

Lawrence Kohlberg

Some of the most heated debates in developmental psychology have centered on the development of moral thought and action. A leading figure in this debate was Lawrence Kohlberg. Kohlberg believed that there were three phases of moral thought with each phase consisting of two stages each, for a total of six stages. Each stage builds upon another and is associated with changes in cognitive structure.

The first phase is **pre-conventional morality**, during which right and wrong are defined by the hedonistic consequences of a given action (punishment or reward). The orientation during this stage is towards punishment and obedience. In stage two, there is an orientation towards reciprocity- an "I'll scratch your back, you scratch mine" orientation. Stage two has been called the instrumental relativist stage.

The second phase is the **conventional phase of morality** which is based on social rules. Once again, there are two stages in this phase. In the third stage, the emphasis is "good girl, nice boy" orientation in which one is looking for approval of others. The fourth stage sees morality defined by the rules of authority, and is therefore characterized by a "law and order orientation."

The third phase is called **post-conventional morality** and once again, there are two stages in this phase. Stage five is what Kohlberg calls social contract orientation. Moral rules are seen as convention that is designed to ensure the greater good. Finally, stage six, according to Kohlberg, consists of acting according to a set of universal ethical principles.