I. Preconventional Emphasis on getting rewards and avoidance of punishments.

Stage 1: Might makes right (punishment and obedience orientation). At this stage the most important value is obedience to authority in order to avoid punishment, while still advancing self-interest.

Stage 2: Look out for number one (instrumental and relativist orientation). Each person tries to take care of his or her own needs. The reason to be nice to other people is so they will be nice to you. In other words, you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours.

II. Conventional Emphasis on social rules.

Stage 3: "Good girl" and "nice boy." Good behavior is considered behavior that pleases other people and wins their praise. Approval is more important than any specific reward.

Stage 4: "Law and order." Right behavior means being a dutiful citizen and obeying the laws set down by society.

III. Postconventional Emphasis on moral principles.

Stage 5: Social contract. One should obey the rules of society because they exist for the benefit of all, and are established by mutual agreement. If the rules become destructive, however, or if one party doesn't live up to the agreement, the contract is no longer binding.

Stage 6: Universal ethical principles. General universal principles determine right and wrong. These values (such as "Life is sacred") are established by individual reflection, and may contradict the egocentric or legal principles of earlier reasoning.