Psychology

Moral Realism

Beginning about age five, the child develops a sense of obligation to follow rules, treating them as absolute moral imperatives handed down by some authority—possibly parents or God. Rules are permanent, sacred, and not subject to modification. Obeying them to the letter is more important than any human reason for changing them. For example, children at this stage reject the suggestion that the position of the starting line in the marble game might be changed to accommodate younger children who might want to play.

Ask your students the following hypothetical scenarios and record their responses:

**Group #1: A boy broke a teacup while trying to steal some jam when his mother was not home; another boy, who was doing nothing wrong, accidentally broke a whole trayful of teacups. “Which boy is naughtier?” Why?**

**Group 2: “Which boy is naughtier” a child who tells her mother that she saw a “dog as big as a cow” or one who tells her mother that she received a good grade in school when she did not. Why?**

When Piaget asked preoperational children he question you posed to group #1 they tended to judge as naughtier the person in the stories who did the most damage, regardless of the intentions or motivation behind the act. Similarly, the child who tells her mother that she saw a “dog as big as a cow” is judged to be naughtier by kids in the preoperational stage than one who tells her mother that she received a good grade in school when she did not because a dog could not be as big as a cow, and hence this is the bigger lie. Preoperational children no not differentiate between deliberate, opportunistic lies and harmless exaggerations or misstatements.