

Knowledge Versus Action Conflict: A Dilemma Impinging upon Plato's Theory of Morality that Justifies Intensive Moral Education for Teachers in Kenya

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Abstract: *This paper examines knowledge versus action conflict as a moral dilemma in education which impinges on Plato's theory of morality that justifies intensive moral education for teachers in Kenya. Teachers are expected to adhere to a Code of Conduct and Ethics but philosophical analysis of the teachers' behaviour reveals that they engage in acts of conduct that violate moral principles and hence there is no correlation between possession of knowledge of virtue and resultant action which is contrary to what Plato espouses. In Plato's contention, once an individual is knowledgeable, virtue is axiomatic. The result shows that education must be intertwined with body and mind, focusing on imagination, nexus and praxis so as to make teacher trainees, and henceforth, act in conformity to their knowledge as propounded by Plato. When there is no direct correlation between possession of knowledge of virtue and actualization of moral actions, teacher education may be described as superficial in the sense that it does not stimulate the mind to reason and internalise moral values. The study, therefore, proposes inclusion of intensive moral education course in teacher education programmes in Kenya. Further research is needed on the relationship between body and mind in inculcating moral values.*

Keywords: Akrasia, Imagination, Nexus, Plato's theory of morality, Praxis

1. Introduction

This paper analyses Plato's theory of morality which gives prominence to possession of knowledge of virtue as a prerequisite to actualization of moral actions. It therefore seeks to establish the relationship between possession of knowledge of virtue and actualization of right actions, with regard to the teachers' compliance with the Code of Conduct and Ethics in Kenya.

The paper is divided into four sections. The first section deals with the background to the conception of morality whereas the second section dwells on the conflict between knowledge and action as manifested in Plato's theory of morality. The third section examines teachers' breach of the Code of Conduct and Ethics in Kenya, contrary to what is postulated in Plato's theory. The fourth section contains analysis of what the paper discusses and proposes an intensive moral education course to be included in the teacher education programmes.

2. Background to the Conception of Morality

The term morality refers to a public system for governing and regulating human behaviour (Audi, 1991). Morality focuses on realization of acceptable conduct among human beings by use of laid down rules and regulations, ideals and virtues. Morality is thus concerned with set standards or principles that guide human conduct (Gert and Gert, 2017). It then implies that morality is a universal concept that applies to all human beings in all cultures and societies. Bennaars (1993) explains that morality defines, guides and

regulates acceptable conduct among people. This is facilitated by setting of standards and norms of conduct, usually expressed in laws, rules and principles that the target group of people has to comply with. Kant's theory of morality holds that morality emanates from human thought. Human beings are endowed with unique capacity to reason and execute actions in conformity with their duty or obligations (Shakil, 2013). Kant's theory of morality conforms to that of Plato for they both give prominence on rationalism as the basis of objective morality. Plato believes that morality exists in form of metaphysical qualities (*forms*) which have to be attained through intellectual effort of *recollection*. Kant however contends that morality is a construct of the mind. It constitutes actions that are executed out of reasoned thought, and that they conform to one's duty or obligation. Immoral acts are then attributed to failure to attend to one's duty or obligation.

The concept of morality is one of the themes in Plato's works, *Protagoras* and the *Republic*. In the *Republic*, for instance, Plato attempts to answer the question of what the good life is. He explains that good life is the life of 'happiness,' a life where one lives virtuously.

3. Knowledge versus Action Conflict as Manifested in Plato's Theory of Morality

Plato (translated by MacDonald, 1945) equates morality to justice, which he believes encompasses all other aspects of morality. He contends that every person's goal in life is to attain happiness, which is associated with living a virtuous life. The happiness is in turn attained when one undergoes

intellectual training in order to attain knowledge. In Plato's *Meno* (translated by Grube, 2002), Socrates argues that virtue comprises knowledge of the good, which is attained through intellectual exercise. He contends that knowledge exists in the form of abstract qualities which he refers to as *ideas* or *forms*. These *forms* exist independently and can only be accessed through intellectual effort. Once in possession of the *forms* of the good, people translate this knowledge to the corresponding virtuous actions. However, one who acts otherwise demonstrates lack of the knowledge of virtue. Since virtue can be attained through intellectual exercise, it implies that it can be taught (Oniang'o (1994). Teaching is just a process of making one remember what had been planted in abstract *forms* in the soul before one is born, as explained by Plato (translated by Grube, 2002). Plato explains that *forms* are metaphysical entities that contain the true existence of things. The forms can't be perceived by the human sense organs because they are not subject to space existence and are hence intangible. Plato thus perceives two worlds of existence. First is the world of objects, perceived by the senses (the sensible world). He describes this world as a shadow of the true world. The second is the world of *forms*, which according to him, is the true and eternal world (Plato, translated by Price, 1967). In Plato's view, authentic knowledge is represented by the *forms or ideas*, which can only be accessed through *reminiscence or recollection*, a process through which the human soul is able to recall the *forms* implanted in it and it is analogous to teaching. It is an intellectual process of retrieving knowledge from the sub-conscious of the mind to the fore, as explained by Mackenzie (1985).

To demonstrate the relationship between the soul and virtue, Plato (translated by Waterfield, 1956) identifies the three-fold faculties of the human soul namely: the rational, the irrational and the spiritual. The manifestations of the faculties have direct connections to the human body in terms of behaviour where each has designated roles. The rational faculty does the reasoning and decision making. The spiritual part is auxiliary to the rational part, while the irrational part is the appetitive part that operates on the basis of bodily desires such as love, thirst and hunger among others. Socrates in the dialogue *Phaedo* (translated by Grube, 2002) maintains that the soul is immortal and divine, as opposed to the body, which is mortal and carnal. This implies that the body is subject to being influenced by passions and appetites to deviate from the norms. Virtue is hence an attribute of the soul.

Plato contends that the cardinal virtues of wisdom, courage, temperance and justice are characteristic of a virtuous person. These cardinal virtues are attained through critical reflection which leads to knowledge acquisition (Plato, translated by Waterfield, 1956). There exists superficial uniformity among the cardinal virtues, held by the central function of wisdom. Wise persons are those who reach informed decisions and subsequently opt to pursue righteousness. This is why Plato maintains that "knowledge is virtue while ignorance is vice." Plato considers immoral acts as forms of intellectual error committed out of ignorance. In the *Republic*, Plato (translated by Waterfield, 1956) reiterates the prominence of knowledge in relation to virtue. He argues that the greatest qualities in human life are

knowledge and virtue, which he believes are inseparable. Therefore a person's possession of knowledge of virtue definitely translates to virtuous actions (Plato, translated by MacDonald, 1945). Kiruki (2004) apportions these cardinal virtues to the distinctive faculties of the human soul. That is, wisdom corresponds to the rational faculty of the soul; courage is associated with the spiritual faculty; while temperance consists of the union between the spiritual and the appetitive faculties, under the rule of reason. Justice on the other hand is an overall virtue that is attained when all the three faculties of the soul effectively perform their designated roles.

Plato (translated by Waterfield, 1993) postulates that the rational faculty of the soul is in continuous struggle with the irrational faculty in an attempt to control the soul. When the rational faculty is in control, the state of harmony is restored within the soul and the human person at large. This state of harmony is manifested in an individual's moral conduct. However, when the irrational faculty overrides the rational faculty, then one's reasoning gets impaired, culminating in unacceptable behaviour. Plato (translated by Price, 1967) contends that a moral person is one in whom the rational faculty is in control of the other two faculties of the soul. So when the three faculties of the soul effectively execute their designated roles, a state of harmony (justice) is attained. Plato therefore conceives the three faculties of the soul as influencing people's actions and the particular action depends on the one that is predominant. One's actions therefore get tilted towards the predominant faculty, thus translating to the corresponding human behaviour. Plato maintains that the relationship among the three faculties of the soul is moderated by reason, which plays the role of maintaining the state of equilibrium in the soul. However, the appetitive faculty is in constant attempt to outdo the rational faculty in a bid to attain pleasure. In the event that the appetitive faculty succeeds, a person deviates from the rule of reason and indulges in immoral action(s). Therefore according to Plato, a person's moral conduct is a construct of the soul that manifests in overt behaviour. The human conduct is determined by the existing relationship among the three constituent parts of the soul. The conflicting interests among faculties of the soul are manifested in an individual's conflict between righteousness and wickedness. In the event that one's informed decision is swayed by passions, then they end up succumbing to them (passions) despite the fact that they are aware of how they are supposed to conduct themselves. This is what is referred to in philosophy as *akrasia*, the state of acting against one's well-reasoned judgment (Plato, translated by Price, 1967).

From the above discussions, it is evident that Plato's theory of morality conceives an individual as having both body and soul. Morality in a person is then attained when each of the three constituent parts of the soul effectively discharge their functions, under the control of the faculty of reason. In the event that the rational faculty is corrupted by the irrational faculty, a state of disharmony occurs in the soul, making the faculty of reason to be overridden by the latter faculty. Such a state is what Plato believes to lead to immoral behaviour in a person. For one to be moral, it requires that the rational faculty takes charge of the soul with the other two being subordinate to it.

Plato maintains that once a person has been educated the rational and the spiritual faculties of the soul check on the irrational faculty so that it doesn't override them. A moral person is one who has inner harmony among the three faculties of the soul. The ability to achieve such a state of equilibrium in Platonic view constitutes morality, whereas failure to do so amounts to immorality.

4. Teachers' Breach of the Code of Conduct and Ethics in Kenya

People are expected to be morally upright and it is assumed so in human societies. Stipulating how people should behave in a profession is provided to ease the harmonious relationship and this is why there is Teachers' Code of Conduct and Ethics and Teachers' Code of Regulations in Kenya. The codes regulate the relationship between the teacher and the learners, especially. The relationship among teachers and between the teacher and the employer is also covered; including the general public. The education that teachers undergo is considered an invaluable asset that makes them to uphold moral integrity.

It is paradoxical that moral behavior depicted by teachers conflicts with the norms and the stipulated codes. Many teachers have been dismissed in Kenya due to professional misconduct (Ng'oma & Simatwa, 2013, Nuland & Khandwale, 2006 and Oziambo, 2013). As explained by King'ori (2013), over 1000 teachers have misconduct cases that involve desertion of duty, sexual intercourse with the learners, embezzlement of school funds, examination irregularities, among other offences. In 2015 as indicated by the general public, 126 teachers were dismissed because of having sexual affairs with their learners whereas in 2016 the number reduced to 22 (Wanzala, 2016).

Apart from the immoral acts, punishment meted out to learners by teachers has raised concern despite the fact that physical punishment was banned in Kenya in 2001 through Legal Notice No.56 of the Kenya Gazette. Under Basic Education Act 2013, Section 36 (1), a learner is protected from any form of torture or violence. Unicef (2014) states that Kenya is among 39 countries of the world where teachers physically punish learners, contributing 47% of the violence.

The effects of teachers' misconduct manifested in immoral behaviour and subjecting learners to violence interfere with the provision of education. When teachers are under interdiction or dismissed, schools experience shortage of teachers resulting in inadequate teaching that contributes to poor performance in national examinations (King'ori, 2013). Indiscipline among learners could also be an issue because of the large number of learners manned by few teachers.

The knowledge-ignorance conflict is manifested in the noncompliance with the Code of Conduct and Ethics by some professional teachers in Kenya. Non-compliance also includes failure to handle learners professionally and avoid physical punishment. The law banning caning of learners is disregarded by some teachers.

A survey report on service delivery in primary schools by Oduor and Wamalwa (2016) reveals that caning contributes to at least 40 percent of all forms of punishment in the seven selected counties where the survey was conducted. In Baringo County, it stands at 48 percent, Busia 62 percent, Kajiado 50 percent, Kilifi 49 percent, Mombasa 45 percent, Nairobi 50 percent and Taita-Taveta 40 percent.

Although teachers are expected to comply with the dictates of their profession, are all teachers conversant with the rules and regulations that govern their conduct? Do all those who read them subsequently comply with them? Furthermore, professional ethics is not formally taught as a course in the Teacher Education programs in Kenya. However, upon completion of the course, the teachers' employer expects those joining the profession to read and comply with the Code of Regulations and the Code of Conduct and Ethics. Teacher Education programmes in Kenya generally tend to ignore the ethical component of the teaching profession, instead dwells on instructional competence among the student teachers (Kafu, 2011).

Perhaps the teachers' employer assumes that once educated, teachers develop moral integrity, besides academic and professional competence. Balogun (2008) considers an educated person as one with well integrated personality. With these attributes of education, it is noteworthy that teachers have to exhibit the said attributes and subsequently uphold moral integrity yet the situation in Kenya as explained above is, somehow, contrary to expectations. The knowledge of virtue does not always translate to execution of right actions.

5. Analysis

What is presented above deserves some analysis and suggestion for the way forward. What is it that makes teachers to be immoral? It has been demonstrated that education makes one virtuous and this is the contention of Plato. What type of education makes one virtuous? It is sound and deep education that touches an individual's psyche.

Education provided to teachers in teacher education institutions may be shallow or superficial because it does not strike one's mind and stimulates imaginations. When Plato describes education as a process that enables an individual to remember what had been planted in the soul before birth, the process of remembrance has to be devoid of superficiality. It must deeply touch the soul, which is equated with psyche or mind.

In ancient civilizations like that of Egypt, flogging and harsh conditions meted out to learners probably struck their minds but in modern education, advances in educational psychology do not recommend harsh treatment to the learners. Long years of training in ancient times probably were an important factor in sound education. For example, at the first world recorded university known as the Temple of Waset that was built around 1391 BCE, students had to learn for 40 years in order to graduate (Nantambu, nd). Many students did not complete their education, even Plato learnt there for only 11 years. If teacher trainees in teacher colleges

in Kenya could undergo many years of training, whereby moral education is discussed intensively then a change of mind to be morally upright could be achieved. On the other hand, many years of education for teachers in Kenya may not be the solution but the intensity of the training. Plato's training at the Temple of Waset was only for 11 years instead of the recommended 40 years, which means he only completed a quarter of the training. When akratic tendencies limit the teacher from being morally upright, in essence, the teacher lacks deep sound education that results from intensive training.

To make an activity intensive is to tackle the weakness of the will. The weakness of the will is posited to be both a philosophical and a psychological phenomenon, in the sense that it is metaphysical and behavioural. The education and training that address *akrasia* deal with both mind and body, where the mind is within the realm of metaphysics and the body is within psychology. The mind has to be intensively changed so as to change the behavior. It is posited that to intensively change the mind of a teacher to be morally upright, some tenets must be upheld.

The first tenet is to make the mind imagine. Flew (1999) explains that imagination is creative ordering of events in the mind resulting into the knowledge of virtue. When an individual imagines, the raw materials of the mind are ordered. It is an activity which is done freely without coercion. Teacher trainees can be tutored to imagine as many things as possible and in this sense those touching on moral behavior. They are encouraged to be free to imagine effects of being moral and immoral. They also engage their minds on the most appropriate virtuous route to follow. Imagination should be a continuous and intensive endeavour. Once the mind has been subjected to a phenomenon continuously, the mind unconsciously rehashes the phenomenon. This can be confirmed by dreams, formal and informal conversations, and the urge to do more imagination.

Once this tenet of imagination is fulfilled, the next tenet is nexus, which is a form of connections within the mind (Willcoxson, Manning, Johnston and Gething, 2011). The mind of the trainees is to form a web-like-structure connection with all issues pertaining to morality. The connection needs to deeply touch the mind with resultant automatic behaviour, ingrained in the nervous system. Once moral ideas are ingrained in the mind, the individual teacher trainee theorises and even dreams various alternatives that may prompt manifestation of good behaviour. Theorisation leads to the next and the last tenet which is praxis, meaning the practicability of nexus (Mautner, 2005 and Quinlan, 2012).

In praxis, the individual teacher trainee works with body and mind to fulfill moral precepts which they had imagined and theorised about. Here they can write essays on school's moral behaviour; they can dramatise or present this in art form. Praxis cements the relationship between the mind and the body thus making what is learnt to be deeply internalised and ensuring it is an ingredient of a teacher trainee's behaviour.

6. Conclusion

It is the conclusion of this paper that possession of the knowledge of virtue does not guarantee actualization of right actions unless knowledge and action are integrated body-mind postulates. Moral uprightness on teachers is a function of the mind that must work in uniformity with the body resulting in sound education which is premised on imagination, nexus and praxis. Superficial learning that glosses over morality as a topic does not strike human psyche and this makes action and knowledge divergent.

Moral education for teachers in Kenya requires sound approach that strikes human psyche. This will alter attitudinal dispositions for the better since it is education that develops both mind and body. More researches are needed to highlight the relationship between mind and body so that relevant syntheses arising from both teaching and learning processes can produce teachers of moral integrity who demonstrate seamlessly interwoven knowledge and action.

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