Understanding the nature of moral transgression and moral action in a situation of free choice by children, adolescents and young adults
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Background

There have been various attempts to account for the development of moral behaviour, with cognitivistic, social-learning and psychoanalytic paradigms being most influential among them (for the reviews, see Eisenberg & Fabes, 1998; Damon, 1988; Hoffman, 1988; Subbotsky, 1993; Turiel, 1998). There has also been multiple studies conducted (mainly within the cognitivistic, Piagetian/Kohlbergian paradigm) on how children and adults understand moral issues (see Kohlberg, 1966; Nucci & Nucci, 1982; Piaget, 1932; Smetana, 1981; Turiel, 1998; Walker & Taylor, 1991). Although each of these paradigms has its merits, the main emphasis in empirical studies in all the paradigms has been made on explaining how children learn to conform to moral rules, even in the situations when external social control is absent. At the same time, the reasons of why children transgress and cheat in those situations have been studies to a considerably lesser extent. A common view prevailed that transgression and cheating was indiscriminately bad and should be overcome and exterminated from the children's behaviour.

Yet, in recent years there has been a growing appreciation that lying may play a certain positive role in cognitive development. First of all, the capacity to cheat involves understanding of false belief, and thus contributes to the development of the ‘theory of mind’ in children (Sodian, Taylor, Harris & Perner, 1991). It was also reported that 3 year old children performed better on the appearance-reality task if the task was placed in the context of a deceptive game (Rice, Koinis, Sullivan & Tager-Flusberg, 1997). It was shown that many preschool children are aware that successful cheating pays off, and the number on children who mentioned personal gain as a reason for feeling happy as a result of cheating grew among first graders as compared to kindergarten age children (Dunn, Brown, & Maquire, 1995).

Although the fact that experimenting with cheating can be beneficial for the children has been acknowledged, the way this benefit was understood was mainly limited to children’s cognitive development. That is why, in studying of the phenomenon of cheating, a stress has been made on how children learn to produce and understand lying, and what strategies adults and care givers apply in order to detect lying in children (see, for instance, the materials of the recent symposiums on lying ‘Development of lying in different social and cultural contexts’, 2000). The studies of moral development in preschool children that I and my students conducted in Russia for nearly 15 years may suggest even a stronger claim: transgression and cheating in the situations of moral conflict is a necessary and vital stage in moral development per se (see Subbotsky, 1993). If this is the case, then the educational strategies that the care givers (parents, teachers, guardians, etc.) are supposed to apply in order to deal with children’s cheating behaviour should vary depending on the concrete circumstances in which the cheating occurs: in one kind of circumstances cheating should indeed be disclosed and appropriate punitive measures applied, while in other kind of circumstances the deceptive story should be taken for truth, while the disclosure and punishment could rather bring psychological damage for children’s moral development than help this development. The question arises to what extent adolescents and young adults, as prospective parents, are aware of this?

As my many years of teaching on the issues of moral development at the under- and post-graduate levels in this country have shown, the appreciation of the positive aspects of cheating behaviour on both levels is below the average. Yet, as the case of John Bulger has dramatically shown, not all is well in the UK with moral development and moral understanding. My participation in the BBC Radio 4 program ‘Natural genius’ also showed that there is a strong interest in the mass media towards the problems of moral development. This makes studying moral understanding in both children and adults an issue with important social and practical implications.

The crucial point to emphasise is that there can be no a truly moral decision made and moral virtue shown if there is no the opportunity to transgress safely (see Subbotsky, 1993). This opportunity to transgress can only appear if the child can create a story in which she (here and below she stands for he/she) did not transgress, and present this story to the external world. If the
child's mind is not yet capable of this, the child can still transgress, but this can only be done in the anticipation (perhaps, unconscious and 'conditioned' by previous experiences) of the forthcoming punishment. That is why wrongdoings in toddlers are usually accompanied by frustration and anxiety (Cole et al., 1992; Grusek & Goodnow, 1994; Kochanska, 1994; Stipek et al., 1990). The question arises, under what conditions can such situations occur in the everyday life of a child? Obviously, there are three conditions that make a situation of free choice possible: (1) the child has to be aware of the moral rule and anticipate punishment for the transgression, (2) the child's personal interest in this situation must make the transgression attractive for the child, (3) the child must see the opportunity to transgress while avoiding punishment at the same time. While conditions (1) and (2) do not require the child to be capable of creating a deceptive story, condition (3) does. When the child's mind becomes sophisticated enough, situations emerge in which the child is aware that she can get away with cheating and, therefore, is free to transgress. Let me call this class of moral conflict situations 'the space of free moral choice' (the SFC situations).

In the real life of a preschool child, the SFC situations are not so frequent. In most situations of moral conflict only conditions (1) and (2) are implemented; as far as it concerns condition (3), the opportunity to create a feasible story and make others believe it is a rare occasion for the child. In most cases of real life, transgressions leave traces and are easily detectable for the child's caregivers. However, if all the situations were like that, then the space of free moral choice could never develop, and so the genuine moral action. Though infrequently, the child yet comes across the SFC situations in her life. Usually, children learn about the SFC situations by observing (or listening to) other children who deceive and get away with this. On the basis of these observations (conversations) children become aware that there is for them an opportunity to do the same. When later finding themselves in such situations, children whose minds have all the prerequisites (such as, for instance, understanding that other people can act on the the false premises) ready for this, would try to create the deceptive story. Having lied successfully for the first time, the child would then be less hesitant and find more and more opportunities to do so. The more efficient deceiver the child becomes, the larger the space of free moral choice gets. So, it is not an exaggeration to say that it is through deception and lying that the child enters the space of free moral choice and moral responsibility.

That the child who entered the SFC does not start complying with moral rules from the very beginning, should not be surprising. In fact, if this were the case, there would be no moral development whatsoever. Indeed, if, by some miracle, the child inherited a strong tendency (motive) to follow moral rules, then he or she would have no choice and would have to follow moral rules in the same way as animals follow certain rules guided by their instincts. On this basis, it can be assumed that there could be no an opportunity for a child to develop a moral action if she did not acquire the capacity to deceive. The stage of cheating is the first and the necessary stage in the development of moral action. As the the child's mind develops and the SFC expands, the child becomes increasingly aware that she has two different lives and two different images of herself. One life (image) is the private life (image), another life (image) is the life (image) presented for the outer world. In her private life, the child is a cheater and a transgressor, and in her public life, the child is a moral, good and rule abiding person. As, by its very nature, conformity to moral rules is positively evaluated by society, and nonconformity is evaluated negatively, the child's private image acquires for the child an ambiguous meaning. The child may think of herself as a smart and clever cheater, yet she is aware that what she is doing is wrong. At the same time, the public image, due to positive social reinforcement, acquires a positive meaning in the child's eyes ('a good boy or girl').

So, in the beginning, a positive moral image of herself is created by the child as a protective shield. By using this 'shield' (i.e., creating and telling deceptive stories to adults) the child is trying to protect her own personal interests in those cases when they contradict the interests of more powerful individuals (usually adults). Viewed in this way, the whole process of the development of the moral action in the child is about when and how the positive moral self-image ceases being 'the means for the ends' and becomes the 'end in its own right'. In other words, it is about how and when children become interested (motivated) to do what their positive moral self-images require them to do (that is, to go for the moral choices in the SFC situations). When this occurs, pragmatic moral behaviour, motivated by personal interest and the external social control is added to with non pragmatic moral behaviour, motivated by the child's care to preserve her
positive moral self-image (see Subbotsky, 1995).

An experimental study of moral actions in children in the situation of a free moral choice was conducted in Moscow, in 1976-1989. As moral rules for the situation of free moral choice, the rule of decency (to keep one's promises) and honesty (not to tell lie) were selected. In the warming up session, children were taught to perform a manual task -- to transfer three ping-pong balls from a pail into a jar using a special L-shaped shovel, without touching the balls with their hands (for the original research reports, see Subbotsky, 1983, 1992, 1993). The correct performance on this task required some training, but it was quite manageable even for 3-year-olds, as long as the bottom of the L-shaped shovel was slightly concave. The task was specially devised in order to exclude the possible role of empathy in complying with moral rules (hence, the artificial structure of the task, and the absence of negative consequences for the task giver in the case of transgression).

In the first experimental condition (verbal behaviour in an imaginative situation) children were individually told a story of a boy who was instructed by an adult to do the task. The boy was promised a reward if he successfully completed the task. The adult then left the room and allowed the boy to work on the task unsupervised. The boy tried hard to cope with the task, but without success, because the balls rolled down from the shovel. Then the boy pondered what to do: either to go back to his classroom and be left without the reward, or to transfer the balls with his hands and tell the adult that he did the task correctly and never even touched the balls with his hands. The boy decided to transfer the balls with his hands, and when the adult returned, the boy said that he had done the task in the right way. Participants were asked to repeat the story, and then to judge the boy's actions and say what would they do in the boy's place.

The purpose of this condition was to prepare the child for acting in the space of free choice. First, it tested whether the children were aware about the rules of decency and honesty and considered these rules to be directives for their own behaviour. Second, the children were given hints in the story that it may happen that the task of transferring the balls without touching them with the hands can become impossible. Third, the children were acquainted with the scenario in which the character breaks the rules of decency and honesty and gets away with this (the T-duplicate scenario). Forth, the children were made aware that what the character did (transgression and lying), he did not under the adult's pressure (the boy could simply leave and go back to his classroom without the reward), but because he wanted (opted) to do this.

In the second experimental condition (free choice, no direct surveillance) children were individually invited into the room and offered the opportunity to try to perform the task. If the child agreed, she was reminded that she should only try to transfer the balls with the shovel and not touch the balls with her hands. For successfully completing the task, the child was promised a reward (a nice postage stamp). It was made clear to the child that the experimenter had a large paper bag full of similar postage stamps. The child was also told that if she did not manage to do the task in a right way, she would not be given the reward. In addition, the children were told that they could stop doing the task at any moment and either go back to their classroom or wait for the adult to come back. After that, the child was left alone in the experimental room. The child's behaviour was observed through a screen, of which the child was unaware. After beginning to perform the task, the child soon discovered that it was not possible to transfer the balls with the L-shaped shovel, because the concave shovel used in the training session was surreptitiously replaced by an identical but slightly convex shovel.

When the child discovered that the manual task could not be done without using the hands, she entered the space of free choice. On the one hand, the child was free to stop working on the task and go back to her classroom, or wait for the adult to come back and tell him the real story ('I couldn't manage, because this shovel is now different'). In this case, the child would not violate the norms of decency and honesty, but had to sacrifice her personal interest (a postage stamp promised). On the other hand, the child could transfer the balls with her hands. In doing this, the child could be motivated by her personal interest (to get the reward), or (and) by the feeling that the 'moral contract' had been broken by the switch of the tools. In any case, the transgressing child could still tell the adult the real story ('I did it with my hands'), or she could tell the adult the deceptive story ('I did it with the shovel, I did not touch the balls with my hands').

There can be some predictions made on the basis of the proposed theory. First, children who are not capable of creating a deceptive story would transgress on the task, but then would
acknowledge the violation in their reports to the experimenter (Group 1). Children capable of creating a deceptive story would make attempts to transfer the balls with their hands, thus preparing the basis for the deceptive story, but then they would split into three groups.

Children who do not identify themselves with their positive moral self images, would either leave the balls in the jar and tell the experimenter the deceptive story (Group 2) or return the balls into the pail and tell the adult the real story (‘I tried hard but did not manage’) (Group 3). This latter group of children would do this not because they go for a moral choice (what it superficially looks like), but because of the fear that their transgression and lying would be somehow discovered by the experimenter. This internalised (or imaginative) external control makes them personally (pragmatically) interested in conforming to the moral rules. Lastly, the fourth group of children would show the same pattern (attempting the transgression and then returning the balls into the pail and telling the adult the real story), but with the different motive behind. These children would keep to the moral rules because they identify themselves with their positive moral self-image, and the transgression would destroy this identification. The predictions received substantial support in a series of experiments conducted with Russian children in Moscow and with Slovakian children in Bratislava (Pozar & Subbotsky, 1984; Subbotsky, 1993).

It was also established in our experiments that it is in the SFC situations that the child’s deceptive story should be taken for truth by the educator. If this occurs, then the phenomenon ‘a bitter candy’ can occur: some children who transgressed and lied and were offered a reward promised for the ‘performing the task correctly’, refused to accept the reward and became obviously ashamed of their cheating. On the other hand, if in this situation the educator, guided by some hunch or suspicion, goes for the ‘disclose and retribution’ scenario, than it may destroy the trust between the child and the educator, which is an important condition of the later child’s identification with her positive moral self image.

Aims of the project

The main aim is to investigate, to what extent the prospective parents -- adolescents and young adults -- are capable of understanding the difference between ordinary and the SFC situations of moral choice. Specifically, can they understand that if the child creates a deceptive story in an ordinary situation (in which the transgression leaves obvious traces and can be easily disclosed by an adult), then the deceptive story (what the child tells she did) does not coincide with the Mirror story (what the adult knows the child did), while in the SFC situations (in which the transgression leaves no traces and can not be disclosed) the Mirror story coincides with the deceptive story? Can they also understand that, in the first case, the most appropriate educational response would be a disclosure and disapproval of the deception, while in the second case it is much more appropriate to take the deceptive story for truth but to make it clear to the child that adult trusts her story and thinks that the story is truth?

The second aim is to find out to what extent children of various ages and adults can understand the intentional nature of moral transgressions in a situation of free choice.

The third aim is to find out if children and adults can understand the difference between free (internally motivated) and pragmatic (motivated by personal interest or external social control) moral actions.

The forth aim is to examine whether putting a participant in the role of a transgressor in the SFC situation of moral conflict would facilitate her understanding the relationships between the Story, the Deceptive Story and the Mirror story in this situation, as well as help her to realise that the ‘Disclosure and retribution’ response to the deception is unsuitable in this situation.

Main principles of the technique.

Experiment 1 (children’s understanding the intentional nature of moral transgression)

Procedure. The child is acquainted with the ‘bucket and balls’ task (see above). After that, she is shown a series of 3 pictures. In P.1 the child is standing in front of the bucket with a spade in her hand, and an adult is staying next to the child. In P.2 the child is shown in the room alone, moving one of the balls from the bucket into the can with her hand). In P.3 the child is shown with the task done (the balls moved from the bucket into a can) and the adult staying in front of the child.
While showing the pictures, the experimenter accompanies this with the following instruction: Look (P.1 is shown), this is a girl called Linda. She was told by this man that if she transfers the balls from this bucket into this can with this spade, but without touching the balls with her hands, then she will be given a nice candy as a reward.

Now, here (P.2 is shown) the man went away to give a phone call, and Linda was left alone to work on the task. Linda tried very hard to do this task properly, but failed because the balls rolled away from the spade all the time. Then Linda moved the balls from the bucket into the can with her hands. Here the man returned into the room and saw that the balls had all been moved into the can. The man asks Linda: ‘Well done, well done. But did you moved the balls with your hand, or did you do it with the spade?’

(The participant is asked to repeat the question that the adult protagonist is asking)

Key questions:
1. Now, what do you think Linda told the man: Did she tell that she had moved the balls with her hand, or did she tell that she had moved the balls with the spade?
2. Why did she tell that she had moved the balls with her hands (with the spade)?
3. How did Linda really moved the balls: with her hands or with the spade?
4. Did the man give Linda the candy? Why did (did not) the man give the candy to Linda?
5. Did the man know that Linda had moved the balls with her hands? How did he know?

The aim of the questions is to find out if the child realises that moving the balls with the hands by the protagonist involves an intention to tell lie to the adult.

Possible outcomes:

--If, in response to Q.1 the child says that the protagonist tells `with the spade`, then there can be the following levels of understanding of the intentional deception:

**Pattern A-1**: The higher level of understanding: The participant thinks that the protagonist said she had moved the balls with the spade (q.1), justifies this by the protagonist’s intention to get the reward (q.2), remembers the way the protagonist really did the task (q.3), says that the man gave the child the reward (q.4), and understands that the man did not know about the real story (q.5).

This pattern of answers means that the participant is capable of bringing together the Tape story (what really happened), the Double Tape story (what the protagonist says had happened) and the Mirror story (what the adult thinks the protagonist had done).

**Pattern A-2**: The lower level of understanding: The participant thinks that the protagonist said she had moved the balls with the spade (q.1), justifies this by the protagonist’s intention to get the reward (q.2), remembers the way the protagonist really did the task (q.3), says that the man did not give the child the reward (q.4) and justifies this by the fact that the man knew about the child’s transgression (q.5). Another version of this pattern would be that the adult gives the reward to the protagonist not for the correct performance, but because ‘she tried’ (q.4), yet the adult knew about the protagonist’s transgression (q.5)

This pattern of answers means that the participant is capable of bringing together the Tape (what really happened), the Double Tape (what the protagonist says had happened), but not the Mirror (instead, she believes in the retributinal justice, as if the adult must have the knowledge of the protagonist’s transgression that he possibly could not have).

--If in response to Q.1 the participant says that the protagonist told `with my hands’, then there can be the following levels of understanding:

**Pattern B-1**: The higher level of understanding: The participant thinks that the protagonist said she had moved the balls with her hands (q.1), justifies this by the protagonist’s desire to be honest and not to tell lie (q.2), remembers the way the protagonist really did the task (q.3), says that the man gave the child the reward because “she tried hard” (q.4) and says that the man knew about the child’s transgression (q.5) because the protagonist told her. Another version of this pattern would be that the adult does not give the reward to the protagonist ‘because she did it incorrectly’ (q.4), yet the adult knew about the protagonist’s transgression (q.5)

This pattern of answers means that the participant may be capable of distinguishing between the
Tape (what really happened), the Double Tape (what the protagonist says had happened), and the Mirror. However, this understanding is disguised by the direct imposition of the social expectations (to be honest, not to tell lie) on the protagonist’s answer.

**Pattern B-2:** The lower level of understanding: The participant thinks that the protagonist said she had moved the balls with her hands (q.1), justifies this by the protagonist’s intention to get the reward (q.2), remembers the way the protagonist really did the task (q.3), says that the man gave the child the reward because ‘she tried hard’ (q.4) and says that the man knew about the child’s transgression (q.5). Another version of this pattern would be that the adult does not give the reward to the protagonist ‘because she did it incorrectly’ (q.4), yet the adult knew about the protagonist’s transgression (q.5)

This pattern of answers means that the participant is incapable of distinguishing between the Tape (what really happened), the Double Tape (what the protagonist says had happened), and the Mirror. Instead, she believes that the protagonist simply reproduces in her verbal account (Double Tape) what really happened (Tape) and is (is not) rewarded for this by the adult.

**Participants:**
Children of 5, 7 and 13 years. These age groups cover the most potentially sensitive points in the development of moral understanding: the age of understanding of false beliefs, the age of the beginning of school education (the start of the concrete operational period), and the age of the beginning of adolescence (formal operational period).
There will be 30 children (15 boys and 15 girls) in each age group.

**Experimental design:** age (3), gender (2), with the pattern of answer (A-1, A-2, B-1, B-2) as a dependent measure.

**Hypothesis:** there will be a slightly increasing number of patterns A-1 and A-2 answers in older children than in younger children, yet there will be no a significant change in the answers till age 13. The reason: understanding the SFC situation requires not only the capacity to understand false beliefs (the protagonist does not know what the participant knows), but to understand the ‘false beliefs about beliefs’ (the adult does not know that the protagonist is lying to him, but the protagonist knows this). It has been shown for instance that it is not until later than 8 years of age that most children come to the understanding that pretenders keep in mind the representation of the pretend state of affairs while they are pretending (Fabricius & Imbens-Bailey, 2000; Lillard, 1996), and this is exactly what the SFC situation involves.

**Experiment 2.** (Understanding the pragmatically and non pragmatically motivated moral actions).
Children will be told stories in which two characters keep to their promises and did not cheat in the ‘bucket and balls’ task. One character did it under surveillance (another person was present in the room and watching the character’s performance), and another character did it when being alone in the room. Participants will be asked questions about the reasons that made the characters not break the promise and cheat in each of the situations.

**Participants:** same numbers of children of the same age groups.

**Hypothesis:** There will be poor awareness of the role of maintaining the positive moral self image as a motive for non pragmatic moral behaviour in children of all age groups. Rather, most children would prefer to justify moral actions in both situations terms of the characters’ ‘personal qualities’ (because she is a good girl). The reason: because a traditional way the incentives for being moral are presented to children by educators is to portray these incentives as driven by children’s personal characteristics (she did well because she is a good girl) and not in terms of the specific moral motives (she is a good girl because she values moral rules above her personal interests).

**Experiment 3.** (Understanding of the nature of moral transgression and the differing strategies of dealing with deception by prospective parents -- adolescents and young adults)
Procedure:
The same as in Experiment 1, except for the formulation of the key questions. Questions 1 and 2 were as in Experiment 1, then:
3. What do you think the man should do: should he give Linda the candy or not? Why do you think the man should (not) give the candy to Linda?
4. Did the man know that Linda moved the balls with her hands? How did he know?
5. And if the man secretly observed Linda’s actions and knew that the girl really moved the balls with her hands, should he still give Linda the candy or not? Why do you think so?
6. And if the adult gives Linda the candy, what would this be a reward for: for Linda’s having done the task correctly, or for her having transgressed on the task?
7. What kind of response, in your view, would be more beneficial for the girl’s moral development: the disclosure and punishment for the cheating, or trusting to the girls story?
The reason for this change of the key question is that for adults, unlike for children, there will be no problem of understanding the intentional nature of moral transgression, as well as the problem to retain the story in their memory. What is the new problem for adults through (as for prospective parents) is to decide how they should tackle the transgression in this situation, and whether they should go for the ‘disclosure and retribution’ scenario, or they would be on the right side if they go for the ‘trust the Deceptive Story’ scenario.

Response types:
-- initial level of understanding (the participant says that the candy should not be given in order not to reinforce transgression and lie)- no understanding that the reward in this situation is given for the performance presented in the Deceptive Story (i.e., for the correct performance on the task) and not for the real story (i.e., not for the girl’s transgressing and cheating on the task)
-- intermediate level (the reward should be given because there is no way to catch the girl on lying, but this would be less beneficial to the girl’s moral development than ‘the disclosure-punishment’ would be)
-- advanced level (the reward should be given (q.5), this would be the a reward for the correct performance and not for the transgression and cheating (q.6), and this would be more beneficial for the child’s moral development than the ‘disclosure - retribution’ scenario, because it can secure the child’s trust to an adult, strengthen the child’s positive moral self image an evoke feelings of remorse.

Participants: 60 adolescents (15-16 year olds), and 60 young adults (19-25 years old).

Hypothesis: There will be poor understanding of the fact that in the SFC situation ‘believing’ a trasgress or giving her a reward is not reinforcing the cheating, because the reward is given not for the transgression (what really happened) but for the protagonist’s correct performance on the task (what the protagonist says had happened). The reason: the dominance of the traditional view of a reward as a positive reinforcement of actual behaviour that precedes the reward. This view that permeated mass education comes from the deep influence that the traditional studies on reinforcement conducted on animals had on the mass consciousness. The fact that, unlike animals, the child is a linguistic (story creating) subject and puts a Deceptive Story between the real action (a transgression) and the reward proves to be surprisingly difficult to understand for an average western type educated adult.

Experiment 4. (Adolescents’ and young adults’ understanding the difference between pragmatically and non pragmatically motivated moral actions).
Participants will be told a set of two stories, one of which depicts pragmatically motivated rule conforming moral action, and another contains a description of a free moral action. For instance, in one version of this set will be as follows: Story 1-- Suppose that a friend of mine, who lives overseas, left with me some books that I promised, after inspecting them, to donate to the library for the public use. Soon I had the sad news that my friend had died in a car accident. When I inspected the books and found them to be of no interest for myself, I fulfilled my promise and donated the books to the library. Story 2 -- Now, suppose that, after I examined the books, I found them very
interesting and important for my own work -- the books that I would very much like to have permanently on my desk. Yet, I decided to fulfil the promise that I gave to the friend of mine, and donated the books to the library’.

In other versions more parameters will be manipulated, such as ‘presence versus absence’ of the anticipated external control control (the friend is my colleague who just left abroad but will be back in a year).

Participants will be interviewed on their understanding of the difference between the pragmatically motivated moral behaviour (when following the moral rule -- my moral interest -- also coincides with my personal interest (not to keep in my house the books that I do not need) and non pragmatically motivated moral actions (when my personal interest -- to keep the books -- contradicts my moral interest (to fulfil my promise and donate the books to the library).

Participants: 40 adolescents and 40 young adults.

Hypothesis: Poor understanding of the difference between pragmatically and non pragmatically motivated moral behaviour is expected. The reason: the scarcity of the SFC situations in real life, and the popular view that positive moral and procosial behaviour is only driven by emotions (love, compassion, empathy) and not by self consciousness.

Experiment 5 (Facilitating the understanding of the nature of moral transgression in prospective parents)

The purpose of this experiment is to facilitate understanding of the mediating role of the deceptive story through putting a participant in an imaginary role play situation.

Only those participants take part in this experiment who failed to understand that the reward is given not for happened in the real story, but for what happened in the deceptive story.

The participant is asked to imagine that he/she is in the position of a character who just moved the balls with his/her hands. The experimenter is playing the role of an adult story character.

‘Now, I return to the room and see that the balls are in the can. I am asking you ‘Have you managed to move the balls, yes or no? Have you moved them with the spade, or with your hands?’

If the participant responds with the right answers (which would be ‘Yes I did’, and “with the spade”), then the experimenter says: OK then, now get the candy that I had promised.

If the participant responds differently (‘I did it with my hands’), she is encouraged by the experimenter to answer in the expected way (‘Now, suppose that you decided to cheat me and said ‘With the spade, OK?’”). Then the experimenter says: OK then, now get the candy that I had promised.

After the participant receive the imaginative ‘candy’, she is asked ‘ And what do you think now: what did I give you the candy for: for your cheating on the task, or for you performing the task correctly?’

The purpose of this experiment is to facilitate understanding in the participant that the deceptive story that the child creates mediates the relations between the child and the adult and makes it necessary to give the reward independently whether the adult is or is nor aware of the child’s cheating.

Participants: 20 adolescents and 20 young adults.

Practical implications of the study: these include the development of this technique into a series of clinical interviews with the aim of the diagnostics, facilitation and correction of moral understanding in children and adults. There is a fair amount of evidence that improving children’s understanding of moral issues positively affects their moral and pro social behaviour (Eisenberg & Miller, 1987; Turiel, 1998). The existing studies of moral understanding illuminated many important aspects of moral understanding, yet the problem of how children and adults understand
the voluntary nature of moral transgression in a free choice situation and the pragmatically versus non pragmatically motivated moral actions remains open. As prospective parents, adolescents and young adults will have to come across many situations in which their children will create deceptive stories, and it is important for the care givers to understand how they should tackle these stories in various circumstances. Their understanding the difference between the ordinary situations of deception that require the ‘disclosure and retribution’ type of response, and the SFC situations which require ‘trust the Deceptive Story’ scenario would facilitate the moral development of their children, while the lack of such understanding can have a negative effect on this delicate and fragile process.

The results of the study also can contribute to various adjacent areas of cognitive development, such the debate on in what age and how children acquire the ‘theory of mind’, in particular, the capacity to understand ‘false beliefs about beliefs’.

Data analysis.
Quantitative data will be received on the basis of the numbers of subjects producing particular categories of responses over various conditions of the experiments. The aim will be to compare between these variables across different conditions. Consequently, the appropriate non parametric tests will be applied, such as \( \chi^2 \), t-test, and z-test. More complex forms of statistical analysis, like ANOVA and ANCOVA will also be attempted, on the basis of scoring responses to particular questions on specially devised scales.

Research facilities and equipment.
Portable computer, Software, portable tape recorder, tapes.

Dissemination of findings.
Studies will be written up as they are completed and will be submitted in British and international journals. Additionally, the work will be given more rapid publication through presentation at both national and international conferences on developmental psychology. Results will also be included in a popular guide on child development for parents and teachers, which is being currently prepared by the author. They will also be disseminated in the form of public lectures, conference talks for clinicians and educators, and as a series of newspaper- and radio interviews on the topic of the developing moral understanding in children and adults. A booklet available for distribution on request will be created containing the interviews and the description of the procedures of testing, facilitation and correction of moral understanding.
ANNEX 1

References.


