

The Importance of Ethics and its Relevance to Challenges of Global Education

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Abstract

The article focuses on one of the dominant issues of higher education – moral education, and its significance in the process of globalization of education. How are these two interlocked in a broader context? How is morality understood and interpreted by American scholars and philosophers? How should ethical concerns be applied in a realm of higher education? Globalization of education demands that a common ground for morality – based on a system of universally recognized policies and rules should be established. Knowledge, based on recent achievements in science and humanities, has become the most powerful vehicle to override irrational social constructs which are inconsistent with universal ethical and moral norms. Application of cultural relativism when teaching and practicing morality at the universities might lead to some miscommunication among the university population; on the other hand, tolerance towards differences is one of the fundamental principals of a democratic society. Universities are determined to achieve global standards through excellence in performance. This aim could not be achieved unless the university society has full understanding of cultural differences and expresses its tolerance and good will to find its place in a multicultural environment. The universities that are dedicated to high ethical standards reap many rewards, including high employee commitment, stronger commitment of the students and alumni, enhanced reputation, and sustained long-term performance. Ethics in education is a solid foundation of university change and improvement which can continue only in an atmosphere of confidence and fairness.

Keywords: Moral education, University ethics, cultural relativism, common moral decencies, ethical relativism, globalization of education, ethics and multicultural education

Introduction

How can schools and higher education institutions inspire and teach students to be moral people, take responsibility for others, pursue justice, and sacrifice for important principles?

Schools in the United States started taking a value-free approach in the latter half of the 20th century, leaving the job of teaching morals to the students' parents and churches. However, according to Studies in Social and Moral Development and Education, not addressing morals, or character as it is now referred to, in the school setting resulted in behavior and discipline problems as well as a drop in grades. Moral education helps students to find the way in the complex moral situations they encounter throughout their life time determining their success and peaceful coexistence in the society.

Students' low academic achievements, lack of enthusiasm and motivation are often linked with the problem of deficiency of moral education at secondary and higher educational levels.

The reasons of students' misconduct towards their mentors which ultimately lead to violation of teacher -student ethical relationship can be caused by a number of reasons which vary from culture to culture. Most universities in Georgia do not have a code of ethics, and the students are not often aware what kind of punishment they will get in case they violate ethical norms. Though reasons of unhealthy ethical climate may vary, still the basis of unethical behavior of the students is due to ineffective system of moral education in Georgian schools and universities, which often has negative affect on graduates' life performance at workplace or elsewhere.

The present problem is to identify the common basis for ethical norms in higher education institutions which aims to develop high morality among the students of different nationalities, culture and religions.

The conception of morality as a system of objective, universally binding rules has come under attack in our era from the social science (Shipka & Minton, 2004, p. 243). Ruth

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Benedict, a noted cultural anthropologist, a representative of ethical relativism, observed that forms of behavior vary so extensively from culture to culture that no universally approved practices can be found (ibid, 2004, p. 243).

I. The Search for Objectivity

Globalization of education demands that a common ground for morality – based on a system of universally recognized policies and rules should be established. Knowledge, based on recent achievements in science and humanities, has become the most powerful vehicle to override irrational social constructs which are inconsistent with universal ethical and moral norms.

The first giant step in the search for objectivity in morality was taken by the Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle. Plato saw clearly that morality must be broken from religion and made into an independent intellectual enterprise. Aristotle's ethics is the ethics of self-realization as he discovered that human beings are equipped by nature to pursue intellectual activities. Humans are rational animals. Therefore, the good life, the life of happiness, must consist in rational activities. Moral virtue then is the state of character that leads to intelligent and rational choices in our pursuit of happiness (Philosophy, p. 266). Aristotle brought down morality from the heavens and said that the source of value is within our own nature. Human nature is not intrinsically corrupt - it is intrinsically good. Furthermore, we possess the power to become happy and virtuous. Virtue is a result of training, or the application of intelligence to living. The total effect of Aristotle's thought is to ennoble humanity and to increase personal responsibility (Noddings, 1998, p. 12).

The eighteenth century German philosopher, Emmanuel Kant believed that key to moral objectivity lay in the rationality of humans. Kant's moral theory is called a rationalistic theory of value because he believes that reason alone, through investigation of our moral concepts, can discover what we ought to do. Love of duty is the only morally respectable motive for action.

John Stuart Mill, one of the outstanding thinkers of the nineteenth century, advocated utilitarianism as the basis for the social reforms. The core idea of the theory is that happiness of an individual is intrinsically valuable, and that each person ought to be concerned with the happiness of others. The foundation of morals is "utility" or the "greatest happiness principle"; and actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness; wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. Happiness and freedom from pain are the only things desirable as ends; and that all desirable things are desirable either for pleasure inherent in themselves, or as a means to the promotion of pleasure and the prevention of pain (Philosophy, p. 296).

The students' misconduct towards representatives of ethnic minorities in recent years has raised interest in their moral responsibilities. Moral duties – determined by categorical imperative by Kant ideally suits to the assumption that action is right, according to Kant, if an agent can imagine the action as something that he or she would want everyone to do in similar circumstances.... Whatever can be so universalized into a law for everyone - is right. Of course, this is Kant's version of the Golden Rule - "treat your friend as you want to be treated".

Cultural relativism is a theory about the nature of morality. Cultures vary widely regarding their customs and traditions; the theory of cultural relativism studies cultural differences in different societies and refer them as "cultural differences argument". To many philosophers, a belief that different cultures have different moral codes has seemed to be the key to understanding morality. But it is debatable whether it is persuasive or a sound argument from a logical point of view. On the other hand, there are values that have been identified as common for thousands of different cultures, such as protection of their children and truth telling, which is absolutely necessary for meaningful communication. Prohibitions against murder and some other moral rules vital for the survival could be identified as common across societies. The idea of universal truth in ethics, relativists argue, is a myth, as different customs of different societies cannot be judged as correct and incorrect, for that we must have an independent standard of right and wrong by which they may be judged. There is no such independent and objective standard to judge rightness or morality of cultural and historical traditions: every standard is culture-bound, and consequently different societies have different moral codes.

We could decide whether actions are right or wrong just by consulting the standards of our society. When we judge the other society we use "our" standards, but the question is whether it is considered as "ethically justified" by other cultures. This approach is not considered by cultural relativists. According to relativists' theory, imperfectness of the society, such as, slavery or anti-Semitism, whenever they occur cannot be criticized by other culture based on cultural differences argument.

The above mentioned dilemma takes a broader character when put into the realm of university population. Application of cultural relativism when teaching and practicing morality at the universities might lead to some miscommunication among the university population; on the other hand, tolerance towards differences is one of the fundamental principals of the democratic society. Universities are determined to achieve global standards through excellence in performance. The aim could not be achieved unless the university society has full understanding of cultural differences and expresses its tolerance and good will to find its place in a multicultural environment.

Ethical relativism is based on the assumption that ethical systems are arbitrary conventions that have no logical basis in human nature or any other objective fact. Therefore morality varies from culture to culture, and each culture's morality is correct for it, for there are no criteria for determining which, if any, is the superior system of rules. Social scientists have long been aware of the disastrous effects of one culture rigidly imposing its system of morality on another. The same act may not have the same meaning in different cultural contexts because of divergent beliefs about the world.

James Rachels, an American philosopher, suggests that if we probe deeply enough into the beliefs that give meaning to different cultural practices, we may find a common network of values. It is not an exaggeration to call ours the era of relativism. Never before in the history of thought have so many intelligent and educated people rejected belief in a universal, objective system of values. According to James Rachels, Moral chaos is the inevitable consequence of a godless universe. Many eminent thinkers simply believe that the logical problems confronting an objective ethics are overwhelming. The representatives of the objectivist tradi-

tion in ethics are Paul Kurtz, Tara Smith, Immanuel Kant, and John Stuart Mill, and others (Rachels, 2004, p. 253).

Today, many secular moralists assert that "morality is deeply rooted in the common moral decencies— related to a person's moral behavior in society and ethical excellences— as they apply to a person's own life. Paul Kurtz, a well-known humanist philosopher, holds that morality is independent of religion, that is, that we can discover objective moral standards and follow them successfully without becoming religious believers (Kurtz, 2004, p. 250). The common moral decencies are trans-cultural in their range and have their roots in generic human needs. They, no doubt, grow out of the long evolutionary struggle for survival and may even have some socio-biological basis. Though they may be lacking in some individuals or societies, their emergence depends upon certain preconditions of moral and social development. Here is a list of the moral decencies which should be common for people regardless their culture, religion or traditions. Moral decencies involve:

- Personal integrity, that is telling the truth, being sincere, candid, frank, and free of hypocrisy; keeping one's promises, honoring pledges, living up to agreements; and being honest.

- Trustworthiness - we manifest loyalty to our relatives, friends and co-workers, and we should be dependable, responsible and reliable.

- Decencies of benevolence, which involves manifesting goodwill toward other human beings and having apposite concern for them. We have an obligation to be a benevolent, that is, kind, sympathetic, and compassionate. We should lend a helping hand to those in distress and try to decrease their pain and suffering and contribute positively to their welfare.

- Principle of fairness. We should show gratitude and appreciation for those who deserve it. A civilized community will hold people acknowledgeable for their deeds, insisting that those who wrong others do not go completely unpunished. This also involves the principle of justice and equality in society.

- "Tolerance is also a basic moral decency: we should allow other individuals the right to their beliefs, values, and styles of life, even though they may differ from our own. We should try to cooperate with others, seeking to negotiate differences peacefully without resorting to hatred or violence" (Kurtz, 2004, p. 251).

The common moral decencies express general rules which should be guiding principles for any member of civil society. Though individuals or nations may deviate from practicing them, they nonetheless provide general parameters by which to guide our conduct. Those principles are not absolute and may at times conflict; Morally developed human being accept them and attempt to live by them because they understand that some personal moral sacrifices may be necessary to avoid conflict in living and working together. Practical moral wisdom thus recognizes the obligatory nature of responsible conduct. The common moral decencies refer to how we relate to others, our inter-social morals. But there are a number of important humanistic values that we should strive in our personal lives. These personal traits of character provide some balance in life. What are they?

First is the autonomy, or what Ralph Waldo Emerson

called self-reliance. This means a person's ability to take control of his or her own life. This means a person's ability to take control of his or her own life to accept responsibility for one's own feelings, marriages or career. How he or she lives and learns, values and cherishes. Such a person is self-directed and self-governed. A person's autonomy is an affirmation of one's freedom. Second, intelligence and reason are high on the scale of values. To achieve the good life we need to develop our cognitive skills and good judgment about how make wise, and at the same time moral choices. Third is the need for self-discipline over the person's passions and desires. We must satisfy our desires, emotions and needs in moderation, under the guidance of rational choices, recognizing the harmful consequences that imprudent choices can have upon ourselves and others. Fourth, a self-respect is vital to psychological balance. We have to develop some appreciation for who we are as individuals and a realistic sense of our own identities. Fifth, and high on the scale of values, is creativity. This is closely related to autonomy and self-respect, for the independent person has some confidence in one's own power and is willing to express his/her own unique talents. A creative person is willing to be innovative and has an enthusiasm for life that involves adventure and discovery. Sixth, we need to develop high motivation, a willingness to enter into life and undertake new plans and projects. A motivated person finds life interesting and exciting. Seventh, we should adopt a positive and affirmative attitude toward life. We need some measure of optimism that what we do will matter. Although we may suffer failures and defeats, we must believe that we shall overcome and succeed despite adversity. Eighth, an affirmative person is capable of some *joie de vivre*, or joyful living. And appreciation for the full range of human pleasures – from the so-called bodily pleasures such as food and sex to the most ennobling and creative of aesthetic, intellectual and moral pleasures. The intrinsic value we seek to achieve is eudaimonia: happiness or well-being, it is an active, not a passive process of performing our talents, needs and wants (Kurtz, 2004, p. 251).

As the proponents of secular moralists assert, the end of life is to live fully and creatively, sharing with others the many opportunities for joyful experience and moral conduct. The meaning of life is not to be discovered only after death in some hidden, mysterious real. On the contrary, it can be found by eating succulent fruit of the Tree of Life and by living in the here and now as fully and creatively as we can.

The role of ethics in globalization of education.

What is globalization of education and how is the system of common moral decencies which express general principles and rules could be applied to it?

"Globalization of education refers to the worldwide discussions, processes, and institutions affecting local educational practices and policies" (Spring, 2009, p.1). The events are happening on a global scale that affects national schools and higher education systems across the world. The global superstructure of the education is not constant and it is in the process of change nourished through different education cultures and mentality, affecting local education systems in its way. Global education superstructure is comprised of international organizations, (such as the World Bank), multinational educational corporations and schools that directly and indirectly influence education systems. Good examples are: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), The World Trade Organization WTO, UNESCO and other international organizations. Many arguments support globalization of education to some extent.

For educational qualifications to be of value in the global economy some standardization of the educational ladder and curricula is necessary. Mass Schooling is the predominant model of education in the world today. It pervades every part of people's lives in modern society and creates a cultural education unparalleled in human existence (Spring, 2009, p. 11). Francisco Ramires argues that world culture of education developed as a part of an increasing emphasis on global identities and goals. Spread of Western-style schools around is a result of European cultural imperialism. Western schooling dominates the world. Global uniformity of schooling provides entrance into the global economy and global community. There's a threat that creation of global education uniformity will be used to legitimize the power of rich nations. In this context the problem of integrity and ethics becomes more valuable.

The US organization Achieve Inc., organized for the purpose of school reform, declared: "High school is now a front line in America's battle to remain competitive on the increasingly competitive international competitive stage" (Spring, 2009, p. 3). This declaration suggests the importance of education as an economic investment and linkage between education and globalization process, which alongside with scientific and technical civilization will contribute to the development of a learning society. The emphasis on education leads to the important question – How should global education reflect multiculturalism? International organizations are promoting global education programs emphasizing the problem of multiculturalism. The "Culturalists" in education stress the existence of different "knowledges" or different ways of seeing and knowing the world and the lending and borrowing of the educational ideas (Spring, 2009, p. 14). Global uniformity of schooling provides entrance into the global economy, but at the same time it should reflect cultural aspects of different nationalities, thus nourishing global education and making it understandable and appealing to the millions who are to build human capital worldwide. The presence of multiculturalism in global education is closely linked with ethics in education, based on universal system of ethics which has to systematize and categorize global education.

Next to globalization of education, the term "knowledge economy" emerged which advocates that nations should invest increased finances in education to broaden the opportunity of the nation develop in full potential and create valuable part of the global workforce. The goal of education is also to lead a person to become social capital which is a part of human capital. To achieve this end, the learning should become increasingly ethical or moral in relationship to others in the context of promoting civil liberties. Education should embrace social aspects, particularly combating gender equality problems, as a necessary to develop an international workforce. Any member of the social capital should conduct his/her interaction with society based on a system of rules, the secular system of common moral decencies.

Many theories, such as progressive and religious educational models, present valid arguments that could reveal weaknesses of global educational uniformity. The proponents of "Culturalist theory" argue that local communities and nations can change and adapt educational ideas in the global flow (Spring, 2009, p. 206). The central point in the globalization of the education will be moral and ethical concerns because whatever models or principals are to be applied they rest on ethical interaction of humans.

While many people feel that being ethical is just com-

mon sense, the complexity of our society requires a more educated approach to understanding ethics, especially in the universities and workplace. A code of ethics of the majority of universities worldwide provide students with the norms of ethics, telling them what is right and wrong in a multicultural education context. The knowledge of ethics is important to the community of any university because without a commitment to trust, honesty, and integrity the foundation to global education cannot be laid. The universities that are dedicated to high ethical standards reap many rewards, including high employee commitment, stronger commitment of the students and alumni, enhanced reputation, and sustained long-term performance.

The university, along with professional associations, monitors and applies sanctions in response to violations of normative practices in scholarship, teaching, and research. There are a variety of agencies that address academic or research misconduct, ethics in research, scholarship, teaching issues, and other.

II. Conclusion

Generally, university policies often deal with relationships between students and faculty, incidents of racial and sexual harassment, plagiarism, fraud and conflict of interest in research. Plagiarism is wrong, and should not be condoned. Cases of plagiarism strongly affect the University community. The normal sanction for plagiarism is suspension of the student from the University. In reference to this problem, Elisabeth Brocking, Virginia Commonwealth University professor states in her comments to the present article that, "most U.S. universities will expel a student, especially a graduate student, in serious cases of plagiarism. If the student obtained a degree using plagiarized material, the degree would be withdrawn".

There are number of ethical issues of which one should be aware when teaching. These include, but are not limited to, confidentiality, discrimination on the basis of religion, gender, sexual orientation, also favoritism, and exploitation. Good teaching requires that you both act responsibly and teach your students how to act responsibly. This is just a brief suggestion of the major ethical issues the higher education institutions deal with. Universities are responsible to assist students develop important humanistic values and personal traits of character described above during their studies which will ensure some balance in their personal and professional life. Globalization of education demands that a common ground for harmonization of ethical problems in higher education settings based on universal truth and ethics of humanism should be accepted.

Ethics in education is a solid foundation of university change and improvement which can continue only in an atmosphere of confidence and fairness. Relationships between teachers and students based on ethical norms, mutual trust and respect is crucial for the university success; and academic integrity is the foundation for its good reputation and progress. The universities, a home for the students and teachers of different nationalities, religions and cultures should be founded on the respect, acceptance and appreciation of difference approach to building and maintaining a tolerant society. The study and practices of ethics based on universal civil code address the most fundamental values inherited in a human being and, consequently plays a crucial role in formation of the citizen of democratic society able to

share achievements of global education.

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