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UNIVERSALITY AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN PROFESSIONAL ETHICAL DEVELOPMENT: FROM KOHLBERG TO DYNAMIC SYSTEMS THEORY

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Abstract

Upholding ethical standards is part of what it means to be a professional and therefore part of professional education, but to what extent is the development of ethical reasoning universal across cultures, or is it highly dependent on culture? If universal, how can we explain the unique patterns of moral reasoning and behaviour in Asia, which reflect Confucian values? This issue is particularly pertinent to professional education as it becomes increasingly globalised, with students from different cultural backgrounds travelling overseas for their professional education, sometimes staying to practice in their adopted countries, and as nations such as the US and Australia become increasingly multicultural. Moral psychology has generally adhered to universalism, calling on support from Kantian ethics. Strong universalism has historically been associated with resistance to relativism. Over the past half-century, cognitive rationalist approaches (e.g. Kohlbergian and neo-Kohlbergian), focusing on the development of reasoning skills, have tended to predominate in courses of professional ethics. However, over the past decade, these approaches have met considerable criticism. This paper explores these ideas as they impact on practice and research in professional education, and with reference to a comparative study of ethical identity in American and Asian dentists.

Professional ethics and the legacy of Kohlberg

Traditionally, there has been a very close relationship between professional education and the of professional ethics. This is hardly surprising; given that adherence to professional ethical is usually a significant criterion in the definition of a profession. Thus, for example, George Beaton (2010) notes that the definition adopted at the 1997 Annual General Meeting of Professions Australia

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begins with the words: 'A Profession is a disciplined group of individuals who adhere to ethical standards…' (p.4). Beaton argues that, despite the globalisation of knowledge, the distinction a profession and a craft or trade needs to be maintained. He says that craft and trade guilds do not fit into the professional mode 'because they are commercial and profit motivated' and 'they are not by definition altruistic or ethical' (p.4). Whether or not his claim regarding the non-commercial motivation of present-day professions remains true, professions certainly seek to uphold ethical standards. In fact, one could argue that this has become increasingly important, not least because of growing threat of litigation. Professional education is, it seems, inevitably concerned with professional ethics.

This is certainly the case in the medical profession, where there is a considerable body of literature on professional ethics and the education of ethical standards. For example, in the report of Project Professionalism, first published in 1995, the American Board of Internal Medicine (ABIM) requires training programs to 'foster a commitment to professional ethics in residents that is demonstrated by a spirit of collegiality and a high standard of moral and ethical behaviour' (p. 4). Also, there have been a number of studies describing the moral and ethical reasoning of medical professionals and the impact of intervention programmes based on cognitive developmental psychology (Baldwin et al., 1991; Self & Olivarez, 1996; Self et al., 1991; Self et al., 1993). In teacher education, there is a general and long-standing expectation among parents, policy makers and teacher educators that newly qualified teachers entering the profession need to be morally and ethically aware. For example, in Australia, the standards set by the New South Wales Institute of Teachers (NSWIT) require that courses of teacher education ensure 'teachers adopt professional ethics with regard to their own conduct and that of others' (p. 3). Also, teachers are expected to 'demonstrate ethical behaviour' (p. 14).

The educational problem is how to teach professional ethics. Partly this a technical issue about what teaching strategies to use, but, underlying these issues of teaching methodology, there are deeper related to the nature of ethical judgements and the ways in which individuals acquire and develop an ethical repertoire. For the past half-century or so, these kinds of issues have relied heavily on the of Laurence Kohlberg and James Rest, which, in turn, has also strongly influenced the teaching of professional ethics across the professions. However, the theoretical stance of moral developmental psychology (especially, Kohlberg and Rest) brought a problem that continues to bedevil moral development theory; the problem of universality versus cultural diversity. The issue, put simply, is

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whether the development of moral values and our ability to reason our way to ethical judgements is universal across cultures or culturally specific? Moral psychology has generally adhered to universalism.

This issue has practical implications for the teaching of professional ethics, especially as professional education becomes increasingly globalised, with students from different cultural backgrounds travelling overseas for their professional education, sometimes staying to practice in their adopted countries. Also, because nations, such as the USA and Australia, are becoming increasingly multi-cultural. In professional medical and dental education, for example, students increasingly travel from Asia Pacific nations to study in the USA and Australia. In professional teacher education, students from many different cultural origins enrol in Australian universities, some being resident in Australia and others from overseas. When teaching professional ethics, are we to assume with Kohlberg and Rest that all human beings reason their way to ethical judgements in much the same way, or should we expect medical students from Taiwan, for example, studying overseas in Australia or America, to reason differently from those of their host nation? And if so, how might those differences become manifest in practice? Notice that the issue is not whether morality is influenced by culture, which clearly it is, but whether the way we reason about moral judgements is culturally situated.

Perhaps, however, there is a more fundamental issue. Some critics have claimed that the whole developmental approach to morality and the making of moral judgements is inherently flawed, because it assumes that it is an inherently rational process, whereas in fact it is largely intuitive and social (Haidt, 2001). We first act intuitively. Our reasoning comes later, when we provide a narrative to explain our actions on the basis of what we identify as socially acceptable norms. This seems to be in line with neuroscientific evidence that much of our moral reasoning occurs automatically and below the level of conscious awareness (Sankey, 2006).

If taken to its logical conclusion, however, Haidt's social intuitionist model would seem to undermine the educational role in professional ethics, where students, for example, are expected to reason their way to the resolution of a professional ethical dilemma. If ethical judgments are mainly intuitive and social, as Haidt claims, one presumably has simply to inculcate accepted professional norms, without any rational scrutiny, and wait for intuition to guide each individual's ethical actions. But that would seem to undermine the notion of professional ethics, which, as noted, is one of the main criteria of a

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profession. Most if not all employment occupations have their rules of behaviour that, on Haidt's model, could be acted on intuitively, without the need for rational deliberation. If we wish to the notion of professional ethics, it cannot be reduced to sets of rules to be followed intuitively, recourse to reason. Indeed, one could claim that what makes professional ethics professional is that that they demand reasoned application in the multitude of different professional circumstances in they arise.

The main assumption of this paper is that morality in general and professional ethics in particular involve both intuition and reasoning. However, given that ethical reasoning matter, this paper seeks to reopen the debate about universalism and cultural diversity. It will argue that the making of ethical judgements is strongly influenced by culture, though with important universal elements. The approach taken in the paper will employ Dynamics Systems Theory (DST), in the belief that this theory, or more accurately metatheory, and its key concepts provide potentially new foundations for professional ethics. In particular, adopting this stance means rejecting the dualistic mindset that underpins the many dichotomies one finds in developmental psychology, including the dichotomy of universalism versus cultural diversity. In what follows, we will begin by considering Kohlberg's universalism and show how the universality/cultural diversity dichotomy is overcome in a dynamics approach. We will then outline a dynamics approach to moral development and ethical judgements in more detail, before considering a case study in which I describe my own personal encounter with these issues as a researcher in professional dental education.

From Kohlberg's Universalism to Dynamic Systems Theory

Kohlberg provided a coherent and widely accepted theory of moral psychology in which one proceeds to a universal 'post-conventional' moral reasoning, following an onward and upward linear pathway, regardless of culture or society (Kohlberg, 1969, 1981, 1984; Colby et al., 1987). He was not alone advocating universal moral reasoning. Indeed, within moral psychology, 'a strong assumption of universalism characterises psychological theories of moral development' (Miller, 2006, p.375), and is historically associated with resistance to moral contextualism or relativism, which, it is claimed, has the potential 'to undermine the very concept of morality' (Moshman, 2005, p. 73). Kohlberg had personal and professional reasons for asserting universality. He had been appalled by the inability of Behaviourism and Freudian Psychoanalysis to provide any kind of response to the Holocaust 1996, p.41). What was needed, he believed, was a notion of morality that asserts universal moral

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standards in opposition to Nazi claims to be acting according to their own cultural norms. To this end, Kohlberg turned to many key elements of Kant's moral theory, which includes the focus on moral reasons, the distinction between form and content, and the concern with universality and the of morality.

However, it is now generally appreciated that Kohlberg's adoption of Kant's ethical theory brings severe problems. Richard Bernstein has argued that in the background of Kant's inquiry into morals there is 'a dramatic Either/Or. Either there is a universal objective moral law, or the concept of morality is groundless and vacuous' (Bernstein, 1983, p. 13). Furthermore, Lapsley (1996) has noted that 'Kant's ethical theory simply assumes a "moral law folk theory" that we are essentially dualistic in our nature' (p. 204). Kant's ethical theory also establishes a dichotomy between a superior human rationality and what Kant saw as unworthy, animalistic passion; a view subsequently challenged by Darwin's account of human origins.

Kohlberg's staunch defence of universality led to his theories being widely criticised for their lack of 'cultural, situational context and history, and …insufficient justification for the universalisability of moral maturity.' (Henry, 2001, p. 268). Even within the Kohlbergian research tradition, 'the anomaly of uncodeable material opened up the question of whether the concepts inherent in Kohlberg's moral theory were truly applicable in other cultures' (Haste & Abrahams, 2008, p. 384). On a personal note, the dichotomy between universalism and cultural diversity was apparent when I conducted research into the moral identity of American and Asian dentists, as I discuss later in this paper. For the moment, it is sufficient to note that so long as we stay in this 'either/or' dichotomy, we will suffer an endless irresolvable argument. What is wrong is not the account of universalism or cultural diversity, but rather setting up of a dichotomy between them. Indeed, this dichotomy suffers from exactly the same problem that all dichotomies and dualisms suffer from; the inability to perceive a 'third way'. What is needed is a model that can incorporate both universalism and cultural diversity, but how might that be achieved?

If we are to retain the notion that making ethical judgements is, at least in part, a rational undertaking that develops with maturity and education, we require a theory of moral development that overcomes the Kohlbergian, Kantian dualist legacy and provides a more acceptable theory of moral functioning. In September 2008, this concern prompted a Special Issue of the Journal of Moral Education, in

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leading scholars, mostly from the Kohlbergian or Rest's neo-Kohlbergian traditions, attempted to the way forward. One year later, in the September 2009 edition of the same journal, Derek Sankey I suggested that the 2008 Special Issue had not gone far enough in providing an alternative theoretical framework, and we proposed Dynamic Systems Theory (DST) as an alternative paradigm or metatheory. DST postulates emergent self-organisation as the predominant driving force of change, operating across descriptive levels from the neuronal maps in the brain to social and cultural (Solé & Goodwin, 2000; Sawyer, 2005).

A dynamic systems approach to moral development and ethical judgements

Kohlberg postulated that moral development proceeds through discreet stages and levels towards the predetermined end-point of Post-conventional reasoning. As Kohlberg and colleagues put it, 'development proceeds through a stepwise sequence of internally consistent stages'…. 'Within each of the three moral levels, there are two stages. The second stage is a more advanced and organised form of the general perspective of each level' (Colby, Kohlberg, & Higgins, 1987, p. 15-16). However, Robert Fullinwider (2007) has noted that Kohlberg makes a logical error in conflating universality and generality when he attempted to theorise his stages. Kohlberg adopted the idea that adequate moral judgments are universalisable and reversible prescriptions, and believed that only the so-called "principled" judgments made in stages 5 and 6 fully meet this condition. Kohlberg's aim was to provide a meta-ethical justification for Stages 5 and 6, by advocating the universal logical superiority of principled reasoning over conventional reasoning. However, it is not at all clear why universality should have this exalted position. Indeed, Fullinwider (2007) argues that: 'it is increased generality, not increased universality that really differentiates higher from lower level principles in the Kohlbergian stages.'

From the perspective of DST, the Kohlberg's stages are, at best, only a rough approximation to the process of development. Clearly, adult reasoning can be expected to be better than the reasoning of child, but this does not imply an invariant onward and upward trajectory of development. Rather, development is often messy and inherently variable, within each individual. The admission of variability begins to break down the linear rigidity of the Kohlbergian and neo-Kohlbergian developmental models. Variability is therefore not an obstacle for understanding developmental change, as it is in the Kohlbergian tradition and more broadly in much traditional developmental research. Instead, as Thelen and Smith (1994) argued, 'the origins and function of variability are

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absolutely central' (p. 145) for understanding development. Viewing variability as central to rather than an obstacle or 'noise in the system' (p. 145), opens up room for variability across and different cultures; breaking through the universal/cultural-diversity dichotomy by holding both in dynamic tension.

Within dynamics theory, development can be conceived as a journey, from day to day and over time, across a shifting landscape of attractor basins (Kim & Sankey, 2009). Some deep and some shallow, like hills and valleys that represent different influences, contexts and situations. 'The hills and valleys both deepen and become more shallow as preferred states emerge and disappear' (Thelen & Smith, 1994, p. 122). Also, the configuration of each hill and valley (ethical position) at any given time is 'a result of the history of the system (a person) up to that point, plus the factors acting to parameterize the system at the time – such as the social and physical context' (Thelen & Smith, 2006, p. 276). In this shifting developmental landscape, there is no place for the idea of a discreet stage or resting-point, free from social and historical contexts. At a low level of magnification, we may find seemingly similar forms of moral reasoning across cultures, but they are snapshots at a moment in time, or cross-sections through a geological landscape, but what kind of forms (configurations of hills and valleys) will emerge in the future for each culturally situated individual is unpredictable. In short, moral reasoning and behaviour are always assembled by the nature of the situation one is confronting, given the social and cultural constraints operating at that time and set against a history of previous reasoning and behaviour.

The historical, cultural context of development is represented in Figure 1. Stable components and factors within the culture may operate on one's moral reasoning and behaviour over different time scales. However, unprecedented new patterns may emerge at both cultural and individual levels from immediate and situational factors working at a specific time point. Along somewhat similar lines, Helen Haste and Salie Abrahams (2008) argued that 'people and historical events are similarly "constructed" – and their construction changes' (p. 382). Within DST, however, the notion of 'emergent self-organisation' can replace 'construction', where individual morality emerges in response to culture and society, constrained by the individual's biology and past history of development.

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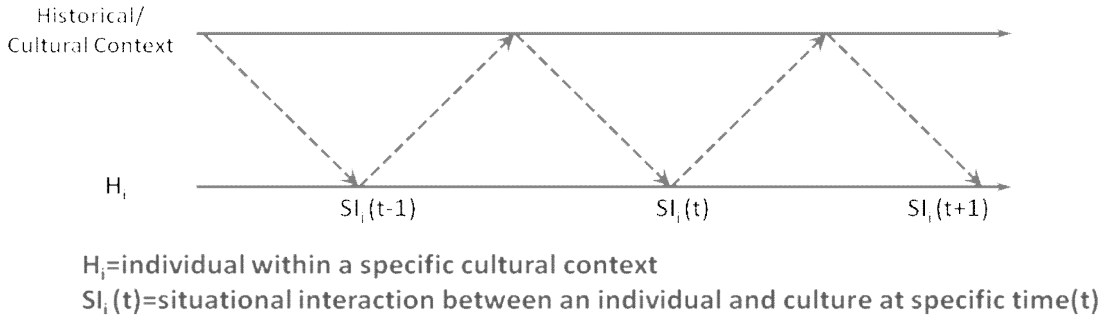

Figure 1. Situated moral development, incorporating historical and cultural contexts

In Figure 1, Kohlberg's stages may be accommodated as a broad approximation of moral development, located at the individual psychological level of description (Hi). Nevertheless, the Kohlbergian and Neo-Kohlbergian tradition did not attempt to articulate a biologically consistent theory. Their folk psychological fragmentation of perception, reasoning, motivation and action is allied to their lack of a clear theory of genetic and neurobiological processes underpinning moral functioning. From a dynamics approach, the neurobiological rudiments for morality and moral development are a product of 'epigenetic emergence' (Kim & Sankey, p.290), operating in response to a substrate of salient experiences laid down in memory. Moreover, our native ability as organisms to categorise our perceptions is coupled with what we call an inborn predilection to value, by which we mean an inborn ability possessed by all creatures to value some things over others. One can see this exemplified, for example, in the very recent research findings of Kiley Hamlin and colleagues who show that, as early as 3 months, babies can discriminate between pro-social and anti-social attitudes and show a marked predilection for the pro-social (Hamlin et al., 2010). While these neurobiological rudiments provide the universal constraints of the moral developmental process, diversity and individual differences of moral functioning emerge through complex, multilevel interactions between an individual's genes, neurobiology, and psychology. These other descriptive levels must therefore be added to historical and situational contexts of development. This is depicted in Figure 2, below.

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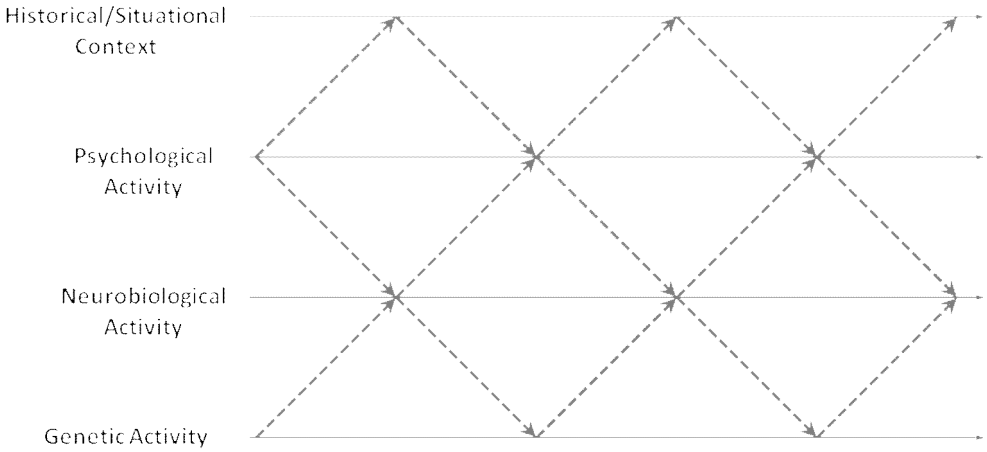

Figure 2. Moral functioning as a dynamic interplay at four descriptive levels

The way our brains are formed and function is universal. Indeed, 'cognitive neuroscientists have viewed their discipline as a pursuit of universal truths … about how the brain gives rise to the mind and vice versa' (Chiao & Ambady, 2007, p. 238). Not only are they the same across all nations, cultures, and traditions, there are considerable similarities across all animal species, preserved through evolution. Much of the work on memory, for example, was conducted on sea snails and fruit flies (Squire & Kandel, 1999). Also, we share 'rudimentary neurobiological system of morality' with non-human primates, whose capacities for fairness, empathy, sympathy, and community concern have been observed in many studies (Flack & de Waal, 2000; de Waal, 2009).

We also share a common human ancestry. In a paper published in Nature (1987), Cann and colleagues presented results from mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) studies analysing five geographic populations. The result of the study was consistent with the fossil record from archaeology indicating that 'all mtDNAs stem from one woman who is postulated to have lived about 200,000 years ago, probably in Africa.' (Cann et al., 1987, p. 31). Though there are dissenting voices, the 'Out of Africa' theory is widely accepted, though the specifics of the theory, such as the time sequencing of the migration out of Africa, are not yet agreed. Some geneticists such as Spencer Wells (Wells, 2003) argue for a time span of only some 50,000 years. Anyway, given out common ancestry, there is much that we share and this inevitably sets some constraints on the degrees of freedom operating in the dynamics of human morality.

However, if our common ancestry provides grounds for asserting universality it also supports cultural

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diversity. In his bestseller Brain and Culture: Neurobiology, Ideology, and Social change, Bruce Wexler finds 'the origins of differences in culture and language' from the mass migration of our common ancestors (Wexler, 2006, p. 184). Small groups of individuals separated from the original group, and often became quite isolated. And, in these isolated communities, 'distinct languages and cultures evolved, leading to what Jane Goodall has called cultural speciation (p. 185).' This cultural speciation or emergence of diverse cultures is a product of self-organisation. As Solé and Goodwin (2000) have emphasised, 'human societies are complex adaptive systems with many features in common with complex biosystems (p. 278).' Therefore, unpredictable change and the emergence of characteristic patterns of order are intrinsic to human societies. Unique patterns of each cultural group are 'not static but evolving' as all the large-scale patterns arising from human activities (e.g., markets, cities and civilisations) show (ibid., p. 287). This insight raises some unprecedented questions about universality that Kohlberg could not have foreseen from his own historical situation. For example, norms and values formed in cultural groups are now being impacted by increasing global mobility and exchange of information across and among cultural groups? Are we, perhaps, inevitably moving towards greater universality?

The universal and the cultural in morality

Arguably, if Kohlberg were working today, he might have looked elsewhere other than Kant to support his notion of universality; including the biological and anthropological insights mentioned above. He might also have looked to the concept of human rights as framed within international law. Mary Midgley (2006) has noted that, although the idea of human rights has only lately been added to our moral vocabulary and there is some variation in the way 'human rights' are understood internationally, this new vocabulary has become accepted by the international community and everybody understands what is meant by violation of human rights. That it can become so widely accepted so quickly seems to suggest some common basis for morality; there are 'some things that should not be done to anybody anywhere. Against these things (people feel) every bystander can and ought to protest' (Midgley, 2006, p. 217). Furthermore, philosophers of science who embrace the concept of 'strong emergence' within nature have considered it possible that 'categories such as right and wrong might possess an absolute (law-like) rather than a socially relative status' (Davies, 2006, p. xiii).

As already noted, DST identifies non-linear emergent self-organisation as the predominant driving force of change, operating across descriptive levels from the neuronal maps in each individual brain to

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social and cultural groupings. Moral behaviour is the product of multiple contributing causes, not single causes as postulated in much developmental theory. Therefore, from the perspective of the it is not moral reasoning that is universally the same as Kohlberg had claimed, but rather the processes underlying human and moral development, based on our common humanity. There are similarities across time and places in the way human organisms and their morality develop, resulting from the common process of emergent self-organisation, but the product of that developmental process is regionally and culturally diverse.

Indeed, there is now a widespread recognition of cultural diversity in moral development and the need to 'search for morally defensible yet culturally sensitive grounds' for understanding moral practices (Miller, 2006, p. 382). Moreover, as David Moshman (2005) has noted, the seemingly irresolvable debate about the rightness or wrongness of female circumcision illustrate that some things are not commonly accepted across cultures, or even within cultures. Context often plays a crucial role. All of this provides strong grounds for incorporating Kohlberg's concern for universality while also recognising cultural diversity in moral theory, and hence in professional ethical education. I would argue that this is made possible by adopting the richer insights stemming from DST.

Reflections on my own intellectual metamorphosis

In what follows, I revisit data collected in 2006, in the United States of America and Korea, when researching differences of ethical perceptions in dental professionals in those two different settings. This part of the paper takes on a somewhat autobiographical flavour, as I portray how my own theoretical assumptions changed in response to the specific interview data. Though starting from a position of Kohlbergian universality, as my study progressed I became convinced that the ways in which health professionals reason and behave on specific occasions are governed by values that are culturally nested. My personal metamorphosis presented here not only provides an example of one researcher struggling to deal with cross-cultural data within the context of the either/or dichotomy, it also shows how new reflections emerged in my thinking, in response to personal experience and ongoing reflection.

Over a period of six months, a sample of dental students and beginning practitioners were 13 in California, America and 15 in Seoul, Korea. The study employed six standard Kohlbergian-type structured dilemma interviews, aimed at exploring the participants' understandings of their

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roles and responsibilities. For the purpose of this discussion, just two of the six scenarios will be used. These were:

1. You become aware that a close colleague failed to inform his patient of an error he had made in leaving a portion of a broken instrument embedded in the tooth. Is it your professional duty to inform the patient?
2. You become concerned that damage to the mouth and teeth of a young child has been caused by physical abuse. Is it your professional duty to report this to the relevant child-protection authority?

In the first dilemma, 12 out of 13 American and 5 out of 15 Korean respondents said that they would tell the patient what they had detected. In the second case, every America respondent that they would take active measures such as reporting the case to the authority or attempting to examine the child in the absence of the parent. However, 6 out of 15 Korean dentists said that they would not take further action regarding possible abuse.

Despite differences in the responses from the US and Korea, my analysis of data was primarily focused on investigating where these professionals were situated in terms of the Kohlbergian universal stages of moral reasoning (which I was accepting as fact) and whether nationality might be influencing the rates of development through the stages. Following the Kohlbergian paradigm, I put a strong divide between the behaviour choice (performance) and reasoning (mind) and attempted to analyse the structure of the reasoning. Furthermore, I was particularly eager not to simply criticise Korean morality or open my analysis to alternative forms of morality; for example attributing the Korean results to Confucian collectivism, as that would involve the possibility of invoking relativism. To explain the differences, I therefore employed a four-stage process of development similar to Kegan (1982) and Bebeau (2005)'s accounts of identity development. Against this theoretical background and on the basis of my research data, I argued that professionals progress from holding individual values to a period of conformity with group values and then, via personal reflection, arrive at a more stable integrative ideal.

Although I found my analysis convincing, I was also aware that I was ignoring possible social and cultural diversity, but I convinced myself that I could legitimately bracket out such diversity and variability by assuming a 'coherent' and 'stable' structure of moral functioning. This strategy allowed

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me to investigate what Kohlberg assumed to be the 'underlying commonalities in the directions and steps of moral development' (Moshman, 2005, p. 73), an assumption that is essentially linear where events occur sequentially as a result of an identifiable cause and the outcomes are thus predicable.

The uneasiness I initially felt regarding my adopted strategy increased and eventually undermined my strong belief in developmental stage theory. In the language of dynamic systems theory, my earlier conviction regarding Kohlbergian theory would be said to constitute a strong attractor basin that gradually shifted to a situation of attractor instability. My personal dilemma as a researcher was real; how could I put the respondents at the same stage labelled 'conformity to the group norm', when the two professional groups, operating in different societies, have qualitatively different sets of norms?

In truth, a noticeable difference is evident in the responses of the American and Korean participants cases dealing with a tension between being honest to patients and taking collegial responsibility, and a tension between avoiding expected harms and interfering in patients' domestic affairs in a possible child abuse scenario. In the first case, the majority of respondents in Korea said that they would not reveal their colleague's unintended mistake or malpractice, and furthermore would not do so as they believed it was their ethical obligation. One respondent reported that: "I would neither tell the patient nor report the misdeed to the authority; I've learned that it's ethical not to reveal a colleagues' fault, to protect ourselves professionally - informing the patient will unnecessarily make the (patient-colleague doctor) trust and treatment relationship worse. Instead, I'll contact the colleague personally and tell him what he did was wrong and ask him to repay the damage" (Kim, 2007, p. 66). By contrast, every interviewee from USA gave priority to the patients' right to know the truth, while only a few Korean interviewees gave this much priority. What this suggests is not different positions on the ladder of universal moral reasoning stages, but rather culturally situated differences in the understanding of professional ethics; where western professionals aspire to maximum autonomy, honesty, and justice whereas professionals in Asia put collegial responsibility above other norms.

However, though I came to appreciate the cultural influence on reasoning, I was also very wary of falling into an alternative dualism, such as the 'East/West' or 'Individual/Collective' dichotomy that often employed in cultural psychology (e.g. Nisbett, 2003). First, I did not want to 'undermine the very concept of morality by lapsing into radical contextualism and relativism' (Moshman, 2005, p. Second, it seemed the prevalent categorisation in cultural psychology oversimplify the phenomena

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fails to grasp the complexity and ever-changing nature of cultures. A crucial problem with prevalent frameworks is the tendency to 'construe cultures as homogeneous entities' composed of monolithic norms and values (Moshman, 2005, p. 65). From such a perspective, Confucianism seems to be synonymous with East Asian culture. However, this simply overlooks many interwoven strands of East Asian thoughts, in particular, the pervasive influence of animism, especially belief in ancestral spirit. In regard to Confucianism, from the beginning this has been subjected to endless criticisms in East Asian philosophy, with arguably the most noteworthy criticism coming from the Chinese philosopher Han Feizi (ca. 280-233 BCE) who placed much more value on justice and honesty than relationships. It seemed to me at the time I wrote the 2008 symposium paper that one can perceive different degrees of emphasis being given to particular values across different societies, rather than a basic difference of kind (Kim, 2008).

Growing awareness of the multiplicity and complexity of relationships, from the individual level to that of society, was leading me to a Dynamic Systems Approach - though I did not fully articulate that in 2008. I started to be aware that the theories on which I had depended 'tended to use linear sequential models of cause and effect that are statistically manageable and conceptually straightforward' (Fogel et al, 2008, p. 239), which as Fogel and colleagues have noted has typified much previous social research. In revisiting my data, I can now appreciate that my interpretation should not be in terms of either universalism or cultural diversity. To adopt either position is to build a dualistic dichotomy in from the start. Instead I needed to interpret the responses of those who participated in the interviews in terms of the four descriptive levels working together holistically – there is no need to pull the biological universal and cultural/historical apart.

I am reminded of an interview with a young Taiwanese prosthodontist, a third generation immigrant to America. When given the case of family where an injured child shows possible signs of negligence or abuse, he responded that he would promptly report the case to the local authority in California. The signs of possible injury child seem to alert his mind to what he has been taught about child protection, bringing a clear-cut a quick response to the situation. But, he said he would not behave in the same way if he were living in a Taiwanese community. He said: 'In the US, I could understand it not being a problem to report something like this because this is always being done. In Taiwan, I don't know what it would be like….It just depends. If I lived there for a while I might not report it, but if I just went there and saw this happen then I would have to report something.'

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Brains are 'complex', 'emergent' and 'dynamic' systems. Minds seek preferred behavioural modes as a function of the interactions of their internal components (e.g. memory, emotion and values imposed in the brain) and their sensitivity to external conditions (e.g. medical law and code of conducts, individual patients' character and responses). It is not a certain structure in the mind (i.e., conventional reasoning in Kohlbergian term) that functions to solve a moral dilemma, but rather the totality of the system. As Thelen and Smith (1994) noted, 'there are no codes, prescriptions, schemata, or programs' orchestrating the nature of the preferred choice or decision. As one respondent mentioned in the interview extracts (it just depends!), 'the components are free to assemble into other stable behavioural modes (ibid. p. 60)' and it is this "soft-assembly" that both provides huge flexibility within an individual and explains distinctive patterns of moral behaviour across cultural groups. So any one individual (same genes and brain) may have very different perceptions and reasoning when interacting within two different cultural and social contexts. And each group of people possessing different historical experiences develop and continually redevelop their own moral norms in response with their unique contexts that are often in considerable flux.

In both America and Korea, codes of conduct and medical law work as important control parameters, though the degree of impact on any individual may differ significantly. In his response to the colleague's malpractice, the Taiwanese dentist justified his act of telling the truth to the patient as: 'Unfortunately there is not much we can do [here in America] because we are bound by the justice system ourselves, and I cannot lie or cheat or do something for someone else. Avoiding litigation is something that we cannot avoid either. So, unfortunately, there's not much we can do.' In response to the same case, a young periodontist (Caucasian, male) stressed how the law and the code of conduct set strong constraints: 'this [just doing what a dentist thinks is best for patients] is how you get sued, this is how you get in trouble, this is how you create problems for yourself. People who get kicked out of dentistry don't get kicked out because their hands are sloppy. They get kicked out because they make stupid decisions about stuff like this'.

In the case of Korea, the medical law and code of conducts have their very different developmental history from those of America. As Kang (2004) noted, Korean dental professions did not experience professionalization which American and British medical society went through to win their status; their privileged status was simply given. The Oath of Korean dentists and their code of conduct still

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supports their collegiality and did not need to be negotiated with the public, as happened in America (ABIM, 2003; Rule & Veatch, 2004). Also, these control parameters (the norms operating in the societies), which have different developmental histories, assemble dentists' behaviour in different in the two different societies. As Smith (2005) noted, 'dynamic stabilities and instabilities emerge as a consequence of how complex systems composed of many heterogeneous components self-organise in context and in time (p. 296).

Conclusion

This paper has focused on the common dichotomy of universality versus cultural diversity in moral development theory, and argued for dynamic systems theory as an alternative to many dichotomies built in the traditional paradigm. Embracing this new perspective is likely to affect how we formulate research questions, and conduct moral education in culturally diverse societies. I am not arguing that cultural contexts and situations determine one's morality, but I am arguing that our moral understanding, like other forms of knowledge or abilities, is a 'complex set of internal processes bound to each other and to the world through perception and action in real time (Smith, 2005, p. 279). Principles such as 'honesty', 'justice' and 'autonomy' do not comprise a fixed and segregated representation in one's minds.

These understandings are 'in-the-moment' events that emerge when one's internal process (e.g. predilection to value, memory in the brain) and outer world (e.g. given situation, legal system, cultural norms) actively engage with each other. In this process of emergent self-organisation within our thinking, Kantian dichotomies such as moral reasoning/behaviour and universality/diversity have no role to play. And these same processes operate at the group level. Culture is then no longer a discrete variable, as frequently predicated in empirical studies that demarcates a given group of people. Within a society, as in a living organism, new forms of culture emerge, always stabilising and destabilising in response to immediate factors and factors operating over time both in and out of the society (Solé & Goodwin, 2000; Sawyer, 2005). Rather, we see both similarity and difference between individuals and within and across groups, as they variously respond to the social, cultural and temporal contexts in which they find themselves.

Professional education necessarily involves an education in professional ethics. Although, in the past, this has often employed a Kohlbergian approach to moral development and the making of ethical

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judgements, Kohlbergian theory is open to the severe criticism that it assumes universal forms of reasoning. This is no longer sustainable, but the alternative is not to accept the Kantian Either/Or and adopt moral relativism. This paper has attempted to show that a very real alternative to this kind of dichotomous thinking is provided by dynamic systems theory. It is the contention of this paper that adopting this alternative will provide new foundations for the teaching of ethics in courses of professional education. Nevertheless, there remains a lot of work to be done in filling out the practical pedagogical implication of this new approach.

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