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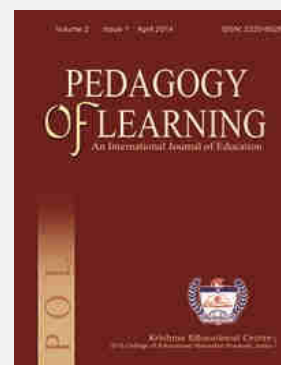
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Theory verses Practice in Moral Education: A Candid Concord

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Abstract

Debates about moral education have again cropped up in academia as well as social milieu. Large scales of corruption, organised crime, violence, communalism, fanaticism, chauvinism all around have invited the attention of the intelligentsia towards the significance of the moral education. But, as it was before, there is fierce debate among thinkers about the content of moral education. Another issue regarding moral education that always drags attention is the relation between moral philosophy and moral education. This paper is a humble attempt to show a candid relationship between the two. By that, it also dictates the shape of content deserved to be included in moral education.

Keywords: Moral Philosophy, Moral Education, Compatibility, Separatism

Each time I enter to my class meant for Moral Philosophy, same intriguing questions though with newer form and severity, are thrown upon me - what is the aim of studying a course on Moral Philosophy? The question is asked from two different angels. Firstly, out of the system - Is a course on Moral Philosophy relevant, worth studying in the age of self interest? The world is so engulfed with material worries; material achievement being the only

motto of human life, what is the value of moral values prescribed by Moral Philosophy? Pursuing moral values (prescribed in Moral Philosophy) seem unattractive, irrelevant and quite impossible too. Moreover, the question is asked within the system; about the nature of Moral Philosophy too. Moral philosophy, being a Science is out and out theoretical. Practicality is out of its preview. Therefore, a course on moral philosophy is useless. I am pretty sure that all my moral educator friends face the same questions in their classes very often. This article is a humble attempt to explore a justification for moral philosophy in general and moral education in particular. This justification aimed at here is obviously a moral one.

The content of Moral Education or Moral Philosophy: A Perpetual Perplexity

The suspicion gathered around Moral Philosophy and Moral Education is largely due to its unfixed and very often perplexed nature of contents across the world. For many, Moral Education is all about certain queer obscurantist absolute values basically designed to prohibit people from having fun. Therefore, Moral Education is often mixed with other fields of study. Moral Education often is termed as religious education or sometimes being equated with sexual education. To highlight this nature of Moral Education Carl Bereiter reports:

Moral education as it was represented in the new England primer, say or in McGuffey's Eclectic Readers, is not about to find its way back into the typical classroom. It goes against the prevailing liberal grain. It is dogmatic. Punishment and intimidation figure too prominently in it. It makes no allowance for cultural or individual differences. It is imposed from outside rather than developing from within. It casts the teacher in an authoritarian role, as agent of an official morality, model of virtue, catechist, and disciplinarian.ⁱ

Carl Bereiter, therefore, terms this traditional type of moral education distinctly unfashionable and claims that it has remained so for the past fifty years. People rather prefer to talk about 'education for democracy', mental health and life-adjustment education. Morality and moral education got a bad name and people started ignoring or avoiding it in education system. John Dewey was much concerned about morality, but mainly concerned that it should be assimilated into the totality of educational experience and not treated as a special object of instruction. "The moral and the social quality of conduct are, in the last analysis identical with each other," Dewey said and "all education which develops power to share effectively in social life is moral."ⁱⁱ By this Dewey extended the scope of moral education loaded with moral values to a larger social environment. The primary vehicle for this social/ moral learning was to be the community life of the school itself. The transcendence process does not stop here. Progressive educators transmitted moral problems into social problems. Later generation of educators, influenced by psychoanalysis and social psychology, tended to view problems of moral conduct as problems of psychological or social adjustment. But for each time, to be sure, the crow has been searching for a cuckoo's nest to get her eggs fetched.

It is therefore preliminary to decontaminate the popular notions about Ethics or Moral Philosophy in general and Moral Education in particular. Readers might object making Moral Philosophy and Moral Education synonymous. Many people would complain to such amalgamation. But this can be safely said that a large part of moral education carries the

legacy of Moral Philosophy. There are of course philosophers who find no difference between the two. W. Frankena in his “*Towards a Philosophy of Moral Education*” distinguishes between two aspects of Moral Education.

1) Moral Education conceived of as the handing on of moral knowledge and the resulting ability to make moral judgements about right and wrong, good and bad and so on.

2) Moral Education conceived of as inculcation of attitudes and dispositions ensuring conformity of action to this knowledge.ⁱⁱⁱ

Cornel M. Hamm terms the first as Cognitive Moral Education (CME) and the second as Effective Moral Education (AME).^{iv} Even the dispute regarding the proper content in moral education also owes to Moral Philosophy. It is a fact that Moral Philosophy is also contaminated with various similar but subtly different discourses like religion, aesthetics, etiquette etc. Therefore, decontamination of Ethics is required to purify Moral Education too. It is indeed obvious that Moral Education carries the shadows of Moral Philosophy. I wonder, what else!

There are many misunderstandings about Ethics (Ethics and Moral Philosophy is used synonymously here). We will discuss the followings:

1. Ethics is primarily about sex

The first thing we must be clear about Ethics is that it is not primarily about sex. Many people think that moral Philosophers or moral educators are watchmen of sexual purity. Ethics becomes a body of puritanical belief system basically designed to prohibit people having fun. On the other hand, a good junk of morality is based on and guided towards our sexual behaviour. No wonder when we see a newspaper reading about degrading morality in the society, we once again think about pornography, promiscuity, homosexuality or pre or post marital affairs. In this sense again the content of moral philosophy is a set of sexual values preached by a body of religious or social agency. At least one philosopher vehemently opposes this nature of Moral Philosophy saying that the content of Moral Philosophy has other important items instead of these issues regarding sex. To highlight this Peter Singer in his much talked about book *Practical Ethics* reports:

So the first thing to say about Ethics is that it is not a set of prohibitions practically concerned with sex. Even in the era of AIDS, sex raises no unique moral issues at all. Discussions about sex may involve consideration of honesty, concern for others, prudence, and so on, but there is nothing special about sex in this respect, for the same could be said of decisions about driving a car. (in fact, the moral issues raised by driving a car, both from an environmental and from a safety point of view, are much more serious than those raised by sex.^v

2. Ethics is synonymous of Religion

A large amount of people do not differentiate between Ethics and Religion or Theology. Many theists say that Ethics cannot do without religion because the very meaning of good is nothing other than what god approves. One can see now clearly the reason why the curriculum of both Western and Indian Moral Education contains so much of religious value.

In this respect C. Seshadri observes: “Moral Education is rarely if at all referred to as such in Indian education thought. The problem as the Indian educationists see it is not one of moral education but one of moral and spiritual education.”^{vi} As the CRMI observed, “Whenever any proposal was mooted for the teaching of subjects other than secular in schools and colleges, the words used as moral and religious education.”^{vii} Seshadri further observes, “This tradition of combining the moral and religious and sometimes equating the two is not peculiar to India alone. The traditional assumption even in Britain has been that religious education and moral education are synonymous terms. This derived from the strong moralistic strain in British Protestantism.”^{viii}

However, one can see fierce debates against implausible combination of morality and religion both in Eastern and Western civilisation. Plato refuted a similar claim more than two thousand year ago by arguing that if the gods approve of some actions it must be because those actions are good. Actions are good not because gods approve them but god approves them because they are good. In this way Plato established autonomy of Ethics from Religion. In India, at least one philosopher popularly named as Gautama Buddha could establish a whole philosophical system in the absence of god. In fact Buddhism made morality its religion. Contemporary Moral Philosophers, therefore, are more concerned about Ethics independent of religion. Let’s imagine what would be the content of moral education in this scheme.

3. Ethics is Theoretical

This is the most challenging question about Ethics. Ethics is criticised the most because it cannot be applied to the life situation. Its inapplicability owes to two closely connected factors.

1) Ethics is too theoretical to motivate people to act. It is alleged that theorising for the sake of theorising only is the motto of Moral Philosophy. Moral theorisation lacks necessary strength to motivate people to act.

2) Ethics sometimes fetches undesired consequences.

One can see a tacit tension between the two claims. The first claims that Ethics cannot be applied while the second claims that it can be applied but should not be applied. Let’s move to the first claim in detail. In nutshell, it claims that Ethics is a body of knowledge which lacks necessary tools to be applied. The western conception of ethics takes the scientific root. Ethics is considered as a science, a body of knowledge about moral principles. Accordingly the prime business of Ethics is to know the right moral choice, right moral standard or using right moral language. Does knowing necessarily transform into action. In other words, do ethics guarantee action? Is it necessarily true that if we know good, we do good. Socrates, the founding father of western ethical thinking, believes so. For him knowledge is virtue. If someone knows good, then he cannot but do good. The Upanishads also took the Socratic strand. “The evil doer does not know the evilness of his act otherwise he would not have acted that way.”^{ix} The Jain thinkers expressed the same idea when they declared that total knowledge (*Samyak jnana*) inevitably leads to total character(*samyak caritra*)

These high words do not stop sceptics. Doing moral good actions, it is argued, is essentially a matter of personal commitment and no amount of instruction can bring about such commitment. The modern Indian educational thinkers are highly sceptical about the role of moral teaching in the character building. Tagore and Aurobindo disapproved of direct moral teaching. So did Gandhi.^x An education centred around productive work, Gandhi held, took care of the moral needs of the children. Therefore, post independence policy on moral education in India focused more on behavioural transformation and argued for a minor role of cognition. Though sometimes they talk about inculcation of the different values in the students' personal behaviour, in any case, it is certainly not on acquainting the student with any rational methodology of moral thinking.^{xi} Moral and religious instructions do not mean moral improvement: instruction is not education says the UEC.^{xii} The syllabuses of moral education course declare: moral education is to be given a practical shape rather than teaching it on a theoretical way.^{xiii} Without falling into any theoretical discussion of morality, some generally accepted qualities are to be developed.^{xiv} And importance should be given more to participation in activities rather than talks on theory. These are some of glaring suspicion regarding the efficacy of morality and moral education and moral philosophy.

Notwithstanding these suspicions, some modern thinkers like ancient Greeks or ancient Indian philosophical schools such as Upanishads or Jainism, held high about the efficacy of moral teaching. Jawaharlal Lal Nehru inquires: intellect without character is likely to be dangerous, but what is character without intellect?^{xv} Similarly, John Wilson, in the contemporary western milieu has argued that moral education has an essentially cognitive component in it and that this should not be ignored. To him, the ability to make moral judgements based on sound reasoning is a very important aim of moral education and it has to be deliberately cultivated.^{xvi} Paul Hirst has said that moral education involves a great deal of understanding and intellectual mastery and therefore, explicit learning in periods especially separate for the purpose are necessary.^{xvii} The logic of moral discourse, grasp of fundamental moral principles, grasping the significance of public and private morality in society, the relationship between morals and religion, law and convention, are all matters to be dealt in moral education periods and by moral specialists.^{xviii}

While these words show a close connection between theory and practice in regard to moral philosophy or moral education, Connel M. Hamm's article, 'The study of ethics as moral education' conducts the exhaustive empirical as well as analytic study to make the concord candid. Hamm begins by the definition of moral education provided by W. Frankena in his "*Towards a Philosophy of Moral Education*"^{xix} Hamm writes:

I will distinguish two aspects of moral education: (1) moral education conceived of as the handing on of moral knowledge and the resulting ability to make moral judgments about "right" and "wrong," "good" or "bad," and so on (I shall label this cognitive moral education, or CME) and (2) moral education conceived of as inculcation of attitudes and dispositions ensuring conformity of action to this knowledge (labelled here as affective moral education, or AME). The former picks out the cognitive aspects of moral education which are related to judgments about questions like "What ought I to do?" the latter emphasizes the conative and commitment aspects of moral training. There is perhaps a third sense of moral education we could entertain. This would be a form of education about the logic and language of morals. It would pick out those aspects of morality that are typically subject to scrutiny by someone skilled in the distinct methods of philosophical investigation. For convenience let us call this

Education in Ethics, or EE. This is not usually considered moral education as such, but education in moral philosophy. It is usually held that this study is engaged in for its own sake because it yields the satisfaction that comes from understanding. Few would dispute — and certainly it is not here disputed — that such study would be worth pursuing even if its relevance to practice could not be shown. Moral philosophy, as other theoretical studies, has its own intrinsic value as well as other derivative values.^{xx}

Hamm then showcases empirical evidences to show the connection between EE and CME.

- a. 'It provides a new vista for examining questions of right and wrong.'⁷
- b. 'It gave me a deeper insight into the complexities of moral issues.' (p. 44 of L. Garrett's report).
- c. In answer to the question, 'Did the course help you in deciding questions of right and wrong?' a student replied, 'Not decide, but rather question what is right and wrong.' (p. 44)
- d. 'It (ethics) did not offer 'pat standards', but it left various criteria which I judged and selected to fit my needs.' (p. 44)
- e. From the Willis Moore Experiment⁸ come this remark: 'The greatest value in the course is that it forces people at least to think about possible alternatives to action rather than appealing blindly to some unquestioned authority for moral decisions.'

Hamm argues to show the connection as follows:

- (a) The standard moral act is "doing the (morally) right thing for the (morally) right reason."
- (b) "Right reason "for action implies the availability and employment of objective standards or rules for determining the "rightness".
- (c) Using rules to determine Tightness or wrongness in a particular situation requires judgment,
- (d) Judgment implies use of second-order rules,
- (e) Discovering, explicating, and enunciating second-order rules or principles is the task of ethics,
- (f) Ethics is therefore necessary for determining right reason for action and in that sense can be a part of moral education.^{xxi}

Hamm at the outset shows the importance of the question itself. The question is about our initial worry: can ethics be practical? Hamm says that numerous philosophers are prepared to and in fact do, state that the point of ethics is its bearing on moral practice. The presumption is that since philosophical problems in ethics arise from practice, the philosophical understanding is reflected in practice. Hourani, for example, says "If the desire to understand the meaning of right arises in the course of practical difficulties, it must be because such an understanding is thought to have some value for practice."¹⁰ W.D. Lamont, too, states that "unless we (as philosophers) are interested in practical results we are in great danger of becoming little more than trifling sophists."^{xxii}

Hamm therefore traverses a long journey- a journey of considering the separatists view of Nowell to the compatibility view of H.D. Aiken via B. Mayo's three tier model and Hartland- swans distinction between moral problems and problems in morals. Hamm then in agreement with Aiken declares that there is a candid concord between theory and practice in

moral philosophy. "What a person, says Hamm, does in ordinary life in making moral judgements is on a continuum with what the philosopher does qua philosopher. The two differ in degree but not in kind.^{xxiii} Aiken does not distinguish between philosophy and practical moral judgement as two distinct modes of activity. Rather, he refers to two sorts of levels of entertaining ethical questions. On the first level (what he calls 'substantive' ethics) arise such questions as "How ought I to live?" and "What ought I to do?" These are both practical and speculative questions. He says, "Problems of conduct often require speculation, not only about matters of fact, but also about the validity of moral principles themselves. On the second level ("analytic" ethics) arise questions of meaning and logic, questions such as "What are the meanings of and correct applications of words such as ought, right and good? Analytic ethics at bottom relates to the meaning of words. But clarification of the meaning of ethical terms is in fact a clarification of the rules for the application of the terms. And such clarity is indispensable to clear thinking."^{xxiv}

Aiken therefore writes: Understanding (moral discourse) is all the more important precisely because, unlike mathematical logic or theory of induction, ethical theory, in one crude form or another, is already part of the public domain. As such it is used to bolster or lend prestige to various substantive prohibitions or demands.^{xxv} And furthermore, he writes: He makes his contribution (to practice) partly (by) providing us with sharper tools and a clearer notion of the search itself, and partly in a more direct way (by) freeing us from (false beliefs).^{xxvi}

From above discussion both Hamm and Aiken concludes that EE is contributory to CME. Its very nature constitutes its contribution. It is by nature applied.

The second objection was ethics, even though can be applied, should not be applied in the life situation. One can see this objection is within ethics not about ethics. It is claimed that ethical principles applied into concrete life situation bring catastrophe, unwanted consequences. Two things are to be clarified here. Firstly, by this people believe ethics to be a set of simple rules such as do not lie, do not kill etc. It is true that these simple rules often fetch unpleasant consequences. At other time, these simple rules class with each others. So people tend to say that ethics is good at theory but not in practice. But ethics is not simply this and that rule. Even though one simple rule is not applied or if applied brings unpleasant consequences, this is not enough to show that whole ethics is not applied. It can be simply said that that particular rule could not be applied. Peter singer very aptly writes:

Like the failure of a restrictive sexual morality, the failure of an ethic of simple rules must not be taken as a failure of ethics as a whole. It is only a failure of one view of ethics, and not even as irremediable failure of that ethics.^{xxvii} Deontologists normally regard ethics as system of rules. Even deontologists can rescue their position by finding more complicated and more specific rule that do not conflict with each other, or by ranking the rules in some hierarchical structure to resolve conflicts between them.

The second point is clearer than the first one. It claims that ethics should not be applied because it brings unwanted or unpleasant consequences. That means anything that brings unpleasant consequences is bad. This is itself a claim within ethics, popularly known as consequentialism. Consequentialism as an ethical theory cannot call ethics irrelevant. It is self contradictory. The best it can claim that a particular type of ethical theory is irrelevant or

impracticable. But saying that also requires adequate moral argument and justification. Doing so, consequentiality ethics remains within the preview of ethics so also the ethical theory it banishes.

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