

# Five Sins of Moral Research

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## The Need of Validity

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“What is lacking is a psychological theory that dictates explicitly which items should be included on the test. ... Such an explicit theory - if it were true - would resolve all doubts as to whether or not the test actually measured what it was intended to measure.”

Miller, G.A., former president of the American Psychological Association.

Miller (1962). Psychology, the science of mental life. Harmondsworth: Penguin, p. 349.

## Moral-Democratic Competence

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P is defined as the ability to solve conflicts of action on the basis of moral principles through thinking and discussion, rather than through violence, deceit, and power.

# The Five Paradoxes of Studies of Moral-Democratic Competence

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1. Defined as an *internal* disposition, but measured by an *external* standard.
2. Defined as a *structural* property of a person's behavior, but measured with *itemized* instruments.
3. Defined as the *ability* to cope with *conflicting* courses of action, but measured as strength of single moral-democratic *motivations*.
4. Defined as *sub-conscious aspects* of behavior, but measured through *conscious* self-reports.
5. Defined as consisting of two distinguishable aspects (orientation and competence), but only *one* confounded score is produced in measurement.

## ... and More Shortcomings of Psychology and Social Sciences

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1. Simplicity is lacking (Occam); complexity is in the eyes of the beholder, not a property of reality.
2. Effects must be measured in absolute terms so they can be compared among different studies; statistical significance is insignificant, relative effect sizes are somewhat better but not a solution.
3. Important concepts must be defined concisely and clearly, and in a way that the concepts can be unambiguously linked to observations and measurement.
4. The concept of validity must be taken serious: Does the observation or measurement observe or measure what it intends to measure? Are theory and method of research aligned?
5. Methods are tools or means, not ends in themselves.

There is a voice inside of you  
That whispers all day long,  
'I feel that this is right for me,  
I know that this is wrong.'  
No teacher, preacher, partner, friend  
Or wise man can decide  
What's right for you – just listen to  
The voice that speaks inside.

(The Voice, by Shel Silverstein)

## Kohlberg's Definition of Moral Judgment Competence:

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"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;  
emphasis added)



## Kohlberg's (and his disciples') Unresolved Paradoxes:

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- P According to Kohlberg's theory, we must measure moral competence
  - ▶ in reference to the individual's *internal* moral orientations, but he uses *external* standards derived from philosophy;
  - ▶ as reflected in an individual's manifest *behavior*, but in his interview method he bases scoring on the content of the participants' *conscious* reasoning;
  - ▶ as the *structure* of behavior that is revealed in respondents' *pattern* of answers to probing questions, he uses itemized scoring from psychometric methods;
- P Although Kohlberg is interested in how students solve moral dilemmas and how we can promote their ability to do so, neither his definition nor his measurement makes any reference to this.



## The *Moral Competence Test* (MCT)\*

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- P **Difficult Situation:** The MCT confronts the participants with a difficult moral task, namely to judge agreeing and *opposing* arguments by their *moral quality* rather than their opinion-agreement.
- P **Schemata of Action:** Participants' *pattern* of ratings of 24 arguments for and against a given decision.
- P **Structure Built into the Test:** The standard MCT consists of pro and contra arguments in two dilemma stories (workers, doctor), representing six moral orientations, thus forming a 2 x 2 x 6 orthogonal, experimental design.
- P **Scoring the Two Aspects of Moral Behavior:**
  - ▶ **Moral competence:** the C-score reflects the degree to which an individual's action pattern is determined by his/her moral orientations.
  - ▶ **Moral orientation:** The degree of preference for each of the six moral orientations.

\* Formerly called "Moral Judgment Test" (MJT)

**I strongly disagree**

**I strongly agree**

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

**I strongly  
reject**

**I strongly  
accept**

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

























	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> ...		<b>I strongly reject</b>					<b>I strongly accept</b>			
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!

Excerpt from the *Moral Competence Test* (MCT); Lind (2008). Contact: Georg.Lind@uni-konstanz.de

## Structural Scoring

The moral competence score [C] describes the *individual pattern* of responses to a multivariate test situation.  
Fictitious example: Patterns of low and high competence-scores

Person:	Person A		Person B	
Opinion:	“The decision was right”		“The decision was right”	
	Contra	Pro	Contra	Pro
Arguments on				
Stage 1	 3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4	-4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2  +4	 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4	 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4
Stage 2	 3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4	-4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2  +4	-4  -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4	 3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4
Stage 3	 3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4	-4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 	 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4	-4  -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4
Stage 4	 3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4	-4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 	-4 -3  -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4	-4 -3 -2  0 +1 +2 +3 +4
Stage 5	 3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4	-4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 	-4 -3 -2 -1  +1 +2 +3 +4	-4 -3 -2 -1 0  +2 +3 +4
Stage 6	 3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4	-4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 	-4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1  +3 +4	-4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 
	C-score: <b>0.4</b> Low moral competence		C-score: <b>92.2</b> High moral competence	

See Lind, G. (1982; 2008), also: <http://www.uni-konstanz.de/ag-moral/>

## Internal Standards

The moral competence score [C] is tied  
to the participant's *own* orientations, not to *external* norms  
Example: Same moral competence, but different moral orientations

Person:	Person C		Person B	
Opinion:	“The decision was right”		“The decision was right”	
	Contra	Pro	Contra	Pro
Arguments on				
Stage 1	-4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 ✖ +3 +4	-4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 ✖	✖ -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4	✖ -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4
Stage 2	-4 -3 -2 -1 ✖ +1 +2 +3 +4	-4 -3 -2 -1 0 ✖ +2 +3 +4	-4 ✖ -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4	✖ -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4
Stage 3	-4 -3 ✖ -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4	-4 -3 -2 ✖ 0 +1 +2 +3 +4	✖ -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4	-4 ✖ -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4
Stage 4	✖ -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4	-4 ✖ -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4	-4 -3 ✖ -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4	-4 -3 -2 ✖ 0 +1 +2 +3 +4
Stage 5	-4 ✖ -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4	✖ -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4	-4 -3 -2 -1 ✖ +1 +2 +3 +4	-4 -3 -2 -1 0 ✖ +2 +3 +4
Stage 6	✖ -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4	✖ -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4	-4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 ✖ +3 +4	-4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 ✖
	C-score: <b>92.2</b> High moral competence Modal moral orientation: Stage <b>1</b>		C-score: <b>92.2</b> High moal competence Modal moral orientation: Stage <b>6</b>	

## How the Five Paradoxes of Moral-Democratic Competence Studies are Resolved by the MCT

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1. Participants do not need to prefer the “highest” moral orientations in order to get the competence highest score.
2. The competence score “C” reflects a property of an individual’s total response *pattern*, not just an average of response items.
3. The MCT contains a *difficult moral task*, therefore the C-score reflects an *ability*, not a *preference* for certain moral orientations or principles..
4. The MCT reveals the subconscious competence of the participants; they do not have to be aware of it or be able to report it.
5. The MCT lets us measure the two aspects (orientation and competence) distinctly as aspects of one and the same pattern of responses.

## MCT: Theory-Driven Test-Construction

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- P The items (arguments) have been created using Kohlberg's Stage descriptions and validated through expert ratings
  - ▶ No data-driven item selection was done to boost 'reliability' of test-items or correlation of the MCT with age
- P Rigorous construct validation by theory-derived criteria:
  - ▶ Non-fakeability of the moral competence score (Kohlberg 1958; 1984)
  - ▶ Preference hierarchy of the six types of moral orientations (Rest 1969)
  - ▶ Quasi-simplex structure of inter-correlations of the six types (Kohlberg 1958)
  - ▶ Affective-cognitive parallelism (Piaget 1981; Kohlberg 1984)
- P The MCT meets all four criteria very well, as studies in many countries show
  - ▶ See Lind (2008); Nowak et al. (2013); Hemmerling (2014)
- P The MCT is in use since 1977, and is validated in 39 languages

# MCT-Research Supports and Extends Our Dual-Aspect Theory of Moral Behavior and Development

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**P Relevance:** Participants with high C-scores show

- ▶ lower rates of criminal behavior
- ▶ better school learning (grades in various fields)
- ▶ political liberalism and reflectivity
- ▶ less extreme opinions on moral issues
- ▶ quicker decision-making in dilemma-situation and
- ▶ less 'brain-effort' (activity in the dorso-lateral prefrontal cortex)

**P Evaluation of education:** The development of moral competence is fostered

- ▶ by opportunities for responsibility-taking
- ▶ by dilemma-discussions, especially by the *Konstanz Method of Dilemma-Discussion* (  $r > 0.50$  )
- ▶ and it is hampered by dogmatic religiosity of the students.



## Conclusion

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Paradoxes Resolved:

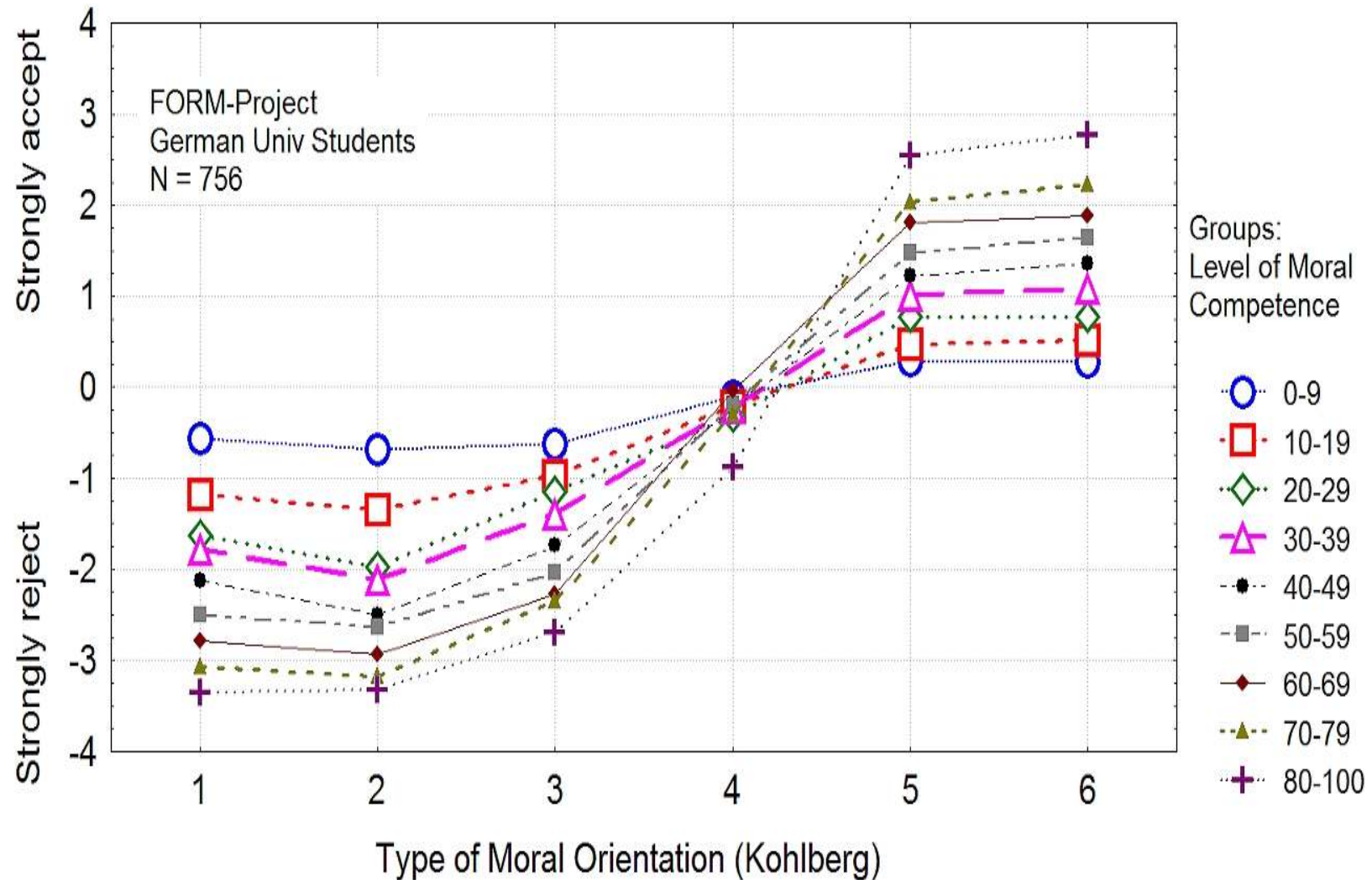
Adequate measurement of moral-democratic competence is possible and flourishing.

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# Validity: Parallelism of Moral Orientation and Competence



## My Solution: Experimental Questionnaires

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	Standard for Scoring	Behavioral Data
Classical Test Theory, Item Response Theory (e.g., MJI, DIT, SRM)	<b>External</b>	<b>Itemized</b>
Experimental Questionnaire Method (e.g., MCT)	<b>Internal</b>	<b>Structural</b>

See Lind, G., 1978, 1982, and 2008.

## Report card

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With the Moral Competence Test (MCT)

“a scoring algorithm can be arrived at for assessing pure stage structure score for an individual.”

Kohlberg, 2010. Foreword. In: Lind, G., Hartmann, H.A., & Wakenhut, R., eds. 2010. Moral judgment and social education. Edison, NJ: Transaction Publisher.