On ambiguity of Idea of education

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Abstract

The ideal of education is widely held to be composed of two contrasting viewpoint: Utilitarianism and idealism. Though, the pressure put upon the sources that have made education to be not more than instrumental for something else. In India as well as globe the whole expansion of modern education is, historically, driven by means to certain ends rather making education end in itself even though as time proceeded it apparently become clear to many that the institutionalized education and its close alignment with modern capitalism and meritocracy, e.g. deployment and monitor of huge institutional infrastructure by state, market and society, would invites major challenges. And, a particular moral tradition, namely utilitarianism in its crudest form, has been celebrated and growing presence of market in education has tended to put immense pressure on education to be valuable in itself.

Keywords: Values, Institutionalized education, state, and economy

Introduction

The perfection of human being have been driving forces among almost all philosopher of time being as they have been quite vocal (or sometimes overestimated) about education, cutting across different philosophical position (or ideals) since ancient time. To add a caveat, it must be noted that they were highly educated of their time; so, it would quite natural to anticipate the positive side of education in their account but the emergence of modern education is somewhat different from ancient education. Education conventionally thought of intrinsically and instrumentally fulfilling in itself, even though there might have differences on degree of emphasis on which should core values. Al-Ghazzali, an Islamic mystic and thinker of eleventh century Iran, was quite clear when he wrote on two equally important element of human wisdom, and it would be worthwhile to reflect; as he goes on saying

“There are two kinds of eye, an external and an internal,...the former belong to one world, the world of sense, and ...internal belong to the another world altogether, the realm of celestial...each of the two eyes has sun and light whereby its seeing is perfected..."(p.29)².

Thus the perfection through education has been driving forces behind ideal of education. However, the seeds of modern education system can be found in enlightenment periods, or in earliest account during Protestant religious reform³, where the optimism over education was highly appreciated and entertained. As matter of our curiosity, the highest values was attached on education as it is, perhaps, best asserted in Kant when he

²For full quote see Palmer (2004) ‘Fifty Great Thinkers On Education: From Confusions To Dewey’
says that ‘how then is perfection is to be sought? Wherein lay our hope? in education and nothing else’\(^4\). Indeed, such high tide of rationalism was articulated with diverse set of lexicon.

There seems to the underestimation of the historical fact the whole urge of modern documenting society to get wisdom through text (borrowed form Olson; 2003) has indeed very little or nothing to do with moral educations. He enormously has ambiguous account of knowledge and its institution, namely university and schools, in beurecaractic society. Or if it is pictured as candid reality, an essential question has to be raised that why modern education has constantly been failed to live those ideal. Is it possible to hold two opposing at same time without anxiety? And how far one would go with hold of opposing ideas of education.

1. Two opposing views on education

That’s why Kant had in mind that by education people would be with good will and aware about the danger if it is not realized. Indeed, Kant (1785/2001), of enlightenment while grounding his moral thinking, writes;

“Nothing in the world –indeed nothing even beyond the world-can possibly be convinced which could be called good without qualification except a GOOD WILL. Intelligance, wit, judgement and other talent of the mind however they may be named, or courage, resoluteness, and perservance as qualities of temperament, are doubtless in many respect good and desirable, but they can become extremely bad and harmful if the will, which is to make use of these gift of nature and which in its special constitution is called character, is not good. It is same with gift of fortune. Power, riches, honour, even health, general well-being and contentment with one’s condition which is called happiness make for pride and even arrogance if there is not a good will to correct their influence on mind and on its principles of action, so as to make it generally fitting to its entire ends...Thus the good will seems to constitute the indispensable condition even of worthiness of happiness\(^5\)” (p.7).

Therefore, it is not true that philosopher of enlightenment could not envisage the danger about which Pathak in above paragraph is referring to. Instead more surprising is that it has become day to day reality in present age and still the search for good will in Kantian sense is going on; therefore the sage must be uncovered in order to see how education and its values has been unfolded since enlightenment. Equally important is to notice in Kant is of a kind of values that universal in nature and indications of human being as utter most integrity in his moral schema. Another strong feature of enlightenment is the reliance to the universality and knowledge through ‘Rationality’ has been firmly established by now, it is often taken as of special characteristic of human being leading to the exploration of nature, human relation and so on.

MacIntre(1966/1998) writes that one of most enthuse of enlightenment ,namely  Kant, who place ‘Rationality’ at highest stage for human perfection(p.183). Kant sought the moral law is again a law that reason prescribed to itself and ruled out the possibility of inclination (or instinct) to be sources of grounding morality in a priori; that means the moral axiom on the basis of ‘reason’ .And act is morally worth if it is done for its own sake rather than done for sake of external ends or any sort of inclination; that has attracted many sort of criticism. The chief rival of Kantian thinking is utilitarianism armed with consequentialism (broadly it is defined as judging action on the basis of consequence of action rather on intention of it) to which later fully elaborated.

\(^4\) For detail see  Palmer (2004)
Kant, thus, sharply separate the sphere of nature from the sphere of morality, but he conceives that education would be bridge between two form the compulsion of natural desire to state of being able to perform the right act simply through an understanding it as right act. However, without going in the detail of morality, the implications on education need further elaboration.

Indeed, Kant envisages the education as process lead individual as perfection and there is no distinction between the means and end; thus it is end in it-self by perfecting human being. Indeed, Palmer (2004) goes on to summarize that although Kant had no clear cut proposal for education, but he conceived that education should be given in disciplined ways to children which would be compatible with freedom. Thus, it can be said that any ideal society need education for its own sake (or the main vehicle of modern society is through education is no longer questionable) and given his scepticism about the modern nation-state to be armed with militarism, he wasn’t in favour of education to be patronized by the state. However, it can be said that Kantian writing on education is too optimistic of education as many change in social and political milieu of that time was unfolding in the front of him in seventeenth century. Therefore, two questions are needed further elaboration; 1) is there agreement any among later thinkers on what is morally right action which would equally universal in principles? , and 2) whether the drives for education in modern society is really about perfection of individual (intrinsic in nature)?

The main opponent of Kantian morality appears in ‘Utilitarianism’. Therefore, it is appropriate to discuss the main ingredients of Utilitarianism to which modern thinking in many ways has been largely shaped our thinking about morality. Indeed, the utilitarianism is chiefly contrasted with Kantianism on the ground of belief that action should be judged on the basis what extent it does yield pleasure and minimize the pain and the chief aim of human life is pleasure not Good Will. Thus, the difference must be noted in these two schools of thinking. Anyway, there is two aspect of Utilitarianism:1) Hedonism (maximizing pleasure and minimizing pain to maximum number),and 2) Consequentialism (an action should be evaluated on the basis of its consequences not on its intention or will). The main exponent of Utilitarianism, namely Bentham, argued that by the calculus of action on basis of pleasure and pain and it later modified by the J.S.Mill in the line of argument that there is distinction between different sort of pleasure (higher pleasure and lower pleasure).

One of the chief critics against universality of any morality (partly in response of Kantian deontology and partly to utilitarianism), according to Graham, labeled by Nietzsche even though somewhere it converse with hedonism but there are every evidence to suggest that he proposed to ground morality on the basis of own will rather maximizing pleasure. For Nietzsche- a late nineteenth century German philosopher- there is no truth but perspectives and all good (or moral values) are construction of Christianity. According to Anomaly,Nietzsche was critical about the ‘utilitarianism’ on the basis of its universalize appeal to which he leveled ‘secularist doctrine of Christianity’, in its claim to be treating every one equal, and its easy equation of morality with pleasure, yet he could not build the coherent opposition thinking. Thus, there seem to be ambivalence towards ‘Utilitarianism’ in Nietzsche thinking. Perhaps, this is the reason of Graham to claim

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6For detail, see: Anomaly (2005) ‘Nietzsche’s Critique of Utilitarianism’. According to Anomaly,Nietzsche was critical about the ‘utilitarianism’ on the basis of its universalist appeal to which he leveled ‘secularist doctrine of Christianity’, in its claim to be treating every one equal, and its easy equation of morality with pleasure, yet he could not build the coherent opposition thinking. Thus,there seem to be ambivalence towards ‘Utilitarianism’ in Nietzsche thinking.Perhaps,this is the reason of Graham to claim that is of having tendency to be temptation of hedonism in Nietzsche schema who sometimes rely upon psychological state of oneself.
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Nietzsche ‘The Genealogy of Morals’ in which he made devastated criticism against Christianity and its moral account of good and evil as the construction by Christianity out of the fight between the ancient Rome and Judaism; In former the good and bad was relative conception whereby only talented would be considered as talented and hierarchy was harmonious but in later the divine law was introduced to bring sin in picture of moral account. But it’s ultimately the ‘Christ’ (King of Kings in Nietzsche terminology) who won the battle by grounding Christianity in Europe. The Christ succeeded in doing that because it glorified the poor and slave people. And the morality is transformed in god as absolute good and humanity as sin. However, W.B.Yeats wrote on side line of his copy of ‘The genealogy of morals’ that ‘but why does Nietzsche think that night has no stars, noting but bats and owls and the insane moon?’, as quoted in Sen (2005, p.273).Thus Yeats personal remarks on the genealogy does suggest that Nietzsche, indeed, missed the crucial important aspect of human life; very soon it would be reflected upon.

According to Schroder(1987/2006), both, namely Nietzsche and Weber, were clear on the one observation that is the weakening grip of religion and emergence of science is not going to give any values in modern society. But the major question is what could be standard of human conduct. Therefore, he argues the moral life of individual as ‘his life is justified before itself and remain justified-this life which shout at every one of us- Be a man and don’t follow me-but yourself; yourself’ (ibid.39). So after dismantling the universal morality he tried to construct his heroic (what he call in German ‘Übermensch’) morality on the basis of egoist individual. Graham argues that Nietzsche was trapped in its own dilemma, namely the egoist admire the exercise of individual will especially when it goes against the flow of conventional thinking; but individual will can be exercised in affirming the conventional morality. Thus, it requires what thing it is best to will. Irony of Nietzsche is that his clearance to the hedonism and world centre around superman doomed to die its own because it would put immense pressure on such individual to live for oneself.

Hence, although all three school of thinking about morality differ on the nature of morality but consistent on that individual has to be focused as moral point in making any claim and capable to live her own goodness. This brings us closer to the philosophy of education which was explicitly started with work of John Dewey. In fact it would be perfectly right to state that he was perhaps first and last who locates the discussion of ‘education’ wider perspective and wanted any study (or philosophical thinking) on ‘educational’ studies at canter stage of enquiry which ranges from moral, social, political, and psychological element that is hard to suspect. It is worthwhile to note that Dewey (2001) seems to deny that education can be viewed as two separate realm of values and aim must be sought in itself as if the engagement in educational activities for further activities; Dewey based his proposition in light of pragmatism—defines as ideas (or theories) is worth if it has cash (or applicable) values- and argued that the democratic society must have education in such ways that would institutionally renew (or modify) itself.

Given the complexity involved in the moral worthiness of education, it should not be surprising that modern education as ideal as well as practice is beset with numerous problems. By the beginning of twentieth century, one would see such high level of optimism is faded away and whole chimera of natural perfection of human

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7Brubaker (1984/2006) Weber ethics is defined as heroic one rather masses in which the pessimism about science in generating any values is also apparent in both scholars writing(p.38). Thus, one must not to be mistaken to have discussion of Nietzsche does not have any relevance on the sociological imagination of Weber.

8For detail see Olson (2003)
being and progress started to rest in blue mist of sky. For instance, Durkheim, writing in beginning of twentieth century, saw education as socialization process and preparation for positively function in modern society, and in position to deny the any independent values of education as such, even though he could not escape the Kantian optimism of perfection altogether. Durkheim, in fact, also extends that education need to be understood in wider social context, and goes as far as to claim ‘we must never lose sight of the fact that the class is small society’ thereby little or almost no scope for fulfilling societal demand that has been placed upon children, namely the division of labour, tightly coupled with level of education. In fact, history of education across globe does suggest that books (reading and writing) and grading upon has been becoming tighter and precision.

Interestingly enough, it can be convincingly argued that the urge to hold of both school of thinking (Kantianism to promote good will and utilitarianism education as means to achieve certain ends)-as some hold that could be taken especially in case of education, e.g. Suppose a child enjoy the process of education thereby try to explore yet fails the institutionalized examination, which has somewhere become and linked with next level of growth, cannot be given as example- is ‘fig leaf of mind’ (means ‘Idealism without idea’, to borrow Bentham phrase) hard to sustain in our age as educational institution and its Knowledge is fully bureaucratized and moved towards its independent entities of what Weber, or Dewey, have missed it. By now it is established that it provides certain knowledge on basis of different discipline in coherent manner and gives credential on the basis of examination of those content which has taught which is universally acceptable.

Conclusion

This paper pointed out that the moral values are caught in dilemma since Kant over the nature of human being and its proper place between two extremes, namely individuality and humanity. While Kant argued for the universal rational law to be accorded in the action so that maxim of action could be achieved but critics have pointed out the rationality could not be the sole of morality. Indeed, the emotion and human compassion also play role in action to be morally worth. In his thinking, education plays a decisive role in the perfecting the individuals and place higher integrity to each and every human being till her action is not deviated from duty. In fact, Kant has gone as far as claiming that education will ‘perfect’ individual. Thus, education has the ability to sharpen the individual judgment and being able to act even contrary to inclination (or desire). Later philosopher, namely Nietzsche, was in position to claim that any sort of morality in universal appeal are phantasm in which everyone succumb to death, and went on to argue in favour of the confirmation of will on the irrational ground yet it seems to be ambiguous alternative. Weber although differs on some ground with Nietzsche, but place the highest place of action in which nature has minute (or almost negligible) role to play thereby he gave the ample room for education, what he calls (for higher education and science & scholarship) education as vocation, to be affirming oneself. Thus, the education has been placed at central aspect of human life as looming crisis of modernity in which the threat are coming from many directions but the primarily the universality and certainty that was completely discarded by both of them. In fact both of them rejected that the ‘rationality’ (scientific studies) would give any ‘values’, of what later Frankfurt school and Jung supported in their own ways.

References


