

## FOUNTAIN OF MORAL ESSENCE

Juan Ponce de León was a real man.  
The Fountain of Youth was a legend.  
The two found fame in Florida.

Ponce de León searched for the legendary fountain. He never found it.  
The legend survives. The fountain is untapped.

While a real Fountain of Youth remains elusive, your Fountain of Moral Essence is near at hand. That fountain, that morality, that essence resides within each of us. Somewhere in the depths of our being is the fountain head of our moral essence. This is where our moral structure has been given its life and begun to grow. The flow of that fountain has brought each of us to where we are today - at whatever point in time we choose to call "today".

To begin, here is a bit of psychological history.

Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget is known for his theory of how human intelligence is developed. His theory is based on a cognition model which involves a stepped process with changes being made over a sequence of chronological eras, ranging from childhood into adulthood. Piaget's work exhibited how a child's reasoning quality improves over these eras, resulting in more accurate and thoughtful answers to questioning. It was a model which investigated how children arrived at the answers they gave, not what they gave as answers. That is, he observed the approach they used to solve the problems presented them. Over time a child receives - their cognition of - a variety of influences, such as, from family, education, environment, and so on. The thrust of Piaget's theory was that, the human mind operates on the elements of organization and adaptation (adaptation might be assimilation or accommodation). The important factor in this is, an adaptation to an existing organization of thought occurs as we pass through each of Piaget's chronological eras.

Enter Laurence Kohlberg. Kohlberg used Piaget's early twentieth-century work and theory to develop his own, "cognitive-development theory of moralization." It begins with Piaget's assumptions that thought and feeling develop on parallel tracks. Meaning: as one begins to think more thoroughly, one begins to feel the nature of what one is thinking. Kohlberg's contribution adds: as we develop physically, mentally, and emotionally, we begin to establish values, or alternately, we begin to live by values that are established.

. These values may be introduced while we are infants, such as, “the crib means sleep.” Or, as toddlers our parents inform us, “crying is for babies.” As youngsters our elders demand, “children are to be seen not heard.” As adolescent students we are told, “sit down or you’ll go to detention.” As teenagers the rule is, “be home by eleven or your grounded.” And, as adults the requirements are, “get a job, start a family, pay your taxes, and don’t complain too much.” Values are ingrained over time by family, school, government, church, circumstance, and hard knocks.

Okay. It is time to think about one’s own cognitive-development of moralization. How did your moral essence develop? Much of it began within those eras indicated above. But, and a big but, along the way those established, imposed and expected values were altered by you. This writer cannot tell you how or where on the road of life you changed, adapted, accommodated, or possibly assimilated your adherence to those values. At this point, it might not be of concern to you. Even so, you got this far in this essay. So, let’s continue.

You ask, why is this important? Think of it this way. You know you like potatoes but will never eat a brussel sprout. You love warm weather and avoid cold and snow. Along your road of life, you determined certain likes and dislikes were to be part of your comfort zone. In the same manner, for example, somehow you came to abhor animal abuse. Something informed you of that. Maybe, as a child you had a neighbor who loved to hurt small animals. That experience informed your world view, your moral essence. Other experiences along your life’s highway informed you as well.

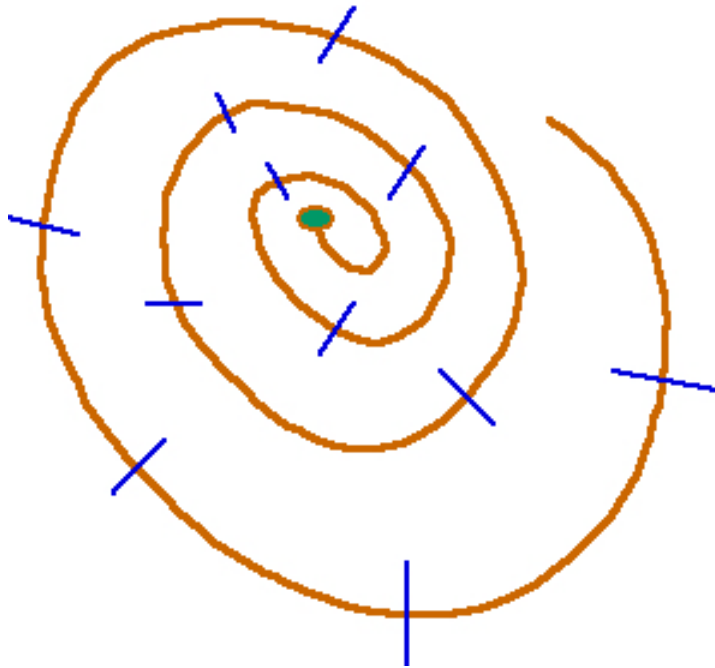
So now, why not explore the source of your moral standards? Agreed? Let this writer offer you a few tools to help investigate your own moral development; your own fountain of moral essence. We begin by developing two charts. The first will use the Piaget/Kohlberg eras, and add a few suggested influences. In each section of the chart, check mark what or who significantly influenced your moral thinking during each specific era of your life. Begin with the influences listed, and add some of your own.

Moral Influences	Era by Age					
	0-7	8-12	13-18	19-24	25-44	45 +
Parents						
Siblings						
Spouse						
Your Children						
Family Member						
Neighbor						
Friend						
School						
Teacher						
Religion						
Clergy						
Profession						
Work						
Program						
Counselor						
Literature						
Politics						
Military						
Life						
Laws						

When finished, you will arrive at an accumulation which reveals that certain elements had more influence than others. As you did this exercise, hopefully you were thinking about why those elements had their influence. It is possible you cannot answer or identify that. To help with this, we must go beyond particular people and institutions in your chronology. We must also explore the environment in which you were developing.

To help identify that environmental influence, we will use what is called a Histogram. The Histogram is used to identify what was happening in and around your life at specific points in your time line. Draw a Histogram like the one shown here, leaving plenty of room for writing in the spaces.

## Moral Histogram



The gradations should be seven to ten years. Mark your age at each gradation. Then, fill in the space between each gradation with what was happening in your life; and, alongside that, a notation of what was happening around your life. (As examples: age twenty one, you graduated from college and you met your future spouse; at age thirty, you got divorced and you lost your job; sorry about that!)

When finished using both tools, sit back and take some time to think about your results. Why did those influences have their effect on you.? How did the happenings of your life affect you? What have you learned from all this?  
Can your mind see what has brought you into “today”?

The answers are near at hand - as close as your paper and pencil. Again, this writer cannot answer for you. Even so, now that you have completed these exercises, you should have a better portrait of you, your moral development, and an understanding of the “waters” that now flow from your Fountain of Moral Essence. Good job!

Best Regards to All  
Chaplain on Signal Mountain  
2010