

# The Limits of Education and Technology for Ethical Thinking

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**Abstract:** In this article the present author explores briefly the benefits and limits of education and technology for ethical thinking. Due to the time limits imposed by the seminar this article was prepared for, he speaks only generally about education and restricts his comments to technology to computer technology. He also limits his analysis of ethical thinking to four major western theories concerning judgement about right and wrong, good and evil. They are: Utilitarianism, deontological (duty) ethics, existential ethics, and virtue ethics. The author finds in the case of each ethical theory some advantages in the use of educational strategies or computer technology to support ethical thinking; but he thinks that education and computer technology fail to solve the fundamental problems of each ethical theory. The reason for this failure is not the limits of education or computer technology themselves but the inherent difficulties of each of these ethical theories. However advanced may be the “thinking” of artificial intelligence or the sophistication of educational programs, the same difficulties that people confront in trying to utilize these ethical theories also confront artificial intelligence and those who believe that ethical issues can be solved by a little more education. In the end, neither education nor computer technology can help us choose from among these theories the one that functions best or to use any of them as a final ethical justification for judgements of right and wrong, good and evil.

**Key Words:** Limits, Education, Technology, Ethical Thinking, judgement about right and wrong, good and evil

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Can we learn better how to make ethical choices? This question is much more than one about just distinguishing between doing right or wrong. We often identify “ethics” with “morality”, and certainly these two terms overlap in meaning. But they also indicate three aspects of a broader concept of moral life that are not identical. Moral life involves policies, rules, strategies, etc. for determining and pursuing right action (and eschewing wrong actions) and a delineation of a mode of human existing that describes the one who pursues right or wrong action. Moreover, this latter aspect of moral life is not merely a neutral phenomenological description of the “who” that acts rightly or wrongly but an evaluation of a quality of goodness or evil in respect to the one who acts. That quality is as well intrinsically related to an experience of being, *e. g.* , of a general sense of well-being, moral integrity, or an enduring sense of meaningfulness in living and the possession of both joy and peace. Thus, when we consider ethical thinking, we must take into account three important aspects of ethical action: the context and situation of the one who is choosing and acting in specific instances, a moral description and evaluation of the whole of that person, and the person’s experience of life as mediated by their moral choices.

The concept of moral life must include these aspects and involve an ontological reference to the

one who lives and acts in the world as well as an understanding of how to determine essentially the grounds for acting rightly. In the history of western thought, four basic types of moral strategies for human living commonly underlie human life either in a very explicit philosophical form or within a religious tradition: consequentialism (e. g. , Utilitarianism and hedonism), deontological, or, duty ethics (e. g. , Kantian philosophy, the humanistic emphasis on human rights, and many book-centered religions such as Judaism, Islam, and Christianity), virtue ethics (e. g. , the ethical theories of both Plato and Aristotle as well as the related Christian moral philosophy of Aquinas), and existential ethics (e. g. , the notions of authenticity, freedom, and responsibility as we find them similarly related in the works of Soren Kierkegaard, Martin Heidegger, Gabriel Marcel, and Jean-Paul Sartre). Each of these moral typologies, with all of their variations, promote their own strategies for achieving right and just action in the world and point to a way of being in the world that solidifies as a *who*, a who that enjoys a fundamental experiential quality of being.

In the following sections I will take up these four major types of ethical theories concerning how concepts of right, wrong, justice, the Good, and Evil might be justified in order to disclose something of their value for achieving the positive value of a good moral life. The task before us then will be to see how education and computer-based technology might help people respond better to moral values and the requirements of moral life.

The first ethical strategy for living a moral life that I shall analyze is, in a general sense, the position of consequentialism, and, more specifically, the movement known as Utilitarianism.<sup>[1]</sup> As evident from their name, consequentialists seek to determine what should or should not be done by analyzing the consequences of a person's actions. If the consequences of an action are deemed to tend toward producing happiness, not just for the individual but for a more general condition of happiness in society, it is "right", or, at least the most preferred action of all other possibilities. The early consequentialism of ancient hedonism was modified and developed toward something more resembling its contemporary form by John Stuart Mill,<sup>[2]</sup> whom we might call the true father of utilitarianism, though Jeremy Bentham and Mill's own father used the term for their more classical version of it. Important in this modification was the incorporation of the notion that persons are inextricably interrelated with others to the extent that one can act for the good of others even to the detriment of oneself, a concept known as altruism (from "alter-ism", or, "otherism"). Further, Mill took up the notion of "happiness" in the light of the classical understanding of it in Aristotle's writings to argue that happiness is not identical to pleasure but includes higher pleasures than those that are related to the senses. Happiness includes the enjoyment of friendship and a good reputation at the end of life as well as a sense of accomplishment and integrity. It is not a passing sensual series of pleasures but an enduring sense of the goodness of life. For this reason, one cannot be said to be happy until toward the end of life. A third modification, one rarely recognized, is the primacy of the

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[1] John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*. (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Co. (The Liberal Arts Press, 1957). Since Mill takes into account the consequentialism of the Hedonists, to which his father John Mill and Jeremy Bentham adhere, and seeks to develop hedonism beyond its emphasis on self-seeking pleasure, I will concentrate in this article on John Stuart Mill's understanding of the term "Utilitarianism".

[2] Cf. , Mill, 9-33 ("What is Utilitarianism?"). Cf. , also Mill, "On Causation and Necessity", *A system of Logic*, 8<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: Harper and Row, 1874).

development of virtues in Mill's concept of utilitarianism. That is, actions are valued not so much for their proximal physical consequences in the world as for their effect in building a character that engages in habitual actions that tend to produce the greatest amount of happiness for the greatest number of people. This latter modification has often raised the question whether the virtue theory of Aristotle might have affected Mill's thinking in such a way that he himself slides into a virtue theory of ethics. Mill's utilitarian consequentialism remains evident, however, in that the actions stemming from one's character are still evaluated in terms of the societal happiness they produce. Good persons are those who naturally act for the happiness of the greatest number, and evil persons are those who are egoistic, uncaring of the happiness of the whole, or even deliberately destructive of it for reasons of personal satisfaction. If Mill cannot be understood in the end as a virtue theorist, however, he does seem at least to offer to virtue theory a reason beyond the mere cultivation of virtues themselves for developing and actualizing them.

Utilitarianism has been an ethical presumption in the development of democratic regimes, which seeks to be guided by the happiness and will of the majority within a society. It also seems self-evident that the telos of human action is the achievement of a purpose that brings pleasure rather than pain and, in a wider sense, happiness. Such purposes range from the satisfaction of the fundamental biological necessities of life to the enjoyment of the most complex societal activities. Most people living in western societies presuppose some sort of utilitarianism in the societal, political, and global structures of interchange. But it has its difficulties as well. We can ask, *e. g.*, what ethical principle governs that point at which, in deciding about any ethical issue, we should stop calculating the consequences of a proposed action or even how to distinguish between one distinct action from another in the continuous flow of events. Consequences flow on with both positive and negative results that vary and interchange so often that no one can determine anything like a "final" result of any particular action, and any decision to settle upon any intermediate consequential event is always arbitrary. Mill himself had to think more deeply about what the good is and how it is related to happiness, considerations that continued through the work of G. E. Moore<sup>[3]</sup> and many other contemporary thinkers. A major consideration that creates problems for contemporary utilitarianism, moreover, involves the nature of our participation in society. Why should we consider that living in a society places upon us an ethical obligation to join in on its projects and make life better for the majority living in it? What about the rights of the minority that might be fundamentally critical of the nature, values, aims, and purposes of their own society? After all, might it not be the case that certain criticisms of a particular society might be correct and warrant withdrawal from participation (*e. g.*, Nazi Germany). What about those who just want to "march to the beat of another drum", as Whitman put it, or simply opt out of society, to "turn on, tune in, and drop out"? We ought to remain open to the possibility that certain people might really have moral insights that are superior to the values of the majority in a society and ought to stand against it. As Thoreau was no doubt justified in wondering why those who railed against him when he was in jail for refusing to pay a poll

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[3] G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1903), 41 ff.

tax<sup>[4]</sup> why they were not there.

Such a criticism leads to the fundamental question of rights in a utilitarian society. According to utilitarian strategies, the oppression of the minority by the majority might well be more effective for preserving peace and forwarding economic growth as well as offer many other advantages to the greater number. Slavery certainly worked well for the majority whites in 19<sup>th</sup> century America. The concept of a right seems to be reduced to a permission given by society as long as it serves the interests of the majority. Utilitarians have tried to remedy this difficulty by modifying its focus on acts of a person to the rules that guide what can and what cannot be done in society. Thus, one speaks of a shift from act utilitarianism to rule utilitarianism. The aim of ethics is to produce rules that facilitate the greatest amount of happiness for the greatest number of people within a society. One does right when one acts in accordance to the rules that guide the society as a whole toward that end and wrong when one acts against such a rule. But rules then become synonymous with “rights”, and rights remain permissions of the majority of society rather than something that is possessed by nature and that must be observed and protected by society. Utilitarian “rights” serve other purposes within society and may be denied marginalized minorities for reasons fitting to the majority. The problem of calculating consequences also remains, as no one can finally determine the result of putting into practice the rules a society decides to follow. Adverse consequences can arise at any point. Moreover, general societal rules may cut across religious and cultural beliefs, values, and practices in ways that make participation in society by some impossible. Christians may be advantaged while Muslims, Jews, Buddhists, and Hindus are not. The pursuit of happiness by cultural, linguistic, and religious minorities may be made impossible in their own terms. A more extreme solution, i. e. , negative utilitarianism, is less helpful as a modification, because it undercuts any supportive context for life in a society. If people act with the aim of producing the least amount of pain for the greatest number of people in a society, they have a much greater freedom to do as they like, and rights are no longer mere permissions; but permissiveness as such then becomes a general right. One can act as he or she likes as long as what is done does not cause pain to others or infringe upon their right to do as they wish. In such a society one can hardly find a justification for welfare, public education, charity organizations, or tax-funded works such as road-building and public maintenance. Negative utilitarianism erodes societal structures so radically that being forced to participate in society as an “act utilitarian” might be preferable.

The criticisms I have offered of utilitarianism in its various forms are fundamental and, I think, not merely contingent difficulties that can be mended by a little moral education or help from a super intelligence that can solve difficulties that ordinary humans cannot solve. This does not mean that education and the application of computer support or even artificial intelligence would not be helpful in applying a utilitarian ethic. While we must not confuse descriptive norms with prescriptive ones, utilitarianism necessitates an alignment with sociological knowledge, i. e. , knowledge of what is actually going on in contemporary society. Education focusing on history, psychology, sociology, ethical theory, anthropology, etc. , would be useful in providing the factual data and statistical

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[4] Cf. , Henry David Thoreau, *Civil Disobedience* (An Essay of 1849) (New York: Penguin Books, 1964). Cf. , *The Portable Thoreau*.

knowledge requisite for any analysis of the life context of people in any given society. Computer analysis would be an essential advantage in providing statistical knowledge, revealing the actual desires, preferences, and choices of people. Moreover, education in political theory and economics will disclose value preferences; and computer analysis, commonly used for statistical information in these areas, can greatly extend our understanding of relevant and possible worthwhile choices. This being said, we return to our caveat that such knowledge is descriptive, not prescriptive. We must not confuse the two by falling into the temptation to argue that what people in a given society generally want is in an ethically necessary sense what they should want or do. Even admitting that no description avoids using value-laden terms and prejudices any decision whether a described state of affairs ought to be valued as a goal, the discovery that people in a certain society value a certain goal and that an underlying prejudice exists that we too should value it is still factual information. Not even the best education can provide certainty that a given goal will in the long term lead to the happiness of the majority. Knowing what people prefer and even what seems good for them at a certain time in history and in a certain situation of the society does not guarantee that goals based on this knowledge will lead to general happiness. Even a phenomenal computer that achieved artificial intelligence would simply be aware of incomparably more data but still unable to solve any of the problems I have pointed out about utilitarianism. The difficulties pertaining to the ethical theory itself cannot be solved by a greater power of calculation and analysis or a better education (or data base). We must resolve these theoretical problems by dealing with the theories themselves.

In this next section I shall move the discussion of ethical theories forward to deontological theories and raise similar questions about the role and value of education and computer-based intelligence in applying deontological theories to ethical issues. There are a number of different sorts of deontological ethical theories, though the one that arises out of the difficulties of utilitarianism, as we have already noted, concerns the question of the objectivity of human rights. When I discussed utilitarianism, I said that it seems that it defines rights as permissions given by society. This definition is antithetical to the concept that seems essential to the notion of a right, namely, that persons possess rights regardless of their advantages for society. A proper understanding of a right is that society has an obligation to protect and preserve rights which everyone already has just for being human regardless of their position or role in society. Rights define a kind of framework for the sort of society people can have rather than having their definition according to the way they support and facilitate a particular society. Nowadays the notion of human rights, given concrete expression in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights,<sup>[5]</sup> has much influence especially in international affairs. But two major difficulties confront those who believe in human rights; first, how is a right to be defined, and, second, how are rights discerned?

The first difficulty is often resolved by one of two strategies. One is to insist that basic rights are obvious to any normal person and can be understood in the light of the universal “golden rule”, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” Perhaps the concept of a right is better served by the negative formulation given by Confucius; “Don’t do anything to anyone that you would not

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[5] A document accepted by the UN National Assembly in 1948. *The Universal Declaration on Human Rights* is a Document passed by the United Nations General Assembly (1948).

want done to yourself. ”The second is to argue that they can simply be discerned as objective patterns of behavior common to man and desired by all, which is to rely on something like a phenomenological strategy to define what they are, perhaps the one presupposed by the Declaration on Human Rights. If this approach is used to define rights, it suffers from the basic difficulty of phenomenology, i. e. , the inability to tie ideal essences ( values, rights ) to concrete realities, a problem Husserl never solved. <sup>[6]</sup> But without a phenomenological foundation, rights might seem to be arbitrarily set by cultural prejudice. And that leaves the acceptance of the golden rule as the principle for defining a right. But the golden rule is rather limited in its application. What one person might be willing to have done to him or her ( receive drugs, trade wives, engage in fights, etc. ) might be considered immoral by others. One needs to know what the good is in order to do it and receive it rather than count as good whatever one is willing to receive at the hands of others. The Christian version of this rule ties it to loving God in such a way that an ethic of love is the context for ethical relations with others according to the rule, restricting its function to a particular religious community. Moreover, moral rules that are accepted as revealed in religious terms, such as those found in the Bible, the Koran, and the teachings of other religious traditions, all treated as objective moral rules in a deontological sense, are similarly restricted in scope to their religious traditions. Clearly the religious teachings of some traditions even contradict the consciences of many, though conscience itself cannot be the arbiter of right and wrong, since it is produced by cultural, social, and psychological experience and not by an essential insight into the nature of moral life.

We must note that even in societies in which religion is separated from the other secular functions of the state or society, the ethical teachings of its major religions are restricted to their religious communities and are not ( except in the case of religious radicalism ) imposed outside the religious context. Religious education treats its ethical traditions as matters of obligation, but these obligations are not imposed upon the “ faithless ”. Hence, they are not universal ethical teachings, nor are they universally applied. Education about how people all over the world live may increase a certain amount of understanding and tolerance for different people of different cultures and may promote a more open globalism and multiculturalism, but it also generally forbids any evaluation of these cultures concerning their moral and religious beliefs. Indeed, the more we know about cultures other than our own, the more we are under pressure to let them be as they are. Otherwise, we are prejudiced, Xenophobic, militant, oppressive, intolerant, and a host of other morally negative names. Thus, education, which emphasizes a tolerant descriptive attitude ( “ openness ” ), generally is not a means of deciding what is right and wrong in society. And an education already supplied with beliefs about right, wrong, and what is good is untrusted in respect to what it says is true because of its ethical prejudices. Computer-based technology can be helpful in the educational process in many ways, but it cannot overcome this paradox of intercultural education.

The most famous voice of duty ethics was that of Immanuel Kant. Kant believed that reason alone could establish an awareness of the duties that were the foundation of moral life. Just as he disclosed in his *Critique of Pure Reason* the ground for the possibility of knowledge of the world ( as

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[6] Edmund Husserl, *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology* ( Trans. By Boyce Gibson ) ( New York: Collier Macmillan Publishers, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. , 1975 ), 377-394.

it appears) to be the categories of Reason, so in the *Critique of Practical Reason* does he disclose the ground for the possibility of moral knowledge to be a fundamental principle of moral reasoning called the Categorical Imperative: “Always act according to that maxim (principle, teaching) that you can will to be universal”.<sup>[7]</sup> Thus, in any situation in which we might seek moral guidance, we need only let reason itself reveal the basic principle that all people would find appropriate to guide moral action in any specific situation. The universality of the principle acts in the *Critique of Practical Reason* in much the same way that the universality of perception and thought functions in the *Critique of Pure Reason*; it provides objectivity and rational necessity in Kant’s limited sense, *i. e.*, in the sense of being universal necessities of thought. Duties, then, can be known by reason. One acts rightly when one acts in accordance with the duty disclosed by the categorical imperative (in one of its three versions) and wrongly when one acts against a knowledge of duty. Right action must be motivated by a will to follow duty, though, and not just a contingent action, done for other reasons, that happens to be in accordance with duty. Right is measured by motive here rather than consequences.

As important as Kant’s work in ethics is, it suffers from obvious vulnerabilities. First, Kant is very much influenced by Hume’s rejection of metaphysics, which leads him to settle for a universality of the structure of Reason as the defining notion of objectivity and truth. But his assertion that no one can know anything about the “noumenal” (read “real”) structure of the world is an assertion that science does not necessarily capture the world as it is. And, thus, the assertion that the categorical imperative reveals an objective moral truth in the duty it discloses is as well a truth grounded in the structure of Reason and not a discovery of moral truth in the world as such. Moreover, Kant escapes the problem that Hume encountered in deriving the moral “ought” from the factual “is” of the world only by separating Reason into different rubrics in which, in the case of the *Critique of Practical Reason*, the “ought” is already imbedded in the duty that is disclosed by reason. Second, even Kant recognized that people seek to be happy, even if seeking pleasure or happiness is not the solution for knowing what is right and wrong. But doing one’s duty very often leads to very unpleasant consequences that are never repaired in one’s lifetime. Kant himself, viewing this difficulty head on, simply declared that it was an excellent proof of a guarantee of justice by Divine action in the afterlife. In this way, God, the soul, and immortality were re-established by Kant as necessary presuppositions of moral life.<sup>[8]</sup>

While the concept of duty as the justifying criterion for what is right or wrong in moral arguments may have led to a loss of any notion of an experienced good in Kantian terms, the contemporary concept of it is tied more closely to the notion of human rights than to the idea that reason can illuminate what our duties are. My possession of a right is at the same time your obligation to honor it. *I. e.*, a duty is an obligation to honor a right. People may pursue their individual life plans to achieve happiness in their own terms within the framework of honoring rights and attending to obligations. Freedom within a liberal democratic society, *e. g.*, is exercised only within the context of agreed upon rules and restrictions based on a common recognition of rights and

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[7] Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Practical Reason*, (Trans. by L. W. Beck from the 1788 work) (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc., 1956), 30.

[8] Kant, 126-137.

obligations. Such a political structure may forward educational goals that establish knowledge of rights and duties in society and encourage individual educational accomplishments for achieving particular life plans. Rights, of course, cannot be considered all equal to each other, since some are more fundamental for human life than others. The right to life, *e. g.*, must be viewed as trumping the right for education, while the right for education in a society trumps the right to a 35-hour work week. In other words, rights are hierarchical; thus, a more important or higher right can be exercised to some degree of detriment to others that are less important when such encroachment is deemed necessary. The application of computer-based knowledge would be helpful in the analysis of a right: what policies, programs, activities, and limits pertain to the logic of applying a right, and how that logic pre-empts the function of other rights or stands vulnerable to pre-emption presents a very complex interrelationship of rights that can be understood better through computer-enhanced interrelating logic structures. Artificial intelligence, gifted with a capacity to learn (in a limited sense), can place our interrelated rights and duties into the motion that characterizes their application within a society and predict conflict points and points of facilitation. But can artificial intelligence itself place a universally acceptable value on some human activities over others and determine the “correct” hierarchy of values, rights, and duties? Can artificial intelligence establish what I *ought* to want in its own terms so that my life plan will correspond to what it supposes are the proper rights relevant to human life? I think that artificial intelligence can only value what it is told that humans value or that it ought to value, so that prime value directives are always already part of its logic structure and are not decided by itself. It lacks the experience of good living, which requires a visceral, embodied presence in the world. Thus, equipped with only information about human life, it lacks what Nagel says we lack when we cannot know what it is like to be a bat. Even if such intelligence can determine the very flow of hormones, electrolytes, or molecules themselves that are implicated in what we report as “good feelings”, it can never determine what those good feelings are about: a deep sense of meaning? The day of one’s wedding? The loving embrace of your child? And it cannot determine whether we *deserve* to feel good about anything. Nor can it determine for itself the means by which pursuing duties that are disadvantageous to us can lead eventually to a good experience of living, such as a Divine reward in the afterlife for suffering for moral purposes in this one. I do not think that an artificial intelligence could follow the logic of Kant in forwarding the existence of God and an apocalyptic justice as a reason for doing our duty.

The third ethical strategy that has had much influence in contemporary thinking centers on the philosophical movement known as “existentialism”. This movement includes a number of thinkers who asserted a notion of “authenticity” as an ethical criterion for action in the world, though this concept takes on different meanings in different philosophers. The main proponents of authenticity as a fundamental ethical criterion for moral decisions are Soren Kierkegaard,<sup>[9]</sup> Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Gabriel Marcel. Other existential thinkers tend to prescind from these. Kierkegaard conceives authenticity as a form of individualism that asserts itself against a Hegelian

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[9] Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or* (Vol. II) (Trans. by Walter Lowrie) (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1959), 234 and ff. Kierkegaard should be credited as having first used the term “authentic” in an ethical sense that had import for the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The work of Kierkegaard is completed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but his importance and his influence on existential thinkers is reserved for the 20<sup>th</sup> century.



notion of society in which each person is defined by the place and role given by a historically defined destiny. To exist is to stand outside the historically defined roles that make a people who they are and to decide the issues of one's own life according to one's own beliefs and standards. But both Heidegger and Sartre think more directly in reference to an ontology of man, Heidegger speaking of *Dasein*<sup>[10]</sup> and Sartre speaking of the *for-itself*.<sup>[11]</sup> The former understands man as that place where being shows itself, and Sartre understands man as a nothingness that collapses in upon itself, creating experience of a world. Kierkegaard is influenced by the Hegelian concept of Spirit and does not depart far from Hegel's identification of consciousness with Spirit even in his insistence on the unique individuality and freedom of man. But both Heidegger and Sartre focus on an underlying ontology that identifies what we in ordinary language call "man", Sartre deriving his notion of consciousness from this ontology. Marcel, for whom authenticity is a fundamental moral criterion, also proposes an ontological foundation for it, though it is one that is critical of Sartre's "for-itself" and the emptying out of all but the place where being shows itself in Heidegger's concept of *Dasein*. Marcel asserts a "blinded intuition" into Being, which grounds all things, including man.<sup>[12]</sup> Authenticity is achieved as we come into a greater and greater appropriation of Being so that our need of Being is fulfilled. In all of these thinkers the concept of authenticity is fundamental to their moral thinking such that one is moral to the extent that one is authentic. For Heidegger and Sartre authenticity is a matter of *choosing*<sup>[13]</sup> what we will be and resolving to act and think according to that choice.

Authenticity poses a number of difficulties for those who would adopt it as a criterion for right and wrong or as a means of differentiating between good and evil persons. For one thing, a certain ambiguity lies at the heart of the concept. Do we choose to live in accordance with who we already *are*, or do we become who we are by choosing to be a certain way? Heidegger would ground authentic action in an attitude of "listening" to one's historical destiny, thus grounding the existence of *Dasein* in an attunement to one's cultural history wherein Being speaks.<sup>[14]</sup> Kierkegaard, on the other hand, seeks to identify authenticity in an assertion of an individuality that distinguishes and, indeed, separates one from his cultural history. Freedom for him means the power, in Whitman's terms, to march to the beat of another drum. Sartre, who believes that the ego is nothing more than what we construct by our radically free decisions, nonetheless finds that what has already been constructed by our previous choices provides us a "true" self to which we can continue to relate authentically or from which we can flee. Marcel holds that we are authentic when we live in accordance with our intuition into Being, which itself entices us as the value of fills our "ontological lack".<sup>[15]</sup> Both Kierkegaard and Marcel are confessing Christians who identify the object of faith (SK) or Being (Marcel) with God. Heidegger's thought lent itself to the support of the Nazi party of Germany

[10] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (Trans. By John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson) (New York: Harper & Row, Pubs., 1962), 279-304.

[11] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (Trans. by Hazel Barnes). (New York: Pocket Books, 1956), 119-133, 404-445.

[12] Gabriel Marcel, *The Mystery of Being* (Vol. 1) (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1950), "Introduction and Lecture I".

[13] Cf., Heidegger, op. cit., pp. 312-341; also, cf., Sartre, op. cit., 559-619 ff.

[14] Heidegger, 319-325.

[15] Gabriel Marcel, *Du Refus à L'Invitation* (Paris: Librairie Gallimard), 135.

while Sartre, a member of the resistance in France, was an atheist with no purpose other than, in his later thought, the establishment of a political system grounded in a philosophical Marxism.<sup>[16]</sup>

Clearly the notion of authenticity in the wide-ranging movement of existential thought does not mean the same thing from thinker to thinker. But a rough family resemblance obtains in each formulation of it. In the end, whether one conceives the true self to be one's historical destiny, one's depositum of past decisions, one's inmost grasp of freedom from determination, or a grasp of what is one's true good and a pursuit of it, authenticity refers to the value of selfhood. One acts rightly when one expresses oneself. Of course, none of these thinkers thought that pure self-expression was a value in itself or that it constituted ethical correctness, as we have seen. But it is the *sine qua non* of any ethical act, a point that seems trivial, since obviously no disingenuous act can be a moral one. Nor is the Holocaust or any selfish and harmful life moral by virtue of being the true self-expression of evil persons. Each of the philosophers who asserted authenticity as essential in moral life searched further for a more proper moral grounding of authentic acts. Kierkegaard found his in his Lutheran faith, Heidegger listened to the voice of being as expressed in the hope of Germany through the Nazi party, Sartre found ethical progress through Marxism, and Marcel was fulfilled in the Catholic faith.

The existentialists had considerable influence on philosophy and the arts during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Moreover, philosophical anthropology, psychology, and sociology have all shown the influence of existential thinkers, and education itself has had to take account of such issues as intuition, the role of selfhood in the growth of the person, the value of free exploration, etc. None of those except the most bizarre movements spawned by existential thinking, such as EST, have supposed that self-expression in itself is the prime moral value. They suppose rather that the values of human living cannot be found without explorations that are self-expressive and self-building. The notion of authenticity led to an interest in the concept of intersubjectivity and of the grounds of commonality in human society. Hence, ethical thinking has been a natural completion of the existential emphasis on an ontology of selfhood. Indeed, Sartre ends his first great work *Being and Nothingness* with a lament that he had failed thus far to establish an existentialist ethic, and only his later work on the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* moves forward to an ethic grounded in a form of Marxism.

Education functions weakly in respect to an existentialist ethic. Learning about the world or man is not much of an advantage for turning in upon oneself to grasp oneself in one's own authentic way of being. Indeed, higher education can be a barrier to existential knowledge. Kierkegaard made fun of Bishop Nielsen as he led his waddling geese all in a row into the church. The well-educated institution of the church preached a concept of faith that was full of facts but possessed no real truth of faith, the truth about man as an "absolute relation to the absolute". Heidegger despised the anonymous "they" who spoke of this and that, who knew what was going on in the world without knowing its meaning, who distracted everyone from themselves by absorbing them in a world of interesting facts, figures, and suppositions. Sartre proposed a Marxism that was sensitive to the needs of the people, distinguishing between solutions to societal problems that had their origin in genuine

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[16] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (Trans. by Hazel Barnes). (New York: Pocket Books, 1956), 797-8. Cf. , Sartre's briefer work *Search for a Method*, which is an abbreviated form of the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*.

class conflicts and those that were basic human problems (a “philosophical” Marxism). He preferred to see rolled-up sleeves to open books. Marcel took refuge in the teachings of Roman Catholicism, which cannot be established by general education. In each of these philosophers, knowledge gained by education must be “bracketed” in order to get to who it is that appropriates that knowledge, rightly or wrongly.

Neither does the notion of authenticity in existential thought lend itself easily to any sort of computer-based or AI facilitation. Indeed, it zeros in on a critical question concerning artificial intelligence: does artificial intelligence constitute a “self”? Can it do what it does because it chooses to do it rather than merely because it is programmed to do so? Does the ability to learn imply the possession of selfhood and freedom? Can AI not only grasp selfhood as an imminent non-programmed data laden with value and direction of its own and choose to express it in its thought and action? Obviously knowing the history of its acts is not the same thing as grasping a wholeness of self that is at the origin of them or as modified over time by them. And even if AI could demonstrate selfhood in the context of intersubjective relations, as do people, its calculative capacity could not overcome the weakness of authenticity as an ethical criterion; it could not show that self-expression itself constitutes right action, since such an assertion cannot be universally true.

The fourth ethical theory that I am considering in this article is that of virtue ethics. I shall consider only western ethical theory here, ignoring Confucian and Buddhist virtue ethics. Here, of course, we have to do with the virtue ethics of Plato and of Aristotle. I shall also ignore the virtue theory of Aquinas, since it is essentially that of Aristotle with Christian virtues insinuated into his theory and directed toward a certain relation with God rather than to a more sedate aim of the full flowering of the human being. Other more contemporary thinkers such as Jacques Maritain and Alasdair MacIntyre rely too much on Aristotle or Aquinas to require specific treatment.

Plato and Aristotle have to be read in tension with each other. Plato views the Good as something that reason can discern when reason leaps beyond its mundane bonds to see the Form of the Good as it is, something made possible only by education and determination. And he asserts that knowing the Good in this way is itself an *ontological* change in the knower such that in knowing the Good one becomes good. And from the good man flows good actions. One cannot know the Good without *being* good, and one can be a good man only through knowledge of the Good.<sup>[17]</sup> Aristotle, however, being a critic of Plato’s doctrine of the Forms, holds that the Good is something that pertains to the whole life of the human being and is something that must be learned by observing good people. The Good is the *telos* of human life as the oak tree is the *telos* of the acorn. We can see evil for what it is when it presents itself in the form of violence to others and taking what does not belong to one and can understand that such actions do not lead to a good society or to a good life. And we can see how following extremes in the way we live leads to self-damage and even self-destruction. For a good life is not constituted simply by being rich or gaining some advantage for power and fame in life but in gaining a general happiness that pertains to the whole of one’s life: good health, friendship, good family relations, good repute, the achievement of understanding and even of some wisdom, and a contemplative grasp of the deep truths of life. Developing good habits based on

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[17] Plato, *The Republic* (Trans. by F. M. Cornford) (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1945), 211-220.

moderation (something reason can discern) are the *sine qua non* of the full flowering of the person and the achievement of the human *telos*. But we must note that for Aristotle knowledge of virtue (action according to reason) is an act of knowing and choosing but not a fundamental change of being. One's action is guided by rational choice and, eventually, habitual choice; but one can always act against reason and do what one knows to be wrong (*akrasia*).<sup>[18]</sup>

According to Plato and Aristotle, then, human life has an ethical goal: to become a certain kind of person. For Plato that goal is to become a good person by virtue of knowledge of the Form of the Good, *i. e.*, to enjoy the vision of the Good. For Aristotle the goal of human life is a deep and abiding happiness that permeates the whole of life. Both of them view virtue as the *sine qua non* of their ethical goals. For Plato virtue is the achievement itself, and it leads to becoming a good man. For Aristotle, virtue mediates the *telos* of the fullness of human life with its attendant happiness, as long as fate does not forbid it by immersing one in tragedy.

Education plays an important role in the ethical development of the person for both Plato and Aristotle. Plato believed that the human mind must be cultivated by a long process of education that begins in early life with physical training and ends at mid-life with training in politics and the study of philosophy. The purpose of this education is to achieve not simply knowledge of things of the world but to eventually prepare the mind for *anamnesis*, or, recollection of the Forms. Few people are expected to manage the whole program of education that Plato sets out in the *Republic* and drop out as the years progress to become laborers, soldiers, artisans, or, if they complete the whole program, leaders of the state. Indeed, from these latter are to be chosen the philosopher king, who alone can govern by knowledge of the Good.<sup>[19]</sup> Growth of knowledge was growth in virtue, and the virtuous man becomes the empowered man (*Virtu, virtutis L.*, "empowered").

According to Aristotle, action according to reason is virtue. But reason is not just a matter of deductive relations between ideas; it involves inductive knowledge of the nature of things and of the causes that bring things into being and to pass out of being. Such knowledge is required to understand the world of nature and of people, and without it we cannot know how to pursue just relations or build the good society. We must learn the consequences of the extremes of the common choices people make in order to determine the point of moderation that fits our particular constitution and situation. Only then can we form healthy habits of life that can lead to happiness.<sup>[20]</sup> While epistemology and ontology do not coincide in Aristotle as they do for Plato, an education that enables one to achieve wisdom is essential for the state of being Aristotle calls *eudaimonia*.

This education can be facilitated, of course, by computer technology. The statistical data base that computers can generate to determine sociological patterns, the general consequences of various ways of being, and the points of moderation for individuals of different types (e. g., how many calories a thin, slight man who is a librarian might need to consume in order to be healthy compared to those a wrestler might need to consume). Computer facilitated education can be useful in mapping personality types, assessing the consequences of behaving according to a virtue, and those of choosing

[18] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (Trans. By Martin Ostwald) (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1962), "books 2 and 3".

[19] Plato, *ibid.*, books 5-7.

[20] Aristotle, *ibid.*, books 2, 3, 6.

not to put virtues into practice. But we must note that virtues are a rather fuzzy concept. Roman Catholic scholars have identified around 50 patterns of acting, attitudes, or commitments that they might call “virtues”. Basically, the word itself is a guide for how to identify them: the word “virtue” refers to an empowerment to live in a certain way that promotes the personal and social good. When we looked at Mill’s utilitarianism, we noted that Mill emphasized character as the habitual source of one’s actions. Thus, he identified virtues as the habits of action that tend toward the happiness of the whole society. Now, as we look at virtue theory, we see the same thing; virtues are virtues because they create a better society and a sense of personal satisfaction. Here, of course, it is not just actions that count in one’s estate of life but the attitudes, values, and predispositions toward doing good that identify virtues; and one might suppose that Mill would agree to such an extension of the concept.

We can note as well that many of the objections concerning computer technology that pertained to utilitarianism also pertain to virtue ethics. The calculative and analytic capacity of computers are finite and cannot solve the question of when to stop calculating, *i. e.*, when one has “the final answer”. Neither is it able to identify what it is like to *be* virtuous. Just as the utilitarian must be satisfied to suffer a disadvantage for the sake of the rights of another, the computer must know when to suffer being virtuous at the disadvantage of its own happiness. But virtues require great sensitivity to notions of what is right, the values of those involved, what tends toward producing happiness, and what builds character. Does a computer have the capacity to build a particular character? Character building requires a sense of self and of how that self can be fulfilled according to its full potential. But the full potential of a computer cannot be that of a human being, since an essential aspect of human potential is the development of everything pertaining to being human, much of which is left out of the construction of artificial intelligence. Moreover, virtues, as habitual patterns of behavior sustained by attitudes and values, do not function either alone or without the *telos* of which Aristotle spoke. But such interconnections of virtues cannot be fashioned out of some particular context of life in a way flexible to other important ethical notions, such as rights, concepts of good and evil, right and wrong. And the *telos* that governs this effort must be implanted in order to work even before it is learned. Thus, a computer could not model the virtues or be much more help than a calculating device for people who are developing virtues.

To conclude, I have argued in this article that education and computer-based technology have only limited roles to play in the development of ethical knowledge. The reason for this limitation is not primarily the fault of education itself or the functions of computer-based knowledge but the difficulties of the various ethical theories to which they might be applied. The major western theories by which ethicists justify their concepts of right and wrong and their evaluations of good and evil suffer from theoretical limitations that education and artificial intelligence cannot resolve or circumvent by their own functions and virtues. While they can to some degree facilitate the application of particular theories to ethical issues, they fail to make an essential improvement in thinking through an issue by means of any of ethical theories I have discussed. We must rethink the ethical theories rather than bolster them by improved education or computer facilitation.

中文题目:

## 教育和科技对于伦理思考的局限性

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**摘要:**作者在本文简要地探讨了教育和技术对于伦理思考的局限性和益处。出于论述的方便,作者着重讨论了通识教育,并把技术限定为电脑技术。关于伦理思考,他也主要集中于四个主要的西方理论,即关于是、非、善、恶的判断上。它们是功利主义、非本体论(责任/义务/道义)伦理学、存在主义伦理学和美德伦理学。作者发现,在推广教育战略以支持伦理思考和使用电脑技术时,每种伦理学理论都有一些积极之处。但是,他认为,教育和电脑技术在每种情况下都不能成功地解决每种伦理理论的根本性问题。这个失败的原因,并不是教育或电脑技术本身,而是每种伦理学理论内部的困难。然而,人工智能的“思维”或教育程序的复杂性可能是先进性的;人们在尝试运用这些伦理理论时遇到的同样困难,也面临着人工智能的挑战,那些相信伦理问题可以通过多一点教育来解决的人们也面临着同样的困难。最后,教育和电脑技术都不能帮助我们在这些理论中选择一个最能发挥作用的理论,也不能帮助我们把握其中任何一个理论,为判断是、非、善、恶提供最终的伦理依据。

**关键词:**局限性;教育;科技;伦理思考;关于是非善恶的判断