

Table of Moral Stages\*Stage Zero:

Before a child understands the idea of rules and the power of authority, he judges what is "good" by what is pleasant or exciting and what is "bad" by what is painful or fearful. The child has no idea of "obligation," "should," or "have to," even in terms of external authority. He is guided only by what he can do and wants to do.

Stage One:

At stage one of moral reasoning a child is responsive to rules and labels of good and bad or right and wrong. However, he looks at what is "right" from only one point of view-- that of authority. He talks about:

- \*how authority figures will react
- \*whether he will be punished or rewarded
- \*whether he will be labeled "good" or "bad"

The physical consequences of an action automatically determine its positive or negative value. Avoidance of punishment and unquestioning deference to power are valued in their own right, not in terms of respect for an underlying moral order.

Stage Two:

The child at stage two of moral reasoning realizes that each individual has his own idea of what is "right," but he usually feels his idea is best. He talks about:

- \*needs and motives of others
- \*the idea that one good turn (or bad deed) deserves another.

Human relations are viewed in terms like those of the marketplace. Elements of fairness, reciprocity, and equal sharing are present, but they are always interpreted in a physical or pragmatic way. Reciprocity is a matter of "you scratch my back, and I'll scratch yours"-- not of loyalty, gratitude, or justice.

Stage Three:

A child at stage three of moral reasoning looks at what is "right" from yet another point of view. He is capable of "putting himself in the other guy's shoes" and seeing things from another person's perspective as well as from his own. A child at this stage is concerned with what others think. "Good" behavior pleases or helps others and is approved by them. One earns approval by being "nice." Intention ("he means well") becomes important for the first time. A child at stage three talks about:

- \* the feelings of others
- \* what others expect and approve
- \* what a "good" person would do
- \* how everyone should agree

Stage Four:

A person at stage four of moral reasoning considers still another perspective -- what is best for society, the majority, or the social order -- when deciding what is "right". He considers consequences to the group or society in general. "Right" behavior consists of doing one's duty, showing respect for authority, and maintaining the given social order.

Stage Five:

Moral values at stage five are defined in terms of individual rights and standards agreed upon by the whole society. A person who reasons at stage five realizes that the "right" action is a matter of personal opinion, except where "right" has been constitutionally and democratically agreed upon according to proper procedures. The result is an emphasis upon the legal point of view, but with the possibility of changing the law for the benefit of society rather than rigidly maintaining it in terms of stage four law and order. This is the "official" morality of the American government and the Constitution.

Stage Six:

For a person at stage six, "right" is defined by a decision of conscience in accord with self-chosen ethical principles. These are universal principles -- justice, reciprocity and equality of human rights, respect for the dignity of each human being.