



# Kohlberg's Theory on Moral Development

**Adolescent Psychology**

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# Biography

- Lawrence Kohlberg born in 1927
- Grew up in Bronxville, New York
- Died on January 17<sup>th</sup>, 1987 at the age of 59
- Kohlberg became a professor of education and social psychology at Harvard in 1968
- His book on moral development is used by teachers around the world to promote moral reasoning.

# THREE LEVELS

## Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development

Post-Conventional

Conventional

Pre-Conventional



SOURCE: KOHLBERG, (1963,1981)

## Kohlberg's Levels of Moral Development

LEVEL	STAGE	CHARACTERISTICS OF STAGE/LEVEL
<b>A</b> Preconventional	Stage 1	PUNISHMENT-OBEDIENCE ORIENTATION
	Stage 2	INSTRUMENTAL RELATIVIST ORIENTATION
<b>B</b> Conventional	Stage 3	INTERPERSONAL CONCORDANCE ORIENTATION
	Stage 4	AUTHORITY AND SOCIAL-ORDER MAINTAINING ORIENTATION
<b>C</b> Postconventional Autonomous, or Principled	Stage 5	SOCIAL-CONTRACT LEGALISTIC ORIENTATION
	Stage 6	UNIVERSAL ETHICAL PRINCIPLE ORIENTATION

# LEVEL ONE

## Preconventional Morality

### Pre-Conventional

#### IN THIS STAGE:

- Kids learn a fear of punishment/obedience
- Self-interest
- Usually occurs in early childhood development

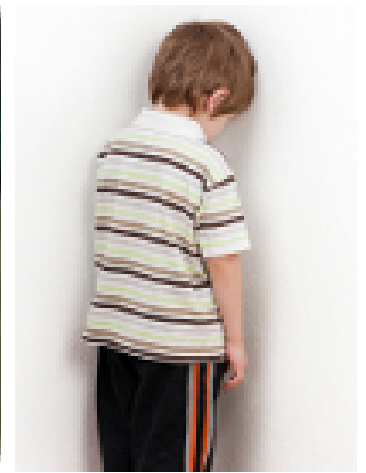


**SHARING  
IS  
CARING**

# Stage 1

## Obedience & Punishment

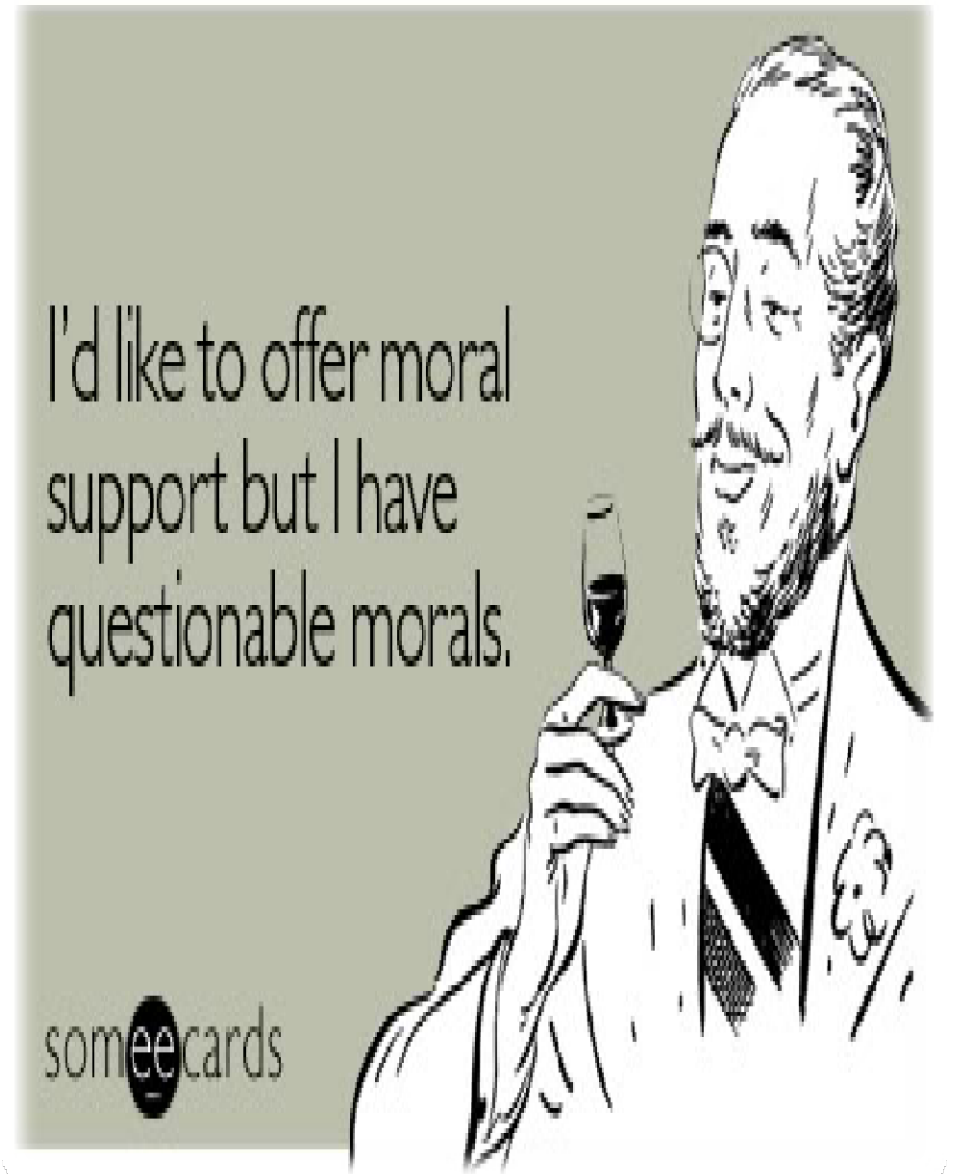
- Earliest stage of moral development
- Common in young children
  - They see rules as fixed and absolute.
- Morality is external
  - At this stage, children see rules as fixed and absolute.
  - Obeying the rules is important because it is a means to avoid punishment.



## Stage 2

# Individualism and Exchange

- At this stage of moral development, children account for individual points of view and judge actions based on how they serve individual needs.
- In the Heinz dilemma, children argued that the best course of action was the choice that best-served Heinz's needs.
- Reciprocity is possible at this point in moral development, but only if it serves one's own interests.



# LEVEL TWO

## Conventional Morality

### Conventional

#### IN THIS STAGE:

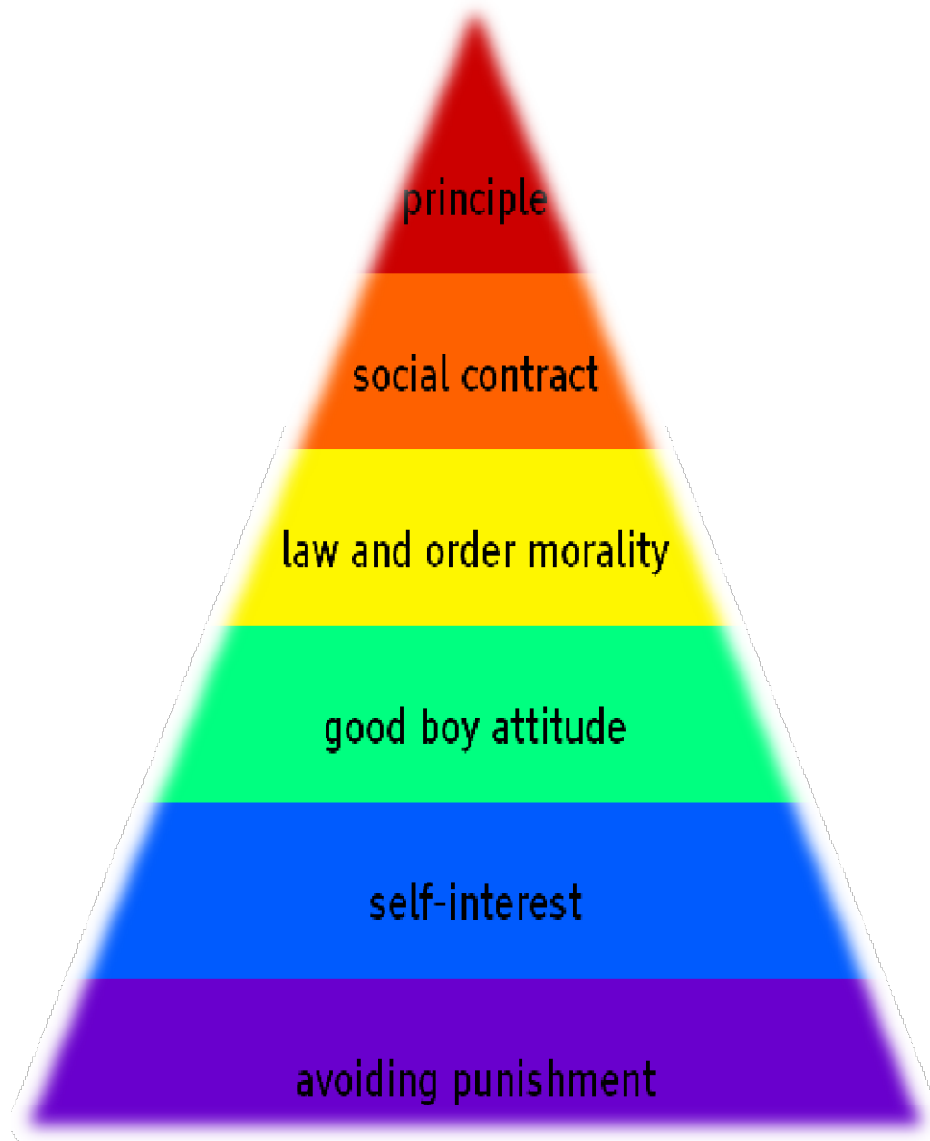
- Teens learn to conform to others
- Rules/laws are upheld
- Usually occurs around middle school





# Stage 3

## Interpersonal Relationships



- Often referred to as the "good boy-good girl" orientation.
- At this stage children who are by now usually entering their teens, see morality as more than simple deals.
- Stage of moral development is focused on living up to social expectations and roles (of the family and community). There is an emphasis on conformity, being "nice," and behave in "good" ways.
- Good behavior means having good motives and interpersonal feelings such as love, empathy, trust, and concern for others.

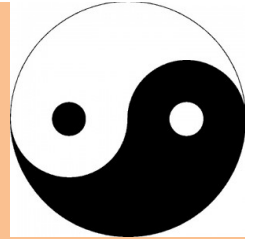
# Stage 4

## Maintaining Social Order

- People begin to consider society as a whole when making judgment.
- Law and order
  - focus on maintaining law and order and obeying laws
  - Heinz's motives
  - Consequences of breaking the law



## Stage 4 contd.



- Stage 1 and stage 4 are giving the same response
  - Similarity is they both agree that breaking the law is wrong
- Differences is for Stage 1 the child can't explain why it is wrong, while Stage 4 the adults are able to deliberate
- Education
  - Follow rules and guide lines
    - It is compulsory for all school-age students to attend school
    - Respect property of others
    - Wear appropriate uniform, *appropriate shoes to be worn*

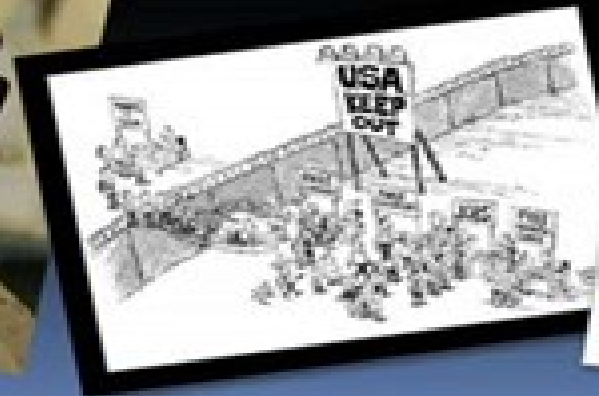
# LEVEL THREE

## Post-Conventional Morality

### Post-Conventional

#### IN THIS STAGE:

- Young adults develop their own ideas on important issues
- Alternatives are considered
- Ideas are based on principles
- Usually occurs around the college years



# Stage 5

## Social Contract and Individual Rights

- At this stage, people begin to account for the differing values, opinions and beliefs of other people.
- Rules of law are important for maintaining a society, but members of the society should agree upon these standards.



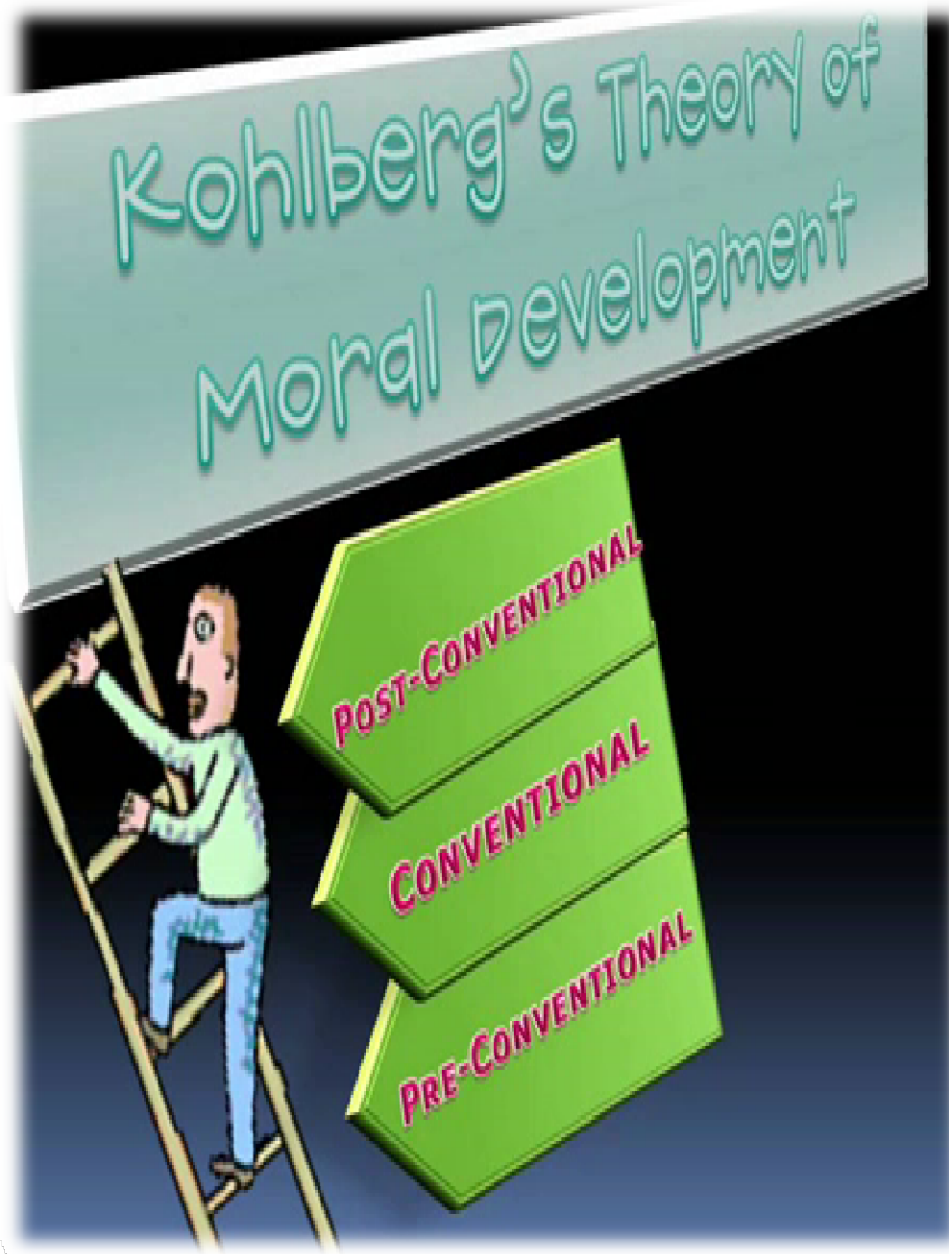
# Stage 6

## Universal Principles

- Based upon universal ethical principles and abstract reasoning.
- Based on respect for universal principle and the demands of individual conscience
  - Takes an idealized look at how people might coordinate their interests
- At this stage, people follow these internalized principles of justice, even if they conflict with laws and rules.
- Define the principles by which agreement will be most just.
- If children are to reorganize their thinking, they must be more active.
  - Principled conscience



# Criticisms



- **Does moral reasoning necessarily lead to moral behavior?**
  - Kohlberg's theory is concerned with moral thinking, but there is a big difference between knowing what we *ought* to do versus our actual actions.
- **Is justice the only aspect of moral reasoning we should consider?**
  - Critics have pointed out that Kohlberg's theory of moral development overemphasizes the concept as justice when making moral choices. Factors such as compassion, caring and other interpersonal feelings may play an important part in moral reasoning.
- **Does Kohlberg's theory overemphasize Western philosophy?**
  - Individualistic cultures emphasize personal rights while collectivist cultures stress the importance of society and community. Eastern cultures may have different moral outlooks that Kohlberg's theory does not account for.

## References:

"Kohlberg's theory of moral Development"  
about.com psychology. web 17 march 2013  
[http://psychology.about.com/od/  
developmentalpsychology/a/kohlberg.htm](http://psychology.about.com/od/developmentalpsychology/a/kohlberg.htm)