

The Importance of Conscience and Moral Development for Our Next Generation



Kohlberg’s Stages of Moral Development (Lawrence Kohlberg 1958)

The Heinz dilemma

A woman was near death from a special kind of cancer. There was one drug that the doctors thought might save her. It was a form of radium that a druggist in the same town had recently discovered. The drug was expensive to make, but the druggist was charging ten times what the drug cost him to produce. He paid \$200 for the radium and charged \$2,000 for a small dose of the drug. The sick woman’s husband, Heinz, went to everyone he knew to borrow the money, but he could only get together about \$1,000 which is half of what it cost. He told the druggist that his wife was dying and asked him to sell it cheaper or let him pay later. But the druggist said: “No, I discovered the drug and I’m going to make money from it.” So Heinz got desperate and broke into the man’s store to steal the drug for his wife.

Should Heinz have broken into the store to steal the drug for his wife? Why or why not?

Questions:

- Should Heinz have stolen the drug?
- Would it change anything if Heinz did not love his wife?
- What if the person dying was a stranger, would it make any difference?
- Should the police arrest the chemist for murder if the woman died?

Watch this video!



PRECONVENTIONAL

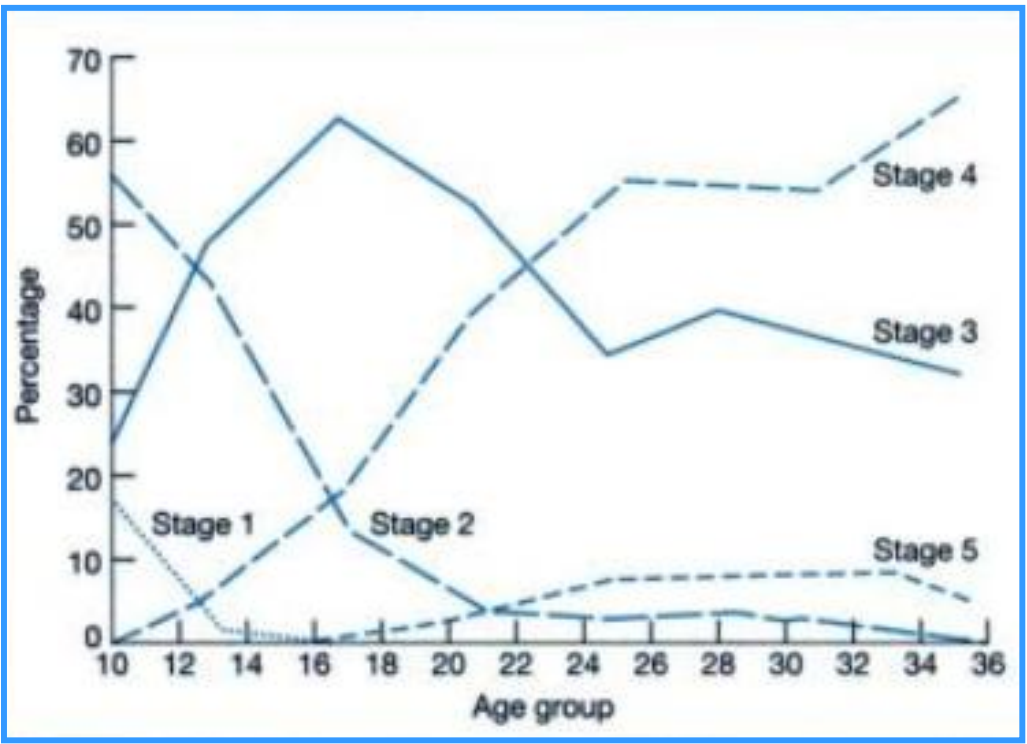
- Stage 1: Punishment orientation.** Obedience to authority is considered. Example: “He shouldn’t steal the drug because he might get caught and be punished” (avoiding punishment)
- Stage 2: Pleasure-seeking orientation.** Action is determined by one’s own needs. Example: “It won’t do him any good to steal the drug because his wife will be dead by the time he gets out of jail” (self-interest)

CONVENTIONAL

- Stage 3: Good boy/good girl orientation.** Action determined by the approval of their peer group. Example: “He shouldn’t steal the drug because others will think he is a thief. His wife will not want to be saved by stealing” (avoiding disapproval)
- Stage 4: Authority orientation.** Should uphold the law at all costs. Follow social rules. Example: “Although his wife needs the drug, he should not break the law to get it. His wife’s condition doesn’t justify stealing” (traditional morality of authority)

POSTCONVENTIONAL

- Stage 5: Social-contract orientation.** Rules are open to question but are upheld for the good of the community. Example: “He should not steal the drug. The druggist response is unfair but mutual respect for the rights of others must be maintained.” (social contract)
- Stage 6: Morality of individual principles.** High value is placed on justice, dignity, and equality. Example: “He should steal the drug but alert authorities he has done it. He will have to face a penalty, but he will save a human life.” (self-chosen ethical principles)



- Strong evidence that children progress through Kohlberg’s stages as predicted
- From age 10-16, there are fewer that stayed in stages 1-2, and more advanced to stages 3-4
- Most people do not go beyond Stage 4
- Stage 5 is more prevalent in western cultures comparing to rural or village cultures
- There is gender bias

