

## **Education, Moral Values and Human Society: A Constructive Reflection**

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### **Abstract**

*The paper that follows is an exercise and reflection in philosophy and education, using the methodologies of conceptual clarification, analysis, exposition and argumentation. The paper examines and interrogates the position and the role of education and moral values in the pursuit of the common good of society. This paper states that education needs to prepare individuals to seek for the common good of society, most especially in whatever situating they find themselves in life. Education as a moving train has been and continues to be fundamental to the development of citizens. Moral values, on the other hand, bring to play the value of education and how individuals should apply such values in their daily activities within a given society. This paper therefore submits that education and morality have the same foundation inherent in human nature and this can be realised in a conducive human society. From the foregoing, it is clear that there is a distinct relationship between these three terminologies, (education, moral values and human society) and that they complement one another.*

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### **Introduction**

Every human culture has provided some form of education by which it has transmitted a cultural heritage from one generation to the other and as well as preparing them as members of society. Besides, education also provides the ground for societal well-being and also prepares some modalities which may help such society in the future, specifically the younger generation. However, this can be done through a well structured form of education, by which the norms, values, cultural heritage, learning of new things, and skill acquisition can assist in the development of man and society. On the other hand, since education plays an important role

for the development of every human being, it therefore follows that a society where a large percentage of her members are uneducated, such cannot but be filled with immoral actions, chaos and anarchy.

This paper therefore focuses on education, moral values and the human society. It attempts to draw a link among these three concepts. It argues that for us to enjoy the beauty of any human society, attention must be given to education and moral values. These are the key ingredients for a sound and harmonious human society.

### **The Idea of Education**

The concept of education appears difficult to define. Education, like any other concepts has been defined by many persons in many and diversified ways. The definition a person gives to education comes mainly from how he views education. Educationists define education in a very different way, philosophers have their own different way of also defining the concept, and a lay man also has his own definition. Before we consider these definitions, it is expedient to first consider the etymology of the concept *education*. This will help enhance better understanding of what education is all about. We shall critically consider two opposing schools of thought and how they view the etymology of education.

Idealism and realism are two schools of thought that have different views on how and where knowledge should come or go to (Ojih, 1995: 22). The idealist, led by Plato, said that the word “education” is derived from the Latin word *educare* which is “to lead forth”, “drag out” or “pull out” ideas which are innate in man right from the moment of childhood. They were opposed by the realist led by John Locke. To the latter the word “to educate” comes from the same Latin word *educare*, but it involves “sending in” or “putting in” ideas into the mind of a child which is believed to be blank at the moment of birth (Ibid: 23). We can see that what differentiates the two schools is that the idealists believe that in educating we bring out what is already innate in us, while the realist asserts that in educating, we put in that which is not innate from birth. For them, nothing is innate from the moment of birth, education helps put in or send in ideas.

According to Daniel Sifuna (1994: 1), some educationist defines education as:

The entire process of developing human abilities, potentialities and behaviour. Education is an organised and sustained instruction meant to transmit a variety of knowledge, skills, understanding and attitudes necessary for the daily activities of life. Education is also a process in which an individual attain social competence and growth within a selected chosen and controlled institutionalised setting.

The above defines education in three diverse ways. Its last sentence considers an institutionalised setting which one can call a school. The other sentences look at education as a necessity for living a good and balanced life. The definition of education is not limited to what we have above. John Dewey was one of the educationists who sought to define education in his own way. For the American philosopher and educationist, education is termed reconstruction or reorganisation of experience. These experience adds to the meaning of experience and also increases the ability to direct the cause of subsequent experience. In short, he defined education as a continuing process of reconstructing experience (Ibid: 141). His educational method is what is currently employed in the United States of America.

The idea Dewey holds on education is that education should be more of experience and not just to be packed with too much of curriculum with no time for experience by the pupils themselves. He further held that, “education is a process of living and not a preparation for future living” (Ibid: 144). People have confused education to be a preparation for future living thereby neglecting the present. Education helps us to live life daily and not about waiting for the future. It is true that education helps us to prepare for tomorrow, but that does not mean that the present should be neglected, because it is even the present that helps us to live a better tomorrow. It is first a process of living which will definitely prepare one for the future. What the statement is against, is that when one view education as just a preparation for future living, he no longer

sees education from the holistic point of view. Education is holistic and should be viewed as such. Through our definitions so far, we have seen how difficult it is to separate man from education. Man continues to be the subject of education. It is man that receives and transmits education to his fellow man.

Furthermore, education can be thought of as the transmission of the values the accumulated knowledge of a society (The New Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1). To educate means to help someone understand the elements of reality in life. A good education is to be able to transform individuals and reach their heart. Therefore, education becomes communicable and capable of moving others to the affection of each other. An educated person is someone who is sensitive to things and personally looks for solutions to his human needs and the needs of others. Therefore, anyone who has received education has the possibility of thinking logically and can communicate them by analysing critically his reasons and arguments.

According to Nunn, (1998) education is the complete development of the individuality so that he can make an original contribution to human life to his best capacity (Laxmi Devi, 1998:29). Every individual is a unique one who needs to think normally as a process which leads to the formation of a character. Education brings changes in behaviour, and its main functions include being a transmission or enrichment to our individual society. As already said, the subject matter of education is the development of the personality into a society. To understand very well the personality of an individual is a complex one. The aim of education should be the development to the full potentialities of every individual in accordance with the general good of the community of which he or she is a member and the world at large. Education is an infinite process in our lives. This is because education rightly begins from our birth till death. Therefore, education is in reality of all our lives because there is no aspect of our living where there is no effort to learn, train and develop ourselves (Ibid: 30).

Education which is based on teaching and learning specific skills are more

recognised to be a means of imparting positive knowledge and well developed wisdom in an individual. Education means a lot to every individual, because it is what influences and highlights the life of a person. For education to be very effective, the self needs to be well focused and that is where true knowledge comes from. Every individual has wisdom and it is in potency, but this can be proven by the learner's possibility of learning by himself and also truly learning it well with the help of a teacher. The wisdom transmitted by the teacher is the same wisdom by which the individual can arrive with his own cognitive system, but teaching still takes first place because it presupposes a higher level of wisdom to attain and the presence of a teacher who has already achieved this higher level. Every student is like clay waiting for the potter who is the teacher to mould (Ibid). Basically, education begins from birth, but the term has come to be used only for formal system of education. For instance, John Milton says that "education is that which enables a man to perform justly, skilfully and with satisfaction, the offices both private and public which have been assigned to him" (Gyesi-Appiah, 2003:4). The implication is that the individual gets what will aid him/her in their life through education.

Fundamentally, the idea of education from the above analysis is that process of acquiring skills, information, development of individual capacity, imparting knowledge, and the transmission of individual capacity for independent thinking. Education is important and fundamental to every rational society. It has been with man since the beginning of reality (creation of man) and has contributed greatly to the development of human society. The system of education each society practice and adopts, goes a long way to affect the overall human behaviours, ways of life and level of development in that society.

### **Morality: Meaning and Nature**

Morality refers to the normative code of a group of people, a set of principles employed by a people to determine the forms of behaviour that are to be referred to as right or good as opposed to those to be rejected as bad or wrong. As an enterprise, morality provides a guide of conduct for human beings as they engaged in social interaction

determining the conduct, the personality traits and the social institutions or practices that should be accepted by the society. This why it is acceptable to simply describe morality as a venture committed to the specification of the types of conduct people should embrace, the kind of character traits and social institutions/practices that should be accepted as against the contrary.

Morality is that set of convictions whose function is to promote human flourishing, to enable us to live together on terms of mutually beneficial cooperation - or whatever one's doctrine as to its function may be (Routledge Encyclopaedia of Philosophy). Indeed, the object of morality is primarily to order human behaviour and the activities in the society in a way that will enhance social stability, the well - being of all in the society and also to provide an adequate context within which all members of the society can effectively pursue their interests in ways that will be mutually beneficial. Morality bases its judgment on the rational nature of man and his final destiny which make his actions morally right or wrong. In summary, we can say that morality is a system of justification or condemnation of human actions as right or wrong, good or bad, etc (Routledge Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, *ibid*). Therefore, it is in the attempt to achieve the above objective that standards of actions evolve to specify those actions and character traits that are acceptable as good or bad, right or wrong, in the society. This standard in turn provides the basis for specific human conducts. Summarily, morality is concerned with the setting of normative standards for evaluating which ones are good or right, justified or unjustified bad or wrong. Again, a group of authors have defined morality as this, "the rules and codes that we live our lives by - morality tells us how we should live and act and develop as humans" (Jones, 2006: 7). This means morality serves a guide or a norm which humans "act" ought to follow if they want to promote unity and the good of other.

Wherever and in whatever human beings do in their social interactions, there must be a standard of action which is morality. There are basically two types of morality the ordinary morality and the occupational morality. The ordinary morality, as the name implies, entails those codes of conduct

that guide everybody in the society. They are general principles of action that guide human conduct without the exclusion of anybody in that society. The occupational morality in its sense means those codes of action that guide specific works or roles in the society. We should also bear in mind the essence or purpose behind morality; and this why *Blackwell Dictionary of Western Philosophy* states that “...but the overriding purpose of all moralities is to preserve social harmony” (2004, 228). This aim is fully found in the extract above. According to Gonslaves (1986: 50), “morality is the quality or value human act have by which we call them right or wrong, good or evil. It is a general term covering the goodness or badness of human act without specifying which of the two moral values is meant”. With this, we can see that morality does not present to us the good deeds required but also the bad ones to be avoided. It also implies that morality covers the whole acts of human being. It must be noted that morality does not only serve as a guide or code but can be used in a descriptive form. Apart from this, morality can be influenced by some factors. This means that if we use morality to describe some actions, it is quite possible to have been influenced by some things to act in that manner. In this, we can say that morality can be subjective and objective (Gonslaves, 1986: *ibid*). It is subjective when morality is influenced or when one acts according to knowledge, consent, background, training, prejudice, emotional maturity, stability, and personal traits. It is objective when it is judged from the rational and realistic point of view excluding emotion and ignorance.

Significantly, morality is something everybody looks up to and works towards, in the sense that it is the measure of good conducts of all inhabitants of a particular society and that means in effect that one can individualize morality. No society takes the issue of morality with levity and because of that, every member of the society tries to live up to expectation. For instance, if a particular society frowns at immoral act like theft, people of such community become very conscious of it. People tend to behave according to the socially acceptable norms of society. Morality helps individuals living in a particular society to behave in a certain situation and places. This is because certain behaviours do not correspond to certain places. The popular saying, “do the right things at the right

time and at the right place”, codifies this. This ensures good conduct among individuals.

### **The Nature of Society**

This concept is one of the concepts that can be defined in a broad sense and in a narrow sense. In a broad sense, the concept society means a large group of people who live together in an organized way, making decisions about how to do things and sharing tasks that need to be done in order. Society is considered as a unique and the highest stage for the development of every living being. It manifests itself in the functioning and growth of social organizations. But in its narrow sense, society means an organization in which people share similar interest (Ogundowole, 2004: 28). *The Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* (2000: 119) defined society as people in general, living together in communities; a particular community of people who share the same customs, laws, etc. Multon Gonslaves (1986: 228) also defined society “enduring union of a number of persons morally bound under authority to cooperate for a common good”. In all these definitions and analyses, there is a common trend and it is that the society is an organisation of human beings, sharing some common culture and pursuing a common good. But it is worthy of note that society is not a physical thing. The only thing physical about it is the members and their actions. Thus, society is a kind of relation, not a single but a number of relations unified and systematized into an order (Ibid).

From the above, man is observed as an important element in the society; that is the society makes no meaning devoid of the person. Thus, man is conceived as a social being in the history of philosophy. Put simply, the human nature is social and as a social being, he/she must dwell within a society for full realization of his/her potentials. It is the view of many scholars that from conception of man to the end of his life, the society defines part of human nature. Therefore man cannot but live in a society, because it is in the society that humans can develop and become fully human. Every human beings is born into a particular society in which he (man) learns how to live and associate with others. In this society, man learns how to be human and learns a particular behaviour, attitude,

custom, tradition, the good or bad. In others, man learns and acquires some characteristics to enable him lead a meaningful life if he chooses. It is all these that a human being learns that make up his individuality. Following from this, it necessary to state that events of social life do not just come like that unless in a society, so man has to live in a particular society in order to form a good society (Naji, 2006: 102).

Man creates society, and society also forms man to be what he is as a social being. As a social animal, human beings need human interrelations, organizations and relationship for their full or best existence and fulfilment. Thus, for there to be social beings, social arrangements, laws, and other institutions must be put in place; such would assist individuals to make choices either to be good citizens or bad ones of a society(Ibid).

### **Education, Moral Values and Human Society: A Synthesis**

Having examined and the discussed the nature and trend of education, moral values and society, it is imperative to show at this stage how education and moral values can help build a sound and viable human society. It simply means that a peaceful society must consider the relevance of good education in conjunction with moral probity, for it to thrive and achieve its full potentiality. First, there is a great relationship among education, morality and the society. One cannot do without the other, because it is the synergy of individuals' intellectual capabilities that build the society. It is the individual that set in motion, morals, custom, traditions, aimed towards the realization of a better society. Put simply, education and morality have the same foundation which is in human nature. They are centred on human nature which inseparable from each other. We should note that human beings cannot grow to be human without these three concepts(education, morals and values). It is these three things that make up a human and a good society. Education is important for the growth of the society and for the growth and development of individuals. It cannot be separated from man and also from our life. Education and moral values ensure stability in a society. It is through education systems that young members of the society are taught the expected behaviour of the society (Dubey et al, 1982: 1). Most members of a society grows up with its values ingrained. This

means that the internationalization of expected behaviour ensures harmony among the members, and education is therefore viewed as a social control mechanism. A society cannot exist or will exist in chaos and anarchy where there is no social order.

From another perspective, we cannot deny the importance of education and morality in character building. Moral upbringing, or character training, has been a strong principle of education. In clear terms, we cannot talk about character formation in any human society without mentioning morality. This is because education and morality in different forms helps one to cultivate a certain habit which later becomes one's character. Education and morality inculcate in people the ability to coordinate whatever is learnt towards social and useful purpose against destructive ones (Onyeaghalaji, 2009: 100). This makes individuals to get a habit or a way of thinking that will engrave the good of the society in the heart. Therefore, when we have a lot of people who have positive thinking trend, development is facilitated in that particular society and this in turn affects those around them. In addition, there is no education without discipline and discipline helps to instil moral probity and good character. Discipline allows morality especially within the context of education to question the behavioural attitude of educators and learners. Morality and education bring about good conduct that should guide the process of learning. It is true that education is basically to teach someone, (that which begins from the cradle) to pass knowledge or to impart good attitude in recipients. It is to instruct, to give information and, needed knowledge to others through the process of teaching. When this process is on-going, education is serving reformatory purpose that helps to change or shift certain human behaviour. It can be changing from good to bad or bad to good. Thus, education thus restructures or reconstructs someone's personality model. It makes a new whole of person, a better person for oneself and for the society in which one lives and operates (Fagothey, 2000: 35). When all these takes place, the society is at the receiving end.

Society is rooted in morality, that is, it is sustained by moral principles. To enjoy harmonious living in a society, these moral principles have to be respected. One who does not respect or act in accordance with

these principles, is seen as an anti-social being because he/she distorts what the society stands for (Omoregbe, 2003: 382). This fact explains that it is through education that we can build character that would stand the test of time, such that the very nature and peaceful society we all want can be achieved. Besides, this fact also further emphasises that the idea of morality is inseparable from education and by extension, the society. There is a wall of distinction between education and related concepts such as training and indoctrination. These related concepts deal with the intellectual formation without involving without much of moral principles. However, within the context of education, it implies the transmission of intellectual knowledge as well as moral values and judgement. In the absence of morality, we cannot make reference to education because education necessarily implies morality. For instance, “one can be trained to be a nurse, carpenter, driver, a doctor and this has to do with the intellect without involving will or morality; whereas education involves both the intellectual and moral formation” (Omoregbe, *ibid*: 384). Education thus means transforming the person’s character from bad to good. As R.S. Peters as cited by Omoregbe (2003) said, it would be a logical contradiction to say that a person is educated but he is in no way changed for better”. Rousseau (2007), however, is of the view that the objective of education is not to prepare one for a particular job or function in the society but to form a man. By forming a man, Rousseau means a person who will be balanced in life both intellectually and morally. In scales of values, education belongs to the values that are regarded as intrinsic in man’s nature such as good health, happiness and so forth; it is different from extrinsic values, like any acquired skills. Above all, the importance of education and moral values touches the behaviour of the individual and maintains a social relationship among others. Such social relationships helps in the reduction of vices like corruption, examination malpractice, violence and conflict, human right abuses, injustice and to mention but a few. These can be attained if only the majority understands that education and moral values are necessary tools for justice, development, and peace. This is what everybody desires, but it is unattainable except societies around the world improve the fundamental tenets of education and moral values.

## Conclusion

This paper has been able to discuss the idea of education, with emphasis on the fact that education is as old as man and that education is the *alter ego* of other activities of man. All the activities of man directly or indirectly are geared towards educating man for the development of his capacity and his environment and for the well being of his existence. And these are realisable when appreciate that moral values must guide every of our actions. The paper also emphasised the fact that the role of education and moral values in the society assists man to live in the society as a social animal. This is because a society without education is like a rudderless ship and such society cannot progress beyond a certain level. Following from this, we can say that education and moral values are necessary to the society as what nutrition and reproduction are to physiological life. It (education) consists primarily in the transmission of values, culture and norms of the society. Education in all forms is set out to develop the person for life. Thus, based on this preparation of the individuals, that moral aspect also comes in towards assisting the person or individual to think rightly about whatever he or she does and is held responsible for it. From the foregoing, it is clear that there is a distinct relationship between these three terminologies, and that they complement one another. It is also important at this point to know that without education and moral values, the society is irrelevant and without the society, education and morality are also irrelevant.

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