

Influences of Internal and External Factors on Morality

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Abstract. Morality concerns individuals in every society and is important for the normal functioning of the society. Individuals are guided by morality in daily activities and may engage in emotions such as moral anxiety when moral perceptions conflict with moral behaviours. This study provides a review of the factors that influence morality from both internal and external influences. The results indicated that external factors that influence morality include the upbringing environment, childhood experiences. The internal factors that influence morality mainly include the function of brain areas and mental disorders. On the base of the review of prior studies, this paper makes recommendations for future research and practice development. Future research should systematically compare the effects of innate and acquired factors. In addition, the link between the neural structure of the brain and morality beforehand needs to be further explored. More research methods from other research fields are yet to be newly applied in the field of moral sense research.

Keywords: Morality; mental disorder; growing environment; neurology.

1. Introduction

Morality is generally recognised as a set of codes of conduct. These codes of conduct may be rooted in the behaviour of a culture, religion or philosophy, or can be derived from a universal standard that people have a strong willingness to believe in. It promotes the rise of ethics, and forms people's judgments. It can be detected that people are aware of the standard of different events, making the decisions of judging in a subconscious way. It is under discussion whether people's morality is chosen voluntarily and if it is negative, what is the sources of this term that motivate people to choose to believe something is take it to be true, and something is supposed to be right.

2. Definition and concepts

Morality is regarded as an important indicator of the determination of whether certain actions and decisions are justice and can be put into practice [1]. Morality consists of human's conception of the meaning of life and what people say as moral goodness in daily life, is what gives each of people the sense that they are worthy human being. The sense of morality tends to be universal. For example, most people would feel killing is something that is immoral instead of simply incorrect, meanwhile, helping others is considered to be a positive thing for people. Compared to claiming what statement is right or wrong, morality is more likely to refer to value judgements, instructions of resolving problems, and social custom associated with them.

3. External factors that affect people's morality

3.1. Growing environment including domestic factors, education factors

In the case of school shooting caused by Eric Houston, the criminal that was categorized as traumatized shooters who had experienced an extremely tough childhood surrounded by corrupt customs and a variety of criminal behaviours, which therefore caused his unstable and stressful life. The severe growing environment led to Houston's lack of any semblance of empathy and was described as having distorted well-being that is extremely self-centred and didn't take other people's life values into concern [2]. In Houston's moral cognition, he saw lives as something unimportant since he had never seen respects toward positivity from where he grew up. He becomes school shooter

to accomplish the “task” in his mind by tormenting lives that were in a weaker position in his mind and doing what the people in his family would do. Such people who grow up in complicated domestic environments are hardly able to feel the importance of lives and tell what is right or wrong from a universal standard as they have never had the opportunity to fit in the benefits that basic principles of the society would provide.

Additionally, the education factor influences the mould of people’s morality as telling minors the certain standard of morality that is acceptable in the society’s frame. Education encourages students to develop moral inference and decision-making process to establishing ethical judgements, as well as evaluating their own previous experiences, overviewing their religion and beliefs, and the consequences of daily events they personally undergo. At the same time, it also stresses importance on their cultural standpoints, as education would really influence students’ moral decision-making from the aspect of social-science. Students may make less use of what they learn from school, but that knowledge involving moral decision-making plays an important role in their future life in working in the society [3].

3.2. Mental disorder

According to the cognitive model of PTSD, it suggested that the core experience of PTSD is a severe sense of present menace, even if the trauma occurred in the previous time. The memory of the experiences will bother the individuals in the way of making the them feeling being threatened by the external environment and events [4]. After certain traumatic events, patients are likely to develop internal untrust or sense of insecurity due to the effect of the experiences from the external environment. The individuals are very possible to believe to be treated immorally after the trauma as the external society or relationships may be the existing threat. meanwhile, during the healing procedures, the strategies may increase the patients’ symptoms by accident. The sense of detecting potential threats after experiencing traumatic events may promote the patients to create an individual protection to certain triggers, which prevent the individuals from accepting any possible changes from the comfort zone. The defence mechanisms help the individuals to avoid being hurt by the external stimulation, but also refuse the treatments. Entrance without permission of the patients’ protection mechanisms is more likely to have side-effect.

3.3. Country environment

The ability to identify the extent of events and what are they supposed to do of an individual is greatly influenced by the culture they live in. The culture backgrounds motivate the individuals to develop certain livings and operate the community to build up a whole country based on the principles the society sets up. The basic principles such as developing people’s own jobs, looking after children, and building up a relationship with others are pancultural. They are suitable for all different kinds of societies as they promote the human development from solemn to social interactions with higher efficiency. Different cultures give more specific principles based on what their societies have experienced. For example, countries in the Middle East that have the religion of Muslim would request women to wear veil in order to cover their skin which is an unreasonable regulation in other countries. They maintain the principles by establishing law, regulations, and subsidies. The establishment of law is utilized by the government to take charge of the society, it gives a range to people about to what standard that the events should be judged as wrong. To this extent, the morality people hold is what the government, the rulers want people to know about the society. Majority of people’s moral identity is affected and guided by a relatively small proportion of people. Different sense of morality comes from the different version of the reading of reality the rulers of the society build up, since moral judgement has never been said to be completely correct. Although morality shows humans’ decisions on distinguishing right or wrong, any kinds of understanding is not supposed to be said as incorrect. People’s moral cognition is set up between the two peak values, as it only represents the most efficient and relatively fair common scale under different cultures.

4. Internal factors that affect people's morality

4.1. Brain region

There are scientific and medical evidence showing that personality, behaviour, and morality are associated with the structural function of frontal lobe. Various types of frontal lobe areas are responsible for different works for moral decision-making.

In 1848, Phineas Gage's left cheek was driven up into by a steel rod in an accident. The rod went through his frontal lobe, but he surprisingly survived. After the accident, Gage was described as an impatient and obstinate person, showing contrast to what he had had been described to be. Afterwards, many more patients who have undergone frontal lobe surgeries, are witnessed to becoming more irritable, having completely different values and more likely to take crimes. Therefore, the results demonstrate apparently that surgery and damage of the frontal lobe would lead to morality changing.

Except for the frontal lobe, temporal lobe is also considered to be an important structure for moral behaviour. There are studies found that the superior temporal sulcus of this certain region involves in moral judgement, which activates during moral dilemmas as it is associated with emotion, and such areas are activated usually after the exact timing when an individual makes a decision related to personal moral judgement, particularly when the choosing is a utilitarian response [5,6].

Functional magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) and positron emission tomography (PET) are the common investigations utilised to discover the influence of the lobe structure on moral behaviour and decisions making, through measuring the neural activity by examining the variations correlated with hematologic flow and metabolic processes. Experiment showing the parietal lobe contributing to ethical judgement and is related to unethical acts was carried out in such method. Six outpatients that were Axis I diagnosed, including major depressive disorders, with the mean age of around 33 years old. During the process of experiment, the studied subjects had not taken any medical treatments for more than two weeks. Five male normal volunteers as a comparing group, with the mean age about 34 years old, and were confirmed that they had no family history of Axis I disorders and no personal cases as well. Patients were interviewed by using the Schedule for Affective Disorders and Schizophrenia (SADS) and met criteria for "Impulse Aggression Disorder". All of the subjects were scanned by PET to show negative results of drugs usage. And later they received d,l-fenfluramine and fluorodeoxyglucose injections. The commixture of the MRI images of patients and volunteers and are all screened by a neuroradiologist. The results out for normal. It is then proved that impulsive personality disorder can be reduced in the superior parietal cortex [7]. What is also said about parietal lobe, is that mirror neuron in the interior parietal cortex may be responsible for understanding the intention of action in other people [8]. The explorations on parietal lobe structural functions on moral reasoning or judgement are still under investigations as its accurate functions are in unknown conditions.

Despite brain region, it is generally believed that genetic factors may also affect criminal acts. Such related experiments and theories were also mentioned in some cases of school shooters. Complex behavioural disorders can partially appear from the sequence of the genetic information diversity and environmental factors [9]. The genetic factor contributes to possibility of disorders and the reactions to external stimulations. Family members would have inheritance on certain neurone disorders. Furthermore, the MAOA gene in the X chromosomes that mutates the neurotransmitters and serotonin have impacts on behaviour, it has links with violent behaviour when MAOA gene has exception handling, also low MAOA activity would increase the sociopathic probability [10].

4.2. PTSD factor

The factor of PTSD as an influence on morality has internal effects as well. PTSD not only affects individuals' performances, but also has a significant contribution on the methods the individuals perceive. The cognitive model suggested that when a trauma is handled personally in the form of sensory impressions or untruths, the trauma is articulated and disconnected from the rest of the autobiographical memory [11]. The specific embodiment of morality being affected are the

individual's internal world view, and more frequent negative emotions. The individuals are more likely to look down on themselves and relate their own characteristics with negative descriptions. Also, fear-based trauma is considered to be the explanation of self-directed negative moods which are key components of ethical victimization [4]. Despite trauma causing fearful emotions, perpetration-based moral injury would lead to excessively negative appraisals relating to over-estimation of personal responsibility and underappreciation of one's action. Patients have frequent emotional experiences of guilt and self-hatred. Other types of traumas have the similar characteristic of causing a range of emotions with large fluctuations.

5. Discussion

Current obtained results from previous researchers, from the aspects of brain region is that, brain regions involved in emotional and social cognition showed more activities in making moral decisions of a personal nature, while other regions related to working memory showed more activities in making impersonal moral decisions [12]. It is somehow apparent that current investigations on human's morality are based on the idea of that it's the combination of neural bases influences and diverse individuals' living environment. It is hardly able to determine which kind of factors have greater impacts as both aspects are developing from a chronic condition, except for extreme examples that are undergoing mutations in the brain area.

For possible improvements, it may more focus on the further exploration of human's brain, as the concept of morality is existing only in the dimensionality of human civilization. It is one of the distributions of human's undiscovered potency. Current neurological studies are generally experiments conducted in closed chambers, and such studies may have insufficient ecological validity. Therefore, multi-person interactive studies or outdoor neurological studies need to be carried out later on. More experiment methods can be involved, since more conditions may be included into consideration during the investigations of more possible factors to the morality, such as the Trier Social Stress Test, salivary collection and cortisol analysis can be involved to explore the contribution of stress to the changes of cognitive responses, which is also an experiment that is consists of both external and internal element.

6. Conclusion

This study talks about the many factors that influence the level of ethics. Both internal and external factors have different degrees of influence on the level of morality. Among them, upbringing, mental illness and social environment all to some extent shape the moral level of individuals. Moreover, brain neural activities and influences of genes are typical internal factors that affect morality. It has been obvious that resulting from current technology and theories, the choosing of people's morality is involuntary. It is the consequence of human neural structure development and society's regulations, also including the interactions between individuals or communities. It is hard to evaluate the source of morality, however, future evolution of human's neural bases or reformation of politic systems may promote to different results.

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