Holistic Liberal View of Moral Education of Citizens

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Vatandaşların Moral Eğitimine Bütüncül Liberal Bir Yaklaşım

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Özet

Bu çalışma; toplulukçuların, liberalleri, vatandaşların moral (ahlakî) eğitimini gözardı ederek özelde formel eğitimde başarısızlık ve genelde ise ahlaki yozlaşma gibi sorunları da içeren güncel yaygın sorunlardan sorumlu tutmalarına karşın; söz konusu bu eleştirinin liberalizmi Hobbesçu –araçsal- versiyona indirgediği ve ne moral eğitimi gözardı eden ne de araçsal bir toplum görüşüne sahip olan alternatif liberalizm türünü gözardı etmesinden dolayı hatalı olduğunu, ileri sürmektedir. Bu çalışma, söz konusu alternatif liberalizm örnekleri olarak Mill ve Hume'un siyasal teorilerini analiz ederek, bu alternatif liberalizm türünün vatandaşların moral eğitimini ihmal etmediğini ve toplumun bireyler üzerinde şekillendirici etkisini benimsediğini ortaya koymaya çalışmaktadır. Söz konusu bu düşünürler, karakter eğitimini pek çok farklı kurumun ve formel eğitimi de içeren pratiğin bir sonucu olarak algılamaktadırlar.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Moral Eğitim, Liberalizm, Toplulukçu Düşünce, J. S. Mill, D. Hume.

Abstract

This study argues that although communitarians criticize liberalism as ignoring moral education of citizens and thus responsible for the current widespread problems including formal educational failure in particular and moral deterioration in general, this criticism is mistaken in reducing liberalism to its Hobbesian - instrumentalist - version and thus ignoring an alternative strand of liberalism which neither discards moral education nor endorses an instrumentalist view of society. This article analyzes Mill's and Hume's political theories as examples of this alternative liberalism to show that this alternative strand of liberalism does not necessarily discards moral education of citizens and recognizes the formative impact of society on individuals. They perceive character education as a product of many different institutions and practices including formal education.

Key Words: *Moral Education, Liberalism, Communitarianism, J. S. Mill, D. Hume.*

1. Introduction

According to Michael Strain (1995: 7-8),

> *The Plowden Report (1967) remains one of the most unchallenged educational documents to have been commissioned and accepted by a national government in the twentieth century. Its chief recommendation was the recognition that educational success and failure among children are inseparably linked to a child's social, economic and cultural environment.*

A similar argument is endorsed almost 30 years later by Putnam. According to Putnam (1995: 19), in regard to the educational failure in the USA, it is assumed that "something that schools and educators must have done wrong", yet

> *researchers have discovered that successful schools are distinguished not so much by the content of their curriculum or the quality of their teachers, important as those factors may be, as by the schools' embeddedness in a broader fabric of supportive families and communities.*

These views of formal education as inevitably linked to qualities of larger social life endorse a non-instrumental view of society. On the other hand, according to Strain, as the dominant framework in contemporary societies "the neoclassical liberal framework" and the idea of individual "autonomy" and of society as a "market place" see the relation between individual and society as an instrumental one whose "implication is that the community, conceptualized as a level of aggregation of individuals, is without distinctive social or formative significance" (1995: 9-11). Strain's criticism of liberalism's vision of society as an instrumental and its negative impact on formal education is similar to a significant discussion between communitarians and liberals with regard to moral education of citizens, not limited to formal education though it is also included, in contemporary political theory.

According to communitarians the current societal problems mainly stem from liberalism, since liberalism as the dominant framework that shapes Western societies creates certain structural tendencies and a particular mindset among individuals who are prone to such problems. Therefore, the current problems, including the educational failure, are supposed to be necessary results of liberalism. In particular, according to communitarians, liberalism ignores moral education of citizens primarily as a result of its fallacious and reductionist assumption of "atomistic" human nature and "excessive individualism" on which its instrumentalist vision of society and moral relativism are constructed (Kymlicka, 1988: 181). The focus of contemporary liberalism is claimed to be on the distributive theory of justice, which represents a narrowing of the scope of political theory in such a way that the nature of citizenship or moral education finds no place in social and

institutional regulations and does not recognize the formative significance of society on individuals. As a result, "liberal theory posits the individual *in vacuo* as an intellectual abstraction, ignoring the obvious fact that human beings have always been social animals living in communities, and the individual is always the product of a *particular* form of social life" (Keeney, 2007: 7). In liberalism, according to communitarianism, individuals are perceived as free agents having no intrinsic ties, other than instrumental ties, with each other and the state is seen as the third party to regulate the interaction of selfish individuals (Sandel, 1996: 4)).

For communitarians, since society has a formative significance on individual identity, moral education is an ongoing social process which cannot be limited to formal institutions and the quality of whole society has impact, either negative or positive, on it (Arthur and Bailey, 2002: 47). Accordingly, the moral education of citizenship cannot be conceived in isolation from the general social, political, cultural, economic, and institutional climate of society which forms the context of moral education at large. As Putnam (2001: 58) puts it succinctly,

> The African proverb "It takes a village to raise a child" has become a cliché in current discussions about education in the United States. One interesting question that arises from this call for community engagement is whether some kinds of villages do a better job of raising and educating children than others.

Relying on such an assumption, communitarians criticize liberals loosing the link between the nature of social life and moral education and advocating "individualistic view of education" (Arthur and Bailey 2002: 47). Since liberalism gives priority to rights over good, communitarians argue that "schooling in the liberal state degenerates into little more than a program for vocational preparation or personal self-aggrandizement" (Keeney, 2007: 5).

Communitarians complain also about negative impact of marketization of school education as a necessary result of liberalism. In particular, school is seen as "little more than an enterprise" and "knowledge as a commodity to be bought and sold" rather than "as a means of self-fulfillment which develops a cultural and social responsibility" (Arthur and Bailey, 2002: 61). Communitarian view of education argues that "the ethos of schools is not that of the market exchange and the marketization of education should be ended" (Arthur and Bailey, 2002: 49). In addition to marketization of formal schools, communitarians see "the relationship of character to the economic order is also critical for education and schooling" (Arthur, 2003: 87). In particular, the liberal paradigm endorses self-interest as the driving force of economic activities, which, according to communitarians, leads to "a growing schism between character and what might be called talent, so that particular skills or competencies that are valued in the marketplace are viewed

independently of moral behavior as a citizen" (Arthur, 2003: 148). As a result of moral relativism which discards moral education as enforcement of a particular worldview over citizens,

> *much of higher education has come to operate on a sort of default prog-*
> *ram of instrumental individualism. This is the familiar notion that the aca-*
> *demy exists to research and disseminate knowledge and skills as tools for*
> *economic development and the upward mobility of individuals. This defa-*
> *ult program of instrumental individualism leaves the larger questions of*
> *social, political, and moral purpose out of explicit consideration" (Wilhite*
> *and Silver, 2005: 48).*

2. Historical Background of the Discussion

Yet, the contemporary debate between liberals and communitarians is not new and a similar conflict goes back to the beginning of the modern era for which liberal ideology appeared to offer a new notion of individual or human nature, citizenship, politics, and society. In parallel to the rise of liberal political theory, republican alternative also started to appear as an alternative vision for modern society. For example, Rousseau, who could be seen as an early modern pioneer of contemporary communitarianism, as a modern republican political philosopher, criticizes liberal views of individual, society, and also free market system as creating a morally corrupt society and leading majority of people to lose their freedom and become enslaved. Rousseau's criticism's focus is on the negative impact of economic system on individual morality and social bonds or solidarity (Kim, 1999: 120).

Both early modern republican and contemporary communitarian criticisms of liberalism usually identify liberalism with Hobbes whose view of human nature seems to leave no place for moral education. Hobbes simply discards moral sense and defines human nature as essentially amoral entity whose all behavior is determined by selfish, anti-social, isolated, and amoral instincts guided by an instrumental view of rationality and aimed at increasing self-interest. As Gray (1995: 8), puts it succinctly:

> *Hobbes replaced the Aristotelian conception of human well-being as a sta-*
> *te of self-realization or flourishing by the claim that by their nature and*
> *circumstance men are unavoidably condemned to an incessant pursuit of*
> *the ever changing objects of their desires.*

However, some liberal philosophers such as Hume and Mill do not discard moral sense in their political theory. Contrary, they are well aware of the impact of the larger social life, institutions, and practices on individual moral sense. Therefore,

they consider moral education as a significant part of their liberalism. In the following sections, Hume and Mill's theories are analyzed as examples of such an understanding.

3. Hume and Moral Education

Hume in his essay called *Of Refinements In the Arts* (1985: 270-271) argues that

> *The same age, which produces great philosophers and politicians, renowned generals and poets, usually abounds with skilful weavers, and ship-carpenters. We cannot reasonably expect, that a piece of woollen cloth will be wrought to perfection in a nation, which is ignorant of astronomy, or where ethics are neglected.*

Hume here puts forward a particular understanding of a society whose constitutive parts are interdependent with each other. One aspect of social life has formative impact on others. Implication of this assumption is that as a whole a society could be a vicious circle or virtuous circle depending on characteristics of its constituting parts which have formative impact mutually on each other and its members. The success of one part is strictly related to other aspects. The end result in any area in a society is product of many different forces. If each sector, institution or structure of a society is in good shape, the whole society would form a virtuous circle. Social trust is an example of how social outcomes come to existence as a result of many different forces in society. Recent empirical studies illustrate that there is a huge gap between the developed countries and the developing countries in terms of social trust level. In the former ones, social trust level is high, since in general institutions function better, civil societies are common, and citizens follow formal rules more than those in the latter ones. Therefore, as a particular product of the general quality of a society we could explain the level of social trust in that country. While the developed countries form virtuous circle, most developing countries form vicious circle in terms of social trust (Fukuyama, 2005).

Hume is known as an optimistic advocate of modern civilization. He compares modern and pre-modern societies as qualitatively different yet internally consistent entities. He explains a particular situation or a characteristic within that whole. For example, ancient republics fostered civic military virtues among their citizens. According to Hume, this quality of ancient citizens could be explained by two factors: a particular social-economic setting and international relations among those republics. The former required an independent body of citizenry whose independence was provided by the slave labor. The latter refers to almost constant wars among city-states. Hume (1985: 259) asserts that ancient republics "were free states; they were small ones; and the age being martial, all their neighbors were continually in arms." As a result, military virtues developed in these commu-

nities. In turn, military virtues led to other results such as "little humanity and moderation" in society (1985: 414) and "more factious and unsettled" governments in political life (1985: 421).

Hume's appraisal of the newly emerging modern civilization depends also on the same logic. Hume considers modern society as forming a particular framework - social, economic, cultural, commercial settings - which would create a particular mindset and virtues among citizens. First, in contrast to the ancient republics, there is not slave labor and every individual is a free citizen. Second, in international relations, instead of constant war, there is international trade. According to Hume, among many others, these two qualitative changes in modern society would create a more humane, peaceful, and civilized society. Once, as free citizens, individuals have an opportunity to work for their own good and advantage in a commercial society, the result would be prosperity, awakening of individuals' creativity and improvement of their judgment: "The mind acquires new vigour; enlarges its powers and faculties" (1985: 270). Hume maintains that once individual mind is awakened, it leads to improvement in other areas: "the minds of men, being once roused from their lethargy, and put into fermentation, turn themselves on all sides, and carry improvements into every art and science" (1985: 271). The improvement of judgment by its application to commercial activities as well as improvement in arts and sciences, argues Hume, is closely linked to social order: "Laws, order, police, discipline; these can never be carried to any degree of perfection, before human reason has refined itself by exercise, and by an application to the more vulgar arts, at least, of commerce and manufacture" (1985: 279).

Other advantages commerce creates are increase of "sociability", softening of tempers, refinement of interpersonal relations, and the rise of the modern city (1985: 271):

> The more these refined arts advance, the more sociable men become… They flock into cities…Particular clubs and societies are everywhere formed…the tempers of men, as well as their behavior, refine apace. So that, beside the improvements which they receive from knowledge and the liberal arts, it is impossible but they must feel an encrease of humanity…Thus industry, knowledge, and humanity, are linked together by an indissoluble chain.

For Hume, modern society as a whole creates a particular framework which tends to create certain qualities in individuals. In other words, the whole society in general and each institution and process in particular have formative impact on individuals. Within that societal framework Hume thinks that moral education of citizens takes place. And each particular societal framework tends to create certain

virtues or vices in individuals. That's why Hume thinks that "human character could … be modified by changing the environment in which it developed" (Arthur, 2003: 145). Hume thinks that the rise of modern society would create a better structural environment for moral education of citizens.

Although Hume does not directly analyze formal schooling here, his understanding of moral education of citizens shows a striking similarity to the recent empirical findings in regard to the formative impact of social life on individual morality. He does not think moral education as a purely personal/private matter. Hume's understanding of moral education of citizens is multi-dimensional. As mentioned before, the general quality of whole society forms the general framework of such an education. Different types of societal regulations tend to create its distinctive type of citizens. In general, the rise of modern civilization represents the historical development of human society in such a way that civilized moral education of citizens become possible.

4. Mill and Moral Education

Mill thinks that human beings are social creatures with a unique human capacity of development and morality which differentiates them from animals (Thompson, 1976: 25). Human beings though have similarities with animals with regard to biological and physical needs to sustain their lives have potentials or capacities which are unique to just them. While animal lives in accordance with their instincts, human beings are born with distinctive human potential. Civilization, culture, industry, institutions, laws, arts, language, morality, and sciences are products of unique human capacities. Yet to create all these distinctively human traits and products, we need to realize our potential by training and education. Therefore, as McPherson argues, "Mill placed the prospect of progressive changes in human character and motivation near the center of his thought" (1982: 252).

Mill's understanding of education is formulated on the basis of progressive view of human nature. Mill's understanding of education is a broad one and goes much beyond formal education. Indeed, education means for him moral development of individuals and society. He calls this moral education as "Ethology" which, means "the art of education in the widest sense of the term including the formation of national or collective as well as individual" (Ball, 2000: 30). In other words, "for Mill, education is a moral concept, one that is about character formation and not simply about teaching facts or imparting information and skills" (Miller, 2003: 657). Since Mill, like Hume, sees individuals as progressive creatures with unique capacities for development and morality (Thompson, 1976: 25), "the formation of character became for Mill an abiding preoccupation" (Ball, 2000: 29).

Moreover, "Mill is keenly aware of the intersubjective dimensions of human character, of the fact that individuals are constituted in and through their embeddedness in society" (Zivi, 2006: 50). Mill, therefore, does not restrict education and training of individuals to formal institutions. He locates formal education within the broader context of society as a whole and argues that "What is taught to a child at school will be of little effect, if the circumstances which surround the grown man or woman contradict the lesson." (quoted from Baum, 2003: 411). He emphasizes the significance of larger societal surrounding and practices as follows:

> [Education includes] not only . . . whatever we do for ourselves and whatever is done for us by others for the express purpose of bringing us somewhat nearer to the perfection of our nature; it does more; in its largest acceptation it comprehends even the indirect effects produced on character and on the human faculties by things of which the direct purposes are quite different; by laws, by forms of government, by the industrial arts, by modes of social climate, soil and local position. Whatever helps to shape the human being, to make the individual what he is or hinder him from being what he is not, is part of his education. (quoted from Miller, 2003: 659-660).

Mill, as the founder of modern liberalism, was keenly aware of the negative or positive impact of whole society on individual morality and character.

Mill's analysis of democratic system illustrates how he evaluates political regimes as a branch of institutions in terms of their impacts on human character and morality. For instance, the representative government both creates and needs "active and attentive citizens." Both qualities - activeness and attentiveness - develop among individuals "through the activity of participating in and contributing to the community" (Ball, 2000: 30). Mill defines such active citizenship required by democratic systems as a kind of education and training: "It is through debating and deliberating with one's equals…that one is schooled in the civic arts" (Ball, 2000: 30). Through participation Mill thinks that one would develop "a heightened concern for the well-being" of his fellow-citizens, "an energetic character", and "public spirit" or concern for public issues. In order to create public spirit Mill advocates citizens to participate juries and military training also in addition to politics (Miller, 2000: 100-101). These activities make individuals to be able to escape from narrow self-interest and realize that they are social beings with common interests (Thompson, 1976: 28). Since he thinks that the development of human capacity must be the target of whole social institutions and policies, he judges the merit of social institutions and policies from the standpoint of their contribution

to the development of human capacity rather than simply maximizing and satisfying their material needs. As he argues in his *Autobiography*:

> *I now looked upon the choice of political institutions as a moral and educational question more than one of material interests, thinking that it ought to be decided mainly by the consideration, what great improvement in life and culture stands next in order for the people concerned as the condition of their further progress, and what institutions are most likely to promote that. (quoted from Miller, 2003: 661).*

5. Conclusion

If the larger societal life is devoid of moral concerns, then formal instruction of morality would not create the desired results fully. Of course, moral education needs formal instruction, but society which forms the general structural environment of formal education must be supportive of this education at large. The lesson of this conviction is that our efforts in training technically able and morally responsible students who will be active citizens in the future cannot be limited to the reform programs of any kind constrained to formal educational institutions but must be accompanied by a larger moral revival in whole society. In order to really understand any practice or institution of a society, it must be studied in the context of the society of which it is a part. If the disease has penetrated to the every corner of the societal body, target must be the recovery of the whole body. That's why moral education in formal institutions must be accompanied by moral revival of the whole society. As Mill aptly puts,

> *Much has been said of popular education: but education does not mean schools and school books… The real effective education of a people is given them by the circumstances by which they are surrounded ... the unintentional teaching of institutions and relations (quoted from Baum, 2003: 411-412).*

Since how we perceive human nature determines our vision of society in general as well as our view of education in particular, type of education in formal institutions in particular and the role of other institutions in general, such as from family to schools, from politicians' role to democratic process, depend on our perception of human nature. As Galston (2001: 218) puts it "… these theoretical debates have implications for the content and conduct of democratic civic education - the relationship to be established between classroom instruction and community-based experience." As stated above, while Hobbesian amoral and abstract view of human nature necessarily discards moral education, Hume's and Mill's progressive or developmental views of human nature require moral education of citizens in particular and recognize the impact of contextual factors. As Rawls (1996) calls,

their liberalism is "comprehensive" one which prescribes a particular perception of moral education for liberal citizens. Hume as a classical liberal and Mill as a modern liberal recognize the necessity of moral education. They do not detach moral education of citizens from larger social life.

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