

Education of Emotions as a Possibility of Handling Value Conflicts

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Abstract: It is widely accepted that one of the most crucial issues in philosophy of education is related to the concept of value. The contemporary debates on the concept of value and the power of education to deal with value conflicts revolve around two basic questions. First: *How can I live personally flourishing life with a responsibility for the universe in general and others in particular?* Second: *In what ways can education help us find a common ground between living well and being morally good?* It is argued in this piece of work that education of emotions can be reconsidered as a promising remedy for this dilemma. A Deweyian account of desirable habit formation is elaborated, endorsed and defended, yet possible objections to the account is taken into consideration.

Keywords: Education, emotion, value, Dewey, habit.

Değer Çatışmaları Sorununda Bir Olanak: Duyguların Eğitimi

Özet: Eğitim felsefesinin en merkezi sorunlarından birinin değer kavramıyla ilişkili olduğu büyük ölçüde kabul görür. Hem değer kavramı, hem de eğitimin değer çatışmalarının çözümünde ne ölçüde etkili olabileceğine ilişkin çağdaş tartışmaların iki temel soru çevresinde dolaştığı görülmektedir. Birincisi: *Genel olarak evrensel çevre ve özellikle de insani çevreye karşı sorumlu, ama aynı zamanda kişisel açıdan mutlu bir yaşam sürmek nasıl olanaklı olur?* İkincisi. *Bu çerçevede, eğitim, iyi yaşamak ile iyi biri olmak arasında bir uzlaşım geliştirmemize hangi biçimlerde yardımcı olabilir?* Bu çalışmada duyguların eğitimi olarak özetlenen yaklaşımın sözü edilen sorunsalı aşmak açısından ümit verici olduğu savunulacaktır. Bu amaçla, Deweyci bir 'yeğlenebilir alışkanlık biçimlendirme' yaklaşımının ayrıntılandırılması ve savunusu yapılmakta, ayrıca bu yaklaşıma yöneltilebilecek itirazlar da gözden geçirilmektedir.

Anahtar sözcükler: Eğitim, duygu, değer, Dewey, alışkanlık

I. Introduction

Human beings are brought up in a social network, including family as

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the initial source of a sense of belonging. Based on this fact, we may assume that a young member of society will have certain dispositions to reproduce more or less the same kind of personal relationships, out of which a personal hope for the posthumous continuity of meaning is likely to occur. For the same reason, we may also assume that the individual will want “life” to continue as peaceful as possible, perhaps particularly for the relatives, if not also for others, even after she herself passed away, and this will require developing a sense of cosmic continuity.

Therefore, we have some good reasons to assume that young members of society will tend to live more as “constructive” creatures rather than “destructive” psychopaths. All these remarks aim of drawing attention to the fact that there is a natural source of morality, which readily influences different portions of our socially shaped personalities.

However, we also know that we are not so certain whether personal well-being necessarily consist of consideration for others (especially for those others one is not in a close relationship with) or not. One may live a selfish but –at the same time- a flourishing life, even though one was brought up in a social network. Or one may have very little sense of others, be limited to one’s close relatives, and ignore the interests of larger community entirely. From a social point of view, this obviously cannot be tolerated, for it is not desirable at all when it is taken as a universal rule

This, in a sense, is an optimization or balance problem. The question then that we have come to answer, if we are to live a reflective life, has been *how can I live personally flourishing life with a responsibility for the universe in general and others in particular?* I think education should help individuals dealing with this question.

We have many different values in society. Conflict between these values is almost unavoidable. Against this background education is supposed to do something, which is relatively less objectionable, or more desired. Although we have more than enough theories of morality, it has been hardly possible for the educator to impart a coherent notion of morality that puts an appropriate weight on both individual needs and social or –more generally-socioecological responsibility. Most theories of moral education seeks an effective method of inducing pupils to have this or that set of values based on the assumption that morally desirable action follows from understanding the nature of values or development of good

judgement. However, Dewey argues that this does not necessarily have to be so.

We can imagine a person with most excellent judgement, who yet does not act upon his judgement. There must not only be force to ensure effort in execution against obstacles, but there must also be a delicate personal responsiveness, -there must be an emotional reaction. Indeed, unless there is a prompt and almost instinctive sensitiveness to conditions, to the ends and interests of others, the intellectual side of judgement will not have proper material to work upon. (Dewey, 1909, p. 52)

Then, how can we tackle with the difficulty here, that is, one may behave immorally even though one is perfectly aware of what morally right action is? I want to suggest Dewey's concept of habit in relation to the idea of educating emotions as a possibility of handling the conflict between what one is supposed to do and what one wants to do to deal with this difficulty.

In the first section I shall try to present Dewey's use of the concept of habit, and argue for an account in which "habits" and "emotions" are together seen as a useful ground to derive a coherent conception of values. In the second part I shall deal with the possibility of educating emotions in a balanced way, from which both the individual and society might benefit.

II. Dewey's Concept of Habit

In his guide-like introduction to Dewey's *Human Nature and Conduct*, Murray G. Murphey describes the habits as follows:

It is... a biological fact that human infants are energetic by nature. The task of childbearing, which is obviously performed by the group, is to channel this energy into coordinated sequences of movements, which enable the child to act effectively. This task, which we so aptly call "socialization", enables the helpless child to become the effective adult member of the group, and it is accomplished by the learning of "habits or modes of behavior which are successful in satisfying needs. (Dewey, 1992, p. x)

According to Dewey, "habits" have a dual function. On one side the

individual is equipped, by means of habits, with certain qualities, which are basic to meet her needs and desires. On the other side, they help society incorporate one of its members in a constructive way by harmonizing the natural energy for a particular purpose. By the concept of habit, Dewey does not understand merely a content of what society transmits. His conception of habit rather involves the physical and natural environment as well. There is a dialectic relationship between the human agent and physical, natural, and social environment, and out of this interaction habits are continuously modified. "As breathing involves both the lungs and an atmosphere from which oxygen is extracted, so all habits at once depend upon and alter the environment in which they are performed." (ibid, p. xi)

For Dewey habits, which are in a sense, acquired predisposition, are the building blocks of character, and when we talk about character, we, in fact, mean the interpenetration of habits. The concept of habit has a central importance in Dewey's philosophy in general, and in his approaches to morality in particular. Many writers argue that he wanted to embrace with the term habit also that of virtues and vices. (Rice, 1996, p. 269) And, for Dewey, habits as well as virtues and vices are in a close relation with the human agent's emotional responsiveness. Thus, if the impulse, which is an inborn energy of the human agent, is channeled into positive emotional habits, rather than negative ones, then one can talk about a good character that consists of virtues. I shall come back to Dewey's concept of habit and its relation both to virtues and moral life, but at the moment, let me sketch some other contemporary views about virtue and habit.

It is obvious that there is a renewed interest in virtue in general and its implications for morality and education in particular. A cast of philosophers, including particularly Alesdair MacIntyre has recently sparked the discussion that is basically carried out with reference to Aristotle's theory of character. MacIntyre's personal interest in virtue, I think, cannot be explained merely with his inquiry about the nature and development of morality. Rather *After Virtue* is an invitation to bring about reconciliation with the past, reconciliation with the *tradition* against *doubt*. However, although his notion of virtue helps us connect the present to the past, and expand our understanding of virtue in a larger context of cultural relatedness, it does not imply that there is something in virtue *habitual* or in habit *virtuous*. A virtue, according to MacIntyre, "is an acquired human quality the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to

achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such goods". (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 191) Nevertheless, I think, it can be derived from the concept of social practices that "any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized" might have a habituating power as well.

One finds a more directly relevant discussion of the relationship between virtues and habits in Peters' *Moral Development: a plea for pluralism*. Briefly summarized Peters thinks that the role established habits play in the moral life is obviously important, but habits are not sufficient for the conduct of a person's moral life. (Peters, 1981) He gives two reasons for this insufficiency: First, the different classes of virtues differ in their relation to habit. Peters explicates his point based on the classification he developed by him in relation to Kohlberg's developmental morality. He writes:

...virtues such as punctuality, tidiness and perhaps honesty, seem to be the most obvious class of the virtues which can be called habits, because they are connected with specific types of acts. They are to be contrasted with ... virtues such as compassion, which are also motives for action. The concept of habit ... cannot get a grip on virtues such as these... Nor can it get a grip on more artificial virtues such as justice and tolerance. (ibid, p. 47)

Second, according to Peters, habits alone are insufficient in developing a moral life because behaving in the ways in that those so-called habit like virtues are in charge does not make an action necessarily moral. That is why, Peters writes, children might well possibly be behaving honestly just for the instrumental reasons, such as avoiding from punishment or gaining approval.

Unlike Peters Dewey gives much more importance to habit in human life, regardless of what connotations the concept of habit has in our daily lives. According to Dewey, human life itself is to an important extent ruled by habits. Accordingly, Suzanne Rice writes, "Our thought, language, sense perception, and the manner in which we contort and use our bodies are all, to a considerable extent, habitual". (Rice, p. 272) And, as I mentioned before, 'character', which is to be read as 'interpenetration of habits' is crucial to meet the difficulty that Peters denotes. The human agent does not act always 'out of habit' as Peters assumed, but out of

penetration of habits as well. Dewey's emphasis here on character should not be considered as an appeal to 'constant essential selves'. As Suzanne Rice points out Dewey is aware of the possibility of misunderstanding, and so he writes: "The attained character does not tend to petrify into a fixed possession which resists the response to needs that grow out of the... environment. *It is plastic to new wants and demands*". (Rice, p. 277)

Dewey, most probably as a direct influence of F. Matthias Alexander, author of the *Man's Supreme Inheritance*, implies in the *Human Nature and Conduct* that there is a physiological dimension to having certain emotions and acting in a certain immoral way, which might be result of a wrong habitual development. This failure in developing good emotional habits, Dewey writes in his preface to Alexander, results in a crisis in the physical and moral health of modern individual as well. According to Dewey, Alexander's approach to human condition could be illuminating in many ways, including moral dilemmas. He writes,

His (Alexander's) interpretation centers primarily about the crisis in the physical and *moral* health of the individual produced by the conflict between the functions of the brain and the nervous system on one side and the functions of digestion, circulation, respiration and the muscular system on the other; but there is no aspect to the maladjustments of modern life which does not receive illumination. (Dewey, 1974, p. 169)

Based on the Alexander's technique, which is a technique of mind-body integration similar to meditation and biofeedback, Dewey tends to argue for the possibility of an integrated understanding of moral action in relation to psychophysical health, emotions and habit formation. He claimed that Alexander's technique "gives to the educator a standard of psychophysical health in which what we call morality is included". (ibid, p. 169) It is obvious from this quotation that Dewey saw moral character as closely related to the emotional habits and responses, together have a power to contribute to or subtract from one's psychophysical health.

The same idea is explained by Amitai Etzioni in defining character as the psychological muscle that moral conduct requires. (Etzioni, 1993) That is also what Dewey meant by saying moral education is most potent when lessons are taught to children in the mode of emotional literacy. Otherwise, Dewey claims, moral education has to fail since it will seek to initiate the

pupil into the dynamic nature of habits through only intelligence. He writes, "the separation of warm emotion and cool intelligence is the great moral tragedy". (Dewey, 1922)

III. Emotional habits and morality

Although it has been widely accepted that emotions can be motives to action, there have been few attempts in the literature of explore the relationship between emotions and morality. One of the reasons for this ignorance is the conviction that reason alone can provide a complete theory of morality. However, it is empirically supported in many psychological studies that "a comprehensive theory of morality must include attention to the emotional or affective component of the moral good." (Brabeck & Gorman, 1986, p. 91-103)

In one of the few books on the subjects the author, Justin Oakley, asserts that emotions play a fundamental role in our moral lives, but "we can appreciate the full moral significance of emotions only if we accept that emotions are complex phenomena involving cognition, desires, and affects". (Oakley, 1992, p. 38) According to Oakley this account of morality, in which emotions are by products of a dynamic and simultaneous interaction of the above mentioned elements is morally significant, is necessarily to be based on an aretaic ethics or ethics of virtue. The virtue, or what Dewey calls desirable habit, in such an account of ethics, is both self-regarding and other regarding. (ibid, p. 39) Then what are these virtues or desirable habits out of which a disposition for an integrative moral action can develop?

Based on the Dewey's account that I have discussed so far, I think, it is clear that every human agent is subject to lifelong emotional habituation. What follows then is that the basic tendencies to act in certain ways can be merits of these habits. Now I want to make an important shift in direction of discussion. Emotions exist both before and after an action, and if the action is motivated by a desirable emotional habit (read as *custom, or shared ways of doing*) then the overall result of the action is also desirable for both individual and society. In order to justify this claim one should have some empirical support. How can we know that an action, which is in accord with the common values of society, is also good for the individual?

It is good to see that many psychological studies, biofeedback

research, and neuro-physiology findings are in complete agreement with the view that happy or healthy emotions are those which tend to produce socially approved and encouraged actions. Put another way, if an action is morally good (read as *appropriate* in terms of moral convention and custom in society) then the emotions that the individual had both before and after acting will also be healthy or good for the individual. For this reason, Aaron Ben-ze'ev claims, emotions serve as a kind of moral compass, and are intrinsically valuable. (Ben-ze'ev, 1997, p. 195-212) He writes, "Emotions are often moral barriers for many types of immoral behavior" (ibid, p. 203). Likewise, as Aaron Ben-ze'ev cites in his article, Ernest Hemingway argues: "What is moral is what you feel good after and what is immoral is what you feel bad after". (ibid, p. 205)

According to Aaron Ben-ze'ev, however, the role of emotions in the moral domain is different from what I have implied so far. He appreciates too that emotions are reliable guides as regards morality and that they can be followed to a certain degree. He argues: "Positive emotional states usually increase inclinations toward helping. The reverse direction is also common: helping other people may increase our happiness, and perceiving injustice can provoke negative emotions which may lead to the elimination of the justice" (ibid, p. 200) . But he does not attempt to conceive a natural harmony between *what one is morally supposed to do* and *why doing so is emotionally accords with one's self interest*. Therefore, I think, Aaron Ben-ze'ev equates natural emotions with Aristotle's concept of virtues. He writes,

Emotions which in themselves can be regarded as morally negative may have instrumental moral value in the sense that they may lead to positive moral consequences. Jealousy is morally valuable in protecting unique relationships; envy may encourage improvement of our situation and that of other people; and anger may be useful in maintaining our values and self-respect. (ibid, p. 201)

What is needed here, according to Aaron Ben-ze'ev, is similar to Aristotle's golden mean, wisdom like predisposition to act always appropriately. The same applies to emotions; right emotion, at the right time, for the right reason, and the right amount. He says that only excessive intensity of negative emotions is morally harmful while moderate forms of them are just beneficial.

However, I do not think, and to my best knowledge empirical studies do not support that evoking a negative emotion can be healthy even when it is kept at the moderate level. Dozens of studies provide evidence that anger, regardless of situation, has a great power to damage the heart. On the contrary numerous empirical studies suggest that “happy emotional states are capable of preserving somatic health and curing illness, and unhappy or stressful emotional states are destructive or promote illness”. (Lazarus, 1991, p. 406)

More importantly anger is among the negative emotions, which are most related to moral behavior. Although anger and aggression are two different terms it is obvious that the former may have been cause of the latter in a considerable amount of situations. Its likelihood changes from one person to another, as well as culture to culture, but yet few people can deny the relationship between two. In seeking an answer to the question *is there virtue in anger*, Graham Haydon, too, confirms that the relationship between anger and violence is worth thinking about. (Haydon, 1999, p. 66)

So, can we say that in most situation, in which there is a deliberate violation of a basic moral rule, what actually happens with regard to the tension between individual and society is a lose-lose behavior? To the extent that we can define “self-interest” in terms of “health”, which is an intrinsic an ultimate value for many people, we can say so. Of course there are some people, who perceive their personal well-being as to more depend on other factors than their psychophysical health. So they can live a selfish and immoral life as much as they can, at the expense of experiencing painful and unhealthy emotions. To what extent these kinds of people will act immorally depends strongly on how successful their habituation is. The more successful one is in developing positive emotional habits the less one gets into conflict situations and the less harm on oneself.

IV. Can education be responsive to development of desirable emotional habits?

I have discussed so far that emotions can play an important role in human life in handling personal-moral conflicts between self-regarding and others-regarding actions. However, prerequisite of this, as I have argued before, has been a successful development of emotional habits. In what ways can education contribute to successful completion of this task?

I think there are mainly two tasks that education should undertake to help young members of society grow up with a clear understanding of both their society and its shared values and of themselves as an organic part of a social and ecological system. Accordingly, the first task is to create an educational environment, in which pupils find a realistic picture of their society and its values in terms of which an appropriate emotional habituation can be possible. What is crucial here is that the educational environment should be as realistic as it can be so that *interaction* (not only human interaction but interaction with the environment as well) can be experienced truly as it is in *everywhere*. Once such an environment created transmission of values is no longer the task of a separate moral education. It would rather be the implication of being in this environment, acting and habituation.

However, one might argue that there is no room remaining for critical reflection and growth in this account of education and whole education is reduced to reproduction of existing social order with its goods, as well as its evil. To meet this difficulty I want to come one more time to Dewey since his notion of education is one which most likely to embrace a coherent and smooth transformation of social values to personal-emotional habits, including also those habits of critical inquiry. Murphey writes in his preface to *Human Nature and Conduct*:

It is obviously through education that habits are formed and culture transformed from one generation to another. But is also through education that those habits of deliberation, critical inquiry, dramatic rehearsal, empirical verification can be created, and "cake of custom" can be, as it were, shaped before it hardens. (Dewey, 1922, p. xx)

According to Rorty, who is known as a devoted follower of Dewey, one of the greatest contributions of Dewey to the theory of education is to help us get rid of the idea that education is a matter of either inducting or educating truth. Rather, Rorty writes, the main function of both primary and secondary education is to familiarize the young with what their elders take to be true, whether it is true or not. (Rorty, 1999, p. 118) But non-vocational higher education, Rorty claims, "is a matter of inciting doubt and stimulating imagination, thereby challenging the prevailing consensus". (ibid, p. 118)

Unlike the first one, the second task of education requires much

more deliberation, and significantly different organization of educational content. In the light of the discussion carried out so far, the second task of education is to be considered as, in a sense, a preventive intervention to increase the pupil's awareness of self, of her mental and bodily responses to the emotions, emotional habits, and to all other habits in general. The basic assumption here, which has been the premise of my whole argument too, is that we are capable of developing positive emotional habits out of which both happy (reads as healthy) and socially approved life can evolve.

V. Difficulties of the account

I think a preliminary analysis of the argument I have developed so far would mark at least four basic assumptions, soundness of which is open to discussion. Nevertheless, before proceeding with these difficulties and possible answers to them, I want to emphasize that emotions alone are obviously far from being a sufficient solution to very complex practical problems of modern society. But yet, I want to argue that, given Dewey's idea that much of what and how we do is simply habitual, the possibility of developing desirable emotional habits has become more crucial, especially in the talk of education. If Dewey is right in being so anxious about the importance of habits with regard the role that they play in social and moral life, then thinking seriously about the possibility of developing desirable emotional habits can no longer be a matter of preference, but of necessity. Therefore, one can argue at least for the unnegligible contribution of desirable emotional habituation to the idea of socioecological togetherness and for the role of education in the overall picture.

The first difficulty in this account is about the argument that acting in accord with the society's shared values is by nature both self and others regarding considering its potential for leading to happy or healthy emotions. The first assumption here is that shared values are something that is necessarily obvious to anybody living in that society. The second assumption is that every action, which is in accord with the shared values, should result in happy or healthy emotions.

These assumptions seem to be open to objection. Regarding the first assumption, one might say for instance, values are something that are always in conflict, and there is not an easy way for anyone to see what values are those which are supposed to be free from tension. But, I do not think that we have in such a hopeless situation to not have any amount

of 'consensus' in society. This would be thinking that the society exists on merit of police forces alone, and that there is nothing else contributory to existing picture, that there is nothing positive embedded in personal relations and/or individual predisposition. The pessimistic tendency to see the society in the midst of a serious values crisis goes hand to hand with the idea that there is no real consensus. This might be the result of what Haydon writes, "There is a certain picture of the role of values in society which lends itself to talk of a crisis". (Haydon, 1993, p. 1) Yet, Haydon takes a more optimistic route and argues for the possibilities of creating a philosophical agenda to understand and help others (educators) understand the very nature of the values underlying the society.

Thus we may assume that there is at least a consensus, for instance, that the rule against murdering is "so fundamental as to be utterly taken for granted". (Haydon, 1999, p. 19) Regarding some others such as 'abortion' or some simpler ones like stealing a newspaper's TV guide (say one need only a TV guide and does not want to pay for the newspaper) we may not be as confident as how we were in the extreme case of murdering. However, this shows at the same time that the more morally disputable the action is the less important it is in its *social* consequences.

The second assumption is also arguable. One might say that not every immoral action is necessarily against self-interest, even when there is a proper emotional habituation and when self-interest is basically considered in terms of psychophysical health. One might claim, for instance, that there are at least some emotionally neutral immoral actions, after which the agent suffers neither from unhealthy emotions nor any specific physiological response.

One possible way of meeting this difficulty is to refer back to the society, and try to understand the value structure of it. Some values might be paramount in one society, while not in the other. In the same way both the hierarchy of and the way of habituating into the common values may change from one society to another. Likewise, some other social dynamics such as how traditional a society is or how open it is to external influence could be very important in evaluating values-action-emotion chain and its implications for both society and the individual. In those religiously or traditionally driven societies, for instance, pre-married sexual experience is not only considered as immoral action, but also places a very heavy burden particularly on the shoulders of young women. For a single

woman, who is a member of a traditional society of this kind, acting immorally and feeling badly sick come never apart.

However, the same does not apply of course to a western society, where 'being a member of the society' is completely different than traditional society. But, it can still be claimed that an appropriate emotional habituation can be accomplished in any society based on the 'paramount' values so that the individual can see a natural harmony between what is good for her and in what ways she is supposed to act.

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