## Kohlberg’s Stages of Moral Development

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<th>STAGE</th>
<th>SOCIAL ORIENTATION</th>
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<td>Conventional</td>
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The first level of moral thinking is that generally found at the elementary school level. In the first stage of this level, people behave according to socially acceptable norms because they are told to do so by some authority figure (e.g., parent or teacher). This obedience is compelled by the threat or application of punishment. The second stage of this level is characterized by a view that right behavior means acting in one's own best interests. This may include obedience compelled by reward or punishment (as in stage 1); however, the final decision is made not to avoid/receive the end itself, but because it is best for the recipient. Many people in prisons are likely to have this immature sense of pre-conventional morality, whether they are stage 1 or 2.

The second level of moral thinking is that generally found in society, hence the name "conventional." The first stage of this level (stage 3) is characterized by an attitude which seeks to do what will gain the approval of others. While this might seem like ‘brown-nosing’, there are many people (the business world, for example) who advocate the advantages of getting on someone’s good side. The second stage (stage 4) is one oriented to abiding by the law and responding to the obligations of duty. In this stage, the motivation to follow the rules is because the rules exist in the first place. Many Christian traditions (not Catholic) base their moral norms on the conventional stage, since this is the lived experience of most people.

The third level of moral thinking is one that Kohlberg felt is not reached by the majority of adults. The Catholic Church bases its moral teaching on this level – calling all people to this level as the standard of reference (examples: good works, virtues, and “be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect” Matt 5:48, etc). Its first stage (stage 5) is an understanding of social mutuality and a genuine interest in the welfare of others. This is where “social contract theory” would be found. The last stage (stage 6) is based on respect for universal principles and the demands of individual conscience. While Kohlberg always believed in the existence of Stage 6 and had some nominees for it, he could never get enough subjects to define it through research. Typically people of this stage have such a personal gift of humility that they would never admit to being in this stage.

### Other points:
- Kohlberg believed that individuals could only progress through these stages one stage at a time. One cannot ‘jump’ stages, for example, move from an orientation of selfishness to the law and order stage, without passing through the good boy/girl stage.
- Individuals can only comprehend the moral rationale of one stage above their own.

### Source:
Fowler’s Stages of Spiritual Development

Primal Faith – Faith is based on memories of parental presence - one arrives and intuitively has a sense of meaning and purpose – either one is welcomed or perceived as an intrusion.

Intuitive-Projective Faith – This is often around age two, with language development; faith goes with exploring the world around oneself, including interacting with others, with a focus on the use of stories and symbols.

Mythic-Literal Faith – This is essentially the “age of reason,” which the Roman Catholic Church also uses to define when First Eucharist should be received. It means that through one’s thinking about such contrasts as right and wrong or good and evil, one can develop a strong sense of fairness based on reciprocity (this means evaluating the notions of reward for doing good and punishment for doing bad). Fundamentalism is a symptom of being ‘stuck’ in this stage of faith development – Fowler says that it is dangerous to consider this adult faith.

Synthetic-Conventional Faith – This stage typically begins to emerge in early adolescence. There is a noted problem-solving ability as well as an ability to think outside the box. Faith that is not allowed the freedom to think for itself quickly becomes stifled. The individual is looking to synthesize (bring together) his/her beliefs and values that has, at this stage, a largely tacit (as opposed to explicit) character. By this Fowler means that the beliefs, values, and stories that compose a person's faith outlook and support his or her emerging identity are not yet objectified for critical reflection by that person (that is a later stage). Faith decisions (values, etc) are deeply felt and strongly held, but have not yet received objective critical (self) reflection. One’s identity is derived primarily from membership in a circle of face-to-face relationships – the communities with which they identify themselves.

Individuative-Reflective Faith – This is where one is able to critically evaluate (reflect) on the various aspects of faith. To make the shift from the previous stage, one must switch from being self-centered to centered in the network of one’s relationships and various communities (family, friends, school, work, etc) – an individual begins to act from a new quality of self-authorization. While this shift can happen in high school, it happens more (in America) when one leaves their hometown after high school for further studies (college/university) or occupational pursuits (work, including the military). Sometimes, it does not happen until someone’s twenties or thirties, if at all - between college and settling down (marriage & family). When individuals in their thirties or forties face this transition, it can be quite disturbing to the whole network of roles and relationships they have formed. For the spiritually immature, this can be a cause for the so-called “mid-life crisis.”

Conjunctive Faith – To transition to this stage, one leaves behind the previous stage with a flexibility about life and a comfort with a certain level of ambiguity. This usually happens in mid-life, if at all. One might call it a confident pluralism. While one remains grounded in their faith, they extend freedom to others in their faith.

Universalizing Faith – This is where one is so absorbed by their spirituality as a part of their identity that it is simply who they are – they cannot imagine life without spirituality. While this may seem ideal for anyone, the person who truly reaches this stage of faith development can become immobilized in compassion, risking a loss of personal identity. This person has assented to a radical decentration from the self... and has begun to manifest the fruits of a powerful kind emptying of self. The vocation to the priesthood and/or religious life can (but does not always) embody this stage of spiritual development. This stage can sometimes become problematic for the person with responsibilities such as family/children, who is so focused on widening the inclusiveness of what it means to be a neighbor. While each person to spiritual maturity, this sense of spirituality must be considered with a certain balance towards the experience of living in one’s culture.

* Rather than force people through the stages, or push them through from behind, we need to incubate people in the faith and surround them with a worldview in which to grow into on their own... and trust that they can or will, without trying to control the process.
* People can become “stuck” in a stage when they are stifled or not given the freedom to grow.

Source: