

A Commentary Reflection of Moral Psychology Based on Embodied Cognition

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Introduction

The Western traditional theories of moral judgment have paid special attention to the function of rationality in the relationship between moral cognition and behavior, and proposed that reasoning, judgment and the other rational factors played decisive role for moral behavior. Tracing back to the research of the Western moral psychology, we find that cognitive rationality and virtue ethics are the two main research lines for moral psychology. First of all, for example, the developmental theories of moral cognition pioneered by Piaget and Kohlberg, as well as the other theories and practical research with moral judgment as dominant factors made by many post-Kohlbergian scholars, such as DIT1 and DIT2 (Rest, Narvaez, Bebeau, & Thoma 1999), MCT[®] and KMDD[®] (Lind 1976; 1998), Domain theory (Turiel 1983; Nucci 1981) etc., are the research along the line of moral cognitive development. Since the beginning of this century, American psychologist Haidt (2001) has advocated the social intuition theory of moral development whose idea is that one's moral judgment is caused by rapid moral intuition within which there are plenty of affection elements, only because of which can the moral judgment be made immediately. Haidt has also proposed his Moral Foundations Theory based on the cognitive neuro-science. He insists that as gustatory organ, morality also has many inborn psychological foundations with universal significance, that is, moral matrices that are not immutable, but constantly replenished and revised in the later development influenced by special cultural situations. This theory has found 6 "moral matrices", care/harm, fair/deception, loyalty/rebellion, authority/subversion, sanctity/degenerate and freedom/oppression, that hold that each of the matrices has its evolutionary origin, induced stimuli and emotional reactions by means of which the related virtues are formed (Haidt 2012). We cannot help asking whether moral judgment is determined by rational reasoning or sensitive intuition, whether moral judgment is mainly a kind of cognitive process or affection process, and whether there is any unconscious moral action.

The second line of research is the traditional moral philosophy and ethics that have opened another way to the research of character education

and virtues, such as the American movement of character education facilitated by W. Bennett (1991) and T. Lickona (1991) and others from 1990s; the argument between J. Rawls (1971) and R. Nozick (1974) on moral problems; A. C. MacIntyre's (1981) moral critique to the Western societies and his virtue ethics, etc.

In the past over ten years, there arise a trend of thought that is called "embodied cognition" with the development of the second generation of cognitive science that treats cognition as a sort of highly embodied, situational activity, and the existence of thinking should first of all be regarded as the existence of action. The cognitive scientists do not think that thinking is a series of logical and abstract functions, but a kind of biological system rooted in one's concrete experience, interrelated with embodied activities and interacted with others. In its developmental process, the embodied cognitive science, by means of the experimental and empirical research method, makes a series of research on the environmental factors interacted with the body, including height, smell, temperature, air quality, color, action, time and so on. And this idea that it has proved that intelligence, body, morality and situation are mutually impacted and closely related, is something chime with the idea "harmony between human and nature" in traditional Chinese philosophy, and therefore has significance of comparison. French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty made his epistemological turning in his *Phenomenology of Perception* (2012) from the perspective of "body philosophy" that regarded body as the subject of cognition. According to his opinion, morality is deeply rooted in the interaction of the body and the world (environment/culture), and is also bound by brain physiology, neurology and body.

The impact of embodied cognition on the research of moral psychology is clearly evident especially in recent years. On the one hand, the development of cognitive neuro-science has facilitated the research of moral psychology deeply into the mirror neurons of brain, no longer being limited simply on the philosophical speculation; and on the other hand the experimental research of embodied cognition has provided new evidence for some traditional and philosophical moral issues and even made some new recognition of the issues which are different from the traditional interpretations. Tracing back to the research of the Western moral psychology, we find that cognitive rationality and virtue ethics are the two main research lines for moral psychology. Piaget and Kohlberg have opened a way for the research of cognitive development of morality, and the traditional moral philosophy and ethics have opened another line that mainly make research on character education and virtues. In the European continent, Professor Lind combines both cognitive rationality and virtue ethics, the MCT[®] created by him since 1970s has jointly dealt with cognition and affection, and his KMDD[®] has even become a perfect combination of these two research lines. In the United States, the research of embodied morality has broken through the limitations of the traditional

research on moral psychology and has made a new synthesis that integrated intelligent, body and environment.

The Philosophical Foundation of Embodied Cognition and Its Moral Implications

The philosophical foundation of embodied cognition could be traced back to the epistemology of the “dichotomy between body and mind” and the “dichotomy between subject and object” established by Descartes in 17th century. Since then the Western philosophical epistemology has stressed “knowing through thinking”, that is, by means of the thinking and consciousness, as well as such subjective process of cognitive activities as induction, deduction, reasoning and judgment, people should try their best to reflect objectively the reality of the objects. During the process the mind and body are separated and subject to different disciplines, in which the former is the centre of humane and social science and the latter is the main theme of natural scientific research including medical science. This dichotomy has truly facilitated the quick development of modern science, however, it has also led to the professionalization of the disciplines and its narrowness.

The Chinese traditional philosophy paid attention to an individual’s subjective experience, for example, the ancient Taoism had the idea of the “harmony between nature and human” that wanted to grasp the objects in a whole and therefore it is not separated between the physical materials and human beings. Since the beginning of this century, China has set a trend of thought “back to the ancient Chinese traditional culture. Some Chinese scholars have proposed their opinions about it, that also stress the combination of both body and mind, for instance, Tu Weiming (2011) proposed the concept of “embodied knowing” with the epistemological characteristics of the Chinese philosophy, that stresses the relationship between cognition and body, that is, the embodiment of cognition. To some extent it is also a kind of contemporary returning back to the “harmony between the nature and human”. And actually even in the Gestalt psychology, Koffka’s quasi-physical situation or mental situation, e.g., behavioral situation (Hergenhahn 2001) was a contemporary description of such ancient Chinese concept.

Influenced by the modern natural science, the body is usually in a “hidden” status, however, it arises the active concern of the post-modern philosophy. Michel Foucault made a genealogical analysis to the discipline and punishment in 1970s in which he held that body is a of “the micro political power”. In my opinion the traditional trait theory of leaders is a concrete reflection of such political thought. According to Pierre Bourdieu’s idea, body is a part of the society that reflects the frontier of “symbolic struggle” through “habitus” (Bourdieu 1990). Gilles Deleuze argues that “body without organs” is a key to get rid of the evil of capitalism (Deleuze & Guattari 1987). Jean

Baudrillard thinks that body is something most unfathomable in a consumer society (Baudrillard 2008).

All such instances claim that the connotation of “the body” is rich and meanwhile is a complex with the attribution of culture, society and biology. Although the body has been hidden, it could step in the society and human life by means of its special way, and therefore, the body is no longer an “object” to be reviewed, but a “subject” that could know and recognize itself, and has become one of the important issues in contemporary political and cultural research. The educational history in both China and Western countries has shown that to confirm human beings’ subjective status and subjectivity for education, has been recognized by the mainstream educational theories, but the so-called “subjective human beings” in the educational world pay attention to the “mind” and “brain”, but neglect the “body”. If we overview the educational history in the world, we could find that the body has always been neglected, either as the carrier of the “virtue” (China), or as the container of desire (Western countries), because people usually think that body is second to the spirit and volition that are the first.

Morality is a special trait of human beings who is a special social animal with body, mind and soul and therefore the research of whom should not neglect any side of them (Aronson 2007). We could find in the educational history of both Eastern and Western countries that the main stream of the Chinese moral education has always believed in the goodness of human nature and regarded morality as one’s excellent moral characters that could be cultivated through education, that is, it is teachable, that method of which is ethical speculation. The main stream of moral education in the Western countries regarded morality as the product of one’s cognition that has been developed to a certain stage or level and therefore it uses the method of cognitive psychology. However, both of them neglect the research on “the body” that has been hidden, but not disappeared. Anyway, the research of human morality should not ignore the interpretation of “the body” that is the carrier of both intelligence and morality. Although the brain is a part of body and it also reflects the activities of body, the ignorance of the research on the body can only lead to a one-dimensional research of the brain, and the oneness of the psychosomatic activities cannot be fully understood.

The Cognitive and Affective Foundation of Moral Competence

According to the contemporary philosophical research, the body could be disciplined and therefore could be reformed through education. For example, Foucault argued that people in classic times found that human body is the object and target of the power, and thus it could be tamed to be docile and to be reined, used, reformed, and improved. Such definitions as above has given birth to “the political anatomy” and “the power dynamics”. When people

introduce the research of body into the field of moral education, there have appeared two kinds of different ideas of embodied moral cognition, one of which put the mind into one's body and another regarded the body and mind are separated.

Since the 21 century the research of the embodied cognition has broken through the limitations of the traditional research of moral psychology, and tried to realize the new synthesis based on the mutual confluence of intelligence, body and environment, and then the research of the embodied moral judgment has started with it that mainly focuses on 3 dimensions around bodily cleanliness, disgust body temperature and its acts. It absorbs Vygotsky's (Ma 2005) idea of psychological development, the theories of conceptual metaphor as well as the ideas of evolutionary psychology and has made some theoretical interpretation and exploration on the embodied effects of moral judgment. Since the bodily variable could have its impact on an individual's moral judgment by means of one's emotional and cognitive factors, the moral judgment based on the embodied cognition should be integrated with the related theories of moral judgment, and particularly with moral competence that is the core of moral judgment. And meanwhile the relationship between the embodied cognition and moral intuition should also be explored deeply since it has something to do with unconsciousness or implicit morality, so that such issues as the time efficiency and dynamics of the embodied effects could be further examined.

What is moral competence then? According to Lind's definition, "moral competence is the ability to resolve problems and conflicts on the basis of inner moral principles through deliberation and discussion instead of violence and deceit" (Lind 2017). He also thinks that moral competence is not inborn and not formed naturally either, but could be learned and therefore it is teachable. The method he uses is not the traditional one-way classroom teaching, but the one through the democratic and guided thinking and discussion and thus the KMDD® that he advocated has proved to be a beneficial and efficient method to cultivate and enhance people's moral competence.

The idea of moral competence that Lind created is based on the dual aspect theory that consists of both moral orientation and moral competence. According to Lind, "the moral orientation stands for the internal force which directs and energizes behavior," and thus is represents one's moral affection or feeling, while moral competence is the ability that is expressed in one's real behavior. However, according to my understanding, the moral competence also consists of two faces (or forms), that is, the individual face and that of the social communication. When we look at an individual's ability to deal with the moral dilemma, we are talking about the moral competence. But, when we treat and research how they deal with such moral dilemmas, what we talk about is the democratic competence. In another word, the former is an individual

competence, while the latter is a collective ability that could have manifest help for the enhancement of individual competence.

An Embodied Cognitive Reflection on Moral Competence

Why could democratic discussion strengthen an individual's moral competence? Prof. Lind, unfortunately, has not made his research from the perspective of embodied cognition and the neuro-science of cognition, but the scholars of contemporary embodied cognitive research have mentioned some important arguments that have some thoughtful enlightenment on the deeper research of such issue. The newest research in this field have found that some physical conditions of the "body" (including bright and dark, high and low, front and back, left and right position) could have some probable impact on the metaphor of moral concept as well as the formation of the sense of morality. And therefore we could have reasons to ask whether such condition could have any influence on the enhancement of the C scores in KMDD®? Prof. Peng Kaiping in UC Berkely (2012) argues that the embodied psychology of morality is the research of morality that "puts the mind into one's body" that comprehensively uses the brain science, neuro-cognitive science, biology, moral psychology and moral philosophy. In my opinion, the research fields of the traditional moral rationality and moral affection could be widened if we explore the brain mechanism of the changes of moral competence in both pretest and posttest of KMDD®, and if we could integrate the research of both moral competence and the research of the body, brain and neuro-science.

The research of the embodied cognition has shown that the formation of human being's moral concepts are mostly completed by means of metaphors that means that people use the familiar matters to understand the unfamiliar matters. What is most familiar to us is our own body and the interaction of our bodies with the reality of outside world, which provides us with the most primitive concepts of cognizing the world. And thus to understand the impact of physical environment on morality in a way that will provide us with ways of changing physical environment for the sake of raising people's moral levels and moral competence it is necessary to conduct joined research of embodied morality.

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A Commentary Reflection of Moral Psychology Based on Embodied Cognition

Abstract: The rise of embodied cognition in recent ten years has brought about significant influence on the research of moral psychology. On the one hand, the development of neuro-cognitive science has facilitated the research of morality deeply into the mirror neurons of brain, no longer being limited simply on the philosophical speculation; and on the other hand the experimental research of embodied cognition has provided new evidence for some traditional and philosophical moral issues and even made some new recognition of the issues which are different from the traditional interpretations. Tracing back to the research of the Western moral psychology, we find that cognitive rationality and virtue ethics are the two main research lines for moral psychology. (1) J. Piaget and L. Kohlberg opened a way for the research of cognitive development of morality, and their successors have formed new Kohlbergian School, such as the moral judgment theory based on DIT proposed by J. Rest and his colleagues, G. Lind's dual-aspect theory based on his MCT and KMDD®; the social cognitive domain theory proposed by E. Turiel and his colleagues; the feminine caring ethics advocated by C. Gilligan and N. Noddings; the Social Intuitionist Theory proposed by J. Haidt based on evolutionary psychology, cultural psychology and neuro-cognitive science and so on. (2) The traditional moral philosophy and ethics have opened another way to the research of character education and virtues, such as the American movement of character education facilitated by W. Bennett and T. Lickona and others; the argument between J. Rawls and R. Nozick on moral problems; A. C. MacIntyre's moral critique to the Western societies and his virtue ethics and so on. Since 21st century the research of embodied cognition has broken through the limitation of the traditional research on moral psychology, attempting to realize the new synthesis of intellect, human body and its environment, and therefore started the embodied research of moral judgment which is unfolded around the three dimensions of physical cleanliness, disgust, body temperature and body movements. I has also assimilated Piaget and Vygotsky's ideas of psychological development, the theory of conceptual metaphor in cognitive semantics and the theory of evolutionary psychology, and made its theoretical interpretation and exploration for the embodied effect of moral judgment. Since the variable of physical body could have its influence on individual moral judgment by means of one's emotion and cognitive elements, the moral judgment based on embodied cognition should be integrated with the theories of moral judgment, especially with moral competencies that are the core of moral judgment, and meanwhile the relationship between the embodied

cognition and moral intuition should be deeply explored, and the issues such as chronergy, that is, time efficiency, and dynamics taken place when there is the embodied effect should be further examined, the regulated variables of embodied effects while making moral judgment and the individual differences should also be found out through detailed research. And finally we should check out the embodied effects of moral judgment through the cross-cultural comparison.

Key Words: moral judgment, embodied cognition, moral competence

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