Self-Critique of Moral Development Using Kohlberg’s Theory

## Discussion post

Kohlberg’s theory of moral development outlines a progression through different levels and stages of moral reasoning. I find that my current moral reasoning aligns with the Conventional Level, specifically Stage 4, which emphasizes law and order. This stage is characterized by an adherence to societal norms and the importance placed on maintaining social order. For instance, at my workplace, I strictly follow the established protocols even when they seem inconvenient or overly bureaucratic. This adherence is not just about avoiding punishment but stems from a belief in maintaining harmony and functioning within a collective system. Such behavior reflects a broader understanding of morality that prioritizes social cohesion, a concept frequently discussed in our course (Gibbs, 2019).

Despite my alignment with Stage 4, there are limitations to this stage that become apparent when confronted with complex ethical dilemmas. Critics like JC Gibbs argue that staying within this stage may limit one's ability to adapt to situations that require moral reasoning beyond societal norms. An example would be when I encountered a scenario at work that challenged my adherence to rules, pushing me to consider a Post-Conventional Level of reasoning. Exposure to diverse viewpoints through discussions and ethical dilemmas has encouraged me to reflect on my moral growth. I’m curious to know how others perceive the adaptability of Kohlberg’s theory in real life and whether they have faced similar challenges in their moral development journey (Gibbs, 2019).

## Classmate Posts & Your Replies

### Student 1 Post

Kohlberg's theory of moral development outlines six stages of moral reasoning, grouped into three levels: pre-conventional, conventional, and post-conventional. According to Saul McLeod, "Lawrence Kohlberg formulated a theory asserting that individuals progress through six distinct stages of moral reasoning from infancy to adulthood." (McLeod, 2024).

I identify most closely with the conventional level, particularly stages 3 and 4.

Stage 3: Good Interpersonal Relationships

In this stage, individuals are motivated by social approval and maintaining positive relationships with others. I find that my moral decisions are often influenced by the desire to be seen as a good person by my peers and community. For example, I actively volunteer in my community, not only because I believe in the cause but also because I value the recognition and respect that comes from helping others. I strive to meet the expectations of society and those around me, which aligns with this stage of moral reasoning.

Stage 4: Maintaining Social Order

This stage emphasizes the importance of law, order, and authority in maintaining societal functioning. I often consider the rules and laws that govern my actions and the implications of breaking them. For instance, I believe in following traffic laws, not just to avoid penalties but to ensure the safety of all road users. My reasoning is that adhering to these laws contributes to a well-ordered society where everyone can coexist peacefully.

My engagement in community service reflects my desire to contribute positively to society. I volunteer for local charities and participate in community clean-up events. This desire to be part of a group that does good is indicative of stage 3, where interpersonal relationships are valued.

I tend to respect authority figures, such as teachers and law enforcement, and I believe in following established rules. For instance, in a workplace setting, I adhere to company policies and procedures, recognizing that they are in place to maintain order and fairness. This aligns with stage 4, where the importance of law and order is emphasized.

While identifying with the conventional level, I recognize limitations in this moral reasoning. My reliance on social approval may sometimes lead to conformity, even in situations where I might question the morality of the majority. For example, I may hesitate to speak out against a popular opinion or practice if it goes against the expectations of my peers, which can conflict with my personal values.

Additionally, I aspire to reach stage 5, where moral reasoning begins to consider universal ethical principles and the rights of individuals. I want to cultivate the ability to challenge societal norms when they conflict with fundamental human rights or ethical considerations. This awareness motivates me to reflect on my values critically and seek a balance between societal expectations and personal ethics.

In conclusion, while I primarily navigate through stages 3 and 4 of Kohlberg’s moral development theory, I am aware of the need to evolve towards more principled reasoning that considers broader ethical implications. This self-awareness will help me grow in my moral reasoning and decision-making processes.

References:

McLeod , S. (2024, January 17). Kohlberg’s stages of moral development. Simply Psychology. https://www.simplypsychology.org/kohlberg.html

### Reply

Your engagement with both Stage 3 and Stage 4 of Kohlberg’s moral development theory presents a fascinating parallel to my own experiences, particularly in how societal expectations shape our decision-making processes. While you emphasize the importance of social approval and maintaining relationships, I resonate more with the law and order aspect of Stage 4, as seen in my adherence to workplace protocols. This divergence highlights the complexity of moral reasoning within the conventional level, where balancing personal values with societal norms can be challenging. Your aspiration towards Stage 5, focusing on universal ethical principles, aligns with my reflections on moving beyond societal norms when confronted with ethical dilemmas. It would be interesting to explore how exposure to diverse ethical scenarios might accelerate this transition to more principled reasoning, potentially bridging the gap between adhering to societal norms and embracing broader ethical considerations.