Morality and Development

Xingyue Wang

Major of Land Resources Management, College of Resources and Environment, Shandong Agricultural University, Jinan, China

Keywords: Morality, Economic Development, Social Development, Social Behavior, Moral Education

Abstract: This paper explores the correlation between morality and development. We introduce the concept of values, ethics and pro-social behaviors to clarify and delineate morality to more concrete and demotic terms. We underscore the significance of moral education in modern societies and economies after examining the interactions between morality and development in three different perspectives. The paper finishes by proposing potential solutions to debatable social and economic issues such as the provision of public goods and suggests pedagogical reform on moral education provided by the school and the parents.

1. Introduction

Concerning yet obscure effects have been brought about by economic development. Few has noticed because the change has been slow and subtle. Ever since the industrial revolution, many economies has stepped into the era of rapid economic growth with its inhabitants experiencing life-changing transformation from living styles to their social position. Demarcation marked the turning point of social development as people started becoming restive under the widening gap between the wealthy and the poor and their inability to fit themselves into the fast-paced economy of the urbanized city. Perhaps afraid of being replaced by machines, people started to focus their effort on improving their skills and abilities which can be shown on their cover sheet and apt to forget to seek for the right position for them in this new environment and the correct way to interact with the society. This problem is passed through generations and is becoming increasingly evident throughout the years.

It might be the time that we acknowledge the fact that there is a mismatch in economic development and social development and the latter has started to cumber the former. We need to take a closer examination of the society, morality and social interactions of individuals to determine the relationship between morality and development and thereby solve issues that are rooted in morality but are usually interpreted as economic problems such as taxation and free-rider problem. Renowned economists such as Timothy Besley and his fellow scholars has studied on both pro-social motivation and the relationship between norms and tax evasion in which he modeled the motives for individuals to pay taxes and pro-social motivation respectively (Besley, Jensen&Persson, 2019; Besley&Ghatak, 2018). He illustrated the incentives for agents to act pro-socially and he proposed the possibility of merging psychology and sociology into the field of economics to put these incentives into good use. Our paper takes a similar stance on interpreting the origin for pro-social behaviors but puts our emphasis on the possibilities of utilizing and fostering these incentives in order to achieve sustainable development.

2. Definitions

Development have several interpretations and standards/codes of measurement, its definition revolves around continuous betterment of the welfare(the UN Declaration on the Right to Development) and constant improvements in the personal ability to expand people’s capabilities to achieve a prospering life(Sen 1984 and 1999). To be more specific, the former definition entails the right of all people to share both the work and the reward from contributing to the development in
the field of economy, society, culture and politics. The latter encloses a wider range of standards, including viewing impoverishment as a sign of incompetency as it limits the capability for an individual or a society to achieve and obtain their needs and wants thereby obstructing their path to prosperity. This idea also relates to egalitarianism: from the point of view of a society as a whole, ‘capability equality’ is one of the prerequisites for sustainable improvements in capability to be possible for every individual in a community (Sen 1992).

While both interpretations of development are appropriate, they fail to present a clear approach to measure the state of development and has not pinpoint the field that relates to the term the most—economic development. Economic development stresses the sustainability of the growth of a state and is concerned with the accretion in quality and types of goods and services, innovation and risk diversification, which are the deterministic factors which segregates long-run from short-run growth (Feldman, Hadjimichael, Kemeny and Lanahan, 2014). The standard of measurement of development is rather complex as it encompasses a multitude of concepts that are mostly abstract and hard to capture in a collective manner however it still helps to avoid the ambiguity from directly measuring development by breaking it down to a more detailed list of concepts which are recorded and summarized from relevant indexes and indicators such as Gross Domestic Product per capita to measure the capability of public to obtain materialistic needs and Gross National Happiness to measure the capability to obtain spiritual contentment by decomposing happiness into different domains that are culture-specific depending on the demographic it is to be applied upon (Heikkinen, 2011).

In order to provide better support to economic development and make consistent progress, a state requires a blend of abilities which encompasses fiscal indicators such as the endogenous fiscal capacity that examines the competence of a state’s tax system, which, if well-built, could significantly shore up the rudimentary functions of a state to produce and redistribute goods and services to maintain peace in a society (Besley and Persson, 2018). However, with the booming global economy, moral issues has risen in importance for most developing an countries and becoming one of the great menaces against sustainable development due to the mutable milieu brought along as a derivative of economic growth. Hence it is pivotal to enforce social norms on human societies and underscore the importance of individual morality (Gordon, 1989) to disincentivize people from making actions and decisions that contrasts the common good and hinders state development. This prompts us to take a closer look at the term morality.

The origin of the term morality can be traced back from the word “mores”, which means the convention of conduct within a society in Latin language (Echekwube, 1999, p. 15). It delineates a series of human actions as either right or wrong and whether appropriate in the context of society and agents within it where each action or reaction of a person can be considered either just or unjust. The term morality is innately intertwined with the values of human beings which are fostered and developed through the interactions between individuals and the society, it is commonly defined as the importance, valuation or utility derived from a certain concept which could be evaluated from a personal or public perspective (Garner, 2009). Value is of utmost importance to the development of a person as one cannot achieve prosperity without knowing what kind of conduct would lead them towards or further from it. This includes the search for answers of questions like: what is the happy life?; what ought I do and not do?; and what actions are appropriate or just? (Omoregbe, 1989, p. 14). Does these actions make me better off? The answers to these questions constructs the concept of value for a person and are of significant importance to determining what is the ‘moral good’, which is what we expect to be ‘the common good’ in social values (Zdybicka, 1977, p. 198).

To guide people towards the pursuit of common good, norms and principles are often imposed on the rational conduct of people. Moral principles can be dismantled into two parts: the positive moral principles and the negative moral principles where the former spells out actions that apt the social values and therefore encouraged while the latter underscores the vices that are to be avoided as they impose a cost on the society (Omoregbe, 1989, p. 14).
3. Morality, Values, Pro-Social Behavior and Development

3.1 Morality, Capability for One to Lead a Happy Life and Development

We examine the relationship between morality and development by starting off our train of thoughts by the adoption of the definition for development as an improvement in capabilities of people to lead an affluent life where the word ‘capabilities’ emphasizes the abilities and opportunities that a person have to do certain basic things or become a certain someone at their free will (Sen 1984 and 1999). We adopt this concept and supplement the idea with traditional utilitarianism which captures quality of life in a cardinal and hence quantitative way for the ease of economic evaluation. We engage morality with development by introducing moral education and its relation to the prime motivations that lead people to exhibit pro-social behavior into the equation. While most standard economic models puts emphasis on the actions that originated from self-interest of agents, this paper aims to pinpoint the underlying social drives behind altruistic and pro-social behavior displayed by individuals and how such motivations are fostered. Thus the main focus of this paper would be on the capabilities and chances of agents to obtain utility from spiritual contentment rather than those acquired from materialistic pursuits and also the possibility of transforming the latter one into its former counterpart. We thus take a stance to take a closer look at the pro-social motivation.

Pro-social behavior is defined as a voluntary helping behavior or action done to better the condition of the recipient individual or a group of people (Eisenberg, N. and Mussen, P. H. 1989). This behavior is not coerced nor exhibited out of the scarification or manifestation of professional obligation, this encompasses an array of actions including sharing, supporting and comforting another individual, and such activities are not motivated by pecuniary interests (Bierhof, 2002). Various models has been proposed over the last decade to illustrate and explain the reason for pro-social involvement and why people are concerned about the situation of others. Here, we adumbrate three prominent models that are widely acknowledged: (i) outcome-based pro-social preferences theories that draws a direct link from others’ utility to a person’s own utility (ii) theories of reciprocity that proposes that individuals respond to others’ actions depending on their manners they display and respond in a similar manner (iii) theories that emphasizes the self-identity through pro-social behavior. Empirical evidence has revealed that there is a casual positive relation between happiness and the tendency of one to engage in pro-social behavior (Walker, 2007). This symmetrical relationship suggests that people can strengthen their competencies to lead a better life and pursue positive freedoms, which corresponds to our definition of development and we therefore infer a positive correlation between morality and development.

3.2 Morality, Values and Development

To delineate the relationship between morality and development with clarity, we go back to the rudimentary and preliminary stage in which the values are first shaped and introduced to an individual. People mature under certain set of moral conventions (Reiss, 1999) and values are linked with education in a complex manner in the way that the latter influences and realizes the former in a complex and obscure way. This elicits the need for social norm that is conducive to maintaining an orderly society if the agents within conform to the agreed set of conduct. This underscores the necessity for a government to develop an educational scheme suitable for the society to edify its agents by building their core values and introducing certain doctrines as the footing of education and to assist the conveyance of moral and civic values, as well as to heighten the enforcement of social norms (Asekhauno and Omoro, 2015). These values instil individuals with the knowledge that are indispensable for the formation of the customs, behaviors, faiths, techniques and incentives; These are the qualities which enable a person to become a preeminent member of the society which are also crucial for one to develop into a self-dependent decision-maker who knows what their responsibilities are. Also, to assist one to recognize the moral role they assume in their society and to reflect on their decisions and judgments on matters which involves risk, uncertainty and morality through moral codes rather than simply out of self-interest
(the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, 1991; Hurd, 2000). There are three values in specific that are considered in the context of science: the values related to education, to science and to science education respectively (Hildebrand, 2007).

Following the industrial revolution that budded in Great Britain and significantly boosted Britain’s productivity with the provision improved and more efficient capital in the 18th century. The boost soon spread through the whole Europe and the whole world through the thrust technological spillover and interactions between nations by trade, the global economy grew rapidly and cities were urbanized. Almost every facet of people’s life were altered in a short time span: both the average income and population displayed secular growth; The change can be examined in two main aspects: economic aspect and social aspect. Economically, efficiency growth rates surged at an unprecedented rate, for the prominent economies of Britain, measured efficiency growth rose at an approximate 1% per annum rate (Clark, 2007). There was a major structural transition from primary sector to secondary sector. Socially, profound changes were made to social relations, the distribution of wealth became very polarized: classes were demarcated, industrialists, manufacturers and merchants gained large amounts of wealth while the middle classes lived in minimum creature comforts (Carlisle, 1981). Such disparity in income created social unrest and debilitated the strength of a state to develop. Although the economy prospered under the circumstances, members of the society failed to adapt to the new milieu and social unrest appeared as a result. In order to propel the society to adapt to the new norm and help the society to develop peacefully, the government have to set up a modified scheme for moral development to teach people their social position in this ever-changing world that is constantly developing and the social implications of their actions.

3.3 Morality, Empathy and Economic Development

We now draw our attention towards economic development—the foundation stone for a state to construct an affluent society with secular growth and development. The fundamental economic problem that people has been concerned about ever since humanity came to existence has been the mismatch between people’s unlimited wants and limited resources available to satisfy them. Thus, it is not that people lack the incentive, but the lack of resources and our abilities to utilize them that restrict the pace of economic growth and development (Kaldor, 1963). In this section we examine the relationship between morality, the derivation of empathy and economic development to elucidate the correlation between morality and the way different agents make moral decisions that also have impact on our economy. We approach this matter through two parts that impacts economic welfare the most: taxation and provision of public goods.

Conventional economic theories propose that public goods will be under-provided without any interventions in a free market system as they assume that people are self-seeking (Niskanen, 1972) and such characteristic provides them with the incentive to free-ride on others’ contributions: everyone think that others should and would make effort so that they do not have to contribute themselves (Meier, 2006). These individual calculations renders little provision of public goods: no one to maintain the environment, no organ donors and no enforcer of social norms.

The common way to intervene and solve these problems are by direct provision or introducing pecuniary compensation to the provision of these goods. However, some problems are innately complex to solve as it challenges the justice and moral limits of the market: transactions of kidneys, horse meat and dog meat, compensated surrogacy and blood vending have all been listed as repugnant examples of market transactions (Ruth, 2007). Let’s take the example of the provision for organs: it is difficult for the government to find enough willing people to donate with no strings attached, in a more extremely case, such supply will be non-existent if it is true that all people are indeed homo economicus, that they have perfect rationality and perfect information. Even with intervention of government, for instance by allowing and subsidizing compensated donation, it will also trigger a series of issues that will have severe consequences on both moral and social grounds. It poses threat of violating the personal freedom of people as it opens up the possibility of coercion, deception and the efficiency of the market transaction which crumbles from the standpoint from equality: people who live in poverty can be pressured into selling their organs and deprived without.
the full information of the long-term consequences of the transaction on themselves and it also 
elicits violent crimes such as human trafficking for organs (Caulfield, 2018). These problems are 
hard to tackle because of the underlying mechanism and incentives of the market system. However, 
they can potentially be resolved by improving the ability for people to feel empathetic for others. In 
fact, many research has been done to modify the stylized models on human incentives that are 
purely self-interested. People actually display pro-social behavior more often than standard model 
proposes them to. In certain cases, people can actually constrain their use of a common-pool 
resource and avert from complete (Ostrom, 1990). To take a more academic example, the 
rectification and improvements made on open-source software can hardly be explained by entirely 
self-seeking motivation (Osterloh, Rota, and Kuster, 2003).

Pro-social incentives can be formulated and observed as a step in the process of 
professionalization of public-serving vocations. Sometimes it is manifested as the code of conduct 
within a profession or industry to be internalized by the employees. The content of the code can 
 vary for different domains tailored to suit specific contexts but they all spell out the importance to 
place values before self-interest (Besley, Jenson, & Persson, 2018). A common example would be the 
codes that the medical profession adhere to which asks the practitioners to swear an oath to heal the 
sick and not violate their oath (Hippocratic Oath, circa 275 AD). Our paper explores the possibility 
of mirroring such incentive and conduct in a wider social context. If such motivation can be 
propagated beyond the scope of...professionalism? by fostering empathy and sense of compassion 
and hence introduce the well-being of the elements that surround each individual: their 
acquaintances, their environment, their community and the whole society into their own utility 
function. We ought to be able to affect the decision-making process and nudge people towards 
exhibiting pro-social behavior and provide public goods voluntarily to eradicate free-rider problem 
from root and to promote both social and economic development.

In the case of taxation, morality and empathy also plays a crucial but subtle role in determining a 
state’s financial capacity. Shortage of public finance has been the central issue when it comes to the 
progress of development. Tax compliance therefore becomes a pressing matter to be solved in order 
for the economy and the society to progress persistently. This compliance can be viewed as the 
outcome of social interactions and the intrinsic motivations of a person. More specifically, the 
possibility and the severity of punishment for evasion, compliance to the social norm and how others 
behave are the main determinants to pay taxes (Besley & Persson, 2013). Thus, if we educate 
economic agents to become more empathetic to their surroundings; citizens would be more willing to pay taxes to improve the environment and the well-being of the others; Corruption will less likely to happen as political agents gains more utility from their contribution to the society rather than their own compensation; People would be more trusting of the government and each other which builds a better milieu for market transactions and governance; Agents will become more responsible decision-makers who derives utility not only from their own enjoyment but also the others and thereby making more pro-social decisions that promotes the development of the society and state.

4. Conclusion

Moral education and social cognition are pivotal to one’s moral development. Psychologists 
believed that pro-social behavior tend to increase with age (Fabes, Carlo, Kupanoff, & Laible, 
1999; Colby, Kohlberg, Gibbs, & Lieberman, 1983). This belief is explained by the ability for 
people to understand and reason complex problems in general and hence to take other’s perspective 
tend to increase as people age (Colby et al., 1983; Eisenberg, Lennon, & Roth, 1983). Other 
scientists have also proposed that pro-social behavior also tend to increase across youth and puberty 
(Eisenberg, 1986; Eisenberg & Miller, 1987; Fabes et al., 1999). Theory of parental discipline 
(Hoffman, 1970; 1975) underscores the importance of parental induction for the instillation of 
empathy to the child as they grow: parents have great impact on the ability of their child to 
understand others’ affection, how his actions affect his surroundings, and guilt. This theory has been 
developed to extensive researches which infer that parental induction have strong correlation to 
establish pro-social behavior during youth(Krevans & Gibbs, 1996; Eisenberg & Eggum,
Given these research results, we reaffirm the importance of the roles that moral education and parental induction play in the formation of empathy of a child. Moral education can be defined as a lofty behavior which one displays as a strict compliance to a code of moral conduct and values (Anderson, 2000). As one’s values are largely developed and fixed in a young age, we focus mainly on the moral development in one’s youth. Although it is difficult to define moral education with absolute clarity as it involves a broad view to its targets, pedagogical techniques and abstract emplacements (Althof & Berkowitz, 2006; Jones, Ryan & Bohlin, 1999), it is still indisputable that moral education is essential for the building of a concrete moral society and for a state to maintain its pace of development and growth.

Following the arguments that we have made in this paper: improving morality of the society can help people to enhance their capability to attain a happy life by encompassing a wider scope of causes for happiness and utility hence attain personal and social development through moral education; We stressed the importance of moral education for people to develop a correct set of values and to recognize their position in an environment with rapid economic development but is lagged by the slow pace of social development; We then illustrated the link between moral education, empathy, pro-social behavior and economic development and considered the possibility of alleviating complex issues which have been proven hard for government to solve by intervening which restrict both the social and economic development of a state by suggesting a solution through moral education;

There are two factors that affects a child the most during their youth: their parents and also the school. Thus, we explore the possibility of improving morality and increasing pro-social behavior through parenting and school education.

Teleological values are typically not taught explicitly in school curricula and parents of the 21st century, perhaps concerned of the future competition that their child will face (which can also be viewed as a byproduct of rapid economic growth), have shown a bias to focus their parenting on academic knowledge and to neglect the teaching of morality, empathy and other knowledge of life which motivates one to fit in and be a responsible and useful member of the society. Most teens are unfamiliar with morality as a subject and they also lack the ability to delineate their views on moral and social issues. This underscores the necessity and urgency to incorporate moral education into the curricula.

We propose that teachers convey the concept of morality and incorporate them into specific social context to encourage students to better their understanding of moral issues in science and to think of the social impacts when decisions are made so that they can develop a sophisticated mindset towards social issues and be able to approach them in a pro-social manner.

We also highlight the necessity for a reform in the way of parenting towards a more balanced home education. Parents are the first educators and role models of a child thus they have to provide and emphasize moral teaching in order to facilitate their child’s moral development. This can be done by increasing the frequency of communication on social matters and status quo of the society or be demonstrated by themselves as a strong example for kids to imitate and learn. However, excessive indoctrination should be avoided as teenagers are prone to develop psychological reactance and thereby causing reverse effects as opposed to its original intention.

Nonetheless, parents should be minded that they should start to instill and educate their child on morality in a more concrete and conscious way for their child develop into an all-rounded individual who knows who they are and how to contribute to the development of their society.

References


