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Postconventional Morality

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postconventional morality
n. In Kohlberg's theory of moral development, this is the third and highest level of reasoning, characterized by a reliance on autonomous moral principles. Two stages compose this level of moral reasoning. In stage 5, social contract orientation, individuals base their moral judgments on the degree to which actions promote commonly agreed upon laws and rules. Unlike in earlier stages, rules are *not* obeyed simply to avoid punishment (stage 1) or to obey authority for authority's sake blindly (stage 4), but because they represent social contracts agreed upon by the larger society and are based on principles that benefit the greater majority. Rules are seen as flexible, depending on their continued utility. In stage 6, ethical principle orientation, moral reasoning is based on self-chosen ethical principles which are abstract, universal, and context free. These principles are maintained because they are ends in themselves, rather than means to an end. It has been argued that the postconventional level of morality can only be found in complex urban societies (both Western and non-Western). – MRTG