

Introduction

Lawrence Kohlberg's stages of moral development was adapted from Piaget Stages. According to the theory, moral reasoning develops in six stages, each more adequate at responding to moral dilemmas greater than the prior.

Stages of Moral Development

| Stage | Stage Name | Description |
|-------|------------|-------------|
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Pre-Conventional Morality

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| 1 | Obedience or Punishment Orientation | This is the stage that all young children start at (and a few adults remain in). Rules are seen as being fixed and absolute. Obeying the rules is important because it means avoiding punishment. |
| 2 | Self-Interest Orientation | As children grow older, they begin to see that other people have their own goals and preferences and that often there is room for negotiation. Decisions are made based on the principle of "What's in it for me?" For example, an older child might reason: "If I do what mom or dad wants me to do, they will reward me. Therefore I will do it." |

Conventional Morality

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| 3 | Social Conformity Orientation | By adolescence, most individuals have developed to this stage. There is a sense of what "good boys" and "nice girls" do and the emphasis is on living up to social expectations and norms because of how they impact day-to-day relationships. |
| 4 | Law & Order Orientation | By the time individuals reach adulthood, they usually consider society as a whole when making judgments. The focus is on maintaining law and order by following the rules, doing one's duty and respecting authority. |

Post-Conventional Morality

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| 5 | Social Contract Orientation | At this stage, people understand that there are differing opinions out there on what is right and wrong and that laws are really just a social contract based on majority decision and inevitable compromise. People at this stage sometimes disobey rules if they find them to be inconsistent with their personal values and will also argue for certain laws to be changed if they are no longer "working". Our modern democracies are based on the reasoning of Stage 5. |
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Stages of Moral Development (cont)

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| 6 | Universal Ethics Orientation | Few people operate at this stage all the time. It is based on abstract reasoning and the ability to put oneself in other people's shoes. At this stage, people have a principled conscience and will follow universal ethical principles regardless of what the official laws and rules are. |
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