

Report on the international symposium „Moral Competence and the Brain”, Konstanz 21.-22. July 2011

Boris Zizek (Mainz)

The focus of this year`s Konstanz-Moral-Symposium was a merging of the approaches of developmental psychology and neurosciences regarding moral behaviour and development.

As Georg Lind stressed the new and the old paradigm have not yet found a mode of communication to compare and relate their results. Against this backdrop the goal has been, order [...] to bring together scholars and practitioners from different backgrounds to explore the possibilities of a common understanding of research findings across the different paradigms and language regarding moral competence and the brain? (Georg Lind).

As a participant of the symposium I can say that it was fruitful to bring together scholars and practitioners. In both, the contributions and the talks during the symposium, scholars` questions and practitioners` concerns became clear. From the standpoint of a scientist, the task of further differentiation of the matter as well as its implementation were always present and created a productive and challenging atmosphere. In her presentation, Kristin Prehn demonstrated that developments in cognitive neuroscience are providing fruitful tools to investigate the neural correlates of moral cognition and behaviour. In her neuroscientific research Prehn referred to Lind`s dual-aspect theory and showed that moral judgement competence scores were inversely correlated with activity in the right dorsolateral prefrontal cortex.

In his contribution, Georg Lind pointed out that, on the one hand, current moral psychological approaches assume specific brain functions and schemes and, on the other hand, a large number of brain studies do hardly take notice of the present moral psychological research.

In his presentation On the origin of verbal-judgement-oriented moral science? Jean Piaget`s *The Moral Judgement of the Child*, Boris Zizek differentiated between prosocial behaviour, practical and reflexive morality and compared the methods Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg have chosen to explore these forms of cooperation.

The research Roma Kriauciuniene presented was based on Lind`s dual-aspect theory of moral behaviour. Kriauciuniene used the ?Moral Judgement Test? to evaluate the level of future foreign language teachers` moral judgement competence. The results showed a lack of influence of the university upon the students` moral judgements.

Gyun Yeol Park discussed with the audience his future project about ?A New Direction for Measuring Morality based on Moral Functioning?.

In her presentation ?Understanding moral emotions. Philosophical conceptions revisited? Ewa Nowak unfolded a study about teachers` and students` receiving photographs of juveniles expressing emotions. The surprising result of Nowak`s research was that teachers had more problems understanding the expression of emotions of students than juveniles. The following avid discussion about the reasons of the teachers` problems made clear that Nowak`s research had pointed out an important aspect of the problems of teachers` professionalism.

The next meeting of this series of International Konstanz Symposia on Moral Competence will be held on July 26 ? 27. 2012 in Konstanz, Germany. For call of papers, program and registration see: www.uni-konstanz.de/ag-moral/.