

# Fritz Oser's Stages of "Religious Judgement"

Fritz K. Oser. (1937 to present) Oser is a retired professor of education and educational psychology at the University of Fribourg, Switzerland. Along with a colleague Paul Gmünder, he delineated five stages of what they called Religious Judgement. (sic spelling)

In the Stage 1 "Orientation of Religious Heteronomy" Deus ex Machina, God is thought of as intervening in the affairs of mankind and people are perceived as having no part in determining outcomes.

The Stage 2 ("Do Ut Des") "Give so that you may receive." is one where the Ultimate is viewed as external to the person and omnipotent, capable of punishing and rewarding. But there is thought to be a reciprocal relationship with the Absolute, meaning the Absolute can be influenced by a person's good behavior, prayer, etc. ("If I pray hard enough, I will get what I want.") ([our Faithful](#))

Oser and Gmünder's Stage 3 is called "Orientation of Ego Autonomy." Here the person tends to push the "ultimate" out of the world. People are autonomous and responsible for the world and for their own lives. Here they formulate ego-identity, and distance themselves from parental and educational forces. Frequently they will reject religious and ecclesiastical authority. ([our Rational](#))

In Oser and Gmünder's Stage 4 "Orientation of Mediated Autonomy," the earthly is seen as the "likeness" of the Divine—or—the Ultimate appears symbolically in nature, culture, and human capacities for love. Social activism may take the place of religious practices. The Ultimate is mediated via immanence. (the person begins to see God in self, in others and/or in nature.) Images of God exist, if at all, as symbols only, otherwise as universal principles. Despite not exactly believing in a separate God, these people, realizing much of life is not under their control, will surrender to the "will" of an Ultimate—similar to our Mystic. This may be a half-way stage to [our Mystic](#).

In Oser and Gmünder's Stage 5 Intersubjective Religious Orientation—the person feels connected to the Ultimate, however that is understood. This is a stage of unconditional acceptance and complete mediation of Being and the world. According to Oser and Gmünder, this person feels at "one with the universe," "enlightenment," "mystical union or divine illumination, depending what faith tradition he comes from. Transcendent and immanent views of the Ultimate are intertwined. The either/or orientation of the earlier stages is integrated into a broader understanding.

Oser and Gmünder's stages more or less fit in with James Fowler's stages except for a single notable exception: At Oser's highest level (Stage 5: Intersubjective Religious Orientation) the subject "feels no need to be grounded in a plan of salvation or a religious community." View of the Ultimate is translated into a sense of personal responsibility to perform actions of care and love toward others, and to take an active role in the stewardship and shaping of this world.

Fowler disagrees that one can approach the highest spiritual level independent of a religious affiliation. He claims grounding in a particular tradition (in his case, Christianity) is necessary to move toward what he calls the praxis of God (which can be seen as right action or right relatedness in the processes of human life.)