

# KOHLBERG'S STAGES OF MORAL DEVELOPMENT

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## Moral development

is the gradual development of an individual's concept of right or wrong - conscious, religious values, social attitudes and certain behaviour.



## Lawrence Kohlberg

- Lawrence Kohlberg born in 1927
- Grew up in Bronxville, New York
- Died on January 17th, 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.



Lawrence Kohlberg (1958) agreed with Piaget (1932)

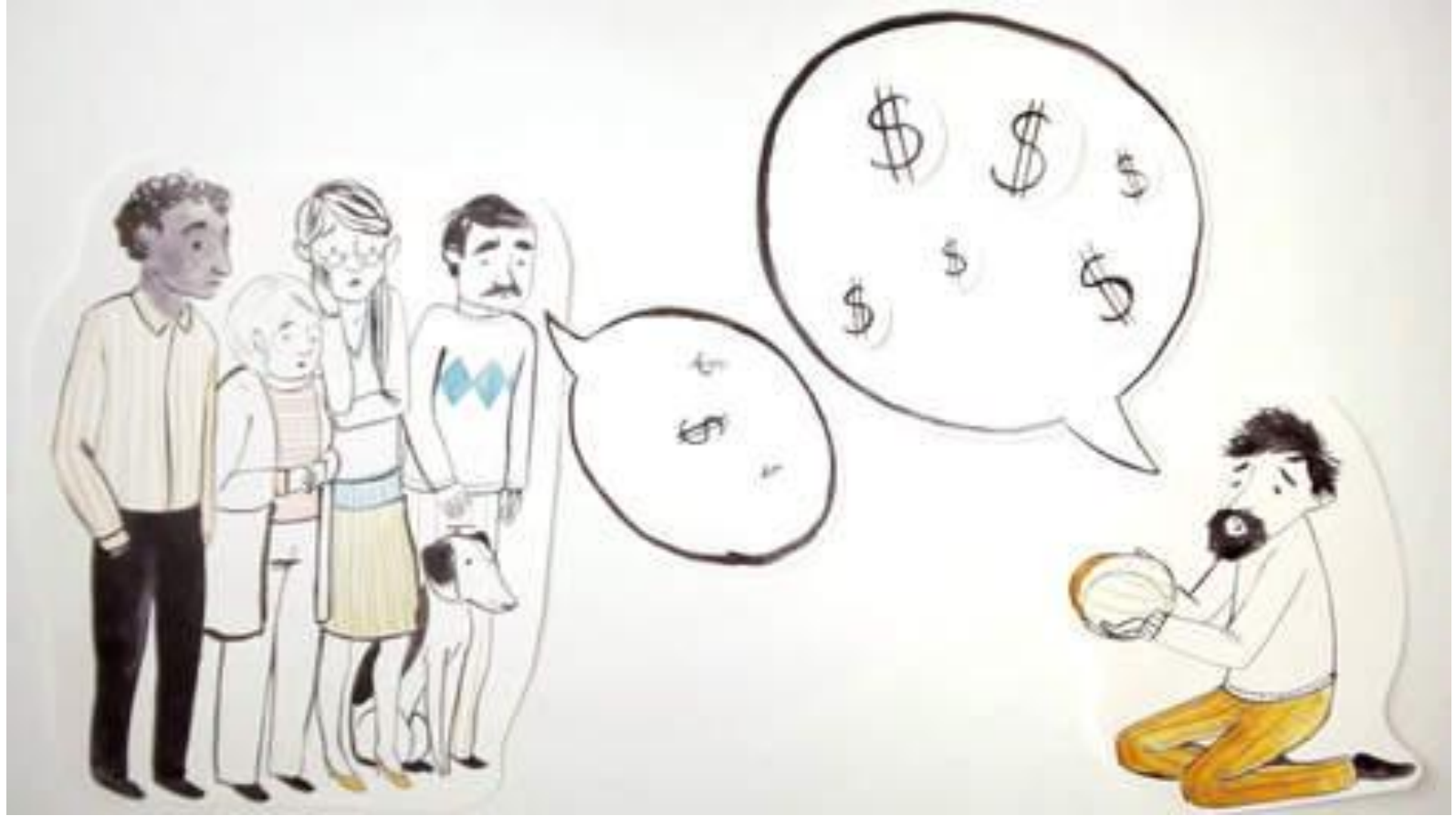
He used **storytelling technique** to tell people stories involving moral dilemmas. In each case, he presented a choice to be considered, for example, between the rights of some authority and the needs of some deserving individual who is being unfairly treated.

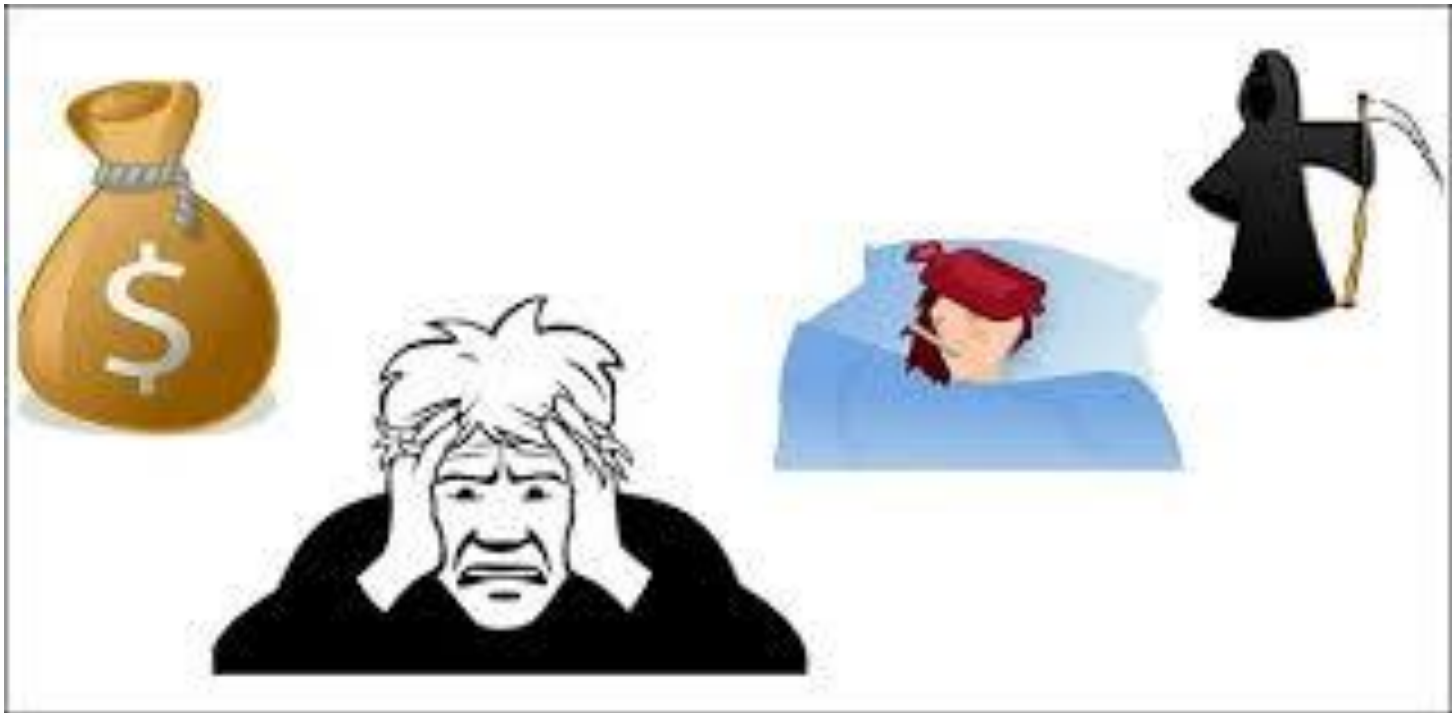


# Heinz's Story











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

1. Should Heinz steal the drug?
  - 1a. Why or why not?
2. Is it actually right or wrong for him to steal the drug?
  - 2a. Why is it right or wrong?
3. Does Heinz have a duty or obligation to steal the drug?
  - 3a. Why or why not?
4. If Heinz doesn't love his wife, should he steal the drug for her?  
Does it make a difference in what Heinz should do whether or not he loves his wife?
  - 4a. Why or why not?
5. Suppose the person dying is not his wife but a stranger. Should Heinz steal the drug for the stranger?
  - 5a. Why or why not?

6. Suppose it's a pet animal he loves. should Heinz steal to save the pet animal?

6a. Why or why not?

7. Is it important for people to do everything they can to save another's life?

7a. Why or why not?

8. It is against the law for Heinz to steal. Does that make it morally wrong?

8a. Why or why not?

9. In general, should people try to do everything they can to obey the law?

9a. Why or why not?

9b. How does this apply to what Heinz should do?

10. In thinking back over the dilemma, what would you say is the most responsible thing for Heinz to do?

10a. Why?



Each boy was given a 2-hour interview based on the ten dilemmas. What Kohlberg was mainly interested in was not whether the boys judged the action right or wrong, but the reasons given for the decision. He found that these reasons tended to change as the children got older.

**Three distinct levels of moral reasoning**

**Each with two sub-stages.**

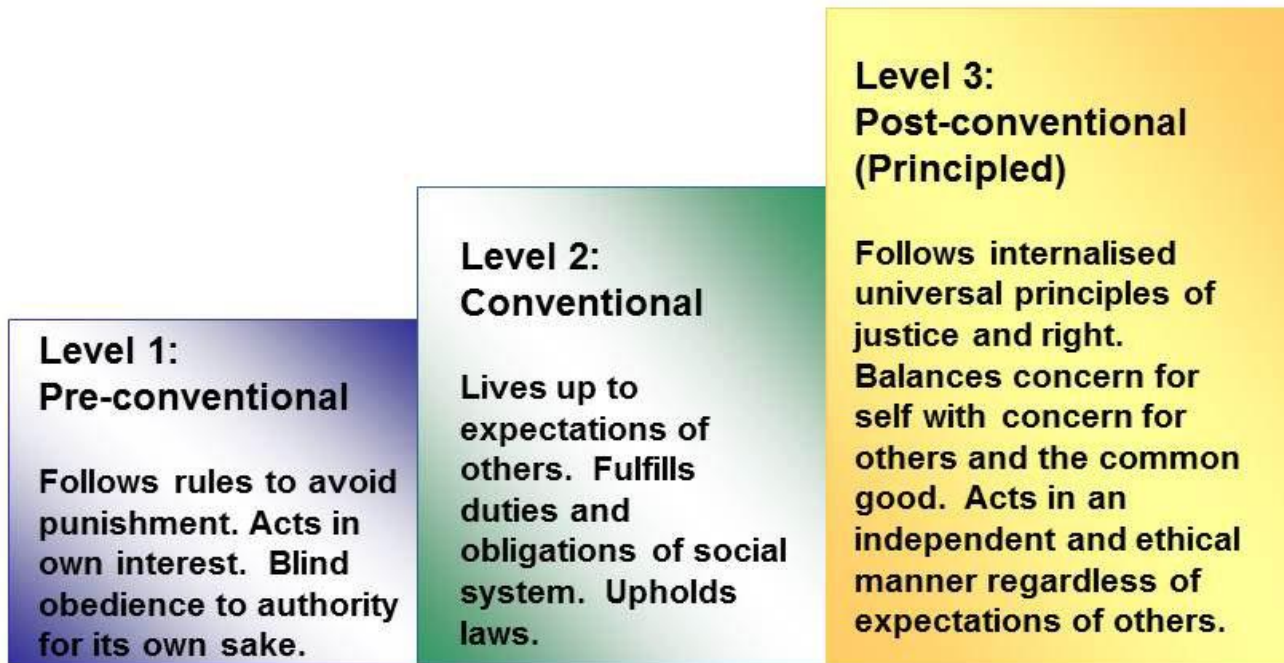
**People can only pass through these levels in the order listed.**

**Each new stage replaces the reasoning typical of the earlier stage.**

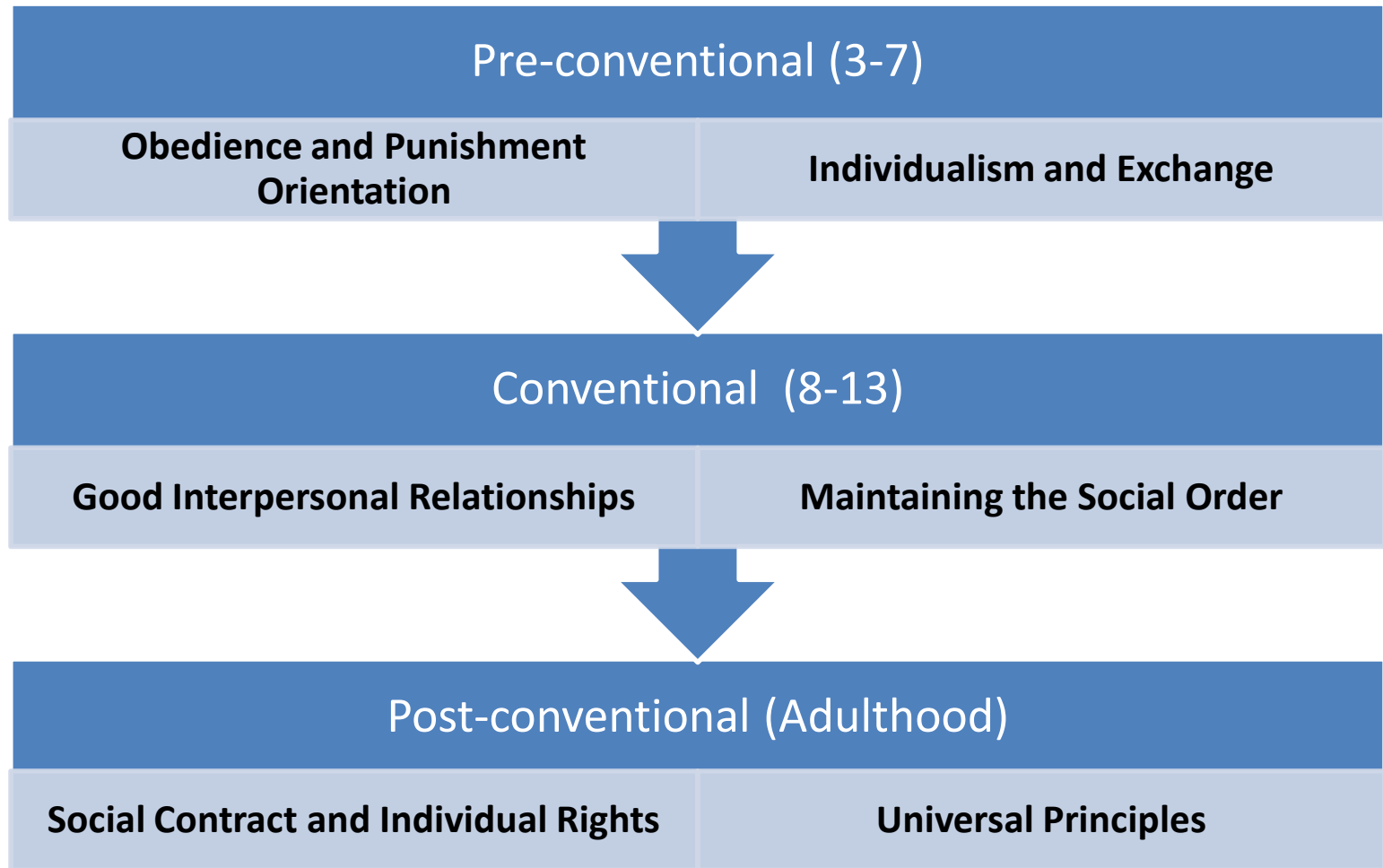
**Not everyone achieves all the stages.**

Levels	Stages of Motivation
Preconventional (3–7 years old)	1. Avoid Punishment 2. Obtain Rewards
Conventional (8–13 years old)	3. Belong and Be Accepted 4. Obey Rules and Regulations
Postconventional (adulthood)	5. Make and Keep Promises 6. Live Moral Imperatives

# Three Levels of Personal Moral Development



(Kohlberg, 1976; Daft 2007)



## Pre-conventional



People at this stage do not really understand the conventions / rules of a society.

Moral code is shaped by the standards of adults and the consequences of following or breaking their rules.

Authority is outside the individual and reasoning is based on the physical consequences of actions.



## Pre-conventional (3-7)



### **Obedience and Punishment Orientation**

To get rewards and avoid punishments.

I would cheat if I knew I wouldn't get caught

### **Individualism and Exchange**

Not one right thing, I should do what I'm told

You copy from my answer sheet if you do home work for me  
"you scratch my back, and I'll scratch yours"

## *Stage 1 - Obedience and Punishment*

There are two approaches for this stage.

The first one says that Heinz should not have stolen the drug, as it would get him imprisoned, making him a bad person in the eyes of the society.

The second approach says that Heinz did nothing wrong as the druggist was overcharging him. The druggist wanted USD 2000 for a USD 200 worth medicine, and when Heinz offered to pay him USD 1000, he was as it is ready to overpay. Besides, when Heinz broke in, he didn't steal any other object except the drug.

## *Stage 2: Individualism and Exchange*

This is all about self-centered priorities.

**It is right for Heinz to steal the drug because it can cure his wife and then she can take care of his home.**

**The doctor scientist had spent lots of money and many years of his life to develop the cure so it's not fair to him if Heinz stole the drug.**

Stage 6:

Embraces a set of universal and self chosen ethics. The law is based on such ethics and should therefore be followed.

Stage 5:

*Principled level*

Recognizes differing but equal moral values, holding certain principles as non relative in the interest of fulfilling a kind of social contract.

Stage 4:

Concern for social order. Laws are seen as agreed upon duties that should be followed for the social good.

Stage 3:

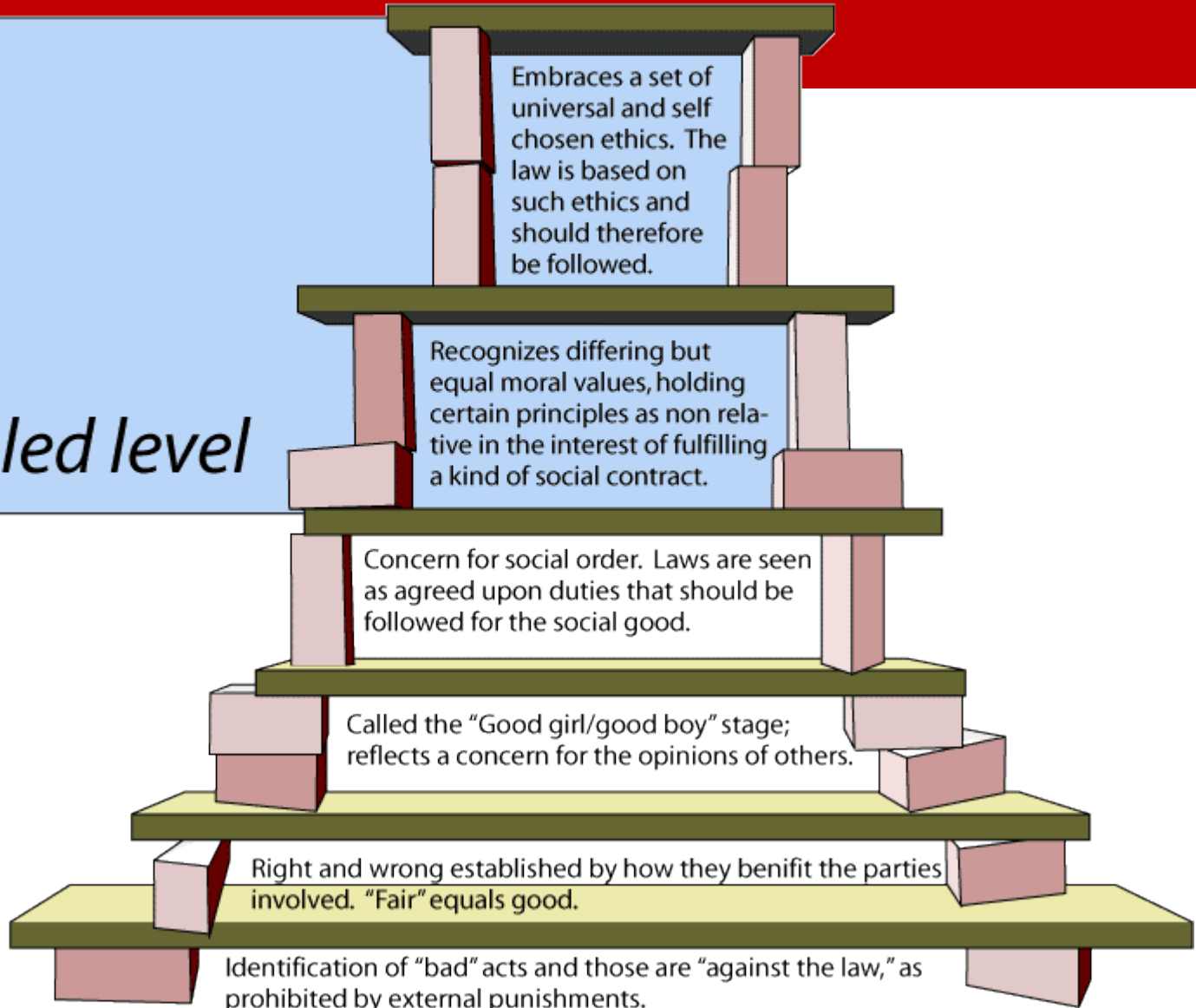
Called the "Good girl/good boy" stage; reflects a concern for the opinions of others.

Stage 2:

Right and wrong established by how they benefit the parties involved. "Fair" equals good.

Stage 1:

Identification of "bad" acts and those are "against the law," as prohibited by external punishments.



## Conventional (8-13)

Good Interpersonal Relationships

Maintaining the Social Order



### Level 2: Conventional

Lives up to expectations of others. Fulfills duties and obligations of social system. Upholds laws.

**People at this stage conform to the conventions / rules of a society.**

**Authority is internalized but not questioned, and reasoning is based on the norms of the group to which the person belongs.**

## Conventional (8-13)



### Good Interpersonal Relationships

- I should look out for myself, but be fair to those who are fair to me.
- What's in it for me?

### Maintaining the Social Order

- Blindly accepts the rules / Rules are same to all / Supposed to obey  
One violates the law, perhaps every one does it.
- I should be a nice person and live up to the expectations of people I know and care about.
- So others will think well of me and I can think well of myself.

### *Stage 3: Good Interpersonal Relationships*

**If he steals the drug and saves his wife, the latter would be grateful and consider him as a good husband.**

**Brown, the police officer should report that he saw Heinz behaving suspiciously and running away from the laboratory because his boss would be pleased.**

### ***Stage 4: Maintaining the Social Order***

**As her husband, Heinz has a duty to save his wife's life so he should steal the drug.**

**But it's wrong to steal, so Heinz should be prepared to accept the penalty for breaking the law.**

**The judge should sentence Heinz to jail. Stealing is against the law! He should not make any exceptions even though Heinz' wife is dying. If the judge does not sentence Heinz to jail then others may think it's right to steal and there will be chaos in the society.**



## Post-conventional (Adulthood)

Social Contract and Individual Rights

Universal Principles

### Level 3: Post-conventional (Principled)

Follows internalised universal principles of justice and right. Balances concern for self with concern for others and the common good. Acts in an independent and ethical manner regardless of expectations of others.

**The moral principles that underline the conventions of a society are understood**

**Moral reasoning is based on individual rights and justice**

**Ethical Principle**

## Post-conventional (Adulthood)

### **Social Contract and Individual Rights**

The world is viewed as holding different opinions, rights, and values./ Mutual respect.

Rules/laws might exist for the good of the greatest number, there are times when they will work against the interest of particular individuals.

The issues are not always clear-cut. For example, in Heinz's dilemma, the protection of life is more important than breaking the law against stealing.

### **Universal Principles**

Abstract reasoning using universal ethical principles

People at this stage have developed their own set of moral guidelines which may or may not fit the law. The principles apply to everyone.

E.g., human rights, justice, and equality.

### ***Stage 5: Social Contract and Individual Rights***

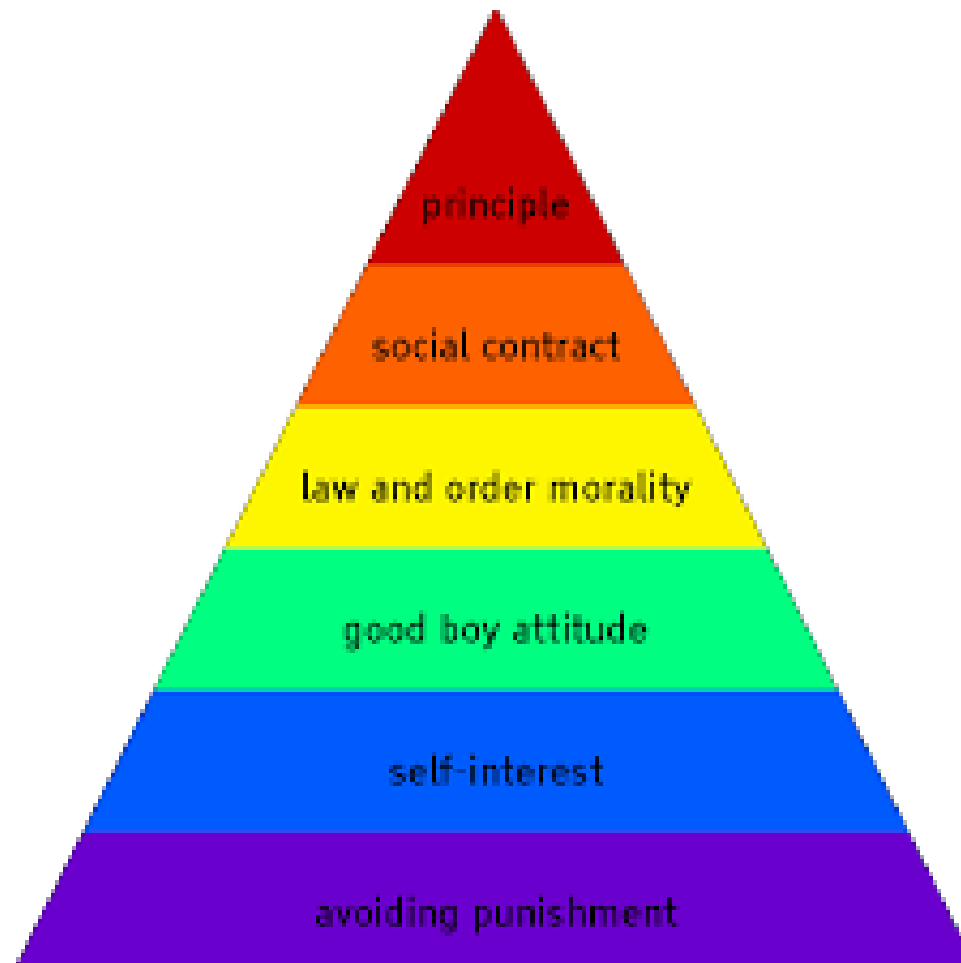
**Heinz should steal the drug because everyone has the right to life regardless of the law against stealing. Should Heinz be caught and prosecuted for stealing then the law (against stealing) needs to be reinterpreted because a person's life is at stake.**

**The doctor scientist's decision is despicable but his right to fair compensation (for his discovery) must be maintained. Therefore, Heinz should not steal the drug.**

## ***Stage 6: Universal Principles***

**This stage argues the validity of a human life above the rights to property.**

**On the other hand, it also argues the fact that others may also be in desperate need of the same property, and may be in a position to pay for it. Therefore, by stealing it, Heinz may have denied both the discoverer of his fair compensation, and another party of the benefits of that drug.**



# Criticisms

1. The dilemmas are artificial
2. The sample is biased
3. The dilemmas are hypothetical