



Post-conventional moral reasoning and reputation

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Abstract

Kohlberg's theory of moral development conceives conventional and post-conventional moral reasoning as consecutive levels in a developmental sequence. This claim was examined in terms of the relationship between preference for these two styles of reasoning on the one hand and moral identity as perceived by others (reputation) and as self-perceived and on the other. Participants ($n = 172$), in groups of four mutual acquaintances, provided ratings of one another's standing, and estimates of their own standing and reputation, on four trait dimensions (moral responsibility, consideration for others, respect for authority, and political orientation). Post-conventional moral reasoning, assessed using the Defining Issues Test, was not significantly related either to reputation or to self-rating on any dimension except political orientation. Conventional reasoning was related to politics though in the opposite direction, but additionally to both self- and other-ratings of moral responsibility and to the corresponding ratings of respect for authority. Findings do not support the view that the conventional/post-conventional distinction in moral reasoning is a developmental difference. An alternative proposed is that these are independent domains of moral thought, related to quite different aspects of social behaviour and political attitudes.

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1. Introduction

The cognitive constructivist perspective in moral psychology, and in particular the perspective associated with the work of Kohlberg (1976), is of significance not just with

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respect to childhood moral development but also because it offers an account of adult socio-moral behavior. The evidence collected by Kohlberg and others for his well-known stage theory of moral reasoning development clearly points to variations within adult populations in the stage of moral development reached (see Snarey, 1985 for review). Moreover, it is anticipated that these variations underlie differences in conduct and attitudes (e.g., Kohlberg & Candee, 1984; Rest, Narvaez, Bebeau, & Thoma, 1999). The issue to be addressed in the research reported in this article is whether the variations in moral reasoning identified among adults do reflect differences on a developmental scale that have consequences for behavior, and particularly for behavior as reflected in reputation.

The agenda of moral psychology has for over 100 years been dominated by questions about the formation of internalised controls over conduct. Psychoanalysis, behaviorism and trait theories all offered accounts of this process, accepting that central questions for the field concerned the nature and origins of the psychological mechanisms that cause individuals to pursue civilised standards of conduct. In this context, Kohlberg's distinctive contribution was the proposition that individuals' decisions about their own behaviour flow from their ability to analyse their moral obligations. Kohlberg (1963) originally proposed that the development of this competence proceeds through a sequence of six stages. Of these, the fourth and fifth stages are of particular interest. Most individuals in contemporary Western societies have, by early adulthood, made progress toward if not reached the fourth stage, but many appear to make only partial or very limited progress beyond this level (Colby & Kohlberg, 1987; Snarey, 1985).

Kohlberg defined the fourth stage as a conventional or "member of society" perspective on moral questions and more specifically as an orientation to morality in terms of social system maintenance. When individuals move beyond this form of reasoning it is to construct a "post-conventional" perspective in which they seek to resolve moral questions not by reference to the established laws of their society but in terms of more general principles of justice, fairness, and social utility; "The stage five prior-to-society perspective is that of a rational moral agent aware of universalisable values and rights that anyone would choose to build into a moral society" (Colby & Kohlberg, 1987, p.29). The implication, therefore, is that variations in moral competence within adult populations are largely around a division between conventional and post-conventional moral reasoning.

The claim that these two forms of moral reasoning are indeed consecutive stages in a developmental sequence has been submitted to various kinds of validity test. Perhaps the most systematic account of these tests and their outcomes is provided by Rest et al. (1999). In this article, we focus on two of the six tests they identify, relating to prediction of (a) real life interpersonal behavior and (b) political commitments, these two sometimes also distinguished as respectively micro- and macro-morality. Thus the realm of micro-morality is represented by interpersonal behaviors that involve respecting the rights and dignity of others, not lying to them, stealing from them, wounding them or cheating them and that involve helping others in danger, distress or need. Validity in this respect is demonstrated by evidence that individuals who are distinguishable in terms of their use of or preference for one form of reasoning over the other also behave differently. The domain of macro-morality is represented by individuals' relations to the political life of their societies, and thus the political agendas they support and oppose. Validity in this respect is demonstrated by evidence that the different forms of reasoning are associated with differences in political attitudes and commitments.

Validity tests of the first kind could take several forms, depending in part upon the particular domain of interpersonal behavior considered. We think it is useful to distinguish at least two such domains, those of altruistic and of antisocial behavior, on the grounds that they appear to be orthogonal tendencies (Krueger, Hicks, & McGue, 2001). These two domains also bear some relation respectively to the Agreeableness (A) and Conscientiousness (C) factors identified in the five factor model of personality (cf. McCrae & John, 1992). Agreeableness reflects in part the degree to which a person is kind, sympathetic, and sensitive to others' needs and interests. Conscientiousness reflects the extent to which a person is reliable, responsible, and dependable.

There have been numerous attempts to show that altruistic behavior is associated with more advanced moral reasoning (e.g., Colby & Damon, 1995; Hart & Fegley, 1995). Little of this work, however, bears directly on the validity of the conventional–post-conventional distinction, not having tested the more specific prediction that post-conventional reasoning confers an advantage over conventional reasoning in this domain of behavior. The link between moral reasoning and delinquency has been even more extensively explored, but again this more specific prediction has received little attention. In one exception, Renwick and Emler (1984) found that involvement in delinquent and antisocial behavior was negatively related to preference for conventional reasoning, but actually positively related to preference for post-conventional reasoning.

In this study, we examined the relation between moral reasoning and the reputations people have in these two behavioral domains. Reputation is of interest for three reasons. First, it can be treated simply as a behavioral indicator. With respect to moral conduct it may have the advantage over self-report of being less vulnerable to self-serving bias. Second, reputation is of interest in its own right, as a goal of action and as a significant resource in social life (Emler, 1984, 1990). Third, reputation may be influenced by moral reasoning via two routes, by shaping the behavioral choices that reputation reflects and more directly when used by the actor to influence observers' opinions. The present study was not intended to compare the relative importance of these two routes, a question about why a connection exists between moral reasoning and reputation, but to determine whether any such connection exists at all.

An association between political views and moral reasoning is regarded by Rest et al. (1999) as another important validity test of the conventional/post-conventional developmental distinction. In this case the same association has consistently emerged in at least 15 separate studies (Emler, 2002); the more an individual prefers or uses post-conventional moral reasoning as compared to conventional reasoning, the more likely that individual is to support left wing (or liberal) versus right wing (or conservative) political parties, policies and causes. What is at issue, however, is what the link means.

Those working within the Kohlbergian theoretical framework have proposed that the link reflects the causal influence of moral reasoning level on political orientation (e.g., Rest, Thoma, & Edwards, 1997; Thoma, 1993). Other and quite different interpretations are, nevertheless, possible. One interpretation, indicated by some of the evidence (Emler, Palmer-Canton, & St. James, 1998; Fishkin, Keniston, & MacKinnon, 1973), is that only the moral position of conservatism is represented in the Kohlbergian stage sequence. More specifically, Emler et al. (1998) showed that conventional moral arguments are perceived to be right wing but that post-conventional arguments are not strongly associated with either left or right. They then proposed that the apparent association of left-wing politics

with post-conventional reasoning reported in previous research may be an artefact of the procedure by which individuals are assigned moral reasoning scores.

The two principle options for assigning moral reasoning scores, Kohlberg's Moral Judgment Interview (MJI; Colby & Kohlberg, 1987) and Rest's (1975) Defining Issues Test (DIT), are effectively both ipsative procedures. In neither case can a respondent simultaneously achieve a high score for post-conventional and conventional reasoning. Emler et al. (1998) propose that these ipsative procedures, in which conventional and post-conventional scores are normally derived from the same set of responses, will have the effect of lowering the post-conventional reasoning scores of right-wingers as compared to left wingers because the former will be more willing to endorse both kinds of moral argument while the latter will tend to reject conventional arguments as inconsistent with their politics.

Entailed in this proposal is a quite different view of the relation between conventional and post-conventional moral reasoning to that originally advanced by Kohlberg. It is that preferences for or use of these two forms of reasoning are unrelated to one another; in effect they do not form consecutive stages in a developmental sequence. A third possibility is that they are alternative moral perspectives (cf. Hogan, 1970) but are not developmentally ordered. The ipsative character of moral reasoning tests such as the MJI and the DIT is of course reasonable if the different forms of reasoning assessed are in reality distinct developmental stages. But the tests cannot then be used to scrutinise the truth of a proposition they assume. And more particularly, they are not well suited to choosing between alternative interpretations of the difference between conventional and post-conventional reasoning.

However, measures of these two kinds of moral reasoning that are not ipsative can be also derived from the DIT. In the standard procedure scores are based on the ranks respondents assign to moral arguments representing different stages. The response procedure also generates ratings of moral arguments and stage scores derived in this way are not interdependent. A respondent could rate both post-conventional and conventional reasoning highly, or indeed give both a very low rating. Consequently, a rating-based measure is particularly relevant to examining alternative accounts of relations between moral reasoning and political orientation (Thoma, Barnett, Rest, & Nasrvaez, 1999).

To summarize the aims of the research, these were to examine the claim that conventional and post-conventional reasoning are consecutive stages in a developmental sequence in terms of two validity tests, the relation of these two forms of reasoning to moral conduct as reflected in reputation and their relation to political orientation on a left-right ideological dimension. The DIT was chosen to assess moral reasoning by virtue of its capacity to provide rating-based scores as well as the normal ranking procedure.

The design we implemented included assessment of moral identities, both as perceived by others and as self-perceived. We also assessed participants' perceptions of their reputations in each of these areas. And in addition to asking about political orientation, consideration for others, and moral responsibility, we asked about orientation to authority. This has emerged in a number of studies as strongly associated with anti-social conduct; those who are more critical of or hostile to formal authority are also more likely to engage in, and have a reputation for, characteristic forms of delinquent and anti-social activity, such as theft, violent assault, and vandalism (Emler & Reicher, 1995).

The sample in this study was drawn from students in higher education. Such a sample is unlikely to include individuals regularly involved in serious crime, if only because this pattern of behaviour is strongly associated with early departure from full-time education. Nonetheless, there is still considerable inter-individual variation in compliance with the law in this population, and certainly sufficient variance in qualities such as moral responsibility and consideration for others, to test the hypotheses examined here (Gibbs, Giever, & Martin, 1998; Renwick & Emler, 1984). Additionally, this population is particularly appropriate to the examination of hypotheses about political identity and its relation to moral reasoning; coherent political identities are more prevalent in college-educated populations (Emler, 2002). Finally, a preference for post-conventional reasoning is strongly correlated with educational level (Rest & Thoma, 1985) and thus the prospects of detecting relevant variance are enhanced in this population.

Evaluating the relation between moral reasoning and action, Blasi (1980) argued that developmental change in moral reasoning should result in a qualitative change in the relationship between reasoning and action. In practice, however, it has proved difficult to specify an empirical test of this claim. Kohlberg's own more straightforward proposal (e.g., Kohlberg & Candee, 1984) was that, at each successive stage of moral reasoning development, conduct will become more closely aligned with judgment; that is to say, individuals will be more likely to do what they judge to be morally right. If, therefore, there is a non-trivial advantage to moral reputation of post-conventional over conventional reasoning, whether because such reasoning results in consistently more virtuous behaviour or because it directly conveys superior virtue, what pattern of results would accord with this? Post-conventional reasoning should not just be correlated positively with a reputation for virtue, but more strongly correlated than conventional reasoning. As an alternative test, insofar as individuals can be distinguished in terms of a stronger preference for post-conventional than conventional reasoning, they should also differ in reputation. The same patterns of results might not be found for reports of self-perceived virtue if such reports are distorted by self-serving biases; people may be inclined to exaggerate their own virtue. For this reason the relation between self-perception and reputation is also of interest.

With respect to political orientation, the predictions were as follows. Degree of preference for post-conventional moral reasoning, as reflected in DIT *P*-scores, will be related to political orientation, both self defined and as perceived by others; a more left wing (or liberal) political position will be associated with a higher score for post-conventional reasoning. However, the interpretation proposed by Emler et al. (1998) implies there will be no correlation with post-conventional reasoning when this latter is assessed on the basis of ratings. The interpretation favoured by Rest et al. (1999; see also Thoma et al., 1999) predicts the same results with both ranking and rating data.

2. Method

2.1. Sample

A total of 172 individuals (96 females, 76 males, and median age 20), comprising 43 groups of four, participated in the research. The criterion for inclusion was that every individual in a group should be acquainted with every other individual in that group. The median length of acquaintance was 16 months, the lowest was 1 month.

2.2. Measures and design

2.2.1. *The Defining Issues Test (DIT; Rest, 1975)*

This measure consists of descriptions of six moral dilemmas, each followed by a question as to which of two courses of action should be taken by the principal protagonist in the dilemma, and twelve statements representing different considerations (or “issues”) that might be relevant in reaching a decision. Each of these issues is rated on a five-point scale reflecting degree of importance, and the four issues judged to be the most important are then identified and ranked. The standard scoring procedure involves the derivation of a *P*-score, based on the ranks assigned to issues reflecting post-conventional concerns. In addition, we computed three further scores. The first of these was an equivalent conventional score based on ranks assigned to issues reflecting stage 4 concerns. The other two were scores based on *ratings* of, respectively, the post-conventional and conventional considerations. However, in computing these indices we did not use all the items associated with these different stages but only those which satisfied two psychometric criteria: they formed uni-dimensional scales, identified through factor analysis, and the scales had acceptable internal reliabilities. The Cronbach α 's were: conventional (13 items) .68; post-conventional (18 items) .73.

2.2.2. *The interpersonal perception questionnaire*

The format for this questionnaire was refined through a series of pilot studies. Participants rated themselves and each of the other three persons in their group on twelve 9-point bi-polar scales which were intended to index four dimensions of moral identity, with three scales for each dimension: moral responsibility; consideration for others; deference to authority; left-right political orientation. In each set of three items, one item was reversed. In addition to rating themselves and the other group members, each participant rated themselves as they anticipated they were viewed on this dimension by other people who knew them, described by Kenny (1994) as ‘meta-perceptions.’

This design corresponds to what Kenny (1994) calls a round robin design. In the form executed here it possessed the psychometric virtues of providing at least three indicators for each variable and three observers for each target. The design also allows for derivation of three indices relevant to the purposes of the study, (1) consensus among observers—the degree to which observers agree in their assessment of a target, or to put it another way the degree to which they share in a reputational judgment of the target; (2) self-other agreement—the degree to which individuals’ self-perceptions concur with the way they are seen by others; and (3) meta-accuracy agreement—the degree to which individuals’ perceptions of how others see them correspond to the way others actually perceive them or their insight into their own reputations.

2.3. Procedure

Groups were recruited by students taking part in a second year psychology research methods class. Each class member recruited one group. None of those recruited were themselves studying psychology. Extensive pretesting confirmed that these were readily achievable conditions within the residential college structure of this university. Each person in the group was assigned a letter, A, B, C, or D, and each was informed of the letter assigned to each other member of the group so that these identifiers could be used

consistently in completing the interpersonal perception questionnaire (IPQ). The IPQ cover sheet contained instructions for completing the ratings together with assurances about the confidentiality of responses. To reinforce confidentiality responses were returned in sealed envelopes and exchanged with another class member for coding and data entry. The procedures for protecting confidentiality were repeated orally to participants by the student researcher who remained present while the questionnaires were completed in order to answer any queries and to ensure that the questionnaires were completed independently. Student researchers were blind as to hypotheses and research questions.

3. Results

3.1. Reliability and uni-dimensionality of IPQ measures

The scales constructed for self- and meta-perceptions each consisted of three items. Scales for other's ratings were based on nine responses, those of three observers to each of three items. Cronbach α 's computed for the four dimensions—self-ratings, others' ratings, and meta-perceptions—derived from the IPQ measures were as follows: 'Moral responsibility,' .85 (self-ratings), .85 (others' ratings), and .76 (meta-perceptions); 'Consideration for others,' .80, .83, and .84; 'Respect for authority,' .80, .83, and .82; 'Political orientation,' .89, .89 and .91. The four dimensions also emerged as four distinct factors in factor analyses of the self-, other-, and meta-perceptions. Principal components analysis with varimax rotation identified rotated factor structures with four factors accounting for 21.02, 18.38, 17.64, and 16.86% of the variance in the case of self-perceptions, 14.42, 12.96, 12.84, and 10.59% of the variance in the case of others' perceptions, and 21.74, 19.62, 19.59, and 16.61% of the variance in the case of meta-perceptions. However, two of the dimensions did also correlate quite strongly with each other, the 'moral responsibility' and 'respect for authority' dimensions (self-perceptions: .43; other-perceptions: .56; and meta-perceptions: .51).

3.2. Inter-observer agreement, self other-agreement, and meta-perceptions

Consensus among observers provides an indication of the extent to which individuals do have distinct reputations—judgments about them that are shared by acquaintances. To estimate consensus, measures for each of the five dimensions were computed separately for three observers, each measure therefore consisting of three items. The average of the three correlations was then calculated. It should be noted that, because each participant contributes assessments of three different targets, each therefore appears in the analysis three times, albeit each time with respect to a different target. Self-other agreement indicates the extent to which reputation corresponds with self-perception. The concordance between meta-perceptions and ratings by others, referred to as "meta-accuracy," can be taken as an indication of the extent to which individuals are aware of the reputations they have among their acquaintances. [Table 1](#) gives the relevant correlations.

It can be seen that there is a good level of consensus among observers regarding all four moral identity dimensions. There is also good self-other agreement in all cases; in other words, the way that participants saw themselves accorded with the way that they were seen by people acquainted with them. Meta-accuracy, or the correlations between observer ratings and meta-perceptions, indicates that participants were also aware of how their

Table 1

Consensus, self-other agreement, meta-accuracy and self- versus meta-perception concordance for moral identity dimensions

	Consensus	Self-other agreement	Meta-accuracy	Self-meta concordance
Moral responsibility	.49	.50	.56	.81
Consideration	.38	.37	.37	.78
Authority	.42	.57	.59	.84
Political orientation	.50	.60	.62	.88

Table 2

Means (and standard deviations) for moral identity dimensions

	Other-perception	Self-perception	Perceived reputation
<i>Identity dimension</i>			
Moral responsibility	6.57 (1.27)	6.56 (1.41)	6.40 (1.57)
Consideration	6.67 (1.11)	6.91 (1.25)	6.62 (1.28)
Authority	4.78 (1.30)	5.15 (1.75)	4.82 (1.75)
Political orientation	5.21 (1.40)	5.59 (1.84)	5.28 (1.80)

acquaintances saw them. The lowest values in all three cases were for the ‘consideration for others’ dimension. A comparison of the mean values for other perceptions, self-perceptions, and meta-perceptions (Table 2) revealed no uniform tendency for individuals to overstate their own virtues or over-estimate their own reputations. Repeated measures ANOVAs with planned comparisons indicated participants did evaluate their own consideration for others and respect for authority more positively than did their acquaintances ($P < .05$), but there was no difference with respect to moral responsibility. Perceptions of reputation did not differ from actual reputation on any of these dimensions.

3.3. Correlations between moral reasoning (DIT) indicators and behavioural indicators

Of the two bases for assessing preference for each of the two kinds of moral reasoning, the ranking procedure produced a negative correlation between preference for conventional and post-conventional reasoning respectively ($r = -.58$, $P < .05$) but using ratings the correlation was positive ($r = +.25$, $P < .05$). Table 3 gives the correlations between observer ratings on the four dimensions of reputation and preference for respectively conventional and post-conventional moral reasoning based on these two procedures. The significance

Table 3

Relations between moral reasoning and reputation on moral identity dimensions

Moral reasoning type:	Conventional		Post-conventional	
	Ranking	Rating	Ranking	Rating
<i>Identity dimension</i>				
Moral responsibility	+0.18*	+0.16*	-0.14	-0.11
Consideration	-0.02	+0.05	+0.04	+0.06
Authority	+0.22*	+0.23*	-0.11	0.00
Political orientation	-0.22*	-0.18*	+0.20*	+0.14

* $P < .05$.

of differences between correlations was tested using the T_2 statistic as recommended by Steiger (1980) for comparing dependent correlations.

As can be seen, the correlations between post-conventional reasoning scores and reputation for moral responsibility were not more strongly positive than those between this aspect of reputation and conventional reasoning. On the contrary, in the former case the correlations were actually negative. The correlations of reputation with these two forms of moral reasoning also differed significantly; for ranking, $T_2(169) = 2.38$ ($P < .05$), for rating, $T_2(169) = 2.94$ ($P < .05$). The same pattern was observed for respect for authority, with $T_2(169) = 2.46$ ($P < .05$) for ranking-based moral reasoning scores, and $T_2(169) = 2.51$ ($P < .05$) for rating-based scores. The reputational dimension of consideration for others showed no significant correlations with either form of moral reasoning, irrespective of the basis of scoring.

The overall pattern of correlations obtained with these alternative bases for scoring moral reasoning was virtually identical with the exception of the correlation between political orientation and post-conventional reasoning; this was significant when using rankings—the standard procedure for deriving a P -score—but not when ratings were used.

Table 4 gives the correlations between the moral reasoning measures (based on both ranking and rating responses) and self-perceptions on the four dimensions. The pattern for the ranking-based measures mirrors that for the equivalent reputational measures, as does the pattern for the rating-based indices. Comparing correlations of moral identity dimensions with the two forms of moral reasoning also revealed the same pattern of significant and non-significant differences. Thus, self-perceived consideration for others was unrelated to either form of reasoning. In contrast, using ranking-based moral reasoning scores, the correlations of conventional and post-conventional reasoning with moral responsibility differed significantly from one another, $T_2(169) = 2.15$, $P < .05$; for rating-based scoring of moral reasoning, the difference just failed to reach the conventional level of significance for a two-tailed test, $T_2(169) = 1.94$. The correlations of these two forms of moral reasoning with respect for authority differed significantly from one another whether using ranking-based scores ($T_2(169) = 2.39$, $P < .05$) or rating-based scores ($T_2(169) = 2.95$, $P < .05$). One other comparison deserves mention here. Not only was the correlation of self-perceived political orientation with rating-based post-conventional reasoning non-significant compared to the ranking-based correlation, but also the correlations based on these two ways of scoring post-conventional reasoning differed significantly from one another ($T_2(169) = 2.18$, $P < .05$).

Table 4
Relations between moral reasoning and self-ratings on moral identity dimensions

Moral reasoning type: Reasoning score based on:	Conventional		Post-conventional	
	Ranking	Rating	Ranking	Rating
<i>Identity dimension</i>				
Moral responsibility	+0.19*	+0.16*	−0.10	−0.02
Consideration	+0.01	+0.14	+0.03	+0.13
Authority	+0.23*	+0.20*	−0.09	−0.07
Political orientation	−0.22*	−0.25*	+0.26*	+0.10

* $P < .05$.

Table 5
Comparing quartile means for moral identity dimensions

Quartile:	Conventional <i>N</i> = 43	Post-conventional <i>N</i> = 43	<i>t</i> (two-tailed)	<i>d</i>
<i>Moral responsibility</i>				
Reputation	6.96	6.31	2.40*	.52
Self-assessed	6.98	6.19	2.65*	.58
Perceived repute	6.88	5.83	2.98*	.65
<i>Respect for authority</i>				
Reputation	5.54	4.88	2.07*	.45
Self-assessed	5.42	4.63	2.02*	.44
Perceived repute	5.69	4.82	2.32*	.51
<i>Consideration</i>				
Reputation	6.70	6.77	0.38	.08
Self-assessed	6.89	7.10	0.80	.17
Perceived repute	6.58	6.51	0.23	.05

* $P < .05$.

As an alternative check on the relation between moral reason type and identity dimensions in the domain of micro-morality, the “post-conventional” quartile defined by a combination of the highest *P*-scores and lowest stage 4 scores was compared with the “conventional” quartile as defined by the lowest *P*-scores and highest Stage 4 scores combination. This procedure maximised the contrast in preferred types of moral reasoning by excluding those whose preferences were most mixed. The results of this comparison are presented in Table 5. As the correlational analyses would lead us to expect, there were no significant differences with respect to consideration for others, whether in terms of reputation, self-perception, or perceived repute. However, the moral responsibility and respect for authority means of the post-conventional group were significantly lower than those of the conventional group on all three indices, falling in the range for medium effect sizes.

4. Discussion

Seldom does it transpire that the results of a single study settle a theoretical debate and that is no more likely on this occasion. On one side of the debate here is the view that differences exist among adults in the way they reason about moral questions, that these are differences on a developmental scale, and that they have important consequences for socio-moral behavior. On the other side is the view that differences in moral reasoning previously identified as consecutive stages or levels in a developmental sequence are not in fact differences of this kind, that they lack the claimed consequences for conduct, and that they relate to political leanings only to the degree that they are descriptions of the moral attitudes that define contrasting political positions. The findings of this present study support these latter expectations rather than the former.

Modesty in offering this conclusion, however, is appropriate for various reasons. Most obviously it is appropriate because the developmental sequence Kohlberg proposed may be validated in several different ways; evidence regarding reputational correlates does not exhaust the options. Additionally, it should be acknowledged that we collected no

direct evidence on moral conduct; neither self-perceptions of moral identity nor others' perceptions are equivalent to behavior.

But is it possible that the reputational measures in this study are entirely unrelated to targets' behavior? Previous work has identified three conditions under which observer ratings are likely to provide valid measures of behavior, namely ratings provided by knowledgeable informants, aggregation of ratings across observers, and use of appropriate rating scales (Cheek, 1983; Moskowitz & Schwartz, 1982). The reputational measures used in this study meet all three of these conditions; observers were well acquainted with targets, ratings were aggregated from three observers for each target, and match to the third condition is reflected in scale reliability.

It is possible that self-perceptions do nonetheless lack validity given the capacity of people to be self-deceiving about their virtues. Two points can be made here. If self-deception is chronic then on moral traits at least people should systematically rate themselves higher than they are rated by their acquaintances. However, mean self- and other-ratings for moral responsibility were almost identical. The corresponding ratings for consideration for others showed a statistically significant but slight self-serving bias, as did those for respect for authority, but in neither case did this bias translate into an inflated perception of reputation.

This brings us to the second point, which concerns these meta-perceptions. Both these and self-perceptions correlated quite strongly with others' ratings. Kenny and DePaulo (1993) have argued that we know how others see us not because we have paid careful attention to their opinions of us but because we project our self-perceptions on to others; effectively we just guess that other people will see us as we see ourselves. This is consistent with the very high correlations in the present study between self-perceptions and meta-perceptions; asking participants how they thought others saw them was virtually the same as asking them how they saw themselves. Kenny and De Paulo go on to argue that meta-perceptions derived from self-perceptions are reasonably accurate guesses because self and others have access to the same behavioral evidence, and self-perceptions also reflect this evidence with reasonable accuracy. The slightly lower consensus and self-other agreement values for consideration for others may reflect the fact that the behavioral qualities defining this dimension will be to a greater degree relationship-specific.

We conclude more generally that post-conventional moral reasoning provides no gain over conventional reasoning in moral reputation. And if reputation and self-perceptions can be treated as reflections of conduct, post-conventional reasoning is not associated with more virtuous conduct. On the contrary, in the case of moral responsibility and respect for authority, a preference for conventional reasoning shows the stronger association with virtuous conduct. It would seem perverse that progress towards a developmentally more advanced form of reasoning should actually be associated with deteriorating standards of conduct. The more plausible interpretation is that conventional and post-conventional reasoning are not consecutive stages in a developmental sequence but are in fact largely unrelated aspects of moral thinking only one of which (conventional) has consequences for conduct, and reputation, as a social actor. As to the significance of post-conventional moral reasoning, we shall offer a speculation below.

Turning to political identity, this is the first study to have examined the relationship between moral reasoning and an individual's politics as perceived by others. The relationship to emerge is precisely as found using other indicators of political orientation, namely a modest link to moral reasoning. At the same time the correspondence between

self-defined and other-perceived politics indicates that sample members possess coherently defined political identities which they communicate intelligibly to others. Our expectation that self-defined political orientation would only relate significantly to the ranking-based indicator of post-conventional reasoning and not to the rating-based indicator was also confirmed. Moreover, for self-perceived political identity the correlations obtained with these two methods of deriving post-conventional reasoning score were also significantly different from one another. This is consistent with the view that the association between post-conventional reasoning and left-wing politics is an artefact of the ipsative character of ranking-based measurement. There are two further points in favour of this view.

First, the strong association between post-conventional reasoning and level of education (Rest & Thoma, 1985) is a challenge to the Kohlbergian view because there is no corresponding association between education and political orientation. Second, various pieces of evidence point to the conclusion that approval of, respectively, post-conventional and conventional moral reasoning are unrelated dispositions. The negative association predicted by the developmental interpretation of these two forms of reasoning only arises empirically when it is forced by ipsative assessment procedures. Thoma et al. (1999) have challenged this view, predicting that rating data will produce the same negative correlation, but Rest's own data clearly indicate the contrary. Thus Rest et al. (1999) report factor analytic results for rating data showing that post-conventional and conventional reasoning respectively load on different, orthogonal factors. In the present study ratings for these two kinds of reasoning were not independent, but were significantly and positively correlated.

What then is post-conventional moral reasoning, if not a stage beyond conventional reasoning and if not the moral perspective of the political left? Several analyses of opinion data point to a two-factor solution as an appropriate representation of variance in political opinions (e.g., Bynner, Romney, & Emler, 2003; Fleishmann, 1988; Heath, Evans, & Martin, 1993). The first is the left-right ideological dimension, related to political party support and voting preferences but not to education. Heath et al. (1993) label the second "libertarian/authoritarian." Nie, Junn, and Stehlik-Barry (1995) identify a very similar dimension, "democratic enlightenment," which is strongly related to educational level. It is defined by attitudes of tolerance and respect for the political rights of various non-conformist and minority groups. Post-conventional moral reasoning scores have also been found to correlate with indicators of democratic enlightenment, including support for human rights, and civil liberties (Lonky, Reihman, & Serlin, 1981; Narvaez, Getz, Thoma, & Rest, 1999).

These findings are also consistent with tests of the relationship between moral reasoning and the personality dimensions identified in the five-factor model (McCrae & John, 1992). Studies testing this relationship have found no link between post-conventional reasoning and either the Conscientiousness or Agreeableness dimensions (Cawley, Martin, & Johnson, 2000; Dollinger & LaMartina, 1998). In contrast, the same studies have reported a relationship with Openness (see also Lonky et al., 1981), a dimension associated with political tolerance. A very similar link was identified in an earlier attempt to develop a measure of adult's moral orientations, Hogan's (1970) survey of ethical attitudes. What Hogan called the "ethics of personal conscience" corresponds conceptually to Kohlberg's post-conventional orientation, and relates empirically to both openness and political tolerance.

Our proposal is therefore that post-conventional moral reasoning is a basis for, or reflection of, political attitudes lying on a second dimension concerning rights, tolerance

and democratic process, and not political attitudes on the left-right ideological dimension. Adoption or approval of post-conventional reasoning may be a developmental outcome but is not a consequence of moving beyond conventional reasoning. Instead what might be expected to precede post-conventional reasoning are less principled, more authoritarian views about rights and political process.

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