

### Introduction

Kohlberg observed that growing children advance through definite stages of moral development in a manner similar to their progression through Piaget's well-known stages of cognitive development. His observations and testing of children and adults, led him to theorize that human beings progress consecutively from one stage to the next in an invariant sequence, not skipping any stage or going back to any previous stage.

These are stages of thought processing, implying qualitatively different modes of thinking and of problem solving at each stage.

### Stage 1: Punishment & Obedience - Focus: Self

Avoidance of physical punishment and deference to power. Punishment is an automatic response of physical retaliation. The immediate physical consequences of an action determine its goodness or badness. The atrocities carried out by soldiers during the holocaust who were simply "carrying out orders" under threat of punishment, illustrate that adults as well as children may function at stage one level.

Might Makes Right: Questions: What must I do to avoid punishment? What can I do to force my will upon others?  
Most Prisoners remain at this level.

### Stage 2: Instrumental Exchange: The Egoist

Marketplace exchange of favors or blows. "You scratch my back, I'll scratch yours." Justice is: "Do unto others as they do unto you." Individual does what is necessary, makes concessions only as necessary to satisfy his own desires. Right action consists of what instrumentally satisfies one's own needs. Vengeance is considered a moral duty. People are valued in terms of their utility.

"An eye for an eye." Questions: What's in it for me? What must I do to avoid pain, gain pleasure?

### Stage 3: Interpersonal Conformity: Good Boy/Girl

Right is conformity to the stereotypical behavioral, values expectations of one's society or peers. Individual acts to gain approval of others. Good behavior is that which pleases or helps others within the group. Everybody is doing it." Majority understanding ("common sense") is seen as "natural." One earns approval by being conventionally "respectable" and "nice." Peer pressure makes being different the unforgivable sin. Self sacrifice to group demands is expected. Values based in conformity, loyalty to group. Sin is a breach of the expectations of one's immediate social order (confuses sin with group, class norms). Retribution, however, at this stage is collective. Individual vengeance is not allowed..

### Stage 3: Interpersonal Conformity: Good Boy/Girl (cont)

Forgiveness is preferable to revenge. Punishment is mainly for deterrence. Failure to punish is "unfair." "If he can get away with it, why can't I?" Many religious people end up here.

"Tyranny of the They" (They say....). Question: What must I do to be seen as a good boy/girl (socially acceptable)?

### Stage 4: Law & Order: The Good Citizen

Respect for fixed rules, laws and properly constituted authority. Defense of the given social and institutional order for its own sake. Responsibility toward the welfare of others in the society. "Justice" normally refers to criminal justice. Justice demands that the wrongdoer be punished, that he "pay his debt to society," and that law abiders be rewarded. "A good day's pay for a good day's work." Injustice is failing to reward work or punish demerit. Right behavior consists of maintaining the social order for its own sake. Self-sacrifice to larger social order is expected. Authority figures are seldom questioned. "He must be right. He's the Pope (or the President, or the Judge, or God)." Consistency and precedent must be maintained. For most adults, this is the highest stage they will attain..

Societal Conformity. Question: What if everyone did that?

### Stage 4 ½: The Cynic

Between the conventional stages and the post-conventional Levels 5 and 6, there is a transitional stage. Some college-age students who come to see conventional morality as socially constructed, thus, relative and arbitrary, but have not yet discovered universal ethical principles, may drop into a hedonistic ethic of "do your own thing."- This was well noted in the hippie culture of the 1960's. Disrespect for conventional morality was especially infuriating to the Stage 4 mentality, and indeed was calculated to be so. Kohlberg found that some people get "stuck" in this in-between stage marked by egoism and skepticism, never able to completely leave behind conventional reasoning even after recognizing its inadequacies. Such people are often marked by uncritical cynicism ("All politicians are crooks...no-thing really matters anyway"), disillusionment and alienation..

Question: Why should I believe anything?

### Stage 5: Rights & Social Contract: The Philosopher

Moral action in a specific situation is not defined by reference to a checklist of rules, but from logical application of universal, abstract, moral principles. Individuals have natural or inalienable rights and liberties that are prior to society and must be protected by society. Retributive justice is repudiated as counterproductive, violative of notions of human rights. Justice distributed proportionate to circumstances and need. "Situation ethics." The statement, "Justice demands punishment," which is a self-evident truism to the Stage 4 mind, is just as self-evidently nonsense at Stage 5. Retributive punishment is neither rational nor just, because it does not promote the rights and welfare of the individual and inflicts further violence upon society. Only legal sanctions that fulfill that purpose are imposed-- protection of future victims, deterrence, and rehabilitation. Individual acts out of mutual obligation and a sense of public good. Right action tends to be defined in terms of general individual rights, and in terms of standards that have been critically examined and agreed upon by the whole society--e.g. the Constitution. The freedom of the individual should be limited by society only when it infringes upon someone else's freedom.. Conventional authorities are increasingly rejected in favor of critical reasoning. Laws are challenged by questions of justice.

#### Prior Rights & Social Contract: The Philosopher/King

Question: What is the just thing to do given all the circumstances?  
What will bring the most good to the largest number of people?

### Stage 6: Universal Ethical Principles: The Prophet

An individual who reaches this stage acts out of universal principles based upon the equality and worth of all living beings. Persons are never means to an end, but are ends in themselves. Having rights means more than individual liberties. It means that every individual is due consideration of his dignity interests in every situation, those interests being of equal importance with one's own. This is the "Golden Rule" model. A list of rules inscribed in stone is no longer necessary. At this level, God is understood to say what is right because it is right; His sayings are not right, just because it is God who said them.. Abstract principles are the basis for moral decision making, not concrete rules. Stage 6 individuals are rare, often value their principles more than their own life, often seen as incarnating the highest human potential. Thus they are often martyred by those of lower stages shamed by seeing realized human potential compared with their own partially realized levels of development. (Stoning the prophets, killing the messenger). Examples:

### Stage 6: Universal Ethical Principles: The Prophet (cont)

Mohandas Gandhi, Jesus of Nazareth, Gautamo Buddha, Martin Luther King, Jr., Dag Hamerskjold

The Prophet/Messiah

Questions: What will foster life in its fullest for all living beings? What is justice for all?

