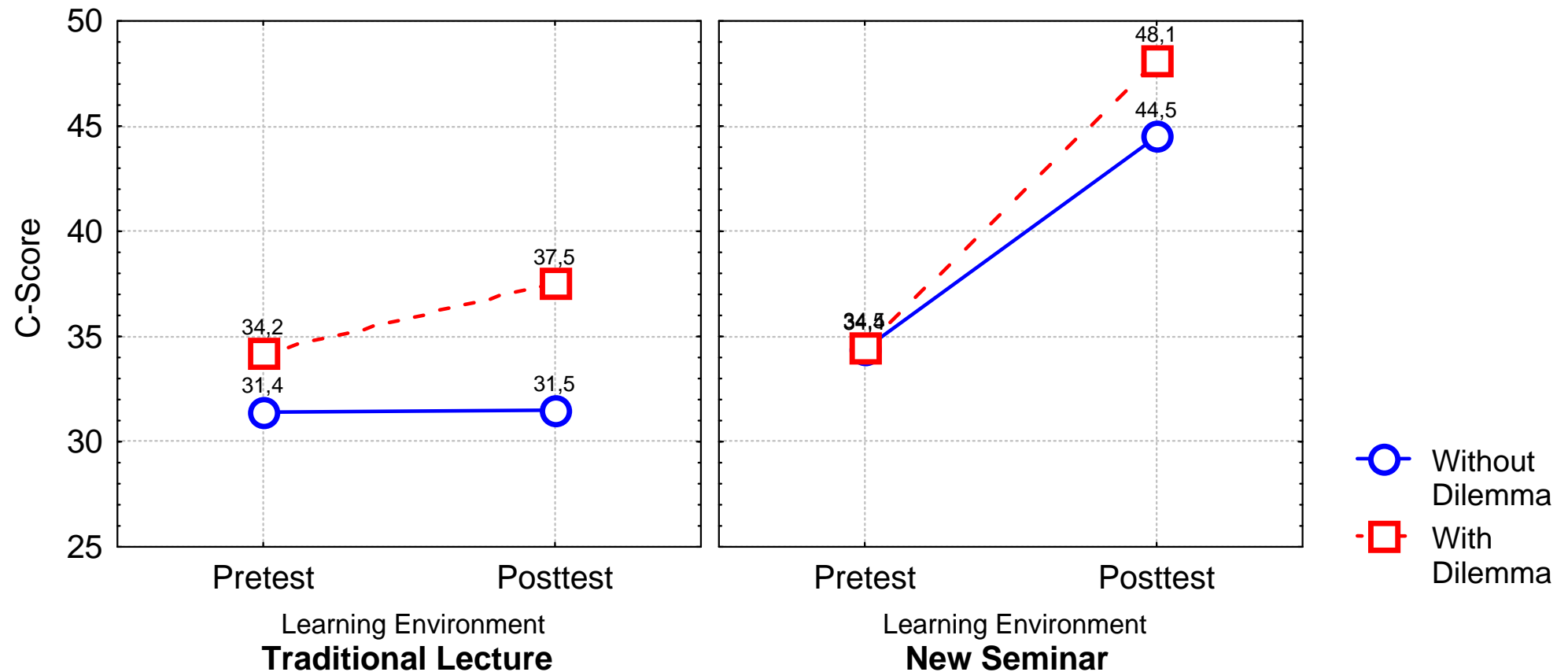
[Http://www.uni-kontanz.de/ag-moral/](http://www.uni-kontanz.de/ag-moral/)

Moral Competence Comes not with Age



... But with Favorable Learning Environment (KMDD)

$F(1,1053) = .01$; $p < .93$; $N = 3102$; aES (Dilemma) = 3.2 and 2.6



Source: Lind, G. (2009).

Answering the Questions:

Education Makes Global Democracy & Peace Possible

- Montesquieu was partly right: Most people show lack some or much ability to apply their moral ideals in everyday behavior.
- But he is wrong (and Jefferson is right) about the implications of this finding: People's moral-democratic competencies can be effectively fostered. There is no reason to exclude them from government by deliberation and discussion.
- Zimbardo, Bandura and other psychologists are wrong: People do desire to be good without being told so, Moral principles do not need to be forced upon them.
- Education is the most powerful way for promoting moral-democratic competence; it even can do better when using effective methods produced by modern moral psychology.

End