

Revelation of Educational Human Nature Theory on the Realization of Educational Happiness

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Abstract

Happiness is the aim and the ultimate goal of education. To obtain educational happiness, we should base on and act upon human nature, bridge it to the further shore of happiness. That is what termed by ancient Chinese as, “What determined by Heaven is Human Nature. Following the Human Nature is Tao. Practicing Tao is education.” This essay gives some brief accounts of the statements on human nature in both Chinese and Western education history, with the purpose of finding a path to the educational happiness.

Key words: The ultimate end of education; Educational human nature theory; Education happiness

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INTRODUCTION

Man's pursuance of happiness is the everlasting theme of human history. Logically, the definition of happiness involves a wide range of intension and extension. However, as a spiritual being, happiness is always a ferry boat that departs from an unsatisfactory near shore for an ideal far shore. Feuerbach says, “All of man's aspiration is but the worship of happiness.” As man's activity of inheriting cultures and trailing futures, education should set man's happiness as its ultimate goal.

Actually, happiness is not only the aim of education; it should be there throughout all of the educational process. The Doctrine of Mean says that, “What determined by Heaven is Human Nature. Following the Human Nature is Tao. Practicing Tao is education (Thirteen Classics Commentaries. 1997).”

Plato, in His immortal work Republic, proposes a similar idea that, “The Nature mentioned above refers to human nature, through which we can make education an amusing thing. Pedagogy seems to have a lot of discoveries of human nature, from which we should seek revelation.

1. SOME MAIN THESIS ON HUMANITY IN THE WESTERN EDUCATIONAL THOUGHT

1.1 Great Didactic of Comenius and “Teachable Person”

Comenius was not only the former educator in middle ages, but also the first one in modern times. He deserved the name “father of modern education” for his great contribution on setting up his own educational thought system and enlightening modern education reform. In his masterwork Great Didactic of Comenius, he wrote in the very beginning, “Education is a kind of art through which everything is taught to every single individual.” “Every single boy or girl should receive education at school”. We know, from this point, that he expressed support for the idea that man is teachable. He believed that education should be adapted to human nature. He made numerous observations and researches on human nature, and on children's age, psychology and personality. He tried to explore the objective laws to guide educational practice by applying laws working well in the natural world. He attached great importance to the role of education in a person's development. In his view, human was born with seeds of good knowledge, moral manner and loyal faith.

But one's postnatal development relies completely on education, "One can become complete only after receiving proper education (Comenius, 1984, pp.12, 39, 43)." He explained his view with examples: Horse, ox, donkey and dog without training cannot be used for fighting, carrying, guarding or hunting; if a baby was captured by beasts and grew up with beasts, his intelligence cannot beat his animal relatives. Therefore, human nature was teachable and ought to be taught in proper ways. "It's necessary for those who want to be real men to receive education (pp.12, 39, 43)."

Comenius also proposed, "Besides sons and daughters of those with money and power, every boy and girl, no matter in village or in town, wealthy or poor, should be entitled to and access to schooling." It's both necessary and possible that every person should get his or her education. He illustrated that man's cognitive ability is boundless after he has studied and analyzed the function of the brain and sensory organ. He enumerated abundant facts and denounced the false speech that born stupid and female should not receive education. He believed, though people were different in mentality, there was no such person as stupid as untouchable in the world; cognitive ability of female was stronger than that of male. Human is teachable; gender or wealth just doesn't matter.

1.2 Emile and "Natural being"

"Everything made by the Creator is good; once they are passed onto human's hands, they turn corrupted (Rousseau, 1978)." In the very beginning of *Emile*, his masterpiece, Rousseau mentioned his thought on human nature. In his view, human nature is a status opposite of vanity. Nature means plain, honesty, freedom and love, while cultivation means the opposite—luxury, sham, corruption and unfairness. The opposition between nature and cultivation is the basic thought of Rousseau. He expounded the original status of human being. He believed that primitive man (natural man) is born with the thought of freedom and fairness, and is born with harmony and good nature.

Rousseau believed that humanity is a natural thing to which education should conform: "someone says nature is just habit, but what goes on over mean? Does he mean that one's born nature could never be wiped out by some certain habits? When refuting this argument with an example, we find some plants will grow vertically again after removing the interference of humans. Although they grow in a certain direction temporally under the pressure of external force, once those external forces were removed, the plants will grow vertically again. It is identical with human nature. If one lives in a constant situation, he would keep habitual nature with him which is the most unnatural thing for us; once situation changes, habits will fade away and natural instincts will come back to us (Rousseau, 1978)." Therefore, Rousseau believed that "nature" is humanity's born nature and "natural being" is the most complete being. "Education is indeed nothing more than a habit", "follow the nature, follow

the way pointed by nature, and experience vexations and sufferings." Rousseau valued the pure instincts of education and the initiative of learners very much.

1.3 Dewey and "Experienced Man"

As one of the most world-famous educator in the 20th century, Dewey's thoughts on education have deeply influenced us. His "experienced man", a hypothesis on human nature, has been one of the most valuable fortunes in the history of educational thoughts.

The "experienced man" hypothesis can be illustrated from three dimensions: "human-environment relation hypothesis", "human's value hypothesis" and "humanity's demands hypothesis" (Yu, 2003). Dewey believed that "men are part of society and nature; men should thus not confront with them", "individuals receiving education are living in the same society, and society is made up of a variety of individuals" (Dewey, 1990); therefore, individuals receive education in a specific environment, and they are real individualistic men.

The greatest value one can gain from education is the creation of his experience. "Education is not a matter of spoon-feeding teaching, but is about taking initiative and gearing up innovation". In the process of taking initiative he would know how to learn from old experience. To make each child's experience individualized is the most important thing facing education. For each individual, freedom is most wanted while they are receiving education. "A constant educational plan should give learners enough freedom and space to promote their natural growing", and the freedom here I mentioned means "inspiring their curiosity about the surroundings and giving them opportunity to explore the world. In this process, they will well understand the personalities of the surroundings and based on that they can avoid being harmed and do the good deeds both of themselves and the others" (Confucius, 2001, p.15). These three dimensions are inseparable and should not be considered separately. In a harmonious educational environment, one can develop freely and learn from his previous experience, gain new experience and become individualized finally.

The "experienced man" theory, interlinked with Plato's idea, stresses the importance of taking initiative and inspiring innovation, and verifies the meaning of abstinent freedom to education.

2. HUMAN NATURE THEORY IN CONFUCIANISM

The western educational thoughts develop by stages, while those in China develop in a consistent way. After Han Dynasty, Confucianism became the core of Chinese nature. Therefore, China's educational human nature theory with Confucius and Mencius and Chu Hsi as representatives, to some degree, is equal to Confucianism human nature theory.

2.1 Confucius, Mencius and “the Benevolent”

“Benevolence” is the core content of Confucianism. In his famous work *The Analects*, the word “benevolence” appears a hundred and nine times. Two words can best suggest how Confucius thought about human nature. “Is benevolence a difficult thing? I don’t think so. I treat you with benevolence, and you will treat me the same as a return (Confucius, 2001, p.157).” “The benevolent treat people kindly” (Zhu, 1997, pp.287-539).

“Treat people kindly” is a kind of indiscriminate love starting from oneself and ending up with others. “Filial piety is the nature of human beings.” “If you don’t like to do something, you should not force others to do it.” “Everyone in the world is all your buddy.” Benevolence is an idea about a harmonious society; it is based on blood lineage and then expands to others. “Is benevolence a difficult thing? I don’t think so. I treat you with benevolence, and you will treat me the same as a return.” These words suggest Confucius’ opinion on benevolence: it’s a born thing but not acquired; it’s not inaccessible; it’s quite usual, it’s one’s true intention.

Mencius inherited and improved the “benevolence” thought proposed by Confucius and clarified the relationship between benevolence and one’s true intention. He believed “benevolence is one’s true intention”. He also believed that benevolence is a gene built in one’s body, and he further proposed that benevolence is a decisive reason why humanity is human. “A real being should be benevolent; this is the nature.” Thus he made a bold judgment that everyone was born kind. He proved his judgment with precise theory. First, based on the law that things of the same kind have the same characters, he deduced that human nature is universal. He believed that “things of the same kind have the same characters. For human beings, this law also works well. Saints and I are the very same kind.” Saints and civilians are both human kind, if saints could do the good deeds, so could civilians. “The king is a mortal being; I am also a mortal being”, in this sense, “everyone could be a king”. Confucius described moral-man benevolence. Mencius broke the limitation and proposed that everyone could be benevolent, making it universally applied. Meanwhile, by introducing real life experience, comparing natural kindness to hearty kindness and illustrating the “natural law”, he completed the framework of “original goodness of human nature” (Wang, 2007).

2.2 Zhu Xi, “Li and Chi”

Zhu Xi is the most representative celebrity of Confucianism after Confucius and Mencius. He spared no effort to protect and rejuvenate the Confucian tradition. He even proposed two different theories, “Li and Chi” and his own human nature theory.

Zhu Xi believed that human nature is decided by “Li and Chi”. “Humans are created only because of the combination of Li and Chi. The universe is filled with

Li, but if not for Chi, human will not be human. Thus there must be Chi first. If there is no Chi, men cannot talk, think or move.” He believed “What God gives would never change, but Chi could change at any time.” “What God gives was called Ming, what was acquired was called Xing.” Li is also called “kindness given by God”, or “human nature given by God”; while there are bad elements in Chi (temperament), which is also called “human nature of temperament” (Zhu, 1997, p.3). “Human nature given by God” and “human nature of temperament” are not acquired after birth. They are both essential but different. “Human nature given by God” makes everybody kind and no different. To be specific, “Human nature given by God” consists of benevolence, justice, manners and wit, while “human nature of temperament” can create both the good and the evil. “Li is just like a bright pearl in water, and Chi is the water”. While the water is clear, the pearl looks bright, and vice versa. He believed the saints are equipped with both “human nature given by God” and “human nature of temperament”. Most of us are controversial; we have goodness given by God and evil of temperament which makes us bad people sometimes. To address the problem, Zhu proposed his famous theory—“uphold God’s will, abolish self desires”.

3. REVELATION OF EDUCATIONAL HUMAN NATURE THEORY ON EDUCATION HAPPINESS

3.1 Revelation of Western Educational Human Nature Theory on Education Happiness

First, Fairness, especially the fairness from the starting point is a basic requirement for education happiness. Education happiness should neither belong to a few people with special rights nor to some elite classes; instead, it should be a gift for all people receiving education. Everyone is teachable. It is every organic being’s nature to pursue freedom and equity. Based on these, the primary foundation of education happiness lies in fair teaching. Today our society is built on knowledge. Education, especially the advanced education not only functions in its own field, but also plays a part in social stratification to a large extent. People’s desire for fair teaching has become stronger than any time. This desire suggests that fair teaching has already been the only way being expected to result in happiness. Therefore, when fair teaching is neglected, superior resources are given to a small group of elite class, and barriers are created to block vulnerable groups. In this sense, all the speeches on education happiness will become hollow, and all slogans of building a harmonious society will become worthless at best.

Second, education must be democratized. Modern education and democracy are inseparable; Rousseau himself is a huge democratic fighter. Most modern people

live in democratic countries, thus the most direct end of education is fostering citizens.

This is a process of reproduction. To realize educational happiness, we must observe the philosophy of openness and democracy. The end of education democracy lies in developing a deliberative democratic character. Such a character involves not only moral reasoning, but also the development of critical and reasonable thinking skills acquired from an education of how to do logical thinking, how to conduct fair and integrated debate, how to consider other alternatives before coming to a certain conclusion. Some fundamental democratic morals, such as tolerance, integrity, preference for non-violent means, should be repeatedly imbued. Meanwhile, people should know they are supposed not to merely rely on their willingness, but have critical thinking upon it. They should apprehend whether they live up to democratic ideas; for instance, public authorities should be shared equally by all citizens. Only in such a context, we will not devastate the blessing given by the creators. Third, education must abandon technology centralism and move towards humanism. Contemporary time was called “technology time” by Martin Heidegger in which technology represents the nature of society. He keenly recognized a terrible reality, “We find the spiritual degradation has become so worse that many nations of the world are about to lose their last spiritual power... The world darkens, gods flee away, the earth was split apart, human becomes walking body and the pursuit of all innovative spirit and freedom are doubted and hated...It is the universal destiny to be homeless (Heidegger, 1995).”

Individual experience is replaced by collective commandments; individual personality is suppressed by social standards. Both factors are the biggest barriers for schooling. Nikolai Berdiaev once described two kinds of “human’s slavery”. One is “social slavery”, meaning a man was saved by the social objectivity and social relations. “Once a society is considered to be as higher in rank than individuality, human beings will become slaves (Berdyayev, 1994).” In such a circumstance, programmed machines have replaced men’s free will, while humans are sleepy and dizzy, without recognizing it. Therefore, when we talking about education happiness, we have to abandon technology centralism and abandon the dependence on the machine. From Dewey’s education theory we know, human-society harmony and respect for individual experience and personalities are the proper ways to make education a real happy thing. A good education should not stop at a technology level; it comes from students’ self-identity and their integrity. An amusing education should be a mental exchange and conversation among people. Knowledge about people is the most important thing to teach. Education-people relation is the most fundamental one in all educational relations. Student is at the heart of education. He should forget about those rigid theories and professional knowledge. He should teach himself with his

own life experience, based on which he should form his own views; he should also think over questions silently and independently, through which he should learn to question the truth and challenge the authority. Only by so doing, he can build self-identity and integrity.

3.2 Revelation of Confucian Educational Human Nature Theory on Education Happiness

The Confucian Educational Human Nature Theory is a morality-based ideological system, which underlines digestion of knowledge and self-improvement. Self-improvement is the foundation of our ancestors’ precept—“Improve yourself, keep your family harmony, contribute to your country and maintain the world peace”. The sense of self-awareness and ownership attitude is the greatest legacy presented by Confucianism. The human nature hiding in “The moral treat people kindly” and “If I treat people with kindness, I will be treated the same way” plays an important role in maintaining educational happiness and social harmony. Let’s put it this way, if western educational philosophy and human nature theory provide a subjective environment to the achievement of educational happiness, then Confucianism philosophy and its human nature theory must be educational happiness’s foundation, for the latter aims at fostering a complete balanced individuality.

Nikolai Berdiaev believed that men were self-slaved, meaning that men used to throw themselves outward and make themselves singular, which are originated from self-egoism. People who believe in self-egoism use it as a sharp weapon in pursuit of individual independence and spiritual freedom, but this means double constraints: restrained by self and restrained by the world—a subject restraining people with outer force (Berdyayev, 1994). In this sense, another biggest barrier preventing the pursuit of educational happiness is self-egoism. According to Confucian philosophy and its human nature theory, a man’s heart should be filled with love and gratitude and responsibility. Such a man should overcome difficulties and improve himself independently. The function of Confucian education is not to give us more knowledge (information about subjective matters), but to help our spirit and soul to surmount the real world. It underlines man’s born duty and stresses the integrity and harmony among human, nature, society and country.

The Confucian individuality could be best summarized by one Mencius saying, “A real man should live in a big house, stand in the center of the world and walk on a broad road (a real man should not stick to trifles); he should share with others when he get something good; he should bury it down to his heart when he meets something unhappy. Not be corrupt even he is rich; not lose dignity even he is indigent; not yield to his enemy when they are tortured. These are only what a real man should acquire after birth.” (Mencius, 2007)

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