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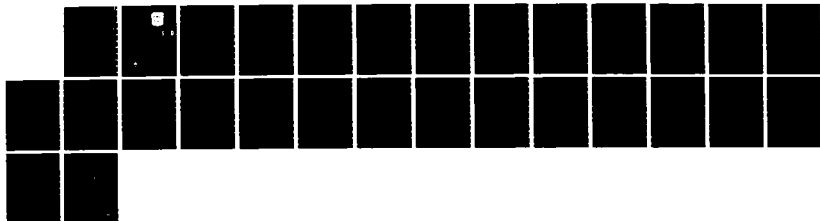
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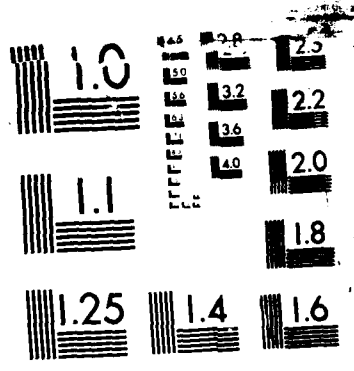
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# STUDENT ESSAY

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A NEW TECHNIQUE FOR TEACHING MILITARY ETHICS

BY

COLONEL ERIC L. LINDEMANN, USAF

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USAWC MILITARY STUDIES PROGRAM PAPER

A NEW TECHNIQUE FOR TEACHING MILITARY ETHICS

INDIVIDUAL ESSAY

by

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Project Advisor

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ABSTRACT

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This essay suggests that ethical behavior of military members could be improved through the use of a teaching technique based on Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development. Unlike many theories of ethics which focus on values education, the Kohlberg Theory focuses on a person's cognitive abilities or capacity for moral reasoning, a capacity which develops in five distinct stages. As not all people reach the highest stage, a problem in communication can occur when a supervisor uses a different stage of reasoning than the subordinates he is trying to influence. To effectively communicate ethical ideas, both supervisor and subordinate must reason at the same level. As it is very difficult to determine his subordinate's stage of reasoning, a supervisor should try to use reasoning from a variety of stages in discussing ethical issues. By understanding and using the various stages of reasoning, supervisors can more effectively communicate and influence ethical decision making and behavior in their subordinates.

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## A NEW TECHNIQUE FOR TEACHING MILITARY ETHICS

In their book, The Teaching of Ethics in the Military, the authors discuss several purposes for teaching ethics in the military. These purposes range from the very general, "that military leaders ought to be moral," to the more specific, "to improve character, to change behavior, to develop sensitivities, to foster intellectual and practical skills, to indoctrinate particular values, to understand moral traditions, and so on."<sup>1</sup> For many years, ethics courses designed to meet these purposes have been taught in precommissioning programs and in the services' staff and war colleges. However, in light of events in recent years, the success of those courses in achieving those purposes, especially changing behavior, has become questionable.

For some time now, there has been concern about a lack of ethical behavior by members of the military establishment. Although this concern is frequently tied to the Vietnam and Watergate eras, we are still seeing too many examples of unethical behavior. All too often, we hear of capability reports being altered to make a unit appear more ready and of officers being court-martialled for submitting fraudulent travel vouchers. These examples would indicate that we need to do a better job of teaching ethics.

Traditional ethics instruction tends to be values oriented. Values are taught primarily at home and at church,

and to a lesser extent, at various level schools. Theoretically, if a student understands and accepts a value, such as truthfulness, he or she will apply that value in making moral decisions. In military ethics instruction, we have generally used the same premise; however, we have emphasised those values most heavily oriented toward military matters such as obedience and loyalty. In essence, traditional ethics instruction is oriented toward the value content of moral decision making.

Unlike traditional ethical instruction which emphasises values, instruction based on the Kohlberg Theory of Moral Development focuses on the process of moral decision making. An understanding of key elements of the Kohlberg theory could prove to be a quite valuable aid, not only to military ethics instructors, but also to all military leaders in their quest for improving ethical behavior in their students and subordinates.

#### THE KOHLBERG THEORY

To understand the Kohlberg theory, one must first understand Kohlberg's background and his orientation toward the cognitive development theory of reasoning. More a psychologist and educator than a philosopher, Dr. Lawrence Kohlberg was Professor of Psychology and Human Development at the University of Chicago and currently is Professor of Educational and Social Psychology at Harvard University.

While a doctoral candidate at the University of Chicago in the late 1950's, he conceived his theory of moral development based largely on the cognitive development theory.

### Underlying Theories

The cognitive development theory holds that a person's thinking process changes or matures. Jean Piaget, a Swiss educational philosopher and cognitive development theorist, said that one's capacity for all logical reasoning, not just moral reasoning, develops in three sequenced stages: the intuitive, the concrete operational, and the formal operational. The intuitive stage is essentially found only in pre-school children. At the concrete operational stage, the individual can "make logical inferences, classify things, and handle quantitative relations about concrete things." At the formal operational stage, usually entered in adolescence, the individual uses abstract reasoning and can "consider all possibilities, consider the relations between elements in a system, form hypotheses, deduce implication from the hypotheses, and test them against reality." It is important to note that not all adolescents and adults reach that stage. From this, Kohlberg postulated that a person's capacity to reason morally is related to and limited by one's capacity to reason logically and is also developed in sequenced stages.<sup>2</sup>

The stage sequence theory is an integral part of the overall Kohlberg Theory. According to the stage sequence theory, one's capacity to reason morally develops in

sequenced stages. The sequence itself is irreversible with regression to lower stages being rare. The sequence is also invariant in that one cannot skip a stage. Furthermore, each higher stage is more qualitatively complex and actually integrates lower stage reasoning. Although one's environment can speed up or slow down the development process, it cannot change or alter the process itself. Thus, the process is universal and not culturally oriented. In his initial study, Kohlberg intended to prove that the stage sequence theory also applied to moral development.<sup>3</sup>

#### Kohlberg's Initial Study

To confirm his theory of staged moral development, Kohlberg studied his subjects' responses to a series of moral dilemmas. His subject population consisted of 150 boys, aged 10, 13, and 16, from the United States, Mexico, Turkey, and Taiwan. To be able to confirm the universality aspect of his theory, he ensured that this cross cultural group included boys with varied religious and social economic backgrounds. Each of the subjects responded to moral dilemmas involving "classic confrontation between legal and moral obligations, authority and contract, and private and public responsibility."<sup>4</sup> Although several dilemmas were used, the most common one, the "Heinz Dilemma" is cited below.

In Europe, a woman was near death from cancer. One drug might save her, a form of radium that a

druggist in the same town had recently discovered. The druggist was charging \$2,000, ten times what the drug cost him to make. The sick woman's husband, Heinz, went to everyone he knew to borrow the money, but he could only get together about half of what it cost. He told the druggist that his wife was dying and asked him to sell it cheaper or let him pay later. But the druggist said, "No." The husband got desperate and broke into the man's store to steal the drug for his wife.<sup>5</sup>

After listening to the dilemma, each subject was asked a series of questions such as those below:

1. Would a good husband steal the drug for his wife? Why or why not?
2. What do you think the husband would do if he didn't love his wife?
3. What would his wife think if he did not steal it? What would she want him to do?
4. Would you steal the drug to save your own life? Why or why not?
5. What would you do if you were the husband?<sup>6</sup>

Each response was then scored, not on the basis of the answer given, but rather on the rationale given for the answer. The

different rationales were then grouped and formed the basis for Kohlberg's levels and stages of moral development.

### Levels and Stages of Moral Development

Initially, Kohlberg found six stages of moral development grouped at three levels: Level 1--the pre-conventional level (Stages 1 and 2), Level 2--the conventional level (Stages 3 and 4), and Level 3--the post-conventional level (Stages 5 and 6). In later research, Kohlberg found it very difficult to differentiate between Stage 5 and Stage 6 reasoning, and as a result has combined the two stages. A description of the various levels and stages and typical responses to Question 1 of the Heinz dilemma follow:

#### Level 1--The Preconventional Level

At this level, the individual is not yet capable of understanding the conventional rules and mores of society. His reasoning is based largely on external motivations and concerns for his own physical needs. "Right" is whatever those in authority command, as they have the ability to punish and reward. An individual who has only achieved Piaget's concrete operational level of reasoning is limited to Level 1 moral reasoning.

Stage 1--Heteronomous Morality. At this stage, the rightness or wrongness of an action is determined by the physical consequence of the action. To be right, one must

avoid breaking rules backed by punishment and avoid physical damage to persons or things. One's objective in making moral decisions is to avoid trouble and feelings of guilt. This stage is typically outgrown by age seven.

SHOULD STEAL--If you let your wife die, you will get in trouble. You'll be blamed for not spending the money to save her and there'll be an investigation of you and the druggist for your wife's death.

SHOULD NOT STEAL--You shouldn't steal the drug because you'll be caught and sent to jail if you do. If you do get away, your conscience would bother you thinking how the police would catch up with you at any minute.

Stage 2--Individualism, Instrumental Purpose and Exchange. At this stage, what is right is what best serves the individual and occasionally others. Moral decisions are very pragmatic with ends justifying the means. There are strong emphases on fairness involving an equal exchange, property, and ownership. This stage could be termed the morality of the market place.

SHOULD STEAL--If you do happen to get caught, you could give the drug back and you wouldn't get much of a sentence. It wouldn't bother you much to

serve a little jail term, if you have your wife when you get out.

SHOULD NOT STEAL--He may not get much of a jail term if he steals the drug, but his wife will probably die before he gets out so it won't do him much good. If his wife dies, he shouldn't blame himself, it wasn't his fault she has cancer.

#### Level 2--The Conventional Level

At this level, an individual understands and accepts conventional rules and expectations of society just because they are society's rules and expectations. The individual may consider society to be anything from a small group of friends or family to the nation as a whole. A moral decision is right if it contributes to maintaining the social order. Individual considerations are subordinated to the social order. To reason at this level, an individual must have at least a degree of Piaget's formal operational level of logical reasoning. In the United States, most people reach this level at about age 13. The majority of adults morally reason at Level 2.

Stage 3--Mutual Interpersonal Expectations, Relationships, and Interpersonal Conformity. At this stage, to be right, one must live up to what those around him expect of him in his role as husband, father, citizen, etc. The need to care for others and share feelings, as well as to show trust, loyalty, and gratitude are important to the Stage

3 reasoner as it leads to acceptance and approval of the group.

SHOULD STEAL--No one will think you're bad if you steal the drug but your family will think you're an inhuman husband if you don't. If you let your wife die, you'll never be able to look anybody in the face again.

SHOULD NOT STEAL--It isn't just the druggist who will think you're a criminal, everyone else will too. After you steal it, you'll feel bad thinking how you've brought dishonor on your family and yourself; you won't be able to face anyone again.

Stage 4--Social System and Conscience. At this stage, rightness is doing one's duty. Obeying the law is critical to maintaining the social order. One must respect the law rather than merely defer to it. One must also fulfill one's contracts. This is the highest stage reached by the majority of adults.

SHOULD STEAL--If you have any sense of honor, you won't let your wife die because you're afraid to do the only thing that will save her. You'll always feel guilty that you caused her death if you don't do your duty to her.

SHOULD NOT STEAL--You're desperate and you may not know you're doing wrong when you steal the drug. But you'll know you did wrong after you're punished and sent to jail. You'll always feel guilty for your dishonesty and lawbreaking.

#### Level 3--The Postconventional Level

At this, the highest level, an individual understands and generally accepts society's rules; however, his acceptance is limited by his concept of the principles that underly society's rules. He defines his values primarily in terms of self chosen principles. This level, if reached at all, is normally reached by the early 20's. To reach this level of moral reasoning, one must have fully attained Piaget's formal operational level of logical reasoning.

Stage 5--Social Contract or Utility and Individual Rights. At this stage, reasoning can become quite complex. There is a general need to obey the law because the law is part of the social contract. However, if some rules or laws are seen as unjust or otherwise lacking in social utility, they should be changed by democratic process. Some principles such as life and liberty may also be seen as absolute. Principles must always take precedence over law. The United States Constitution embodies Stage 5 reasoning.

SHOULD STEAL--You'd lose other people's respect, not gain it, if you don't steal. If you let your

wife die, it would be out of fear, not out of reasoning it out. So you'd just lose self-respect and probably the respect of others too. ...you would have lived up to the outside rule of law but you wouldn't have lived up to your own standards of conscience.

SHOULD NOT STEAL--You would lose your standing and respect in the community and violate the law. You'd lose respect for yourself if you're carried away by emotion and forget the long-range point of view. ...you'd condemn yourself because you wouldn't have lived up to your own conscience and standards of honesty.7

#### Stage Development

From his initial and follow on studies, Kohlberg determined that each person progressed from stage to stage until stabilizing at his final adult stages, usually during his early 20's. Because each stage involved an integration of lower stage reasoning, a person was able to understand reasoning at his own stage and all lower stages. Each person was also able to understand reasoning at one stage higher than his own even though he did not personally accept that reasoning. From the behavioral standpoint, Kohlberg found that while a higher stage of reasoning was a requirement for

and a predictor of higher stage behavior, it could not guarantee such behavior.

#### Current Applications

In the past decade, there has been a shift away from using the Kohlberg theory merely to explain moral reasoning and greater emphasis on using the theory to teach and advance moral thinking. In some schools, teachers attempt to first evaluate each student's stage and then, through discussion involving higher stage reasoning, try to accelerate the stage process and encourage the student to reach a higher stage than he would normally reach without stimulation. Following the instruction, students are again evaluated to determine if stage advancement has taken place. Similar processes have been used in prisons as many inmates have been found to reasoning only at Stage 2.

#### Criticisms of the Theory

This process has generated considerable criticism from a variety of sources. Some parents and religious educators are concerned that this emphasis on the process of moral reasoning underplays the role of values in the reasoning process.<sup>8</sup> Others argue that since schools can't teach the process without teaching values, the schools are involved in religious indoctrination, a job belonging to parents and churches, and that Kohlberg's work "reflects a liberal, Ivy League emphasis on social conscience that has nothing whatsoever to do with the way most people view the world."

Other critics have challenged his methods of determining stage noting that Kohlberg has already had to eliminate Stage 6 because of difficulties in discriminating stages. Of the criticisms of his sampling technique, possible the most valid is that which challenges his using only males in his initial study. Kohlberg himself has agreed that the strong orientation toward justice and property rights in his work may have contributed to women frequently testing low, and that new moral dilemmas oriented toward caring and responsibility toward the community are needed.<sup>9</sup> In spite of these criticisms, the theory appears to be sufficiently valid and understandable to provide concepts which have potential for improving our teaching of ethics in the military.

#### APPLICATION TO MILITARY ETHICS TEACHING

The application suggested here has as its primary goal, a change in moral behavior caused by a corresponding change in moral decision making. In developing this application of the Kohlberg theory to the teaching of ethics in the military, let us first address the components of a moral decision: the process and the data used in the process. The process is the reasoning pattern commensurate to the decision maker's stage of moral development. The data include facts, assumptions, and values pertinent to the moral question. The moral decision can therefore be changed in two ways: change the process or change the data. In the current applications

of the Kohlberg Theory, the intent is to change the process. This is theoretically possible because the students are still developing their capacity for reasoning. In the military, we are generally dealing with older students who theoretically have nearly reached or have already reached their final stage of moral development. To alter the moral decisions of military students, we must therefore select relevant data, both facts and assumptions, and present that data in such a way that it can be used in their own reasoning processes. Let us begin by looking at a currently common way of addressing an ethical issue.

In this example, we have a supervisor trying to convince a large group of 20-year-old subordinates of the moral necessity to honestly complete TDY travel vouchers. We will assume that the supervisor has achieved Stage 5 and that he has an average audience with people at stages of reasoning typical for their age group. For 20-year-olds, 3% are normally at Stage 5, 30% at Stage 4, 57% at Stage 3, and 10% are at Stage 2.<sup>10</sup> The supervisor pleads his case using the Stage 5 reasoning that he personally accepts. He points out that honesty is a basic moral principle that must always be adhered to and that falsifying a travel voucher is the same thing as stealing from the government and violating the individual rights of others. Using Kohlberg's theory that one accepts only his own stage reasoning and understands reasoning at one stage above and all lower stages, and the

stage data for 20-year-olds, we see that the supervisor's reasoning is accepted by no more than 3% (the Stage 5's) and understood by no more than 33% (the Stage 5's and Stage 4's). He essentially failed to communicate with the remaining 67% (Stage 3's and Stage 2's). Had our supervisor tried reasoning at Stage 4, he would have fared somewhat better. His reasoning could have been accepted by up to 30% (the Stage 4's), and understood by up to 90% (everyone except the Stage 2's). To continue, had our supervisor used Stage 3 reasoning, his reasoning could have been accepted by 57% (the Stage 3's) and understood by everyone. Using a common military technique of "preaching" longer, louder, or from a higher level (ie., by a more senior supervisor) would not likely have been more successful had the stage of reasoning remained unchanged.

In the example above, the intent is not to suggest that all who reject or fail to understand the supervisor's reasoning are going to falsify travel vouchers, but rather to show that reasoning at the "wrong" level would be ineffective in changing the behavior of those who would falsify the vouchers. It is quite unlikely that the Stage 5's and 4's would falsify the vouchers anyway, however, it is quite possible with the Stage 3's and 2's. The Stage 3's, if members of a social group that accepted such behavior, and the Stage 2's, if they felt they really needed the money and had really "earned" it, might consider falsifying the

vouchers.

The teaching technique proposed here is not to use just Stage 3 reasoning, but to use examples of all levels of reasoning understood by the teacher. In the scenario above, the supervisor could have better used examples of reasoning at all levels. In addition to using the Stage 5 reasoning given above, he could have added some Stage 4 reasoning, pointing out the requirements of the Joint Travel Regulations and reminding everyone of their military duty to comply; some Stage 3 reasoning, pointing out the need to join with the great majority of the people in the unit who regularly comply; and some Stage 2 reasoning, explaining how the regulations were essentially fair and that everyone had more to gain by complying with the regulations. By using reasoning from all stages, the Stage 5 supervisor could have been accepted and understood by everyone. The Stage 4 supervisor could have been understood by all and accepted by 97-100% depending on his effectiveness at reasoning one stage above his own. The Stage 3 supervisor could have been understood by all and accepted by 67-97% again depending on his effectiveness at reasoning at a stage above his own. In essence, the supervisor who uses examples of reasoning at a variety of stages would have a much better chance of changing the decision making and thus the behavior of those who might consider falsifying travel vouchers. In the example above, the goal of the supervisor might seem to be one of securing

compliance to regulations even though ethical issues of cheating and stealing were involved. In the example which follows, the emphasis is as much on changing attitudes as it is in changing behavior.

Let's assume that a supervisor wants to convince his subordinate supervisors that they must show more concern for the families of their people. To be truly effective in taking care of their people, the subordinate supervisors must sincerely believe in what they are doing, therefore their attitudes must change as well as their behavior. Once again, a variety of reasoning must be used. To reach the Stage 5 reasoners, one may point out that in taking his oath of office, a person swears to support and defend the Constitution, a document dedicated to supporting the ideals and general welfare of all the people of the nation including the families of our military members. It is only just that we take care of the families of those who give so much to support our nation. For the benefit of the Stage 4 reasoners, one can point out that it is their duty to carry out the legitimate orders of those appointed over them and that taking care of the families of military people is an official policy of all the services. As the Stage 3 reasoners already are strongly oriented to family issues, not much convincing should be necessary. For the Stage 2 reasoners, one could point out that it is only fair that if they expect their families to be cared for, they must show

the same concern for their people's families and that they cannot expect their own people to help them if they do not help their own people.

The examples above illustrate how using the Kohlberg Theory of Moral Development could be used to change decision making and, ideally, behavior regarding two ethical issues; but to be truly effective, the supervisor or teacher must be able to apply a variety of stages of reasoning to a variety of issues. Some more generic examples of varied stage reasoning for military ethical issues follow.

Stage 5. In discussing moral issues at Stage 5, one should point out the military members oath of office or enlistment and its association with the United States Constitution. Comments regarding the military role in achieving basic principles of life and liberty for the nation and the need for ones personal commitment can support Stage 5 reasoning.

Stage 4. Providing the Stage 4 reasoner with knowledge of rules and regulations and reminding him of the contractual obligations of his oath are generally sufficient to achieve compliance.

Stage 3. Continuing efforts to maintain high esprit de corps in the unit can help an individual accept the ethical values of the unit and seek out acceptance from the members of it. Reminding the individual of the values of the unit and his

membership in it can be effective.

Stage 2. Convincing the Stage 2 reasoner that what he must do is fair and that it represents equal treatment is important. Compliance frequently must be rewarded with personal gain.

Although based on the Kohlberg Theory of Moral Development, the technique offered above can stand up to many of the criticisms of current applications of the Kohlberg Theory in schools. Rather than trying to isolate values from the moral decision making process, this technique puts greater emphasis on values by putting them into a framework that the student can comprehend. Regarding the propriety of institutions other than the home and the church in teaching moral value, the issue is not in question as values are already being taught in the military. Additionally, any criticisms regarding the difficulty in making fine distinctions in identifying stages are irrelevant in that the technique does not require that the teacher or supervisor identify the moral stage of his student or subordinate. Criticisms regarding Kohlberg's claim that a higher stage is morally better are also irrelevant in that this technique accepts an individual's stage as it is. Furthermore, although Kohlberg's use of males only in his initial research may invalidate this technique in its applicability to women, it would still be valid for the large male population in the

military. And finally, although many would say that a change in the student's or subordinate's moral reasoning will not necessarily dictate a change in his behavior, few could deny that a change in reasoning must precede a change in behavior.

Although it is very difficult to measure the effectiveness of our current efforts to improve ethical behavior in the military, few would deny that we would like to do better. Rather than relying solely on traditional methods for trying to improve ethical behavior, it is time to try a new technique--a technique which augments, not replaces, current methods. By developing a general understanding of the Kohlberg Theory of Moral Development, a theory which recognizes that people use different processes rather than just different values in moral reasoning, a teacher or supervisor can better instill ethical values and improve ethical behavior in his students or subordinates.

#### ENDNOTES

1. Peter L. Stromberg, Malham M. Wakin and Daniel Callahan, The Teaching of Ethics in the Military, Hastings Center Institute of Society, Ethics and the Life Sciences, Hastings-on Hudson, New York, 1982, p. 43.
2. Lawrence Kohlberg, "Moral Stages and Moralization: The Cognitive-Developmental Approach," in Moral Development and Behavior: Theory, Research, and Social Issues, ed. by Thomas Lickona, pp. 31-32.

3. The stage sequence theory is explained in a variety of texts including Helen Weinreich-Haste, "Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development," in Morality in the Making, ed. by Helen Weinreich-Haste and Don Locke, Wiley Series in Developmental Psychology, John Wiley & Sons Ltd., Chichester, 1983, p. 7.

4. Ibid., p. 6.

5. Lawrence Kohlberg, "Stage and Sequence: The Cognitive Developmental Approach to Socialization," in Moral Philosophy: Text and Readings, 2nd ed., ed. by Andrew G. Oldenquist, Waveland Press, Inc., Prospect Heights, Illinois, 1984; reprint ed., Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1978, p. 393.

6. Robert L. Selman, "Cognitive Understanding--A Guide to Educational and Clinical Practice," in Moral Development and Behavior: Theory, Research, and Social Issues, ed. by Thoman Lickona, Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, New York, 1976, p. 302.

7. Descriptions of Kohlberg's levels and stages are in a variety of texts on moral development. Specific responses to the Heinz dilemma are contained in Kohlberg, pp. 392-394.

8. Ruth Beechick, "Lawrence Kohlberg: Why Johnny Can Be Good Without Being Religious," Christianity Today, 30 December 1977, p. 13.

9. Some of the more common criticisms of the Kohlberg Theory

are contained in Howard Muson, "Moral Thinking: Can It Be Taught?" Psychology Today, February 1979, pp. 48-49, 51, 53-54, 57-58, 67-68, 92.

10. Weinreich-Haste, p. 9.

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