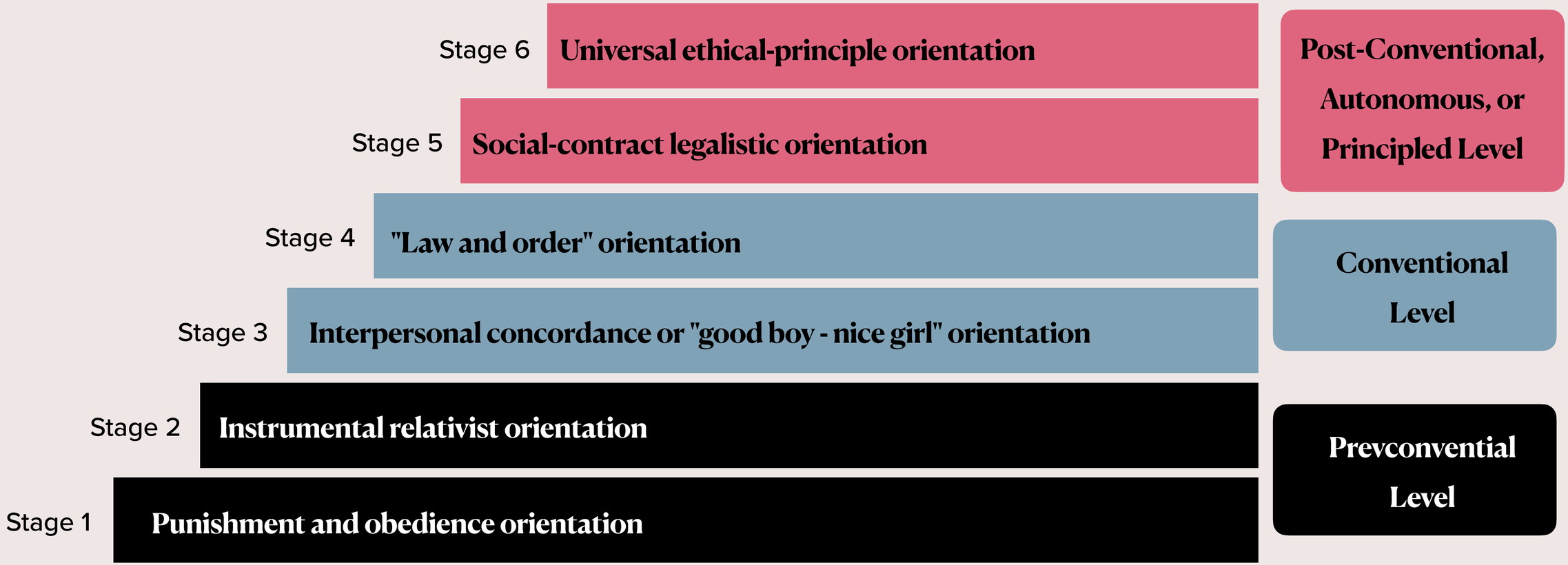
Stages of Moral Development

Fall 2026 SOWK 430 Week 11

Jacob Campbell, Ph.D. LICSW at Heritage University

Stage of Moral Development

(Kohlberg, 1971)



Stage of Moral Development

(Kohlberg, 1971)

Post-Conventional, Autonomous, or Principled Level	Stage 6	Universal ethical-principle orientation
	Stage 5	Social-contract legalistic orientation
Conventional Level	Stage 4	"Law and order" orientation
	Stage 3	Interpersonal concordance or "good boy - nice girl" orientation
Prevconvential Level	Stage 2	Instrumental relativist orientation
	Stage 1	Punishment and obedience orientation

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(Kohlberg, 1971, p. 87)

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The physical consequences of action determine its goodness or badness regardless of the human meaning or value of these consequences. Avoidance of punishment and unquestioning deference to power are valued in their own right.

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Right action consists of that which instrumentally satisfies one's own needs and occasionally the needs of others. Human relations are viewed in terms similar to those of the market place. Elements of fairness, of reciprocity, and equal sharing are present, but they are always interpreted in a physical pragmatic way. Reciprocity is a matter of "you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours," not of loyalty, gratitude, or justice.

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Good behaviour is that which pleases or helps others and is approved by them. There is much conformity to stereotypical images of what is majority or "natural" behaviour. Behaviour is frequently judged by intention: "he means well" becomes important for the first time. One earns approval by being "nice."

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There is orientation toward authority, fixed rules, and the maintenance of the social order. Right behaviour consists of doing one's duty, showing respect for authority, and maintaining the given social order for its own sake.

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(Kohlberg, 1971, pp. 87-88)

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Generally, this stage has utilitarian overtones. 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. There is a clear awareness of the relativism of personal values and opinions and a corresponding emphasis on procedural rules for reaching consensus.

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(Kohlberg, 1971, p. 88)

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Right is defined by the decision of conscience in accord with self-chosen ethical principles appealing to logical comprehensiveness, universality, and consistency. These principles are abstract and ethical (the Golden Rule, the categorical imperative); they are not concrete moral rules like the Ten Commandments. At heart, these are universal principles of justice, of the reciprocity and equality of human rights and of respect for the dignity of human beings as individual persons.

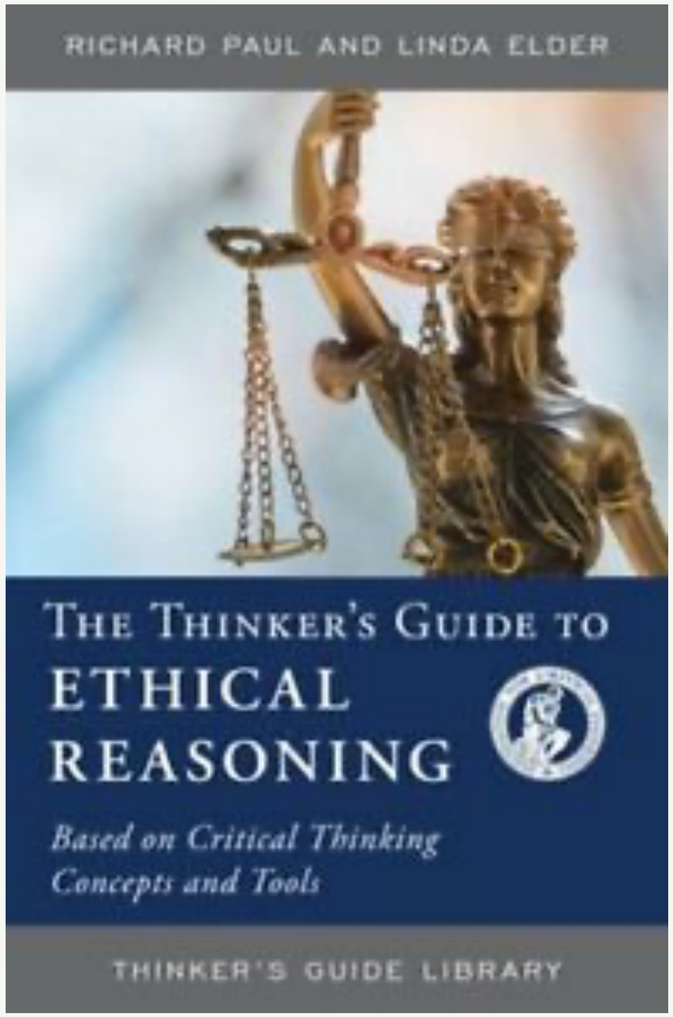
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Reading

The Function of Ethics and The Problem of Pseudo-Ethics (pp. 1-16)



Case Studies

Essential Steps for Ethical Problem-Solving

- Whistle Blowing
- Bartering for Services
- Managing Client Fraud

- Forum on core values and reflecting on the reading.

Reference

Kohlberg, L. (1971). Chapter 1 - Stages of moral development as a basis for moral education. In C. Beck, B. Crittenden, & E. Sullivan (Eds.), *Moral education: Interdisciplinary approaches* (pp. 23-92). University of Toronto Press.

Paul, R., & Elder, L. (2006). *The thinker's guide to understanding the foundations of ethical reasoning: Based on critical thinking concepts & tools* (2nd ed.). Foundation for Critical Thinking.