Understanding The Relationship

Between Moral Reasoning

And Liberalism-Conservatism

Benjamin R. Marx

Empirical thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy (Psychology).

Department of Psychology

University of Sydney

February 2005
Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank my parents for all the love and support they have given me both throughout this project and, indeed, my whole life. Dad and mum, without parents like you, this thesis simply would not have happened. I would also like to say hi to my sister, Jenny.

Secondly, I would like to thank the staff and students of Sydney University for many invaluable pieces of advice. I would especially like to thank (in alphabetical order) Soames Job, Fiona White and Clare Wilson each of whom acted as my supervisor in different phases of this research.

Finally, I would like to thank the psychology students who participated in my studies by answering my (sometimes mentally draining) questionnaires. Additionally, my family and friends also deserve my gratitude for piloting earlier versions of these questionnaires especially when they were longer and even more draining than the final versions...
Abstract

This thesis aims to clarify the nature of the relationship between moral reasoning, as per the neo-Kohlbergian DIT approach of Rest and his colleagues, and liberalism-conservatism. Moral reasoning and liberalism-conservatism are consistently found to be related but the resultant interpretation that liberals are more moral-cognitively advanced than conservatives has been challenged by Emler and his colleagues who argue that the DIT is liberally biased. Subsequent research on this issue has produced a methodological quagmire that this thesis aims to proceed beyond.

The specific aim of this thesis is to test several different (or competing) hypotheses purporting to explain the relationship between Kohlbergian moral reasoning and liberalism-conservatism. These are (1) that liberals are more morally advanced than conservatives; (2) that “advanced moral reasoning” is merely social presentation; (3) that moral reasoning is separately constrained by moral development and conservatism; (4) that moral development and liberalism represent distinct paths to postconventional reasoning preference; (5) that moral reasoning differences between liberals and conservatives are broader than usually thought; (6) that the political content of moral issues affects moral reasoning differences between liberals and conservatives; and (7) that moral reasoning instruments have exaggerated moral reasoning differences between liberals and conservatives.

Study 1 found that a non-ipsative, indirect moral reasoning measure was correlated with liberalism-conservatism thus disconfirming hypotheses 2 and 7. Additionally, hypothesis 5 was not supported by several DIT findings. Opposing hypotheses 2 and 6, Study 2 found that a conservative version of the DIT was correlated
with liberalism-conservatism although a potential methodological issue arose. Study 3 developed an objective measure of moral comprehension, broader in scope than previous moral comprehension measures, which demonstrated acceptable reliability and validity. Employing this measure, Study 4 found that moral comprehension and liberalism were weakly correlated and that they independently predicted moral reasoning, although their interaction did not. Together, these findings provide some support to hypotheses 1 and 4 but not hypotheses 3 and 6.

Overall these findings reveal that liberals appear more moral-cognitively advanced than conservatives but, compared to conservatives, liberals appear to indicate preference for advanced moral reasoning earlier in their moral-cognitive development. This latter mechanism appears stronger and suggests that, although DIT scores are still somewhat reflective of moral-cognitive development, the DIT’s estimate of liberals’ moral-cognitive development is elevated. Future research can continue to explore these hypotheses (e.g., via longitudinal and/or “faking” studies) and, in so doing, further clarify the relationship between Kohlbergian moral reasoning and liberalism-conservatism.
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title Page</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table of Contents</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Tables</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preface</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1: Introduction to Kohlbergian Moral Reasoning and the</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberalism-Conservatism Dimension</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Introduction</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 The Psychology of Morality</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Moral Judgement as a Component of Morality</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4 Kohlberg’s Theory of Moral Reasoning</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5 Criticisms of Kohlberg’s Theory of Moral Reasoning</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.6 The Defining Issues Test and Other Neo-Kohlbergian Instruments of Moral Reasoning</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.7 Liberalism and Conservatism</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.8 Conclusions</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section</td>
<td>Title</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>Conceptual Analysis of the Interrelationship Between Kohlbergian Moral Reasoning and the Liberalism-Conservatism Dimension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>Correlations Between Liberalism-Conservatism and Kohlbergian Moral Reasoning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>Introduction to the Faking Paradigm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>The Issue of Moral Reasoning Versus Moral Reasoning Item Endorsement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>Initial Political Faking Study and Criticism of Kohlbergian Moral Reasoning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>First Criticism of Initial Political Faking Study – Cognitive Development Findings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>Second Criticism of Initial Political Faking Study – Faking Effect Caused By Anti-Authoritarianism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>Anti-Authoritarianism is a Theoretical Dead-End in the Investigation of Liberalism-Conservatism and Kohlbergian Moral Reasoning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.10</td>
<td>Conclusions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Chapter 3: Hypotheses Concerning the Relationship Between Kohlbergian Moral Reasoning and Liberalism-Conservatism**
Chapter 4: Study 1 – Measuring Moral Reasoning with an Indirect, Non-Ipsative Measure

4.1 Introduction

4.2 Testing the Breadth of Reasoning Hypothesis via Examination of DIT Scores

4.3 Testing the Social Communication and Ipsative Hypotheses via a Non-Ipsative Indirect Measure of Moral Reasoning

4.4 Developing a Non-Ipsative Indirect Measure of Moral Reasoning

4.5 Validity Criteria for PIC Scores

4.6 Validating a New Liberalism-Conservatism Scale
4.7 Experimental Hypotheses

Method
  Design  101
  Participants  101
  Materials  102
  Procedure  107
  Counterbalancing  108

Results
  Scoring of Voting Intention Measure  108
  Validating the Liberalism-Conservatism Measure  109
  Validating PIC Scores  111
  Replicating Previous Research  112
  Testing the Ipsative and Social Communication Hypotheses  115
  Testing the Breadth of Reasoning Hypothesis  115
  Post-Hoc Analysis  115

Discussion
  Validating the Political Questionnaire  116
  Validating PIC Scores  117
  Replicating Previous Research  118
  PIC Score Implications for the Ipsative Hypothesis  119
  PIC Score Implications for the Social Communication Hypothesis  120
  Implications for the Breadth of Reasoning Hypothesis  121
  Conclusions From Study 1  122
Chapter 5: Study 2 – Reversing the DIT Dilemma Bias

5.1 Introduction

5.2 The Dilemma Bias and the Importance Hypothesis

5.3 Reversing the Dilemma Bias to Test the Importance Hypothesis

5.4 Using the DIT-CON to Test the Social-Communication Hypothesis

5.5 The Item Endorsement Issue Revisited

5.6 Hypotheses

Method

Design

Participants

Materials

Procedure and Counterbalancing

Results

DIT-CON PIC Scores

DIT-CON Scores

Comparing DIT and DIT-CON Scores

Discussion

DIT-CON PIC Scores

DIT-CON Scores and Conservatism

Conclusion From Study 2
**Chapter 6: Study 3 – The Development of a Moral Comprehension Test**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>The Need for a Moral Comprehension Scale</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>A Moral Comprehension Scale with an Improved “Moral Component”</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>A Moral Comprehension Scale with an Improved “Comprehension Component”</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>Validating a New Moral Comprehension Scale</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>Measuring Verbal Comprehension</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>Hypotheses</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Method**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Design</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Materials</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedure</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counterbalancing</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Results**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Temporary MCQ Scores</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final MCQ Scores</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Hoc Analyses</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Discussion**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reliability and Validity of the Moral Comprehension Questionnaire</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 7: Study 4 – Using Moral Comprehension To Assess Moral-Cognitive Development

7.1 Introduction

7.2 Moral Comprehension and the Sophistication Hypothesis

7.3 Moral Comprehension and the Politically Mediated Development Hypothesis

7.4 Moral Comprehension and the Two Paths Hypothesis

7.5 Moral Comprehension and the Importance Hypothesis

7.6 Hypotheses

Method

Design

Participants

Materials

Procedure

Counterbalancing

Results

Discussion

Methodological Limitations

Implications for the Sophistication Hypothesis

Implications for the Politically Mediated Development Hypothesis

Implications for the Importance Hypothesis
Chapter 8: Evaluation of the Hypotheses 213

8.1 Introduction 213
8.2 Methodological Limitations 213
8.3 Understanding the Evaluations of Hypotheses 217
8.4 Evaluation of the Sophistication Hypothesis 219
8.5 Evaluation of the Social Communication Hypothesis 223
8.6 Evaluation of the Politically Mediated Development Hypothesis 226
8.7 Evaluation of the Two Paths Hypothesis 229
8.8 Evaluation of the Breadth of Reasoning Hypothesis 231
8.9 Evaluation of the Importance Hypothesis 234
8.10 Evaluation of the Ipsative Hypothesis 237
8.11 Hypothesis Evaluation Conclusions 238

Chapter 9: General Implications and Future Research Opportunities 240

9.1 Introduction 240
9.2 The Relative Strength of Each Hypothesis 240
9.3 Implications for the DIT 243
9.3.1 The Liberal Bias Claim Revisited 243
9.3.2 Appraisal of the Construct Validity Arguments Against the DIT 247
9.4 Areas for Future Research
   9.4.1 Further Testing of Hypotheses
   9.4.2 The Independence of Hypotheses
   9.4.3 Investigation of the Political Path

9.5 Conclusion

References

Appendix A: Study 1 Methodological Details
   A.1 Purging of Participants
   A.2 Political Questionnaire
   A.3 Defining Issues Test
   A.4 PIC Questionnaire
   A.5 PIC Score Reliability Complications and Corrections

Appendix B: Study 2 Methodological Details
   B.1 Purging of Participants
   B.2 Political Questionnaire
   B.3 DIT-CON Questionnaire
   B.4 DIT-CON PIC Questionnaire

Appendix C: Study 3 Methodological Details
   C.1 Frequency Histograms From Study 1
C.2  Purging of Participants 328
C.3  Defining Issues Test – Short Form 328
C.4  Verbal Comprehension Questionnaire 329
C.5  Moral Comprehension Questionnaire 332
C.6  Details of Item Removal From Temporary MCQ 361

Appendix D: Study 4 Methodological Details 362
D.1  Purging of Participants 362
D.2  Defining Issues Test 362
D.3  Political Questionnaire 362
D.4  Moral Comprehension Questionnaire 366
D.5  Details of Liberalism- Conservatism Scale Validity 390
D.6  Testing For An Interaction Using a Median Split 390
List of Tables

Table 1.1: Number of Items of Each Stage/Type for Each DIT Dilemma 34
Table 3.1: DIT Dilemma Topics 85
Table 3.2: Theoretical Features of Competing Hypotheses 91
Table 4.1: Form of Perceived Illegality and Perceived Immorality Items Used in Study 1 106
Table 4.2: Rankings of Australian Political Parties 110
Table 4.3: Study 1 Summary Statistics of Moral Reasoning and Liberalism-Conservatism Measures 113
Table 4.4: Study 1 Correlations Between Moral Reasoning and Liberalism-Conservatism Measures 114
Table 5.1: Form of Perceived Illegality and Perceived Immorality Items Used in Study 2 131
Table 5.2: Examples of DIT-CON Items Derived From the DIT 142
Table 5.3: Examples of DIT-CON Items Not Directly Derived From the DIT 144
Table 5.4: Study 2 Summary Statistics of Moral Reasoning and Liberalism-Conservatism Measures 148
Table 5.5: Study 2 Intercorrelations Between Moral Reasoning and Liberalism-Conservatism Measures 149
Table 5.6: DIT and DIT-CON P and Stage 4 Scores 152
Table 6.1: A Selection of Quotes From the MCQ 171
Table 6.2: Details of MCQ Quotes 174
Table 6.3: Study 3 Intercorrelations Between the Temporary MCQ Score and Verbal Comprehension and Moral Reasoning Measures

Table 6.4: Correlations Between the Final MCQ Score and Verbal Comprehension and Moral Reasoning Measures

Table 7.1: Descriptive Statistics of the Theoretically Critical Measures From Study 4

Table 7.2: Correlation Matrix of the Theoretically Critical Measures From Study 4

Table 7.3: Predictors of Moral Reasoning in Study 4 as Revealed by Multiple Regression

Table 7.4: Correlation Matrix of Moral Comprehension Sub-Scale Correlations

Table 8.1: Prediction Overlap

Table A.1: Study 1 – Predictions of Perceived Illegality and Perceived Immorality Ratings’ Reliability
List of Figures

Figure 2.1: Different Causal Explanations of the Relationship Between Liberalism and P Scores

Figure 2.2: Competing Explanations for Why Participants Who “Faked” the DIT as a Liberal, in Emler et al.’s (1983) Study, Produced Higher P Scores

Figure 3.1: The Relative Sophistication Hypothesis

Figure 3.2: The Politically Mediated Development Hypothesis

Figure 3.3: The Two Paths Hypothesis

Figure 3.4: The Breadth of Reasoning Hypothesis

Figure 3.5: The Importance Hypothesis

Figure C.1: Study 1 – DIT Stage 2 Scores

Figure C.2: Study 1 – DIT Stage 3 Scores

Figure C.3: Study 1 – DIT Stage 4 Scores

Figure C.4: Study 1 – DIT Stage 5a Scores

Figure C.5: Study 1 – DIT Stage 5b Scores

Figure C.6: Study 1 – DIT Stage 6 Scores
Preface

Because morality and politics span similar terrain, the fact that they are related should not come as a great surprise. This thesis aims to explore part of this relationship by examining how neo-Kohlbergian reasoning (e.g., as formulated by Rest, Narvaez, Bebeau & Thoma, 1999a) is related to liberalism-conservatism. Prior research has indicated that liberals appear to prefer postconventional reasoning whereas conservatives appear to prefer stage 4 reasoning. It has, however, been suggested (e.g., Emler, Renwick & Malone, 1983) that the content and structure of the instruments employed may be inappropriately influencing these findings. To examine this possibility, this thesis develops several new measures of moral reasoning, liberalism-conservatism and moral comprehension.

Addressing this issue, however, forms only part of the overall aim of this thesis, which is to investigate why liberals and conservatives appear to prefer different types of moral reasoning. Prior theorising has focussed on two main accounts (that liberals are more morally advanced than conservatives and that the distinction between postconventional and stage 4 reasoning is merely political in nature) and this thesis tests these two accounts. Additionally, this thesis develops and experimentally evaluates several new accounts.

In summary, the essence of this thesis is a systematic, neutral exploration of the relationship between Kohlbergian moral reasoning and liberalism-conservatism.