

## Kohlberg's Moral Stages

Kohlberg's moral stages go well beyond Piaget's stages for cognitive development. Instead of 4 stages, Kohlberg uncovered 6 stages with only three of them sharing similarities with Piaget's stages. Instead of purely focusing on development, Kohlberg studied the rationale behind the choices made by individuals in his study. Piaget proposed that true mental stages met the criteria of the research being qualitatively different ways of thinking, structured wholes, progress in an invariant sequence, can be characterized as hierarchic integrations, and are cross cultural universals. In Kohlberg's research, he shows how his stages meet each criteria set.

In his research, Kohlberg's first two stages occurred within the pre-conventional level of moral development. The first stage, obedience and punishment orientation, is characterized by a child assuming that there is a clear set of rules handed down by authority that he should unquestionably obey. Stage 2, the individualism and exchange stage, individuals recognize that people have different interests and viewpoints and punishment is a risk that should naturally be avoided. The notion of favors or "fair exchange or deals" arises. These children are concerned with possible rewards for an action. The conventional morality level of moral development lies stage 3 and 4. Individuals in stage 3 (Good Boy-Nice Girl Orientation) see actions as good or bad, but also reflect on the motive and concern for others. There is a shift from unquestioning obedience of authority to questioning the good of individual's actions. The individual is more concerned with the opinions of his peers. Stage 4 (Law and Order Orientation) is characterized by individuals wanting to maintain social order. This means that they make moral decisions from the perspective of society of a whole. Individuals from both stage 1 and 4 may give the same answer to a question, however when asked the reasoning behind the actual answer, individuals in stage 4 are able in language that attributes the goal of the well being of society. They don't think beyond the law or analyze it. The law is just followed. The next 2 stages fall within the post conventional level of morality. Stage 5 (Social Contract Orientation) deals with the social contract of individual rights. In this instance, individuals reflect upon the democratic process. They speak of morality and rights and maintaining a good society. Lastly, individuals in Stage 6 (Universal Ethical Principle Orientation) stress universal principles. These individuals look at situations impartially. They encourage looking at a situation through another person's eyes.

Kohlberg's stages are not a product of maturation. Individuals transition between them through socialization. Social experiences promote development as mental processes are stimulated. Interaction amongst others stimulates mental growth. His stages unfold in an invariant sequence which means that they don't skip around stages in a mixed up order. Individuals progress through the stages sequentially, but all may not reach higher stages due to the lack of intellectual stimulation. Also, people do not lose the insights gained at earlier stages, but integrate them as they develop.

With the concept of Christianity and what it means to be a Christian, individuals in the pre-conventional level of morality would use what they've learned biblically to assist them with their judgment. A child in Stage 1 would of course say that the Bible says that you should be a good Christian and do what the Bible tells you to do because if you didn't you'd be punished and go to hell. Stage 2 children would feel the same way; however, they would look at the viewpoint of the individual that is doing an unchristian deed. For example, the scenario may be that a person was out of work and stole food to feed their family. The Bible says, "Thou shall not steal", and doing so is deemed unchristian. In stage 2, a person would think about the fact that the person had good intentions because he wanted to feed his family. The person is taking the risk of punishment, but is seen as attempting to do a good deed for his family. Within the conventional level of morality, individuals in stage 3 would think about what others would do if they were in that situation. It may be looked upon as an unchristian thing to do, but would think that this is what anyone would do if they were in this situation. These individuals would be concerned about other Christians and how they feel about them or their actions. In stage 4, the individual would think of the fact that for the benefit of society, it would be best for all to obey the Bible and be good Christians. So, if the Bible says don't steal, then you are not a good Christian if you do. Lastly, in the post-conventional level of morality, an individual would think that people should be willing to give food to the hungry, but everyone should follow the law, but would hope that God would not frown upon the man stealing the food because he was trying to do the right thing for his family. Yes, it's wrong because the law is being broken, but hopefully God would weigh his intent. Individuals in the final stage would hope that a person would not be looked at as not being a Christian just because anyone could be put into this situation and this deed should not be a measure of a person's Christianity.