

To cite this article: Dr Hemlata Krishnani (2025). THE NEED FOR A BALANCED APPROACH TO EDUCATION, A PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVE, International Journal of Education and Social Science Research (IJESSR) 8 (4): 377-386 Article No. 1127, Sub Id 1754

THE NEED FOR A BALANCED APPROACH TO EDUCATION, A PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVE

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DOI : <https://doi.org/10.37500/IJESSR.2025.8427>

ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the aim and objective of education in the contemporary era. It supports a learning experience which can sculpt the soul taking into consideration philosophical theories of virtue ethics and care ethics. Using narrative review methodology, the article explores the theoretical foundations, practical implementations, and real-world impacts and highlights the importance of fostering ethical behaviour and character in students. The two approaches to education- materialistic and values-based approach, one focusing on measurable outcomes such as employment rates and salary packages, making individuals economically productive and the other approach in terms of nurturing moral values, critical thinking, creativity, empathy, and a sense of purpose, making individuals more humane and contributing positively to both, personal development and constructive citizens are discussed. A few definitions of character are examined and common features in those definitions are identified, a brief exposition of the philosophical understanding of the term character is discussed. The paper aims to understand how the philosophical theories of virtue ethics and care ethics can be integrated into the learning experience to achieve a balanced educational approach

KEYWORDS: education, character, moral values, virtue ethics, care ethics

INTRODUCTION

Education is the art of making man ethical. —Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel

Contemporary society faces serious challenges like conflicts, anger, depression, frustration, cutthroat competition, communalism, corruption and so on. To promote sensible, moral and responsible behaviour schools and colleges, implement various moral education programmes. However, the lacuna between theorising morals and implementing them in real-life situations presents a great challenge in today's world. Thus, it becomes essential to understand the cause and the reasons behind such behaviour and to reflect and provide recommendations on bridging the gap between the theory and practice of educational programmes so that such programmes ultimately contribute to the development of all-round ethical human beings. The desired outcomes of any education system are the development of key moral dispositions, the cultivating of desirable and trustworthy traits, and the forming of personalities that can make rational ethical choices rather than being affected by feelings, emotions or

personal gains. An education system that fails to achieve these goals is unsuccessful (Lapsley & Narvaez, 2006). Value-based education can help curb the negative tendencies and promote solidarity and unity among the various sections of society. Youth should embody the virtues and characteristics essential for a thriving and enduring culture. Educational institutions aim to uphold this sacred trust, fostering individuals who are both good people and useful citizens (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005).

The educational philosophy of great Indian thinkers like Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi, Swami Dayanand Saraswati and many more has always been about integrating education and moral values. These visionaries held that education without moral values is empty. All our learning or recitation of the Vedas, correct knowledge of Sanskrit, Latin, Greek and whatnot will avail us nothing if they do not enable us to cultivate absolute purity of heart. The end of all knowledge must be the building up of character (Gandhi, 1935).

Character

The society at large is concerned about the breakdown of a healthy moral atmosphere as there is an increase in the number of violence, substance abuse, cheating, lying, stealing drunken driving, road rage and many more. As educators, it becomes our concern to ponder this and encourage the teaching and execution of high standards of moral behaviour by family, community and teaching institutions (Michigan State University, n.d.).

At the core of self-development lies the development of such traits as purity in thoughts, words and actions, truthfulness, honesty, sympathy, courageousness, and reverence, in common parlance called character.

Now the question is what is character and how can it be formed? This section deals with some definitions of the term character and the next section deals with the philosophical theories of how can character be formed.

In Greek, the term character means a mark, an engraving. it represents consistency and predictability denoting lasting tendencies in behavior. It highlights something deeply embedded in one's personality, serving as the organizing principle that unifies actions, perspectives, and morals (Lapsley & Narvaez, 2006)

Philosophically understood the term character refers to moral aspects of a person. Aristotle used the term *ēthē* to refer to character, a word that is etymologically connected to the concepts of "ethics" and "morality," deriving from the Latin term "mores". When a person is said to have the character, it usually implies, that they have distinguishing moral qualities, moral virtues and moral reasoning abilities (Mordacci, 2021). The Sanskrit term (*caritra*) which is a translation of the word character also means good nature, conduct and behaviour.

There are various definitions given in the literature which attempt to define the term character more precisely. According to Dewey and Tufts, is a "body of active tendencies and interests" that makes

one “open, ready, warm to certain aims and callous, cold, blind to others” (Dewey & Tufts, 1910, p. 256). Kupperman (1991) defines character as one’s distinctive pattern of thought, desire, and action about personal and others’ well-being and other significant concerns and commitments. Yet another definition talks about character as an individual’s “general approach to the dilemmas and responsibilities of social life, a responsiveness to the world that is supported by emotional reactions to the distress of others, the acquisition of prosocial skills, knowledge of social conventions and construction of personal values” (Hay et al., 1995, p. 24).

In essence, a person's character is shaped by their habitual behaviours, underlying moral values, and actions resulting from the interplay of these two elements.

In this paper, the term character is understood as having a moral dimension and moral character, then, can be understood as a demonstration of good traits of personality like self-discipline. empathy etc. called virtues, avoidance of certain other features of personality called vices, and the regular display of congenial habits and attitudes in any course of action.

The philosophers’ view

The philosophical exploration of good moral character has a rich history. Greek moralists like Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics concentrated on the concept of "virtue," equating it with admirable moral character. They posed questions about how one becomes virtuous, whether virtue can be taught and developed or if it arises naturally, and the role of institutions and relationships in fostering virtue. For these Greek thinkers, happiness is found in performing virtuous actions. They believed that virtuous character traits are stable, enduring, and can be cultivated. Most importantly, they saw virtues as the best exercise of reason, which is the activity that defines human beings. Thus, in their view, virtuous activity completes or perfects human life (Crisp, 1998).

Immanuel Kant, approach to character, on the other hand, emphasises duty and obedience to law. His deontological ethics recognizes an obligation to help others. But this obligation originates from reason rather than feeling (Noddings, 2002). Philosophers such as Hume, and Mill, showed a keen interest in the psychology of moral character, echoing the concerns of the Greeks. Mill's qualitative hedonism posits that higher pleasures, which engage intellectual and moral faculties, are superior to lower pleasures. These higher pleasures are closely related to Aristotle's ideas about rational activities, and their pursuit leads to self-esteem and a virtuous life. Furthermore, political institutions play a crucial role in fostering these higher pleasures and improving individuals morally (Homiak, 2019).

In the 20th century, the publication of John Rawls’ "A Theory of Justice" (1971), reignited interests in virtue and character. Rawls illustrated how individuals in a just state might be raised to develop the virtues expected of good citizens. This work inspired other philosophers to delve into the psychological foundations of virtue and explore the roles of friendship, family, community, and meaningful work in fostering good moral character.

Concerns

The insights of Rawls and earlier philosophers on how character can be shaped by institutions governed by the principles of justice, family, friendship and various political and economic institutions have raised some concerns. If our character is influenced by forces beyond our control then it is plausible to say that we are not in control of our characters at all, and good character is not truly achievable.

In "Freedom Within Reason," Susan Wolf argues that a morally problematic upbringing can be forced and might hinder someone from recognising or fulfilling their moral obligations. She provides examples such as ordinary citizens of Nazi Germany, white children of 1850s slave owners, and individuals brought up to accept traditional sex roles to support her argument. Wolf claims that it is impossible to determine which types of upbringings enable people to comprehend and act upon moral principles. Consequently, she believes there is always a possibility that our responsibility for our actions is lessened (Wolf, 1990).

Furthermore, altering one's character is not an easy or quick process. When a character is shaped or misshaped by political, economic, educational, and family structures, changing it may require access to specific transformative influences, which might not be readily available. This is evident in modern societies, particularly in workplaces and homes where discrimination, especially against women, prevents many from experiencing the satisfaction of self-expression. Consequently, many people today lack the opportunities to fully develop the psychological capacities essential for a virtuous character. The critical question is how educational, economic, political, and social institutions should be organized to facilitate such development (Homiak, 2019).

How to build a character-philosophical foundations

There are many philosophical theories on how to build a character, but this paper gives a brief outline of Aristotle's and care ethicists' views.

Aristotle

The role of habits in the development of morality has classical sources. In Book II of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (NE) Aristotle discusses the nature and definition of virtues. According to him moral virtues can be acquired and cultivated if we exercise them. They are thus not part of natural human qualities but a result of habits. One can become good only if one practices the good. Just as we master different arts and crafts by practising them so also, we become virtuous by practising virtuous actions. He argues that just as people become "builders by building and harp players by playing the harp, so also, then, we become just by doing just actions, temperate by doing temperate actions, brave by doing brave actions." (*Aristotle in 23 Volumes*, 1934).

According to (Steutel & Spiecker, 2004), the habits that are cultivated through the Aristotelian notion of habituation are stable and enduring tendencies to do certain kinds of things regularly but spontaneously and effortlessly without conscious choice, forethought or planning (Steutel & Spiecker, 2004).

According to Aristotle, virtue involves both doing an act recurrently and pragmatic thinking. For example, one can learn to be courageous by doing courageous acts repeatedly, such as taking or avoiding risks, by following the examples of others and being attentive to the specificities of the present act. One is courageous if one can differentiate between courage and carelessness and would not take inappropriate risks to impress others or merely to follow the peers. A true understanding of courage involves knowing what courage is, why it is valuable and how it is different from cowardice. A genuinely courageous person fears dangerous situations and acts accordingly rather than putting his life and others at risk because of not making a well-calculated decision. This requires a high level of rationality and clarity about one's actions.

Furthermore, Aristotle asserts that one must have the appropriate emotions supporting their reason. If someone is afraid and reluctantly performs a courageous act while wishing they did not have to, they are not truly courageous. (Hartman, 2013)

According to Aristotle action on non-rational desires like laziness, anger, hunger etc displays incontinence (*Aristotle in 23 Volumes*, 1934) or weakness of will '. Because of these non-rational desires even if we know what is best, it is still possible to fail to do the best. Thus, Aristotle insists on the importance of non-rational desires in moral education. Aristotle argues that the virtues must be a result of habituation '(ethismos), training in the right sorts of pleasure and pain connected with the right sorts of action. The appropriate sort of elementary habituation is needed to ensure the right harmony between rational and non-rational desires. Though people who succeed in following their rational choices against their non-rational inclinations are continent or self-controlled; Aristotle does not consider continence sufficient for virtue. According to him, a continent person might succeed in doing the very same actions that a virtuous person does; but he may suffer conflict in choosing to do the right actions, as he is reluctant to give up the goods that have to be given up to act virtuously, so continence does not suffice for virtue. On the other hand, a virtuous person is not reluctant nor in conflict to give up the goods that have to be given up to act virtuously. He does recognize the importance of the things he has to give up but wholeheartedly accepts the virtuous course of action. this attitude distinguishes the virtuous person from the continent person (he is not wholehearted) and the insensitive person (he has the vice of deficient feeling). Thus, according to Aristotle, a virtuous person must form the right sort of attachment to the virtuous action, and this attachment must involve the agent's desires, both rational and non-rational. Virtue contributes to the agent's happiness because it is the appropriate ordering of the agent's rational and non-rational desires and aims (Crisp, 1998).

Another important point Aristotle makes about character is that virtuous people find joy in doing good things. True virtue engages our emotions. We should feel anger when wronged, determination when going into battle, gratitude when receiving a favour, and cheerfulness when giving. However, it is crucial to have the right emotions because even the most virtuous and rational person can struggle to determine precisely what the right action is and why, especially under emotional pressure, which can lead to rationalization (Hartman, 2013).

Care Ethics

Carol Gilligan, a major proponent of care ethics, says that ethics of care integrates the concept of self with relationships and reason with emotion. This approach challenges traditional binary thinking that separates these aspects and brings a new perspective to psychological and moral theory. The ethics of care begins with the idea that humans are naturally relational and responsive. It emphasizes that our fundamental nature involves being connected and interdependent with others. This perspective highlights the importance of relationships and emotional bonds in shaping our moral understanding and behaviour.

The ethics of care focuses on the importance of being responsive in relationships, which involves paying attention, listening, and reacting appropriately to others. It emphasizes the negative consequences of losing connection either with oneself or with others. This ethical approach uses inductive reasoning, which means it draws general principles from specific instances. It is contextual, meaning it considers the specific circumstances and context of each situation, and psychological, meaning it takes into account the emotional and mental states of the people involved. Unlike deductive or mathematical logic, which relies on abstract principles and formulas, the ethics of care is grounded in the real-world complexities of human relationships and emotions (Ethics of care, 2011).

Care ethics views the human condition as a shared experience that includes universal aspects like birth, death, physical and emotional needs, and the expectation of acknowledgement. The core principles of care ethics are love, care, and recognition. It underscores the importance of dialogue, altruism, interaction, and affirmation in improving how we care for others. Dialogue, a key method in philosophical inquiry since ancient Greece, also known as Socratic midwifery, involves reaching an understanding through discussion until the true nature of a concept is grasped. This kind of interaction provides valuable feedback, which can help caregivers improve their efforts and support the growth of those they care for. In ethical discussions, the ethics of care places significant emphasis on the interactions between people involved, highlighting the relational aspect of ethical behaviour. Essentially, it stresses that ethical care arises from meaningful interactions and relationships, rather than abstract principles (Fang, 2020).

Nel Noddings (2002), in his book “Educating Moral People: A Caring Alternative to Character Education,” outlines the core features of care theory, emphasizing a relational perspective on caring. This perspective encourages considering not only the moral agents but also the recipients of moral actions, and the broader social, emotional, and environmental contexts of these interactions. Care ethics focuses on the relationships and interactions between individuals, rather than just actions themselves.

Care ethics is often categorized as a type of virtue ethics but differs by prioritizing relational aspects over individual-centric virtues. Care theorists believe that fostering better individuals through nurturing environments is more effective for moral improvement than relying on abstract principles.

They emphasize that moral motivation arises from within individuals or through their interactions, rather than from adherence to prescriptive principles.

Care theorists argue that reason alone cannot drive moral behavior, as even well-educated individuals can commit immoral acts. Instead, they stress the importance of virtues cultivated through proper nurturing by individuals who exemplify social and ethical virtues. While care ethics shares similarities with virtue ethics, it avoids prescribing a universal set of virtues, viewing them as context-dependent and defined by specific situations and relationships.

Social virtues such as friendliness, respectfulness, and emotional responsiveness are prioritized in care ethics. Moral feelings, like revulsion at evil or sympathy for others' pain, are considered crucial, with rational thinking guided by refined emotions. Care ethicists advocate for balancing emotional impulses with rational thought to act wisely and ethically.

Additionally, care ethics calls for extending care universally, beyond specific groups or communities, promoting responsiveness to the needs of both friends and strangers alike.

Care ethics aligns with Kant's deontological ethics in recognizing an obligation to help others. However, while Kant believes this obligation originates from reason, care ethicists argue it stems from the natural human capacity for caring relationships. Reason is useful in determining the best way to care for others, but the motivation to care comes from our feelings and emotional connections, not from rational thought alone. Essentially, care ethics posits that our empathy and emotions drive us to help others, and reason guides how we do it effectively.

Practical Implementation

Many philosophers of education have suggested guidelines for effectively implementing a moral education programme based on the philosophical theories discussed above. In his qualitative study on Moral Education, Kapat (2021) lays down many such suggestions by various philosophers and educationists, which are summarised as follows:

The curriculum which moral education should follow must include issue-based learning, cooperative learning (working in groups), discussions and debates on the topics concerning moral issues and moral dilemmas in open and impartial classroom conditions. According to some educationists like Oser, moral issues should be linked to moral action to foster responsibility in students, and this is attained by joint decision-making by teachers and students. Some other educationists highlight the importance of working in small groups because it fosters critical thinking skills and leads students to think about social issues actively considering the perspective of other students leading to open-mindedness and tolerance. One becomes more tolerant of disagreements and aims to resolve differences of opinion or can respect the others' opinions through interaction within the group. The importance of physical education in the curriculum is highlighted as it represents a real-life situation in which students can

practise moral behaviour, because discipline, cooperation and following moral rules are the key features of physical education. Some others propose the use of technology to foster teamwork. Others suggest that the problems or issues students face like environmental degradation or religious intolerance, pollution, global warming, deforestation etc help students acquire knowledge and understand the world around them and would eventually lead to developing a sense of community and responsibility towards society. Saye (1998) also argues that using historical topics, especially themes from the 1960s such as Vietnam, the civil-rights movement or the counterculture, can help students develop critical-thinking skills and stimulate them to consider social issues from different perspectives. Educationists like Murray argue that other subject domains besides social sciences are also significant to moral education, such as examining ethical issues related to science eg human cloning., designer babies, birth control, etc. While discussing and debating on such matters the students acquire both critical thinking and ethical decision-making skills.

Covell et al. (2010) propose that teaching children about their rights concerning basic needs, equality, justice, and education would develop their sensitivity towards the rights of others and respect for children from minority groups.

To summarise we can say that imparting moral education in schools, the schools should have specifically designed courses which focus on ethics, values, and character education, embedding moral and ethical discussions into subjects like literature, history, and science, besides social sciences, creating an egalitarian and democratic class environment that supports ethical behaviour, and creating awareness about their rights. These steps would help to ensure the practical implementation of the theoretical foundations discussed above.

Aristotle's virtue ethics focuses on developing good character traits or virtues through habitual practice and its implementation would require encouraging activities that promote virtues like honesty, courage and compassion in schools and communities and implementing character education programmes that teach and reward virtuous behaviour. The implementation of the Care Ethics philosophy involves creating support systems that prioritise empathy and care in educational, healthcare and workplace settings and promote community-building activities and policies that encourage mutual support and understanding.

According to Martha Nussbaum, a well-known political theorist and philosopher “Not everything is for profit; democracy needs humanities.” She suggests reconnecting education to humanities will strengthen the ability to criticise authorities and increase sympathy with the marginalised, which is essential to be true democratic citizens. While science and technology education are vital, critical thinking and imagination are necessary in education. Instructing in the arts and humanities enables students to examine gender, race, ethnicity, and intercultural experiences, aiding them in comprehending and valuing the varied accomplishments and challenges of different cultures (Cram.com, 2020).

CONCLUSION

From the above study, we can say that two primary perspectives emerge on the aim of education: the utilitarian view that focuses on economic productivity, and a more holistic approach that emphasizes personal growth and societal well-being.

Education, traditionally seen as a means to develop human potential and foster societal progress, is increasingly viewed through the lens of utility and economic output. This utilitarian perspective on education emphasizes skill acquisition and measurable outcomes like employment rates and salary packages. While this approach has undoubtedly contributed to the material development of nations, it can neglect the deeper, more holistic purposes of education that contribute to human well-being and societal harmony.

An education system which views education as a tool to equip individuals with skills and knowledge to be economically productive promotes a narrow view that overlooks the development of critical thinking, creativity, and emotional intelligence. Such a system neglects to cultivate sensitivity, compassion, mindfulness, and aesthetic sensibilities—qualities that are essential for personal fulfilment and social cohesion.

Indian scholars like Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi, J. Krishnamurti, and Rabindranath Tagore considered education as a means to develop the whole person, an education that fosters character, strength, and moral values, emphasizing spiritual and cultural development alongside intellectual growth. They believed education should free the mind from conformity and encourage independent thinking, self-awareness, and compassion. This humanistic ideal suggesting that education should heal and unite rather than merely produce economic value aligns with care ethicists who also advocate an education that prioritizes nurturing relationships, empathy, and care.

Keeping in mind this dual nature of education we can conclude that education should not merely be a means to an economic end but a comprehensive process that nurtures the full spectrum of human potential. By integrating the insights of Indian scholars, care ethicists, and traditional Western philosophy, we can aim for an education system that not only drives economic progress but also fosters a more compassionate, mindful, and harmonious society. This balanced approach ensures that education contributes to both individual fulfilment and societal well-being, creating a better world - a compassionate, mindful, and harmonious world. Since the contemporary world is witnessing conflicts, intolerance, ruthless crimes, and degradation of moral values, as a result of the materialistic model of education, it is time to review the education system.

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