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Abstract

The digital age has brought about unprecedented technological advancements, transforming the way we live, learn, and interact. However, this rapid progress also raises important ethical concerns, particularly in modern education. As we embrace technology in the classroom, we must acknowledge the potential risks and challenges that accompany it. Issues such as digital citizenship, online privacy, cyber bullying, and intellectual property require careful consideration and thoughtful reflection. The study of ethics is crucial in navigating these complexities, as it provides a framework for evaluating right and wrong, good and bad. Ethics plays a vital role in shaping our educational experiences and outcomes, promoting responsible and inclusive approaches to teaching and learning. By investigating the complex relationships between technology, ethics, and education, we can foster a deeper understanding of the ethical dimensions of modern education and places man at the center. This paper seeks to explore the critical role of ethics in modern education, examining the ways in which ethical principles can guide our inter-personal relationship in the society and ethical practices in our educational system. This paper contributes to the ongoing conversation on ethics and education, highlighting the need for a more humanistic approach in the digital age. By rethinking ethics in modern education, it prioritizes the well-being and flourishing of both individuals and society. Ultimately, this paper argues that ethics in education must recognize the centrality of human experience and agency in the digital age.

Keywords: Ethics, Digital Age, Modern Education, Man As Ethical Being

INTRODUCTION

In today's digital age, the intersection of technology and ethics has become a pressing concern in modern education. As we navigate the vast expanse of the internet, social media, and digital tools, we are confronted with a myriad of ethical dilemmas that challenge our values, beliefs, and practices. The rapid pace of technological advancement has outpaced our ability to fully consider the ethical implications of our actions, leading to a growing need for a nuanced understanding of ethics in modern education.

As we embrace the benefits of technology in the classroom, we must also acknowledge the potential risks and challenges that accompany it. Issues such as digital citizenship, online privacy, cyber bullying, and intellectual property require careful consideration and thoughtful reflection. Moreover, the increasing reliance on technology raises important questions about the role of ethics in shaping our educational experiences and outcomes.

The study of ethics is of utmost importance because the importance of the question of right and wrong, good and bad in human conduct cannot be overemphasized.¹ Human beings are so constituted that it is not all kinds of actions that befit their nature and lead to happiness and self-fulfillment. Certain kinds of actions befit human nature, promote general well-being, and lead to happiness and self-fulfillment.² Other kinds of actions, on the other hand, are antithetical to human nature and militate against general well-being, happiness, and self-fulfillment. To live a moral life is the law of man's own very nature, and to throw this law to the winds and behave anyhow can never, in the final analysis, be in man's own interest.³

This paper seeks to explore the relationship between man and ethics in the digital age: the role of ethics in modern education, and examine the ways in which ethical principles can guide our conduct in the society and in our educational system by investigating the complex relationships between technology, ethics, education and the place of man in it.

WHAT IS ETHICS

There are certain actions which all of us would condemn and deem as morally wrong and ought not to be done by anybody. For example, armed robbery, embezzlement of public funds, bribery and corruption, stealing, neglect of one's duties, adultery, dishonesty, are typical immoral acts. Even those who indulge in these kinds of actions would agree that the actions are morally wrong; they know that they are wrong actions which nobody ought to perform; hence, they try to escape and avoid being caught.⁴ There are also certain kinds of actions which men would consider as morally right, for examples, fidelity to one's duties, respect for human life, hospitality, kindness, helping those in need, honesty, etc. But there are

¹ McNaughton, D., and P. Rawling. Benefits, Holism, and the Aggregation of Value. Cambridge university press, 2008.

² Aristotle. 350 B.C.E. *Nicomachean Ethics*.

³ Mill, J. S. 1863. *Utilitarianism*.

⁴ Singer, P. 1993. *Practical Ethics*. Cambridge University Press.

also certain kinds of action about which opinions differ. Some people consider them as wrong, while others consider them as right. Examples of such actions are contraception, abortion, euthanasia, masturbation, etc. Now, why do we consider certain actions as right and others as wrong? How do we decide which actions are right and which actions are wrong? What is the criterion or standard for making such judgments? What do we even mean when we say that a certain action is morally wrong? Is it up to the individual to decide for himself which actions he is to consider as right and which to consider as wrong? Is it true that "there is nothing good or bad but thinking makes it so," or are certain things good or bad irrespective of our thinking? What are the fundamental principles of morality and how do we come to know them? These and similar questions are the questions with which ethics deals with. What then is ethics?

Like philosophy itself, ethics has no univocal definition. It can be and has been, defined in various ways. It can be defined as the branch of philosophy which deals with the morality of human actions. For Kant it is the branch of philosophy which studies the norms of human behavior. Rachels⁵ defined it as the systematic study of the fundamental principles of the moral law; or as the normative science of human conduct.⁶

THE PURPOSE OF ETHICS

The task of ethics, according to the analytic school of philosophy, is simply the analysis and clarification of moral terms. The purpose of studying ethics, therefore, according to this school, is to know exactly what we mean when we use moral terms, such as "good," "bad," "ought," "obligation," "duty," etc. R.M. Hare tells us explicitly in his book on ethics that ethics, as he conceives it, is "the logical study of moral language".⁷ Not only ethics but the whole of philosophy is reduced by this school to no more than the analysis of words. The task of ethics, however, is much more than the analysis and clarification of moral terms. We do not study ethics only with the aim of finding out what precisely we mean when we use moral terms. The clarification of terms is, of course, useful, but to say that it is the whole purpose of ethics or philosophy is to mistakenly take the means for the end. The analysis and clarification of moral terms is a means to the end of ethics. Ethics is the systematic study of the norms of human behaviour, and the purpose of studying these norms is to ensure that human behaviour conforms to them. When we study ethics, we are studying the principles of morality, and the purpose of studying these principles is not just to know them but to conform our conduct to them. R.M. Hare is therefore right when he pointed out that the function of moral principles "is to guide conduct".⁸ If the function of moral principles is to guide conduct, the purpose of studying them must be to know them in order to conform our conduct

⁵ Rachels, J. 2003. *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*. McGraw-Hill.

⁶ Foot, P. 2002. *Natural Goodness*. Oxford University Press.

⁷ Hare, R. M. 1981. *Moral Thinking: Its Levels, Method, and Point*. Oxford University Press.

⁸ Ibid.

to them. Indeed, that is why ethics is defined as the normative science of human conduct since its purpose is to guide human conduct along the line of the moral law.

ETHICS AND EDUCATION

Ethics and education are closely related concepts that are essential for the development of individuals and the society as a whole. Here are some aspects of the relationship between ethics and education

1. Values-based education: Modern education should emphasize values like empathy, respect, and responsibility.
2. Academic integrity: Plagiarism, cheating, and academic dishonesty are ethical concerns in modern education.
3. Inclusivity and diversity: Educators should foster inclusive environments, addressing biases and promoting diversity.
4. Teacher ethics: Teachers must maintain professional boundaries, confidentiality, and fairness.
5. Student privacy: Educators must protect students' personal information and privacy.
6. Curriculum relevance: Educators should ensure curriculum relevance, accuracy, and cultural sensitivity.
7. Assessment ethics: Assessments should be fair, transparent, and free from bias.

By integrating ethics into modern education, we can foster responsible, empathetic, and critically thinking individuals who contribute positively to society.

ETHICS AS PREREQUISITE FOR GOOD LIFE

Is it necessary to study ethics in order to live a good life? There are people who have never studied ethics but who live lives of high moral standard.⁹ Similarly, it is not necessary to study logic in order to think correctly, nor is it necessary to study theology in order to become religious. Many people think correctly without having studied logic and many religious people have never studied theology. Nevertheless, the study of logic (the principles of correct thinking) does help one to think more correctly and avoid fallacies.¹⁰ The study of theology does help to deepen one's religious conviction and therefore makes one more religious.¹¹ The same applies to ethics; the study of ethics is intended to help and does help to elevate one's moral standard.

ETHICS AND HUMAN NATURE

If I have the opportunity to embezzle five hundred thousand naira without being caught, why should I not do so? After all, I could build a nice house and buy a nice car with it. I am sure that it will never be discovered and that nothing will happen. I am therefore not afraid of

⁹ Frankena, W. K. 1973. *Ethics*. Prentice-Hall.

¹⁰ Copi, I. M., and C. Cohen. 2005. *Introduction to Logic*. Pearson.

¹¹ Migliore, D. 2004. *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*. Eerdmans.

any adverse consequences, and yet it is an opportunity for me to become rich and enjoy life. Why should I not avail myself of this opportunity and embezzle the money? After all, I can count many cases of people who have become rich in this way, and nothing has happened to them. If I have the opportunity to take bribes to supplement my salary without any likelihood of ever being caught, why should I not do so? I want something, and I see that I can only have it by giving false information, though I pretend to be speaking the truth. I am told that if I am speaking the truth, if the information I am giving is true, I should come to the court to take an oath as evidence that I am speaking the truth. But I know that what I am saying is not true, that the information I am giving is false. Why should I not take the false oath, if I shall get what I want after taking it? Why should I be faithful to my wife and refrain from sexual dealings with other girls or women? If I have the opportunity to escape from my work and go out to transact some business or do other things at the time I am supposed to be doing the work for which I am paid, why should I not do so? I am told that it would be morally wrong to do any of these things. But what do I care about morality? Why should I, in the name of morality, lose the opportunity I have to become rich, to enjoy life, or to have what I want? After all, many people have done these things and nothing happened to them. Why must I be moral? Why must I live a moral life? The question: **"Why must I live a moral life?" is an old question to which various answers have been given. We shall discuss five of such answers.**

❖ **God Has Commanded Man to Do So**

Men like William of Ockham, John Locke, and religious people in general answer this question by saying that man must live a moral life because God has commanded it.¹² God will punish all those who disobey his command by living immoral lives and will reward virtuous people who obey him by living moral lives. This reward and punishment will take place either here on earth or in the life after death.¹³ Hence, religious people often warn those who indulge in immoral actions that there is no escape from the divine justice. If the man who embezzled five hundred thousand naira manages to escape being caught and punished here on earth, he is deceiving himself if he thinks that that is the end of the story, for if he manages to escape in this life, he cannot escape the divine justice in the next life.

❖ **Because Man Is a Social Being And Member Of A Society**

Yet another answer to our question is that man must live a moral life because he is a social being who lives in a society and to live in a society inevitably involves having to observe certain moral rules.¹⁴ Society demands that you live a moral life, and if you want to live in a society, you have to comply with its demands¹⁵ It is in your own interest in the long run to live a moral life by observing the moral laws and rules of society. This is part of the

¹² Locke, J. 1689. *Two Treatises of Government*.

¹³ Ockham, W. 1992. *A Short Commentary on the Sentences*.

¹⁴ Hobbes Thomas: *Leviathan, Forme and Power of a Commonwealth Ecclesiastical and Civil*. London: Andrew Crooke, 1651

¹⁵ Hegel, G. W. F. 1821. *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*.

"contract" you made (implicitly) when you became a member of a society, and it is what makes life in society possible. Unless members of a society are willing and undertake to live moral lives by observing the norms of morality, society itself would be impossible. Society is built on the principles of morality as its foundation, and if everybody were to go about violating these principles and therefore living immoral lives, there would be no society. Hence, immoral actions are anti-social actions, that is, actions that are destructive in the society. That is why society prosecutes anybody who performs such actions.

❖ **Because Man Is a Rational Being**

The question "Why must I live a moral life?" can also be answered by appealing to man's rational nature. You must live a moral life because you are a rational being, and to be a rational being is to be subject to the moral law.¹⁶ This means that to be obliged by the moral law is part of what it means to be a human being, for it is part of man's rationality. Your rational will tells you that certain kinds of actions are bad and must be avoided, while other kinds of actions are good and should be done. It imposes on you the obligation to refrain from the former and to perform the latter. If you do what it tells you is evil, you will experience remorse of conscience. Everybody, by the very fact of being a rational being, experiences this obligation of the moral law to refrain from evil and do good. This is the kind of answer given by Kant, who sees the moral law as a self-imposed law, coming from man's rational will.¹⁷

Kant says he marvels at two things that fill him with wonder, namely, the starry sky above and the moral law within. If there is any one universal fact about man, says Harzel E. Barnes, it is the experience of values and disvalues—the experience of good and evil, and part of this experience is the obligation to refrain from the latter and do the former.¹⁸ It follows, therefore, that man's own very nature as a rational being obliges him to live a moral life, and it is in the long run in man's own interest to live in accordance with the demands of his rational nature.

❖ **The Path to Happiness**

There is at least one thing which everybody without exception wants and is relentlessly looking for. This is happiness. There is nobody who does not want happiness, for it is part of human nature to seek happiness.¹⁹ Indeed, whatever a person does, happiness is his ultimate goal. The armed robber, the looters of the country's treasury through fraud and embezzlement, the prostitute, the beggar in the street, the student, the farmer in the village, the worker in the factory or on the roads, the university lecturer, the businessman in the cities, the monks in monasteries, the ascetic, and the glutton, etc. are all seeking one thing, and that is happiness. People do these things because they see them as means to happiness. But it is obvious that although everybody seeks happiness in various ways, not everybody who seeks

¹⁶ Kant, I. 1785. *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*. Cambridge University Press.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Barnes, H. E. 1947. *The Philosophical Basis of Morality*. New York: The Macmillan Company.

¹⁹ Aristotle. *Op. Cit.*

it finds it. Many people cannot find happiness because they are looking for it in the wrong direction.

Some people erroneously identify happiness with money and believe that the more money a person acquires the happier he become.²⁰ Such people therefore do everything possible to acquire more and more money. They throw morality to the winds and use all means possible, including fraudulent and evil means, to acquire money. But this is an illusion; money itself does not necessarily bring happiness. A man can be extremely rich and yet be very unhappy. We have had cases of millionaires committing suicide as a result of frustration and unhappiness.²¹ The richest men are not the happiest men. In fact, many rich men have now realized that they have been disillusioned. They thought that money would automatically bring them happiness but instead, they have become increasingly unhappy as they became richer. Is it therefore worth the trouble plunging oneself into evil by using fraudulent and evil means to amass wealth if that does not necessarily ensure one's happiness? In fact, the laws of nemesis always ensure that people who use fraudulent and evil means to amass wealth reap what they sow and end up in frustration and unhappiness.

A lot of people also erroneously equate happiness with pleasure. They think that the more pleasure one enjoys, the happier he becomes, and therefore seek happiness through excessive pleasure. But pleasure is not happiness. Indeed, a life of excessive pleasure is not a happy life but an animal life.²² Excessive drinking, for example, leads to unhappiness, and the same is true of excess in sexual activity. Pleasure is short-lived, transitory, and goes as soon as the activity it accompanies ends, but happiness is a stable state of mind that accompanies peace of mind and moral rectitude. Happiness is very elusive; unlike pleasure, which can be directly sought and obtained immediately, happiness cannot be directly sought and obtained immediately because it does not come with the performance of any particular single action as is the case with pleasure. Happiness is not associated with any particular object of any particular activity; neither money nor sex nor drinking necessarily brings happiness. A person can indulge in these things and still be unhappy. He can live in affluence and go from pleasure to pleasure and still be very unhappy. Pleasure then is not happiness, and happiness is not pleasure.

All the ancient Greek philosophers—Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus, the Stoics, etc.—agree that the only path that leads to happiness is the path of virtue, i.e., a moral way of life.²³

❖ **The Law of Nemesis**

A careful observation of the universe would reveal that it is an ordered universe. Scientists have discovered this long ago and have come to know that the universe is governed

²⁰ Epicurus. 341 B.C.E. *Letter to Menoeceus*.

²¹ Frank, M. 2005. *The Psychology of Happiness*. New York: Routledge.

²² Plato. 380 B.C.E. *The Republic*.

²³ Socrates. 399 B.C.E. *Apology of Socrates*.

by certain laws known as the laws of nature.²⁴ This means that the universe is not a place where things happen anyhow, for it is a universe of cause and effect.

The law of nemesis is an aspect of the natural, universal law of cause and effect, the law which ensures that certain kinds of causes produce certain kinds of effects, so that once the cause is present, the effect will surely follow. This law which operates in the physical world also operates in the human world, for man is part of the universe. We can distinguish two kinds of order in the mechanism that makes the doer of the immoral act restore the balance he has upset. This in-built mechanism by which nature itself does this rectification of the upset moral order is what is meant by the law of nemesis. We can see then that a man is simply being foolish if he thinks that he can cheat nature and get away with it. We can therefore agree with Socrates and Plato that a morally upright man is a wise man, while an immoral man is a fool, a short-sighted foolish man who cannot see beyond his nose.²⁵

WHY IS ETHICS DISTINCTIVELY HUMAN TO THE EXCLUSION OF OTHER LOWER ANIMALS

This is an interesting question that requires rationality for its answer. It would also interest one to know that dominion is ONLY given to man because man is at the center of everything. Going further, you discover that attributes like power, authority, right, will, desire, judgment, conscience, rationality, want, vision, contentment, discontentment, etc., are inseparable from man. It is in view of these that ethics is entirely human to shake off the inhuman and animalistic nature of man and reshape man to embrace morality and conform to societal norms.

To buttress some of the points mentioned, rights are ONLY bestowed on individual members of the community and not on lower animals. This right is to give man a sense of belonging and to live freely in the society and also contribute meaningfully to the society where he belongs. When you assimilate the full concept of rights, then will you know that man needs morality to control his rights.

Again, since only human beings are rational, autonomous, and self-conscious, it follows that only human beings deserve full moral status. The attributes of rationality, autonomy, and self-consciousness confer moral status to human beings because they are the only ones capable of attaining certain values and goods; these values and goods are of a kind that outweighs the kinds of values and goods that non-rational, non-autonomous, and non-self-conscious beings are capable of attaining.²⁶ The values of appreciating art, literature, and the goods that come with deep personal relationships all require one to be rational, autonomous, and self-conscious.

Furthermore, only human beings can act morally. This is considered to be important because beings that can act morally are required to sacrifice their interests for the sake of

²⁴ Newton, I. 1687. *Philosophiæ Naturalis Principia Mathematica*.

²⁵ Plato. Op. Cit.

²⁶ Kant, I. Op. Cit.

others. It follows that those who do sacrifice their good for the sake of others are owed greater concern from those that benefit from such sacrifices. Since animals cannot act morally, they will not sacrifice their own good for the sake of others, but will rather pursue their good even at the expense of others. This analysis explains why ethics is applicable only to humans and excludes lower animals.

Lastly, only human beings are part of the moral community. The moral community is not defined in terms of the intrinsic properties that beings have but is defined rather in terms of the social relations that exist between beings.

The Link between Digital Age and Ethics in Education

The digital age has brought about significant changes in the way we live, work, and learn, raising important ethical considerations in education. Here is how the digital age and ethics intersect in modern education:

Digital Citizenship: Teaching students about responsible technology use, online etiquette, and digital footprint management.

Data Privacy: Ensuring students' personal data is protected and used responsibly.

Cyber security: Protecting students' online safety and security.

Intellectual Property: Educating students about copyright laws and proper citation practices.

Digital Divide: Addressing unequal access to technology and internet connectivity.

Role of Ethics in Modern Education

It promotes critical thinking by encouraging students to think critically about online information and sources; It fosters digital literacy by teaching students to effectively navigate the digital world; it helps in developing responsible behavior, this Encourages students to use technology responsibly and respectfully; It also Prepares Students for the future by equipping them with the skills and knowledge needed to thrive in a rapidly changing digital landscape.

CONCLUSION

Ethics is entirely human because of the uniqueness, peculiarity and the complexity of human nature. Man is vested with numerous attributes that have the tendency to corrupt or refine man. Research has shown that man is the worst animal without laws. Ethics like morality is a natural law that guides man and confers judgments on man's wrong doing. Man being at the center of all things, receives praise and blame on actions, while the wrong deeds of lower animals is blamed on their owner (man) and this makes ethics distinctively human to the exclusion of other lower animals since it is only man that is embedded with emotions, greed, power, will, desire, want, conscience, aggression, discontentment, appetite, jealousy, envy, hatred, receives education, have the capacity to be digitalize etc, ethics is now the mirror that checkmate these attributes and internally judge man and put man at the center in order for the betterment and coexistent of individual members of the society.

SUGGESTIONS

1. Government should develop a comprehensive curriculum that integrates ethics into every subject and courses, highlighting the ethical implications of technology used.
2. There should be a strong focus on digital citizenship, teaching students about online responsibility, privacy, and security.
3. Government, schools, and parents should foster a culture of ethical decision-making, encouraging students to consider the consequences of their actions.
4. Government should develop and implement ethical guidelines for technology use in education, addressing issues like intellectual property and data privacy.
5. Engage parents and the broader community in conversations about ethics and education, ensuring a collaborative approach.

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