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A comparative study of Factors influencing moral actions in Iran and Blasi's viewpoint

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Abstract
One of the significant dimensions of human's social growth is his moral development. The human being not only is a rational and intellectual being, but also is a moral being. His morality has its origin in his sociability. The human being not only is self-centered and concerned about his own interests and well-being, but also is concerned about others' interests and their judgment of his actions and behavior. In addition, emotional perception of moral and ethics is also concerned about the importance of emotion in a moral approach; therefore, when we, as human beings, draw a line between emotion and intellect, and consider them as totally unrelated, we are actually heading in the wrong path. The results of this study revealed that the main categories of moral action consist of: knowledge management, decision making, individual's will, coherency of moral perception. In addition, the main theme which was derived is culture. The culture theme was the most important theme derived from this study. This study tried to investigate Blasi's moral action theory in the context of Iran.

Key Words: *moral actions, Blasi's viewpoint, significant dimensions*

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Introduction

One of the significant dimensions of human's social growth is his moral development. The human being not only is a rational and intellectual being, but also is a moral being. His morality has its origin in his sociability. The human being not only is self-centered and concerned about his own interests and well-being, but also is concerned about others' interests and their judgment of his actions and behavior. In addition, emotional perception of moral and ethics is also concerned about the importance of emotion in a moral approach; therefore, when we, as human beings, draw a line between emotion and intellect, and consider them as totally unrelated, we are actually heading in the wrong path (Mahmudian, 2010). Human intellect is not like a computer and it is actually dominated by his emotions. It is crystal clear that the selection of moral behavior is impossible without getting help from human intellect and reason. On the other hand, moral behavior is also rooted in emotions such as pride and arrogance, wrath, shame and feelings of sympathy (Fukuyama, 1942). A kind of action-based moral approach is what most authors believe it to be the prerequisite for evaluation of the role of cognition in moral growth and development (Jahangirzadeh, 2010). We all set some limits for the whole range of our actions, and there are some actions that we would never do them. The point is that there is a part within our self, which we hardly will believe in this fact, and that is where our weakness lays. Therefore, we can argue that something which poses problems for moral action, is an issue related to the integrity of one's self (Narvaez and Lapsley, 2004).

Considering the issue of moral development, moral growth theories have followed various methodologies and approaches. The earlier theories were ignorant of the role that cognition and moral judgment may play; however, little by little, the role of moral cognition, decision, reasoning and judgment, have gained prominence. Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg are among the well-known psychologists in the field of moral growth. Piaget suggests that moral judgments are completely based on cognitive growth. Kohlberg is a follower of Piaget's research line. To this end, he devised various narratives, that each of them contained a question which was expressed as a moral puzzle. The recent moral theories went so far and instead of merely focusing on reasoning, intellect and judgment, they target real action (Jahangirzadeh, 2010). These theories also see personality (humanity), identity and moral agents as closely related to each other (Narvaez and Lapsley, 2004).

The main research problem in this study is the tendency arising from a sense of responsibility and our work is based on Augosto Blasi's approach.

Research Question: Is Blasi's theory applicable in Iran? What is the role model for moral action in Iran?

Research Method

The present study is a kind of Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA (. QCA is a method in which written, spoken and visual messages are analyzed and it is considered as a systematic and purposeful method for describing a phenomenon. This method allows the researcher to evaluate and analyze the related issues, in order to fully understand them. In QCA method, raw data are summarized based on inferences and interpretations and then they are categorized and grouped based on relevant themes (Sternberg, 2010). The population under study was consisted of 15 people aged between 30-39 years. The selection of the participants was purposeful and it was to the point of data saturation. The data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, using the interview guide, field notes and voice recording. The interview was consisted of four parts and it included information regarding individual's priorities. These priorities included the most valuable and the most important objectives in one's life. The

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next section is concerned about the barriers leading to the failure of that person and which causes the person to be occupied with other priorities. The fourth part is also concerned about evaluation of one's self-integrity.

In order to conduct the interviews, the researcher made a short introductory appointment with each participant. Through this introductory session, the researcher first introduced himself and explained more about the research objectives and procedures, and to encourage their cooperation, the participants themselves specifies the timing and location of the interview. Through interview sessions, the researcher explained about the process of voice recording and also, by emphasizing on the confidentiality of the information communicated and obtaining consent form from the participants, he started conducting the interviews. In sum, 25 interviews with 15 people aged 30 to 39 years, 40 to 49 years and 50 years, were conducted. Each interview took about 30 to 45 minutes time.

After conducting every interview, the recorded information was transcribed very carefully and word-by-word, in the shortest time possible. Then, the hand-written transcriptions were typed and once more, they were compared with the recorded voices. The analysis of data started right after data gathering stage. This facilitated the reciprocity between building concepts and data gathering and therefore can give direction to the following data gathering attempts (Elo & Kyngas, 2008).

In order to analyze the data, Qualitative Content Analysis method (QCA) was used. In this method, the researcher is similar to an interpreter who studies the data in order to find the meaningful parts among them and after finding them, he starts on coding, categorizing and organizing the data obtained. This process continues until meaningful categories will relate to each other and the relevant themes will emerge (Sternberg, 2010).

During the process of analyzing the data, firstly we determined the analytical units. In this study, the interview transcription was considered as the analytical unit. Afterwards, the meaningful units were identified, that consisted participants' remarks about different aspects of the main concept of study. Then coding was done, in which the compressed meaningful units were coded. These codes were finally summarized and grouped and formed the final categories. Finally, the categories were compared and contrasted and themes emerged (Lundman & Granehdim, 2004).

In order to determine the accuracy and trustworthiness of the data, their credibility, confirmability and transferability, were assessed (Sternberg, 2010).

In order to establish the validity of the research, the researcher was too much involved with research topic and data. To do this, the researcher applied the comments given by his/her professors on the process of conducting interviews, their analysis and data extraction method. The interview transcriptions, categories and codes that were extracted were shared by both some of the participants and doctoral students and their opinions were used in this regard. The researcher made use of a variety of methods in the data gathering process (such as personal interviews, filed notes, etc.). There were enough variations in the sampling procedure, i.e. the participants from different age groups, 30-39 years, and 40-49 years and above 50 years. In order to establish the reliability, we used a combination of data gathering methods. Furthermore, in this study we made use of an external observer whose task was to analyze the data, and a good amount of consistency was revealed between the research process and results. In order to make the research replicable by other researchers, all the activities done, consisting of the research process and the method of achieving the results were documented in details and a comprehensive report of what was done during this research, was provided.

In order to investigate the transferability of

the results obtained, the results were shared with five outsiders which were in a situation, similar to this study participants and finally the results were confirmed by them as well (Sternberg, 2010).

Results

The analysis of the interviews in this study resulted in the extraction of the main category of "culture" and four main themes were also extracted. These themes include "knowledge management", "decision making", "will" and "coherency of moral perceptions". In addition, the pattern for moral practice in Iran, compared with Blasi's pattern, was obtained.

Culture

Culture refers to the way each individual perceives the world around him and is an implication of his behavior and view point. Culture is mostly a moral concept which sets the boundaries between right and wrong or good and evil. Generally, culture will affect the way individuals think and behave (Mahmoodi, 2008). The participants made clear that each action should be done according to one's culture. This is such that one of the interviewees said: "We can't do anything which will violate the culture. Even if we want to do something good which is contrary to our culture, we shouldn't do it."

Another participant told the interviewer that: "everything must be done in consistency with social conventions; otherwise, one would be rejected. This is also the case, even if that deed is considered as good."

Knowledge management

The study participants declared that, to so something morally, we need to have appropriate knowledge of how to do it morally. Knowledge management includes these two categories: moral cognition and thought. In this regard, one of the participants says: "to me, in order to do something good, first of all I need to acquire an understanding of that, I need to think about that beforehand, we can't do something without sufficient thought paid to it."

Another participant also said: "In my idea, before commencing on doing something, I should have enough information about it, and I should have thought about t beforehand."

Another male participant said: "To do something, I will gather the necessary information and then I will think about that."

In short, the participants suggested that, to do something morally, before anything else, we need to have sufficient understanding, awareness and thought about it.

Decision making

The second most important category obtained in this study, was "decision making". The participants all stated that after gaining the required information about moral actions, the individual starts to decide about it. This category includes sub-categories such as "values and beliefs", "culture", and "excitements".

The participants believed that, in order for them to decide carefully about moral actions requires the moral action to be consistent with their culture, values, beliefs and faith. It should also motivate and excite them to do that moral action(s).

With regard to this result, one of the participants said: "After getting enough information and knowledge about what I should do, then I will consider whether it is consistent with my culture and values or not."

Another participant suggested that: "For me, in order to decide to do something, that deed shouldn't be contrary to my own values. In addition, I should be eager and motivated to do that."

Another participant also declared that: "To tell the truth, if something will be contrary to my values and beliefs, I won't do that, besides, it should also be consistent with our culture and social conventions."

Individual's will

The study subjects believed that, their will, have a determining role that whether they do something or not, after they have decided upon that. This category also includes these

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sub-categories: "weak will", "strong will".

One of the study subjects mentioned that: "The most important prerequisite to do some moral actions is to have the required will; sometimes I decide to do something, but when it comes to action, I will postpone it again and again."

One of the female subjects stated: "Most often, I decide to do something, but it turns to be impossible, because my will is weak."A study subject also says: "To do a good deed, I should become determined and then start doing it,[he continues while laughing], we are all more determined to do something bad." In general, the study subjects believed that moral and right things require a strong will for the decided work, and if we have a weak will, that moral deed won't be done, and if it done ever, it will be done slowly and with extra hesitation.

Coherency of moral perceptions

Coherency of moral perceptions includes sub-categories such as: "disrupted" and "integrated". The study subjects believed that in order to do something moral, they should reach a certain level of coherency, i.e. there should be a certain level of consistency between higher levels such as: knowledge management, decision-making and will. In other words, that person should have reached the required coherency and if there is a little consistency, there will occur a kind of disruption, and thus the moral action won't be done. One of the study subjects stated that: "In fact, a range of different factors contribute to the completion of a moral action and sole awareness or decision-making do not suffice."

Another interviewees said: "To do a moral action, first I should be conscious about that and I should decide whether it is consistent with my culture, and there are plenty of other factor required to this end."

One of the interviewees said: "Doing a moral action, requires doing many other things."

As a whole, the moral action model obtained in this study is as follows:

Discussion and Conclusion

The results of this study revealed that the main categories of moral action consist of: knowledge management, decision making, individual's will, coherency of moral perception. In addition, the main theme which was derived is culture. The culture theme was the most important theme derived from this study. This study tried to investigate Blasi's moral action theory in the context of Iran. The results showed that doing moral actions are different within different societies, which is influenced by its culture. We can conclude that Blasi's theory is non 100% applicable in Iran. Culture is like glue that joins different members together. Culture is a set of beliefs with a common durability. These beliefs are exchanged via symbolic intermediates and they gain meaning through the course of one's life. It is made clear in this section that there are major differences among different definitions. However, when we compare them, we will understand that all of them do have commonalities in three points. These points include:

a) All these definitions introduce culture with a set of values which show the individuals how to behave correctly;

b) Since these values are approved, they are selected in groups, and,

c) These values are exchanged in the context of narratives, anecdotes, poems, artistic works, etc.

Furthermore this study proved that Blasi's theory, neglected culture and its impact on moral actions. Therefore Blasi's theory is not applicable in Iran, because it lacks the element of culture. Blasi was under the influence of two theorists, namely, Frankfurt and Tylor. Frankfurt perceives the human being as the one having self-awareness, that has the ability to review and evaluate his whims and passions and how to judge them. In his theory, the individual is capable of changing his own identity and will, through his own free-will. Tylor also suggests that human being is a being who

owns excessive eagerness toward harsh criticism and evaluation.

According to Blasi's viewpoint, the basis of one's desires and will, i.e. moral identity, with high degree of commitment, is a strong predictor of moral actions. One's moral identity involves a kind of commitment toward following moral objectives and it determines two significant issues: 1) An action which is considered moral or right from the person's viewpoint; 2) Why a person decides that he should do something.

Therefore, Blasi has articulated a very strong theory with regard to moral action:

In Iran's society, culture is considers as one of the main factors which is influential on the completion of moral actions. The theory resulting from this study showed that knowledge management, individual's will and coherency of moral perceptions, in relation to culture, is influential on doing moral actions. Aronson and Torben suggest that there isn't a single definition for knowledge management. It's because of the first element, i.e. knowledge and how it is defined. The complexity of defining the concept of knowledge as well as various approaches with regard to knowledge management inhibited the formation of a single definition for knowledge management. Some of the definitions provided for knowledge management, degrade it to the level of fata management.

Haines (2001) perceives knowledge management as a process which is based on four pillars. These pillars namely are: a) content: which refers to the knowledge being either explicit or implicit; b) skill: acquisition of some skills in order to extract knowledge; c) culture: culture should encourage the distribution of knowledge and information and d) organizing: organizing the existing knowledge.

In this study, it was inferred that knowledge management is based on our perception and understanding of what moral actions to be done and the amount of thought given to that. First of all, the person should gain an understanding of the action(s) to be done, and think about it. Afterwards, s/he should decide about that moral action. The process of decision making for doing a moral action requires a consistency between that moral action and individual's values, beliefs and culture. Furthermore, the person should be motivated to do that and thus have a strong will to do that. A kind of weak will owned by that individual will inhibit him/her from doing that moral action. It is worth noting that, coherency and consistency between all the above-mentioned categories are required, so that a person can do that moral action.

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