

THE VALUE ATTRIBUTION FUNCTION OF TEACHING PHILOSOPHY IN A MULTI-CULTURAL WORLD

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ABSTRACT

The world of today has become smaller due to intensive cultural interaction and widespread communication. In this world where the accessibility of knowledge is far easier and expeditious, the problem is how and why knowledge will be used, rather than how knowledge is attained. The shortness of human life prevents the apprehension of the events and facts happened from the past to the present as a whole. Unable to see the differences and changes, by isolating a group within the uniform meaning world of the life of communities, leads to create a close and unproductive world of culture. This gradually increases the tension between the individuals and the communities bringing differences prominence. In order to overcome this problem, it is compulsory to restructure the national and international curricula. Taking the training aspect of philosophy into consideration, the spread of teaching philosophy in particular will contribute a lot to bring up free, responsible, reconciliatory individuals. Teaching philosophy on an ethical basis, preventing individuals regard other people as instruments, displays that everything existing is in a harmony with the fundamental life purposes of the person.

Key Words: Value, Culture, Multi-Cultural, Dialogue

ÖZET

Çeşitli topluluklarca tanımlanmaya çalışılan kimlikler, geçen yüzyılın bu yüzyıla aktardığı geniş toplumsal ve düşünsel hareketliliğin kaynağı olarak, şu an Yeni Dünyanın önemli ve tehlikeli anlaşmazlıklarının sebebi görünmektedir. Ülkemizde birçok farklı kültürel topluluk olmakla birlikte, onların sahip oldukları temel kabullerin neler olduğu konusunda pratik felsefe çalışmaları yapılamamıştır. Oysa felsefi bir soruşturma yapılabilecek değerlendirmelerin bu geleneksel toplulukların düşünce ve eylem biçimlerinin çözümlenmelerinde ve anlaşılmasında katkı sağlayacağı açıktır. Bu çözümlenmelerden yola çıkarak onların birbirleriyle ilgili olumsuz, tehditkâr kabul ve önyargılarının ayıklanarak yerlerine olumlu ve uzlaşmacı olanlarının önerilmesi de mümkün olabilir. Bunun için yapılması gereken ilk şey Sokratik Diktum'a geri dönerek, diyalog kavramına yeniden işlerlik kazandırmak gerekliliğidir. Bunun yolu, yaşamın somut, pratik sorunlarına yönelmektir. Felsefi ilginin bir diyalog çerçevesinde çeşitli kültürel oluşların temel yönlendiricilerinin çözümlenmesine dönük olması, ilgili kültürel yapıların olumlu değerleri üzerinden gerçekleştirileceği için, yeni, özgün fikirlerin ve değerlerin oluşturulmasına da katkı sağlayacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Değer, Kültür, Çok Kültürlülük, Diyalog

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We are living in a rapid, compact and a blistering pace in today's world due to intensive cultural and economic interactions and the unavoidable speed of widespread possibilities of communication. In this world, where the accessibility of knowledge is far more extensive, the main question is how and why knowledge will be utilized and governed, rather than how it would be attained. The finitude of human life also hinders our apprehension of the events occurred from the past to present as a whole.² The spaces where individuals live, ethical rules, religious or philosophical beliefs that people consciously or unconsciously obey and cultural environment they exist are so durable that it is usually impossible for people to recognize that these realities have changed. The flow of the daily life, which has permeated our life deeply and delicately is so ordinary that we never think of questioning the histories and meanings of lots of things, from objects to concepts, surrounding us. However, these "things" are the history and meaning themselves; they are always in daily life and they are always produced. In this production, daily life for time, space, culture and human being experiencing all these things, social classes, ideologies, knowledge and historical consciousness created by cultural organization and media are defined and experienced together with habits (Emiroglu, 2002, p. 14). Unable to see the plurality of voices and differences, by marginalizing a group within the uniform meaning world of the life of communities, leads to create a cryptic and impenetrable world of culture. This difficult outcome gradually increases the frustration among the citizens of the particular community and brings differences prominence. In order to overcome this vital complication, it is compulsory to rethink and restructure the national and international curricula. Taking the training aspect of philosophy into consideration, the spread of teaching philosophy in particular will contribute a lot to bring up free, responsible, reconciliatory individuals. Philosophy's demand for seeing plurality in unison seems to be a hinge leading the individuals of the multi-cultured world to contemplate the existing as a whole.

First of all, we should point out that philosophy is the effort of producing concepts. A philosopher is mentioned by the concepts he has produced. By following the contemporary hermeneutical theory, we can argue that the concepts are values (Gadamer, 1977, p. 3-17). The domain of value affects us directly in the formation of our knowledge; it determines our decisions and judgements. A value is a world of the concepts gained in a certain cultural environment and tradition, and constituting all living habits of an individual. Thus, the individual acquires a vision of facts and objects through these living habits. The values, which are the basis for the ethical

² For a more comprehensive analysis of this social structure, see Manuel Castells, 2009, *Communication Power*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, p. 24-53

and aesthetical judgements are the impulses of the acts and attitudes of individuals in life. The values in this sense function as the criteria for the affirmation of knowledge of the individuals. This domain of values arises out of the human being's awareness of the past. The awareness of the past means self-awareness. It requires historical consciousness. So, there are cultural and historical traces in the existence of the human being. An individual determined by his past experiences acquires a view about the objects, events and facts, and from this viewpoint, he judges them. The value in this sense is a person's living habits gained as a historical accretion within a certain living environment, and the faculty of judgement he derived from these habits. For example, the values set criteria for an aesthetic judgement to appreciate whether an object is beautiful or ugly; for an ethical judgement to decide whether an act is good or bad, or for a logical judgement to decide an inference is right or wrong. Therefore, the prominence of the perception as the source of our errors, the values as the sources of living habits in the process of knowledge acquisition leads us to conclude that the actualities of the matters we have talked about are subjective. In this sense the value and the judgement are interrelated. As is pointed out by Kuçuradi "evaluation seen in the all expressions of human life is not to judge something as an audience in terms of its value, to appraise it a ready-made measure or according to something else exclusive of thing evaluated or not to attribute a quality. Evaluation is to see and display the special condition of the evaluated within its own field. In this regard, evaluation is a question of knowledge... [therefore] exhibiting the worth of the values is the task of philosophy" (Kuçuradi, 1971, p. 14-15).

Individuals or groups become meaningful with their relations within their living environment. Accordingly, the tendencies, general values, styles and patterns of thoughts derived within the interrelations and interactions of the groups adopting these should be the focus of this education. Each individual has been formed by the apprehension that everything perceivable has a meaning corresponding to a certain reality of life. So, we see individual life as a form of living attempting at realizing its own desires in interaction with social life, while realizing the desires of the society at the same time. This interaction between the individual and his life is the appearance of life. Students have to be aware of life and see it as a whole in order to determine the life in a qualified way. Therefore, the subject matter of teaching philosophy is the man-made domain of values. This domain arises out of social life. The fundamental life purposes of the individuals are the daily life style of the society within which they live. We can argue that what ensures the meaningful existence of a person in a certain group is his ability to interpret and sustain the life methods of his own society. Culture grows out of the sustenance of the life methods. Culture is a means for a society to explain itself and its life style. Due to the variety in the expansion of culture,

gathering and spreading knowledge through such fields as education, state, law, art, science and religion make it possible to reach at certain levels in the formation of the life style of a society. First and foremost, the basic characteristic of a society manifests itself in the terminology of religion, art and philosophy (Hegel, 1952, p. 105-106). This characteristic is reflected on the life style developed by the society. The development of various styles in art, science and philosophy forms a tradition. These traditions constitute a general framework, and include all fields of life such as language, business, politics, science, communication, art, religion and philosophy. These are the concepts of philosophy. In the solution of cultural problems, in-depth historical and logical realities and reasons are required. Thus, only in philosophy, in the terms of philosophy, these realities and reasons can be revealed. The task of philosophy “is to exhibit the grounds -or groundlessness-of value judgements; then to display the climax and its historical results depending on an anthropology researching the individual as well as the human being and thus, to illuminate the happenings as ethics, philosophy of art, philosophy of law-state or another branch of philosophy” (Kuçuradi, 1971, p. 36).

Social sciences in general, philosophy, history and art in particular have important functions such as developing apprehension, improving mind and explaining the life and the world over and over again within their interactions. Therefore, these branches function as the intermediaries of the positive changes in language, accordingly in culture. The possibility of the positive cultural change manifests itself in the idea of “originality”. Originality is the substratum for a person to create his current life in relation with his essence and what he is beyond himself. In the versatility of life, it reveals a person’s critical consciousness, and helps him develop himself by means of defining, interpreting and criticizing himself. Hence, it leads a person to expose his own potentialities, enabling the person to distinguish himself from the others. The originality in this sense is related with autonomous thinking. This is because free thought is one of the most important and radical factors causing the development of science, philosophy, art and history. Without thinking independently, it is impossible to offer a new insight in culture and to make progress in culture. However, free-thinking “means restraining thinking in the best way, pushing aside the devious and somewhat secret pressures of hardly distinguishable factors leading it to error and fault and avoiding their effects. It is obvious that irresponsible liberal thinking does not have always a positive denotation; similarly, liberal thinking against an abrupt and overt pressure is too primitive and too simple to emphasize it as a problem. In other words, liberal thinking is a freedom against the things preventing dependence on the ways leading to the truth and reality” (Sayılı, 1978, p. 357). therefore, originality should be thought as the source of the creative, developing, changing,

renewing, giving competence, reformative, affirmative thoughts and acts. Taking a step to bring him to future through his choices enabling him free, the original person (philosopher, scientist, artist, historian, etc.) distinguishes himself within this culture and tradition, and makes his original contribution to the manner of expression and the ways of objectification of intellect.

How will all these qualifications be attributed to individuals? Of course, the most important way to achieve it is education. Education is the efforts to adapt people to life and to get people adopt habits throughout lifespan. It gets each person to adopt suitable behaviours so that they can be in harmony with their own society and with other societies. In life, a person gets habits and world-view through education. The skills acquired by a person through education are the customs, traditions, religion, philosophy, science and art of the society. In other words, an individual gets a social viewpoint through education. A viewpoint is nothing but the aesthetic formation of the mind. Aesthetic forms each individual acquires by the effect of the culture within which he is are the signs exhibiting how the person will orientate himself to his surroundings, and how he will change it. As Sayılı rightfully points out “Culture is a spiritual civilization or the civilization of thought and emotion. Culture includes lots of things people never think about, never do consciously, but maintain through habits, customs and traditions. On the other hand, when we mention a cultured man or a society of high culture, the term culture here refers to the knowledge, thought and emotions consciously gained, making a great effort, through education” (Sayılı, 1978, p. 343). Aesthetic consciousness acquired by the education functions as the background for the values to be created by the individuals. Aesthetic consciousness, by this function, becomes the determiner of the characteristics of the social values. Having individuals gain qualified social values is possible through a sufficient, versatile teaching of philosophy, art and history. It is achieved by getting the students, beginning from the early ages, to do creative and interpretive activities, and transferring the existing values to the students in order to equip the students with sufficient skills to make them think over these values, and to develop their creativity. This means that thinking of our cultural values over and over again to introduce new cultural values in the fields of science, philosophy, art, ethics and history, their general expressions, to our social life. This is the indispensable prerequisite of cultural richness. This is because “when is mentioned a culture developed in spiritual field, what is emphasized here at least partly knowledge-based. Since such characteristics as the refinement and richness of artistic pleasure have to base on the knowledge on the level of high culture” (Sayılı, 1978, p. 343-344). Therefore, it is necessary to form the above-mentioned knowledge. This consciousness which will connect us to a historical viewpoint will exhibit what we will be able to accomplish, by considering our historic successes, and settling with them.

Therefore, teaching philosophy concerning human life should be based on the meaning of the man for the man, and include the basic and valid life methods of the social structure within which the individual exists, the awareness and interpretation of them. A teaching of philosophy to be approached as the expansion of the opportunities for students to understand, apprehend and interpret themselves and their surroundings will lead to a qualified cultural awareness. First of all, having knowledge about the intellectual creations of the past will cause the students gain a historical consciousness, and they will understand that philosophical disputes of the past are important data to understand and to explain a historical period. This is because the intellectual possibilities of a society come out in the cultural accumulation created by that society. The body of philosophical works reveals a period, a society, a culture wholly. The institutional structure and the relations, the ideals as the consequences of these relations, the worldviews, and the ideologies can be understood through the aesthetic forms in the artistic activities into which they are transferred. The way to discover the nature, values and viewpoints of the societies, primarily our society, is to give students an education of philosophy augmented by the art history, the philosophy of art and the sociology of art. In this way, we can make the students gain an artistic consciousness. It should not be disregarded that philosophical thought instigates to constitute a current life related to the self and what he is beyond himself. Therefore, the aim of teaching philosophy should be not only to teach individuals the principles and methods of its own subject matter, but also to provide them with the opportunities for philosophical evaluations, and to enable them to develop their manner of expressions, by using these evaluations. A person can apprehend life as an individual life only through a philosophical attitude. As Soykan argues “The man knows the world only through knowing himself. The man who finds humanity in his self knows and understands the world through himself. In order to understand the world, first of all, I should make it “my own world”. It necessitates being sensible to what happens in the world. Thus, keeping the humanity in myself, I make the boundary of my world the boundary of the humanity. If I restrict my world to my selfishness, I will exclude the rest of the humanity, call it the “other”, consider it as an object, and I use it as an instrument” (Soykan, 2003, p. 104). Therefore, teaching philosophy on an ethical basis, preventing individuals regard other people as instruments, displays that everything existing is in a harmony with the fundamental life purposes of the person.

Of course, it is necessary for the students to make use of their own philosophical understanding to think about the true nature of life properly. Life exists in an environment. The environment in which life exists consists of the events, characteristics, relations and essences belonging to the being and the reality. The human being finds himself in this environment. This

existence, which means the individual practices something properly, associates something with the other things, and in this way, he puts the things in a whole rightly is nothing but to understand the styles created by life. Thus, the person aims at “understanding and seeing other people in terms of their values, instead of forming prejudices about them while evaluating other people” (Kuçuradi, 1971, p . 43).

Since the questioning aspect of a philosophical research requires a critical approach, it constitutes the basis for the fundamental teaching practices. The students’ being aware of the fact that the cultural background of various life habits is based on certain philosophical acceptances broadens their horizons. Therefore, the contents of the philosophy courses in the secondary education should be arranged in such a way that they make it possible for the students to question both themselves and other people, and that they should display various problems in order to have the students gain sufficient qualifications to discuss the possible solutions to these problems by rational arguments. Due to this aspect, the existence of philosophy in the secondary education enriches and enlightens the students’ consciousness concerning themselves, society and the world. In this sense, philosophy as the critical self-consciousness of a person within the varieties of life helps him define, criticize, interpret himself, and in this way, it enables the person to develop himself. Therefore, the philosophy courses should include not only general philosophical systems but also the outstanding examples of Turkish and the world literature so that the students can make philosophical analyses of different circumstances of human life presented in novels, the short stories and the poetry. Such a curriculum of philosophy makes the students aware of human experiences and their meanings. Determining the relations between the parts of relationships presented in the literary works and whole human experiences and life will make the students tolerant individuals.

It should not be forgotten that the common value of the world is to become human. In a nutshell becoming human means having wisdom and conscience. In modern times, understanding the human as such has a long history from the German Idealism to Critical Theory (Taylor, 2007, p. 211-259). Therefore, a person should know not only himself but also the other. The person knowing himself is interested in everything surrounding him, and feels responsibility towards them. This responsibility requires being frank even if we find them contradictory and strange. The suitable way to educate students as the modest, reconciliatory individuals having common sense, admitting the differences in a multi-cultured world is to make them aware of the ethics, one of the most fundamental fields of philosophy, and human rights. Living in a world where we can freely discuss our differences, even if we do not have the same thoughts and feelings means getting better in the attempt of becoming a decent and mature man. Teaching philosophy

therefore enables the individuals to consider other cultures as the values, by overcoming their excluding attitudes against those different from themselves. The educationist's carrying out this function through philosophy in a multi-cultured world will promote a healthy communication between the cultures.

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