



Oversimplificative Causal Explanations in Iran's Culture

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Extended Abstract

One of the most usual people's activities is to opine about the causes of daily life events. Influenced by instinctive motivations and social habits and doctrines, this activity may have some bias. Simplification and exaggerating in finding causes in different subjects such as sanitary, environmental, ethical, accidental and so forth, and thereby simplification in determining the culprit, can be derived from two things: an instinctive tendency to the compensation of the cognitive dissonance and escaping from a suffering due to the attribution of happenings to accidents or oneself own mistakes, and also from acceptance of commonplace stereotypical explanations of social affairs inspired deeply by antagonist ideologies. Simplification in finding of cause, finding of cause suffered at least by fallacy of part and whole, can push people to confronting those who are not unique or main cause of their misfortune. Doing so, there will be some expectations for society which lead to radicalism and distrust, a source of more suffering and less function. This article tries to show some sorts of this simplification in Iran's culture, and states that there are mistake in motivations and danger in effects and implications. The extent of examples is a range of virtual sites based on news and comment which seem to be a representation of the average of cultural orientation of Iran.

Keywords: Instinctive motivations, social doctrines, determining culprit, professions, classes

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INTRODUCTION

Causality is a well-known subject of philosophical discussions, particularly in classical philosophy and, to a lesser extent, philosophy of science. However, a considerable part of human mind is somehow preoccupied with cause-seeking and cause-finding, which are not related to philosophy, science, or ontology in their strict senses. Thinking about and discussing the simplest events in personal life and the social issues are often reducible to questions of causality. Seeking to exhaust questions such as why some acquaintances of mine (or myself) were treated in a certain way, or had an accident, or suffered a financial loss, or failed in their business, or did not get promoted, or got divorced, also such questions as why did the revolution take place, why did the war break out, why is inflation so out of control, why did people vote for a certain candidate, why did a certain movie break the box office records, why did a certain team lose the game, and the like, is all to ask questions about causes of and (commonly, but not accurately) reasons for events. The output of such judgments is often pointing out the perpetrators. The general and typical way of answering such questions can be biased; including in the form of simplistic views and grotesque exaggerations.

Beyond personal affairs, people frequently think of and make judgments on numerous issues such as the climate, healthcare, economy and finance, politics and culture, and even sports. Obviously, these thoughts and judgments differ from each other in accuracy, clarity, rationality, logical soundness, fairness, and factual correctness. Nevertheless, it seems that cause-seeking has a role in many of these interpretations and judgments; a role which often comes with oversimplification of causal explanation.

PURPOSE

A number of scientists and philosophers have emphasized that phenomena often have more than one causes. They sometimes even do not have one set of causes, but there exists a complex and variable network of sufficient causes, which to discover the impacts of its various components is difficult, even impossible (Mason, 2015; Mitchel, 2017). This general framework, sometimes referred to as the Complexity theory, traces the reduction of causal networks to a limited number of causal relations in scientific explanations. There is a general tendency to reduce the complex causal networks to just one or two causes. This is something like the so-called “horizontal reductionism,” in which, More plain terms “Oversimplified Cause fallacy” and “fallacy of the single cause” are also used for referring to the replacement of a complex causal process by a simple, convenient cause.

Paying attention to the complexity of causal explanation is not limited to the sphere of scientific explanation. To be sure, sometimes even scientists and scholars

commit oversimplification in tracing the causes, and thus it is hardly possible to expect ordinary people, even in developed societies, to comprehend the causal complexities, and observe them in explaining daily events. Yet, causal analysis of regular affairs on the part of ordinary people, due to its causes and consequences, has also enjoyed some attention. One example is the “fundamental attribution error,” defined as a tendency toward explaining events based on personalities and moral characteristics of individuals involved, while overlooking external causes . Numerous empirical studies have been aimed at revealing the mechanisms of regular causal explanations in daily lives of people . Blaming people around someone who has suffered a loss, and accusing members of a certain group of people of causing a failure or an insufficient success, are among the primary examples of the above-mentioned approach. We are going to see some aspect of this in the Iranian culture.

METHODOLOGY

The method in this article is searching among Persian sites which can be considered as not necessarily scientific explanation but things that ordinary people including the journalist of ordinary sites gather and reproduce.

RESULT

In order to explore this subject in the context of Iran’s news consumption/interpretation culture, here, among all the socio-political gaps that produce “the accused other,” those are concerned which result in blaming the problems on upper social classes, and ultimately on the government and politicians. This is not to claim that what follows is specific to Iranian culture, but, at the very least, it is asserted that Iranians are like this, or Iranians, too, are like this. (Given that proving something does not disprove other things.) Also, it is not claimed that all causal analyses and accusations which are referred to below are necessarily wrong. The point is rather their exaggeration and exclusivity. In this section, various examples from Persian language news-analysis websites are provided, in which the causal oversimplification is obvious.

DISCUSSION

It is not easy to realize what the cause of something is. “Since the accidental relations of the world are extremely convoluted, to answer even the simplest questions such as where does my lunch come from, and what does the pension fund do with my money, is difficult for me.” (Harari, 2018:276) But cause-seeking is among the primary human needs, and this is why people do not give up in the face of that complexity. The need for cause-seeking is not initially a scientific one; it is rather a psychological need to comprehend the causes of problems. Indeed, our need for cause-seeking requires simplification and accusation in order to gain peace



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of mind through diverting the blame from ourselves, and to enjoy a feeling of responsibility and participation in a moral struggle through animosity toward “the other” class/group (Pinker, 2015).

Whether it is a drought or an increase in cancer rates, commercial success of a high-cost play or the spread of child labor, it always involves a set of non-blameful causes (such as natural or accidental causes, and the inherent psychological and physical characteristics of human beings). Moreover, those causes which can be considered blameful are partly due to mistakes on the part of the victims themselves (those affected by drought or cancer, audience of the play or the child laborers), and not the class/group which has been represented as their enemy. Focusing exclusively on the blameful part of the cause, and then putting all, or most, of the blame on others, can be considered as a new version of the Voodoo practice, in which the enemy is symbolized by a doll, and is punished by penetrating the doll with needles.

CONCLUSION

By reducing the various causes resulting in a phenomenon to just one cause, and making an accusation out of it; by oversimplification of the causal networks through exaggeration of corrupt motives or misdeeds on the part of certain individuals or institutions; by attributing the events to some distant, strange, or vague causes; by overlooking one’s own (or one’s group, including class, occupation, etc.) blameful causal role, and also natural and accidental causes, we seek to divert the blame from ourselves (our group); to fantasize an enemy or to exaggerate a real animosity; to find additional confirmation for our accustomed ways and values; to pretend being smart, informed, and able of complex analysis; to demonstrate ourselves as being morally committed and involved in a struggle against evils. The main motive behind all these inclinations is to gain peace of mind for ourselves and to escape mental inconsistency. Their consequence, however, is social radicalism and public pessimism.

NOVELTY

It shows how harmful can be to explain things in such a way and to reproduce the news of it.



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