

COMMUNITARIAN PERSPECTIVE ON AUTONOMY AND HUMAN IDENTITIES

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ABSTRACT

Autonomy is an idea originated from that the enlightenment movement and different philosophers viewed it with their perceptions over centuries. Communitarianism is a broad social philosophy which is contrasting with individualism and liberalism in all fields including educational ends. This paper following literature review as research methodology gives the viewpoint of some communitarian and feminist theorists about educational aims and how it is distinct from liberal theory and also counts on personal opinion right through. The middle line progress is advocated that the communitarian educational sighting suppressed individualities but the 'atomic individual' trend without communal considerations is also not that could be supported, and combined procession should be devised to approach including autonomy as an aim of education.

Keywords: Communitarianism, Aim of Education, Educational Social Philosophy.

INTRODUCTION AND DISCUSSION

Autonomy is attributed as a power to exercise free will, rationality, and intellect in all spheres of life by several philosophers over a long period. The ability to be directed by reasons rather than external factors is viewed and named as an enlightenment by Kant, which consequently heaves from self-imposed immaturity. Kant also emphasizes the courage to use one's understanding to come out of the state of 'immaturity' (Kant, 1784, p.1). He thinks it a hard for an individual to accomplish and it involves the courage to get rid of dogmas of conventions. Most of the time individuals follow the easy answers provided by the experts instead of using their own rationality. Further, Kant also sees this usage of free will differently in both public and private life.

The idea of autonomy to me revolves around the individual self and how this act and who direct it both in commonplace and important matters of life. Kant suggests the answer as moral laws supported by one's own reason and Dearden rds it as one's 'own activity of mind' (Dearden, 1975, P.63) that one's thoughts and actions can be explained with reference to his own "choice, deliberation, decision ... or reasoning" (Dearden, 1975, P. 74-75). Further, he regards freedom and independence as prerequisites for autonomy.

Autonomy is an important debate in the philosophy of education, and it has no doubt a great significance as an aim of education, Dearden calls it a new aim of education which promotes 'self-direction' and 'self-activity' (Dearden, 1975, P.1). The essay will try to critically discuss educational thoughts presented by the communitarian and feminist viewpoint to response the enlightenment ideas of autonomy as an aim of education. Communitarianism promotes that developing counties like Pakistani should make changes in the education system according to their culture, social and organizational context (Oplatka, 2018).

Communitarianism resembles an intellectual political movement which is based on the philosophy to address and spread policies and advances towards community feelings and social cohesion (Golby, 1997, P.125) without instrumental reasons unlike individualism, its fundamental value is individual liberty, which is conceived mostly in a negative term, consequently, leads liberalism as a theory of politics and not as a theory of society (Smith, 1996).

“It does not produce a community of friends who share common views about the nature of good and evil, rather it transforms enemies into civil associates who, driven by their own self-interest, join together in the political association for the attainment of security”. (Smith,1996, P.3-4).

The debate, however, has noticeable implications for education, autonomy is the central value, which is embedded in liberal theory to maintain its liberal values as ‘freedom, rights, democracy, legitimacy and justice’ (Kerr, 2002, P.13). Autonomy as a concept of education is separated from social settings by liberals and considered it individualistic initiative which is quite unacceptable for both communitarians and feminists (Martin, 2022). The difference is quite vivid from the outset of viewing the individual from both liberal and communitarian angles and the communitarian claims which are more arresting to my mind that ‘self’ is rather cannot be defined by isolating from social factors e.g., ‘cultures, traditions, and history with others’ (Kerr, 2002, P.13). I want to refer the point made by Dearden as ‘choice’ and freedom is the essence of autonomy but if one has a very restricted range of choices and choice is more meaningful with the facet of comparison which enables us to justify our choices.

Kerr regards autonomy as a central feature of education in democracies while the liberal education theory does not consider social elements therefore disapproved by several communitarian Philosophers Charles Taylor calls it ‘characterless’ and Alasdair Macintyre views individuals’ decisions in the dominion of ‘one’s personal history. Feminists also thrust aside liberal autonomy by considering it as ‘abstract’ and artificial. In my view, the important point is the moral implications of emotions, personal relationships and ethical considerations which are not catered by liberals as taken unimportant in the exercise of free will provide communitarians unyielding stand to assail as Kerr (2002) states, “...they describe persons free of any social connections and ...that these conceptions are vulnerable to this charge, I suggest that they are mistaken” (Kerr, 2002, P.15).

Kant’s concept of autonomy is characteristically moral as compared to Dearden and Callan which seems alluring to Kerr. A strike is considering autonomy as a stipulation for ‘self-government’ which should morally justify one’s preferences. Moral autonomy should be accepted as an imperative necessity because that has educational implications both morally and socially for the reason that morality involves mostly social interfaces (Kerr 2002). I think presenting autonomy and finding its components in seldom happening situations like the example given by Kerr is not an ideal one, practically speaking education is to promote autonomy serving such qualities as observing for and being devoted to ‘truth, honesty, and fairness in liberal societies.

Communitarianism shifts the focal point from individual to commitment towards a community, which is differently sighted among socialists, conservatives, and liberals. The radical socialist vision of community is comparatively ‘unitary’, universal equality and agreement based given by Philosophers like Marx and Morris. Miller (1992) is trying to elucidate the inconsistent socialists’ view, which they adhere to as a contiguous community; socialists believe it facilitates obtaining their objectives including fair allocation of resources. Alternatively, Miller gives the idea, of nationality as a form of community, which is hard to agree with socialists. Further, he is presenting the view of ‘active citizenship’ which best suits modern societies that avert ‘national identities’ based on shared beliefs from ‘becoming merely traditional. Although in the thesis he pins down elements of myths involved however he is more concerned with the functional importance of these concepts of nationality and citizenship as a form of community (Miller, 1992, p.90-91).

Miller’s conceptions to me indicate an education which is aiming and promoting the ‘common good of the community in the shape of national identity and citizenship rather in more practical terms. He also

raises the ethical issue that common loyalty does not mean being immoral to others. Although nationality is ascribed as a manufactured item the potential question is the 'rational reflection' of these national loyalties. I think nationality as an idea of the community should be taught on the principles of accommodating divergent sections of the community and this view spreads the aim of sacrificing one's interests and 'abstract autonomy' over the collective communal ends (refer to class discussion summary on module). In addition to the idea of a nationality different from nationalism as discussed by Miller, I want to refer to the point, humanity is divided into several nations and tribes for the very reason that each can be distinguished from the rest but probably it does not mean that nations should fasten their pride and false beliefs like presuming better than others. This is an important standpoint of communitarian education philosophy which Miller contradicts but humanity and character teaching should be above other points, including nationality identity. I am not saying that there is any harm to uphold one's national identity but considering others inferior is unsettling in my view.

Friedman (1993) condemns communitarian theorists for their naive attitude toward conventional communal followings that sustained the subordination of women. Friedman describes consideration of the importance of intentional communities, in contrast to those in which we contribute instinctively due to the 'contingencies of our upbringings'. Finally, she maintained that friendship is a relationship that can promote personal growth and can seek social changes (Friedman, 1993).

Friedman along with many other feminist philosophers try to reconcile with communitarians by highlighting and emphasizing the unjust communal beliefs regarding women, in more direct words feminists want to ensure 'nonoppressive and enrich the lives of women which are not addressed in communitarianism. But I think that liberal Philosophy probably can better protect the feminists' apprehensions, for example, individual autonomy and individual rights are those decisive standards which can be structured to apply to lessen this female 'oppression' and 'social subordination' (Friedman, 1999). Further in situations where social relationships are helping in individual development and when we apply these developments in the individual women's selves, it would strengthen to resist the control and oppression of the communities and other relationships which are referred to as 'nonvoluntary communities' (Friedman, 1999). Here I want to establish a middle view, by amalgamating both extremes a possible halfway approach could be possible to suggest potential difficulties faced by individuals in communities.

Communitarians believe that the value of the social self is not realized by liberals in their educational thinking compared with Rawls's 'atomic individual' arguing that no government should have such rights to accomplish any 'social engineering' (Bell, 2004). If we take our example to understand the liberal view while living in a community how many decisions, we can take for ourselves, are we free to choose our blood relations and can stand firm against the common feelings among group members, but there are many others decisive measures which liberal theory can better guide with individualistic autonomy including choices of careers, partners and personal objectives (Bell, 1993, P.6). But is it not more convincing that individuals and community both laid the foundation to help each other in the real sense, I want to refer those communal customs and traditions based on superstitions which more often negatively affected individual life and those self-oriented autonomous decisions which are made without any communal consideration. I think the need is to devise a midway approach in determining the aim of education which should, on one hand, free the negative social and psychological effects related to the atomistic tendencies of the modern liberal self (ibid, 1993, P.7) and on the other hand ensure the room to exercise autonomy with social consensus.

“The sociological or political justification for such a view is clearly that individualism has gone too far or had its day; it is time to redress the balance between individualism or liberalism on the one hand and the collective good or the health of the social fabric on the other”. (Golby, 1997, P.128).

Autonomy as the aim of education is differently sighted in different communities firstly, I want to mention individual differences, difference of opinion is a liberal trade, however, every community have certain points where she needs a collective vision so the education within communities should promote and

develop certain common features to maintain its continuation otherwise there would be a constant threat to survival from close influential nations. Secondly, the history and its related feelings, if the country has a colonial history of oppression and has disputes with other neighbouring nations how would the atomized individual autonomy as an aim of education? Finally, the scarcity of resources and the fight for continued existence are some points where education shifts its purposes, and the autonomy of a person is subverted and directed towards the 'common good. I want to refer to the examples of those African nations where hunger has converted education as a weapon to fight against hunger and decrease (ibid, 1993).

Communitarians have certain sociological and political concerns (Ytrehus, 2019). as well to employ it with more belligerent philosophical discussion and in thinking towards 'autonomy as the aim of education such as 'common good' and collective schema may be diverse for different people within a community including metaphysical beliefs, situations where majority tends to suppress minority (Golby, 1997, P.129) which is in my view against the morality and character education which is contrarily more highlighted in communitarian agenda for education (Arthur 2000: 136-141). Similarly social, religious, or financial influential figures in communities may dominate and cause an effective mass which also grounds an unsettling situation (Gross, 2020). "The communitarian position is that it is anti-intellectual" (Golby, 1997, P.129) I do not agree with it fully though communitarianism does not instigate intellectualism intellectuals are more valued and operative within communities, often an intellectual is not intellectual for their own sake. However, the point has its meaning to me that always compromising for others represses one's intellectual self and contradicts an ability to think critically as a bona fide output of education (Youngmevittaya, 2019).

The question also crops up about the implications of both communitarian and liberal Philosophies in educational policies and determining the aim of education which is not clearly defined and regarded as 'more confusing than enlightening' (Hernández, & Castillo, 2022., Callan & White, 2003, p. 102). The educational implications for community ethos that demands controlled individuality and the whole notion of self-government are not innate from the point of view of implication to some extent (Keeney, 2007, P.13).

"The internal diversity of both liberalism and communitarianism ... there are sharp differences among theorists that generate divergent implications for education ..."

(Callan and White, 2003, P.102).

To conclude this enormous vibrant debate, I want to suggest that the communitarian's response to autonomy as an aim of education needs some improvisation, it needs to spare room to nourish personal thinking abilities, but the education should also have the characteristics in itself that these personal thinking should not be established above the communal considerations.

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