

On the Goal of Social Responsibility Cultivation from the Psychology of Responsibility

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Abstract

The goal of individual social responsibility cultivation shall conform to the physical and mental developments of people in the modern society while the goal establishment shall also accord with the laws of responsibility psychology. The psychological quality of responsibility is an intrinsic psychological structure and the responsibility itself is a mental process. The psychology of responsibility development reveals a gradual advancement of individual social responsibility, in the process of which key elements move, change, and develop to form a relatively stable social responsibility. Therefore, the goal establishment of individual social responsibility cultivation shall as well follow the laws of responsibility psychology.

Key words: Responsibility; Social responsibility; Psychological quality; Mental process

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Learning to Be, published by UNESCO, points out: “The purpose of human development is to optimize human beings to enrich the personalities with diversified means

of expressions, and to assume different responsibilities as an individual, a member of family and society, a citizen, a producer, a technology developer as well as a creative ideologist.” (International Education and Development Committee of UNESCO, 1996) The cultivation of individual social responsibility is not a static self-regulation, but a dynamic developing process of individual social responsibility. Therefore, the goal of individual social responsibility cultivation shall accord to the physical and mental developments of people in the modern society and promote the free and comprehensive development of people at new era.

1. THE PSYCHOLOGICAL QUALITY OF RESPONSIBILITY

Responsibility is not only a social cultural phenomenon but also a mental phenomenon. The core of responsibility, a research domain of psychology, is the intrinsic self-definition and it includes two meanings. Responsibility can be a general state of conscious preparation with an internalized thinking mode and code of conduct under no specific references. But when it involves with detailed behaviors, issues or results responsibility can turn into a personal value judgment system for self-behavior or others that triggers corresponding emotional experience and internal motivation to bring about corresponding behaviors. The former reflects the static feature of responsibility while the latter shows its dynamic process. The former builds the foundation for the latter while the latter is the concrete demonstration of the former. (Kuang & Ye, 2008)

1.1 Responsibility Is An Intrinsic Psychological Structure

Responsibility, as an internalized thinking mode, code of conduct and state of conscious preparation, manifests in the personal perception, judgment, experience and

response to a responsible behavior or issue under a certain conditions, which is the result from the multi-actions of many psychological structural elements. In details, the internal psychological structure of responsibility is made up of four elements: responsibility cognition, responsibility emotion, responsibility will and responsibility behavior. Responsibility cognition is the process of personal perception, attribution, evaluation and deduction of responsible behaviors, issues and results under specific conditions. Responsibility emotion refers to the individual's mental experience of judging whether the responsible behaviors, issues and results meet self-needs or fit in self-value. The subjects of responsibility emotion include the responsibility takers and the spectators or evaluators that understand the responsibility context while the objects of responsibility emotion refer to the targets that responsibility involves, including help seekers, victims and other social disadvantaged groups or individuals in the responsibility context. Responsibility will, an indemnificatory and persistent mental strength, is a strong mental element that supports individuals to fulfill responsibilities despite of obstacles and interferences. Responsibility behavior refers to the behavioral expressions that have a direct or indirect influence on the occurrence, process and result of specific responsible issues. (Kuang & Ye, 2008) The nature of responsibility is the personal value judgment system and its development on the behaviors and the consequences of a specific object, an internal psychological structure.

1.2 Responsibility Is A Mental Process

Individuals may respond to the stimulation of responsibility context with the corresponding mental behaviors or reactions. What differentiates responsible mental activity from mental activity in the normal sense is that the former refers to the individual's mental process of emotional experience and behavioral tendency triggered by the perception and inference of whether the interested parties shall take responsibilities and to what extent the responsibilities shall be taken in a certain responsibility context. Therefore, the difference between responsible mental activity and regular mental activity lies in the special dimension of "responsibility" for the former concept, which makes its intrinsic process and consequences even more complicated with a higher significance of social evaluation. Therefore, it can be said that responsible mental activity is an advanced form of individual mental activity, a concrete demonstration of individual's social nature. As a mental process, responsibility works in the following four aspects. First is the individual's cognition of the responsibility context. Responsibility context is the situation when the responsibility experiencer assumes the responsibility as well as the resulted subjective belief. The belief will bring about different emotional experiences to the responsible parties and influence their behaviors. The

second is the individual's inference of responsibility argument or reference. The third type of responsible mental activity is the responsibility emotional experience brought by the responsibility inference while the fourth is called responsibility behavioral intention that refers to the behavioral intention or implicit motivation directly or indirectly influencing the occurrence, process and consequence of a certain responsibility issue. (Kuang & Ye, 2008) As a mental process, responsibility shows the individual's prescription on the self-responsible mentality and behavior that has been formed in the personal existence and development. Generally speaking, part of the extrinsic social prescriptive responsibilities will be complied, assimilated, internalized and finally transformed to the individual's self-prescriptive responsibilities in the process of personal socialization. The distinctive responsible mental process of individuals will lead to different results of cognition and evaluation that contribute to different attitudes and emotional experiences to result in distinctive responsible behaviors. It can be concluded that responsibility is not only an intrinsic psychological structure, but also a mental process that contributes to a learned psychological quality.

2. THE PSYCHOLOGY OF RESPONSIBILITY DEVELOPMENT

Responsibility, in nature, is the prescription on the self-responsible mentality and behavior that has been formed in the personal existence and development. For individuals, quality of responsibility is part of individual morality and the responsibility development also goes with the psychological laws of moral development. There is no doubt that the individual moral development is a staged process that many well-known researches have also made their proposals on the stage theory of moral development. For example, the famous American psychologist James Mark Baldwin proposed the children's moral development in the book *Social and Ethical Interpretations in Mental Development*. He believes that the individual moral development can be divided into three phases: objective or non-dichotomy phase, dichotomy or cautious or intelligence phase, ethical or ideal phase. William McDougall, the American social psychologist, also illustrated his basic view on moral development in his book *Introduction to Social Psychology*. "The basic question of Social Psychology is the process of moralization which must go through three stages. The first stage is to rectify the instinctive impulse under the influence of prize or punishment. The second stage is to control the behaviors under the expectations of social appreciation or condemnation. And the third stage is to adjust for ideal, the ideal that supports individuals to act in the perceived proper way disregard of the appreciation or condemnation from direct

environment.” (McDougall, 1908) The viewpoints of these scholars provide us enlightenments from various theoretic perspectives for the staged development of individual morality. Lawrence Kohlberg, the famous contemporary American psychologist and educationist, proposed in the early 80s his most comprehensive but also his last rectified staged model of moral development, the three-levels-and-six-stages model. It goes as follows. (Kohlberg, 1981a) The first level is the pre-conventional level that can be divided into the two stages, the stage of punishment and obedience and the second stage of personal instrumentalism purpose and exchange. The second level is the conventional level. Individuals at this level will gradually internalize the current social regulations that they approve and maintain the current social order. The two stages of this level are the stage of mutual interpersonal expectation, interpersonal relation and interpersonal coordination as well as the stage of social system and conscience maintenance. The third level is the post-conventional level when individuals believe that the moral decisions shall be based on power, value or principle. And this level can be divided into the fifth stage of supremacy of power, social contract or utility as well as the sixth stage of universal moral principles. (Guo, 1999) The stage theory of moral development shows that the individual’s moral development is an evolutionary process and the same can be said with the individual’s social responsibility development. The process is the course during which the key elements develop from low level to high level, from simple to complex, from quantitative change to qualitative change and finally form a relatively stable social responsibility.

3. LAWS OF RESPONSIBILITY PSYCHOLOGY FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

From the perspective of Psychology of Responsibility, the individual’s social responsibility is a spirally interlacing development of internalization and externalization. Internalization refers to the transformation from the dominating social responsibility consciousness to the individual responsibility consciousness, which is a dynamic process through multiple internalizations. The externalization of individual social responsibility development is to transform the individual social responsibility cognition and emotion to social responsibility behaviors. The internalization and the

externalization are not isolated but changing and evolving processes that mutually influence the whole process of internalized and externalized mechanism of individual moral development. The whole process varies in stages and individuals. Therefore, the goal of social responsibility cultivation shall be implemented in stages and levels based on the individual’s physical and mental conditions. The cultivation of individual social responsibility lays stress on the self-construction of personal mental quality and morality. It is a gradual process from zero to one and from low level to high level that finally leads to the realization of self-value. The formation and development of individual social responsibility is always increasingly profound and mature with an increasing individual free choice and accountability. Thus, the individual social responsibility can only be cultivated in a gradually evolving education. In addition, the staged content of social responsibility cultivation also complies with the stratified and expanding social relationships. The social relationships that individual deals with can be complicated enough to be direct but explicit or indirect but implicit. The social responsibility resulted from the understandings of the relationships will proceed in the evolutionary stages.

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