

Honesty in Modern Identity Cultivation: A Moral Dilemma-Based Discussion

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Abstract: In contemporary society, individuals have a tendency to cultivate their identities based on their characteristics and traits. Within the current educational framework, individuals are instructed in the virtue of honesty. Nevertheless, falsehoods continue to be prevalent in everyday life. However, a comprehensive and universally applicable explanation for the commitment to the concept of honesty remains elusive. The objective of this work is to establish a universally accepted understanding of the concept of honesty. A moral quandary will be presented to ascertain individuals' present decisions. The analysis is grounded on Freud's theoretical framework of personality agency. In some situations, the use of honesty may not be conducive to efficient problem-solving. The significance of honesty as a moral virtue is underscored by its ability to transcend legal boundaries and contribute to the development of individuals' character. In some circumstances when honesty becomes insufficient in managing various situations, individuals may resort to temporarily using falsehoods, aligning with the ideal of benevolence.

Keywords: honesty, moral philosophy, Freudian theory

1. Introduction

The Morality as Corporation theory holds the view that morality is a collection of solutions to the problems of cooperation recurrent in human social life [1]. Honesty is best understood as the cooperative exchange of information [2]. Honesty and credit in the traditional sense is a kind of moral standard and moral requirement, especially in China influenced by traditional culture and Confucianism, it is a basic requirement of being a human being [3]. Not only in Chinese Culture, it is also required in Bushido and also important in religions [4]. The previous studies all agree on the high status and importance of honesty. Honesty plays a vital role in our education, values, lives, etc. It is a common moral phenomenon in daily life, and its most essential feature lies in its authenticity to people and things [5]. People were also started to be taught to be honest when they were young. Undoubtedly, it is an integral component of human values. Nevertheless, within societal contexts, individuals may sometimes engage in the act of deception. While some instances may include white lies, it is important to acknowledge that these falsehoods still fall under the category of lying. Why do individuals engage in dishonesty while being taught the value of honesty via their education? Furthermore, what motivates individuals to engage in deception when honesty is held in such high regard by society? It is evident that individuals resort to deception as a means of resolving issues.

How can individuals adhere to the idea of honesty? In what manner should individuals assess the efficacy of honesty? These questions remain unanswered.

Aristotle once said that the purpose of theoretical knowledge is truth, while the purpose of practical knowledge is action [6]. He points out the difference between theory and practice. According to Freud's theory of personality agency, the superego is the moral part of personality agency. It owns the highest state of self-control. So it means human sociality, which points out that people are moral. The ego is to satisfy the desire of the Id under the allowance of reality and society. The superego gives us a way to cope with incidents ideally, and the ego proposes a way more consistent with fact. Theoretical knowledge is in line with the superego. However, practical knowledge is in line with ego. It contains people's own values, emotions, preferences, etc. The principle of honesty is about theoretical knowledge and superego, while adherence to the principle of honesty is about people's practical knowledge and ego. As previously people are only told to be honest. Then this paper will talk about the degree of adherence to the principle of honesty.

To study people's original adherence to honesty, the author decided to launch a moral dilemma survey to achieve the results. Both choices in this moral dilemma will be understandable and allowable in the universal moral values. The analysis will be based on Freud's theory of personality agency: id, ego, and superego must work together and be balanced. Then the author will propose a theory that contains the border and standard of honesty.

2. Honesty in Moral Philosophy and Freudian Thinking

Honesty is a part of humanity. People always promote it and emphasize its importance. In China, the principle of honesty and credit has already been applied to the Civil Code. The principle of honesty and credit means that when engaging in civil activities, civil subjects shall be honest and trustworthy, legitimately exercise civil rights and perform civil obligations, refrain from fraudulent and evading laws, and pursue their own interests without harming the interests of others and society. There are two types of definitions of honesty: one is to regard it as a moral law, and the other is as moral behavior.

The value of honesty as a moral law is to constrain people in situations where legislation is ineffective. According to Freud's theory of personality agency, the superego is the theoretical level of people's values, which represents perfection. The moral law is what must be borne in mind and obeyed consciously. Set as a moral law, honesty turns out to be the basic principle and the prior issue for people to think and behave in daily life. Modern societies have created institutions to control cheating, but many situations remain where only intrinsic honesty keeps people from cheating and violating rules [7]. In particular, while people are often willing to take a moral act that imposes personal material costs when confronted with a clear-cut choice between right and wrong [8]. Thus, honesty is an extension of established institutions. It makes people regulate themselves by themselves. At the same time, they must be honest to both themselves and others.

However, given the utility of honesty as moral behavior, people will think more about personal gain and not always stick to honesty. Ego helps people to ponder about the utility of honesty. Moral behavior means that honesty is an alternative. People decide whether to be honest by themselves. Thomas Hobbes wrote in "Leviathan" that anyone's contribution is based on a purpose that is beneficial to himself. Kindness is voluntary, but all voluntary actions are for the purpose of making oneself happy [9]. In some situations, the results that people lie are more in line with their needs. Meanwhile, altruism is feasible. People are more likely to give up honesty and tell lies to get beneficial results. This is also one part of humanity.

Superego and ego are contradictory under some circumstances the result of honesty as a moral law is conflicting with that of honesty as moral behavior. If people set it as a moral law, then people cannot do what makes them happy or what is good for them on some occasions. However, if people

set it as moral behavior, then the restraining function of a moral law will be feeble. The possibility of lies will be larger.

3. Moral Dilemma

So where is the degree of adherence to the principle of honesty? The author sets up a moral dilemma. You are outside a building. Someone who is antisocial set a bomb in it, and he distributed some detonators to a group of people who have serious mental illnesses (one of the detonators is real). Now the police have arrived and don't know the details. What will you do? A is to tell the police that they are robbers and let the police arrest them as soon as possible. After the police get the detonators, you tell them the truth, but you may get some punishment. B is to tell the police the truth at first, but it will take a lot of time.

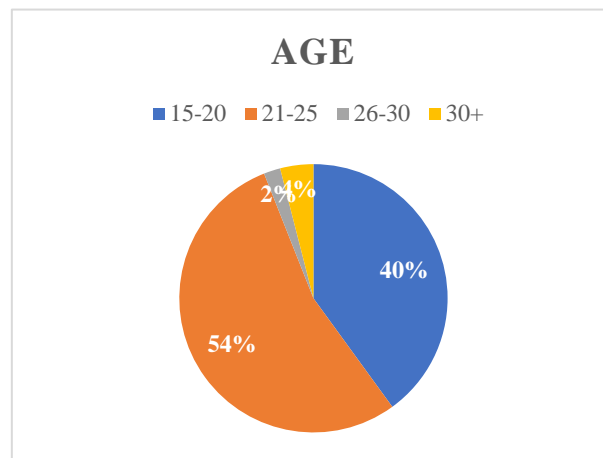


Figure 1: The age distribution of the participants is displayed.

The author did an anonymous survey. 50 young people have taken part in the survey. The basic descriptions of participants and results are illustrated in Figures 1 and 2.

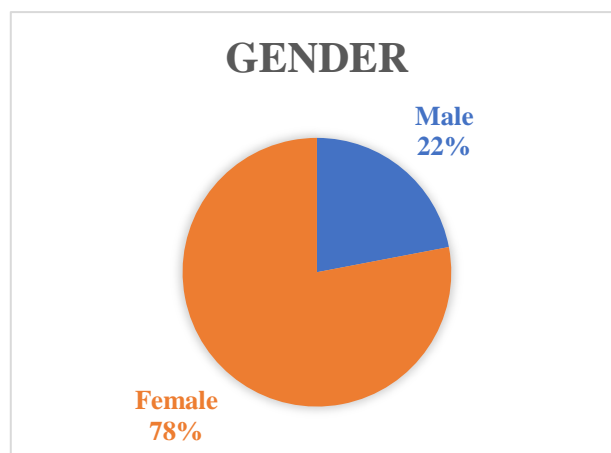


Figure 2: The gender distribution of the participants is displayed.

The difference between A and B is whether to be honest at first. The superego restricts people from being honest at the beginning. Under this circumstance, if people choose to be honest, then during the process of explaining the situation to the police, some of the patients may press the buttons on the detonators. Then the bomb in the building would explode and some people would be injured

as well as the narrator himself. However, ego makes people tackle the incident and protect themselves at the beginning. If people do not choose to be honest, then the risk will be lower greatly.

In this moral dilemma, people tend to consider more about the utility of honesty and conform to their ego. Many people actually betray their superego that honesty is one of the basic moral principles or a moral law since the result of the survey shows that half of people choose to tell lies at first. In this situation, people find out that honesty doesn't help them tackle the incident more efficiently. This is illustrated in Figure 3.

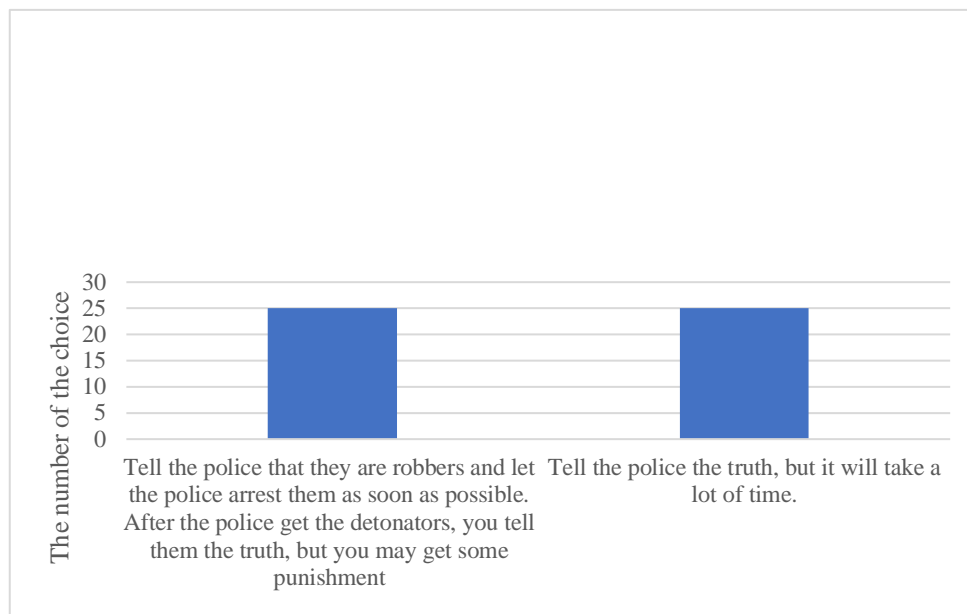


Figure 3: The choice distribution of the participants is displayed.

Conforming to the superego leads to the risk that the narrator himself is in danger. Rather than facing the potential danger, though by telling lies, people tend to manage to set themselves in a safe situation first. Their egos tend to be that since the two ways can both solve the problem, although telling lies may bring some punishments later, they will still give priority to the mitigation of the danger and the maximum protection of their lives.

So is it vital that someone must be honest? Of course, that is why later you need to explain why you tell lies at first and you may get punishment. In a theoretical dimension, honesty is a moral law that helps restrict people's behavior. However, in a practical dimension, people should care about the utility of honesty as moral behavior. When they have solved the problems, then they still should clarify the truth. This is our behaviour principle which is based on morality and the principle of goodness.

Honesty should be a moral principle that restricts people not to perform immoral behaviors. Honesty is not equal to morality, and telling lies sometimes is not immoral. From the perspective of form, behavior rationality mainly manifests as the principle of rightness, and its essence is in line with some value principle or practical standard: Only when action and practice are consistent with relevant value principle or standard can they have rightness. From the perspective of practice, value rationality manifests as the principle of goodness, and its essence is the reasonable demand in line with the subject of action or practice in practice. The satisfaction of this kind of demand means the accomplishment of good value practically [10]. So morality can't be assessed in one dimension. People should evaluate their behavior in view of both behavior rationality and value rationality. Under the moral dilemma that the author sets, although half the people choose to lie, they are still kind and

moral, because they tell lies to save people's lives, which is a reasonable demand. They obey the value of rationality.

To obtain a more widely-used perception, some special occasions should be taken into consideration for those who are diagnosed with mental diseases, such as personality disorder, cognition disorder, etc. Their relevant diseases make them doomed to conflict with being honest.

Id shows people's original desires. The ego contains the part of people's mental diseases as well as the performance of their diseases. The superego controls people not to do something immoral. The superego tells people to be honest and tell the truth.

To set an example, when someone suffering from a personality disorder shows that if he is honest, then he will turn into a histrionic personality disorder. What does honesty mean to people like him?

On the surface, if he lies, his ego then will take a leading position. Now the three personalities lose their balance. When he turns into a histrionic personality and starts to display some traits contradictory to his original personality, he is dishonest since he betrays his previous performances and personality.

However, by digging deeply, is he dishonest? If this condition keeps on, the superego and id will be weakened. If his histrionic personality keeps working, he will lose part of his own original desires, which is his id. Yet, telling the truth is part of his id. He must be honest and intrigue his histrionic personality. This process displayed the real him, which implies that he is honest. Though in the process he is honest, it's a part-time honesty. If his id did not work and perform his original desires, he was not the real him, and honesty was damaged thoroughly. Then he not only is dishonest but also loses his meaning of life.

So how can he keep honest? Since his id helps construct his honesty, he should protect his id. That is to say, he should not be honest all the time to avoid keeping his ego at the dominant status all the time. His telling lies conform to the principle of goodness and is also content with the subject of practice. It also means a good value and he is still moral [10]. Meanwhile, what he lies about must not injure others' rights and his own rights.

What does honesty mean to those people who have relevant diseases? Honesty is still not a moral law that must be conformed to. Although discrete narratives cannot achieve understanding as a whole, they can always embed a longer-term narrative in a short-term narrative. This is the so-called integrated narrative behavior, which shortens the gap between self-perception and self-identity construction distance [11]. It is still a necessity for them to be honest. Protecting their IDs is of great importance. Constructing the complete personality is a kind of honesty. Only when they are with their ids are they honest and their real selves.

4. Conclusion

This research reveals that individuals take into account not just the moral implications of honesty, but also its value. Individuals are unlikely to exhibit unwavering honesty. It might be argued that individuals prioritize their ego in order to maximize their own rights and rewards while dealing with various situations. This article posits the perspective that honesty is a moral conduct that warrants consideration of its usefulness. The assessment should be conducted from several aspects. Honesty has a significant role in shaping individuals' character traits. Individuals need to prioritize honesty in situations when their own rights and interests, as well as those of others, are not compromised. The permissibility of individuals engaging in deception while adhering to the concept of moral righteousness is acknowledged, provided that they afterward provide justifications for their acts and assert the veracity of their statements. The examination of the concept of honesty within various relationships warrants more scholarly discussion in order to facilitate a comprehensive exploration of this subject matter in the future.

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