

Critical Thinking: An Ethical Quality of Citizens in Modern Society*

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Abstract—In the contemporary plural society, ethical quality is an indispensable characteristic of citizens. Of all the ethical qualities, the author believes that moral judgment is one of the most important ethical qualities. This article uses the citizen ethics course as an example to explain how to cultivate students' ethical qualities. The author believes that the ancient Greek philosopher Socrates' dialogical method is helpful to cultivate critical thinking ability and moral judgment ability. Therefore, this course develops students' ethical qualities through discussion of civic ethics issues.

Keywords: *ethical quality, moral judgment, critical thinking*

I. INTRODUCTION

The contemporary world contains ethical issues in many fields, and each field can lead to many controversial issues. With regard to these difficult ethical disputes, if citizens have a high ethical quality, it will help to deepen their thinking and also promote public welfare. Because ethical quality is of certain importance, how to improve citizen's ethical quality has become the key to research.

This article first introduces the relevant theories of ethical quality, focusing on applying the theory to the practice of curriculum design. Here, this article mainly explains the curriculum design of civic ethics and its teaching methods to improve students' ethical quality. This course uses the teaching method of Socrates' dialogical method to cultivate students' ethical qualities.

II. MORAL JUDGMENT AND CRITICAL THINKING

In the contemporary plural society, because people have different outlooks on life, morals, values, religions, philosophy, and world, there are often differences and even conflicting opinions on many ethical issues. American philosopher John Rawls¹ calls this a reasonable pluralist fact. Regarding the major controversies that are difficult to resolve in a contemporary plural society, the author believes that the first ethical quality that modern citizens need is their

ability to judge morally. Moral judgment is the ability to carefully examine the pros and cons of a topic and make a thoughtful judgment after thinking about it. In a democratic society, in the face of these difficult disputes, negotiation and dialogue are a better way to resolve disputes and justify decisions. And if you want to have a deep dialogue, put forward more convincing claims, and make quality moral decisions, you must have the ability to judge morally.

In addition, the author believes that the basis of moral judgment ability is critical thinking ability. To cultivate moral judgment ability, it is necessary to learn to think critically on ethical issues. The so-called critical thinking has two meanings: narrow sense and broad sense. The narrow sense of critical thinking means evaluating the argument, examining whether the concepts, propositions, and inferences that make up the argument are correct, and discussing whether errors have occurred, and whether the reasons provided by the premise support the conclusion. In the narrow sense, the key point of critical thinking is to explore the truth in a rational way. The key point of critical thinking is to check whether errors have occurred in the thinking process. By eliminating inappropriate ideas, people's thinking is closer to the truth, and logicians believe that the validity of various arguments can be examined through logical theory.

The broad sense of critical thinking refers to an open minded and free thinking attitude, which requires people to reflect on their own position. Some professors point out: "Critical thinking is the dialectical activity of the mind of an autonomous and self-disciplined person. This dialectical activity includes the mental operation of questioning, introspection, liberation, and reconstruction. The purpose of this spiritual activity is to make human life more rational." According to this, critical thinking is not just a thinking activity that evaluates whether the argument is valid and the inference is correct. Critical thinking also means that individuals with independent thinking examine the ideas of themselves and others through questioning, introspection, liberation, reconstruction and other activities, eliminate inappropriate fallacies, construct reasonable discourse, and show the freedom of the mind. The two above-mentioned expositions of critical thinking complement each other and form a complete concept of critical thinking. The narrow sense of critical thinking is the foundation of the broad sense of critical thinking, and the broad sense of critical thinking is

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¹ Nussbaum, M. C. *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997. 9-12.

an extension and application of the narrow sense of critical thinking.

In other words, the author believes that moral judgment ability is the ability to critically think about ethical issues. This ability helps citizens explore ethical disputes in a rational and speculative way, learn to think deeply about moral dilemmas, and make deep decisions after introspection. When citizens have better moral judgment, they will be able to assist citizens to resolve disputes through rational communication. Even after rational thoughts and communication, there is still no consensus on intractable disputes such as abortion, euthanasia, death penalty, legalization of same-sex marriage, etc., critical thinking and moral judgment also help citizens to have a better understanding of each other's positions, which will have a positive impact on building a mature citizen culture and maintaining social stability.

III. NASBON ON CIVIC QUALITY

In the book "Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education", Nasbon states that college liberal arts education should cultivate three core abilities: the ability to think critically, the ability to care for others, and the ability to narrate and imagine.² The moral judgment ability emphasized by the author echoes the critical thinking ability.

As far as critical thinking ability is concerned, Nasbon believes that critical thinking ability is a logical reasoning ability. In a democratic society, critical thinking can help improve the quality of decision-making. Nasbon states that "it is not only because a belief is passed down by tradition or used to it, then it is regarded as an authority. This life questions all beliefs and accepts only those that can withstand the logical and reasonable requirements of reason. To train this ability, it is needed to develop the ability to reason logically, and to test whether the reading and speaking is consistent. Examining these often creates a challenge to tradition, and Socrates knows it well--This is why he was accused of corrupting the youth. But his defense for his actions is that: "Democracy requires citizens who can think for themselves, instead of simply obeying authority. They can say a set of reasons for their choices together, not just exchange statements and counter-statements."³ Nasbon thinks about liberal arts education in universities from the context of contemporary multicultural society. Multicultural society has many difficult disputes based on differences in race, gender and religion. Nasbon expects to draw wisdom from classical humanism and inject a living water source into contemporary liberal arts education. He held high the Socrates spirit and emphasized that college liberal arts education should cultivate students' critical thinking ability.

² Nussbaum, M. C. *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997. 9-10.

³ Nelson, L. "The Socratic Method." *Enquiring Minds: Socratic Dialogue in Education*. Eds. Rene Saran and Barbara Neisser. Sterling: Trentham Books, 2004. 140-41.

In the ancient Greek period, Socrates, unafraid of authority and tradition, examined all knowledge, norms and values in life according to reason. Socrates believes that only a mind that can think critically is a noble soul; only a city-state that respects the argument of reason is a respectable city-state. Nasbon believes that contemporary universities should strengthen Socratic education and cultivate students' ability to communicate rationally and critically. Citizens with high critical thinking ability will help rational thinking and communication, help to form a stable consensus, justify quality public decision-making, and help maintain the stability of a democratic society.

The author believes that critical thinking ability is the basis of moral judgment ability. If citizens have more moral judgment ability, it will help to think more deeply about the moral dilemma, and also help resolve moral disputes and make more profound decisions. In addition, the author must emphasize that the criticism emphasized by Nasbon is not only an examination of external things, but also an examination of one's own position and tradition. The practice of self-reflection and deep critical thinking can help to reconstruct persuasive claims. This is an important revelation given by Nasbon when he held Socrates' philosophy high and emphasized critical thinking.

To sum up, the author believes that moral judgment is one of the civic qualities required by contemporary society. Moral judgment should be based on critical thinking. The dialogue of the Greek philosopher Socrates helps to improve moral judgment. The following author will further explain how to cultivate students' moral judgment through curriculum design.

IV. CONCLUSION

The author believes that moral judgment is one of the most important civic qualities in modern society. The ancient Greek philosopher Socrates emphasized dialogue to cultivate critical thinking ability and the educational philosophy required for this course. Socrates believes that everyone has wisdom in his heart, but the wisdom is temporarily blinded, so he uses dialogue to help the other party clarify the concept, eliminate errors, and deliver the wisdom in his heart. This method is also called wisdom delivery. The author believes that Socrates' dialogical method has an important significance: the authenticity of knowledge and the validity of morality come from rational public use. As the German philosopher Leonard Nelson put it: "For the first time, Socrates combined self-confidence in the ability of humans to understand the truth of philosophy with a firm belief. This belief states that truth is not obtained through accidental good ideas or mechanical mathematics. Only by following the plan, keeping one's resolve, and holding on consistent thinking can lead people from darkness to light. This reflects the greatness of Socrates as a philosopher, and his greatness as a teacher is reflected in another innovation: he let his students think independently, and introduced the exchange of ideas to students as a protective measure against self-blindness. Socrates' dialogical method shows a rational optimism. It believes that the errors of ideas can be examined

through verbal dialogue, and self-awakening can be obtained through rhetorical debate.

To sum up, the author believes that the essence of philosophical education is to train students to think deeply and cultivate the spirit of inquiring. Therefore, the author quotes Socrates' teaching wisdom in the course, designs discussions on civic ethics issues, promotes teaching with problems, and arouses students' learning motivation and problem consciousness, so as to cultivate students' critical thinking ability and moral judgment ability through Socrates teaching method.

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