Understanding Moral Psychology and Moral Education through the Lens of the Philosophy of Science

Hye Min Han
Research Fellow, Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology

Changwoo Jeong1)
Associate Professor, Seoul National University

Abstract

This article focuses on discussion concerning moral psychology and moral education from the philosophy of science standpoint. The theoretical model of Lakatos’ program in the field of the philosophy of science is introduced and the structure of moral psychology and moral education is analyzed and evaluated by using Lakatos’ scientific research program as a theoretical framework. The article begins with a review of the theoretical background of the philosophy of science, then continues by analyzing and evaluating the structure of moral psychology by using a theoretical framework from the philosophy of science, and then considers the case of moral education. The authors conclude with a brief description of significant directions for the introduction of the natural sciences, such as neuroscience and sociobiology, into moral psychology and moral education.

Key words: moral education, moral psychology, moral development, philosophy of science, Lakatos

I . Introduction

With the development of the natural sciences, issues related to them have increased since a couple of centuries ago: philosophical debates about the natural sciences also have steadily increased. Thus, the philosophy of science, a discipline

1) Corresponding author: jcwoo@snu.ac.kr
that deals with the philosophical problems of science, started to become an integral part of mainstream philosophy. Several disciplines, such as social science, that contain the word "science" in their names but are not classified into the category of the natural sciences, also started to become subjects of philosophical-from the viewpoint of the philosophy of science—consideration (Henrickson & McKelvey, 2002). For example, psychology as a scientific discipline in the realm of social science became a field of philosophical consideration.

There are some theoretical controversies over whether psychology is a part of science or not: recently, however, it has now settled into a scientific status (Stein, 1994). In fact, these days, the philosophy of science is interested in philosophical issues specific to particular kinds of science: psychology is also an issue of concern of the philosophy of science (Wilson, 2005). Several issues related to psychology, such as the rationality of human beings, the malleability of human nature, and innate knowledge and ideas have begun to become subjects of philosophical study (Bermudez, 2005; Mason et al., 2008).

The development of neuroscience also has thrown many philosophical problems into modern psychology. The eliminative materialism and naturalization of philosophy, the natural scientific explanation of consciousness, and the location of cognitive function from the results of neuroimaging have started to come under philosophical debate (Bennett & Hacker, 2003). Since contemporary moral psychology has started to introduce theoretical ideas from neuroscience, philosophical issues related to neuroscience should be considered an issue of modern moral psychology; the philosophy of neuroscience seems to be helpful in establishing the proper relationship between existing moral psychology and flourishing studies in neurobiology.

Consequently, philosophical approaches to psychology would help to enhance our understanding of the nature and structure of psychology; especially, models and tools of the philosophy of