

Moral Culture as Educational Praxis: A Kantian Reappraisal

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Abstract:

Immanuel Kant's (1724 – 1804) educational philosophy places moral culture at the very core of human development, viewing education not merely as the transmission of knowledge but as the cultivation of moral character and rational autonomy. This paper examines his conception of moral culture with special emphasis on the role of maxims, duty, truthfulness, sociability, and punishment in moral education. He argues that morality cannot be taught mechanically through rules or discipline alone; rather, it must be cultivated through the internalization of rational principles that guide volition. Central to this process is the formation of character, defined as the readiness to act according to self-adopted maxims grounded in reason. The study analyses Kant's views on moral education as an ongoing process of self-reflection, habituation, and rational deliberation, highlighting the importance of autonomy, respect for humanity as an end in itself, and the categorical imperative as foundational moral principles. The paper also explores Kant's nuanced account of discipline and punishment, distinguishing between moral and physical punishment, and emphasizing their corrective rather than retributive role. Ultimately, the paper argues that Kantian moral culture aims at the development of ethically responsible individuals capable of contributing to a just and harmonious society, and that these principles remain relevant for contemporary educational practices, including physical and moral education.

Keywords: Kantian Education; Moral Culture; Maxims; Moral Character; Duty

I. Introduction

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), a famous German philosopher of eighteenth century devoted his whole life in the pursuit of philosophy. He not only touched every branch of philosophy, but also there were several disciplines on those days on which he had a very encyclopaedic knowledge. Keeping all these points in our mind, we can remember a very significant line of an eminent Kant scholar, L.W. Beck - 'Argue for Kant argue against Kant but without Kant philosophical discussion is impossible'.

Kant wrote a little bit regarding education. *Uber Padagogik* is a little work of Kant. In the last years of his long life, he handed over this work to his younger friend and former pupil, Theodor Rink. And Rink brought out the notes on education before public in 1803 just one year before Kant's demise. Kant's moral and political philosophy and his thinking regarding

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Published: 14 February 2026

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.70558/IJSSR.2026.v3.i1.30833>

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aesthetics also give some light on it. And entering into all these writings, we accumulate various ingredients that help us to build a robust thought on education of Kant.

Education is the most important need of a human being. It helps him to understand nature, discipline and culture. Firstly, Kant gives emphasis on this discussion. According to him, education is an art and it helps us to make our practices signing through generations. Each generation, provides its own thought to its next generation. This natural gift helps the community to build its own identity. And with this knowledge, human race advances towards its own destiny. In this paper we try to solve some questions these are – How can we save the decaying of social order? And how can we save our inner nature?

In his educational philosophy, Kant identifies physical education as a fundamental form of education essential to the holistic development of the human being. He maintains that all other forms of education ultimately rest upon physical education, as the cultivation of moral culture presupposes a sound and disciplined body. Such bodily discipline enables the proper development of moral character and intellectual capacities. Although comparable ideas are found in both Eastern and Western philosophical traditions, Kant was among the first Western thinkers to systematically emphasize moral culture in education as the dynamic foundation of ethics. In the contemporary context, Kant's integration of physical and moral education invites renewed reflection on the relationship between bodily discipline, ethical conduct, and the formation of human character.

II. Moral Culture and the Formation of Character in Kantian Educational Thought

In Kantian educational philosophy, moral culture is central to the development of individuals as ethical beings. Kant believed that human beings have a unique capacity for rationality, which enables them to recognize and act upon moral principles. Kant's moral culture involves the cultivation of moral character, which is the development of virtues such as honesty, fairness, and kindness. He argued that this cultivation requires a combination of reason, emotion, and habituation. Through reason, individuals can understand and embrace moral principles, while emotions provide the motivation to act in accordance with these principles. Habituation, or the repetition of morally right actions, reinforces the development of moral character. They also emphasized the importance of moral education in fostering moral culture. He believed that education should aim to develop individuals' ability to reason and to apply moral principles to their actions. This education should be based on the principles of autonomy and respect for persons, which are central to Kantian ethics. In other words, individuals should be encouraged to think for themselves and to recognize the moral worth of all human beings.

This educational philosophy does not proclaim that moral culture is only a simple matter of following rules or obeying authority. Rather, it is the result of an ongoing process of self-reflection and self-improvement. Through this process, individuals can develop a deep and abiding commitment to moral principles, and can become an active agent in creating a more just and ethical society. Kantian educational philosophy places a strong emphasis on developing moral character and fostering a sense of duty and responsibility in students.

According to Kant, morality is not something that can be taught directly but must be

cultivated through the development of character and the internalization of ethical principles. His philosophy, moral culture refers to the process of developing an individual's moral character through the cultivation of virtues such as honesty, integrity, and respect for others. This process involves the development of the individual's rational faculties, including their ability to reason, reflect, and make ethical judgments.

Kant says, “*MORAL CULTURE* must be based upon ‘maxims’ not upon discipline; the one prevents evil habits, the other trains the mind to think. We must see, then, that the child should accustom himself to act in accordance with ‘maxims’, and not from certain ever – changing springs of action. Through discipline we form certain habits, moreover, the force of which becomes lessened in the course of years. The child should learn to act according to ‘maxims’, the reasonableness of which he is able to see for himself. One can easily see that there is some difficulty in carrying out this principal which young children, and that moral culture demands a great deal of insight on the part of parents and teachers.”¹

In Kantian practical philosophy, the significance of maxims is paramount, as they are expected to originate within the essence of human beings themselves. This leads us to ponder the fundamental question: What exactly are maxims? Kant Says, “A maxim is the subject principal of volition.”²

III. Maxims as the Subjective Principles of Moral Action

A maxim can be understood as the foundational principle that guides an individual's subjective will or intention. In philosophical terms, a maxim is a fundamental concept often associated with the moral philosophy of Immanuel Kant. To elaborate further, let's break down this statement:

1. **Subjective Principals:** This refers to the personal, individual aspect of one's will or intention. It highlights that a maxim is not a universally applicable principle but rather a principle that is specific to an individual's particular circumstances, desires, and intentions.
2. **Volition:** Volition is the act of making conscious choices or decisions. It is the process of using one's will to determine and pursue a course of action. In the context of ethics and morality, volition is significant because it involves the deliberate choice of actions based on one's principles.
3. **Maxim:** A maxim, in Kantian ethics, is a subjective principle of action. It is a concise statement that represents an individual's guiding rule or principle for making a particular moral or practical decision. Maxims are deeply personal and are derived from an individual's rational reflection on their circumstances and values.
4. **Subjectivity:** Kant emphasizes the importance of subjectivity in ethics. He argues that ethical principles should be grounded in the rational and autonomous will of each individual. This means that moral principles should not be imposed externally but it will emerge from an individual's own rational deliberation.

Kant says Maxims should inherently originate within every individual. In the realm of moral education, our primary goal should be to instil early on in children the concepts of right

and wrong. If our aim is to establish a strong moral foundation, we must eliminate the need for disciplinary measures. Morality is a concept of such profound significance that we should refrain from equating it with mere discipline. The initial objective in moral education revolves around nurturing one's character. Character is defined by the readiness to act in accordance with one's personal maxims. In the beginning, children may adhere to rules, but maxims are, in essence, personalized rules that emanate from a person's rational understanding. While we should not condone breaches of school discipline, any disciplinary actions taken should always be proportionate to the offense committed.

In this context, we should give emphasis on three cardinal attributes of young individuals, which are: i) a sense of duty, ii) truthfulness, and iii) sociability.

i) A sense of Duty:

In Kantian Philosophy, duty plays a significant role. Kant says, the compliance of maturing youth needs to be distinguished from that of a child. The former involves adherence to principles of responsibility. Acting out of a sense of duty implies rational obedience. Speaking to children about duty is futile, as they often perceive it as a task enforced by punishment. Children may be driven by instinct, but as they transit into youth, the concept of duty must be instilled. Similarly, the notion of shame should not be applied to children but reserved for those who have progressed from childhood to youth. This emotion can only arise once the idea of honour has been firmly established within them.

ii) Truthfulness:

Truthfulness stands as the second attributive element shaping a child's character. A person devoid of honesty lacks character, and any goodness in them is likely a consequence of a particular temperament. Some children may lean toward falsehoods, often fuelled by a vivid imagination. It falls upon the father to ensure this tendency is curbed, as mothers often dismiss it as inconsequential or even view it as a testament to their child's cleverness. This is the opportune moment to invoke a sense of shame, as children in this scenario comprehend it well. The blush of shame reveals deception, yet it isn't always definitive proof, as we might blush in reaction to the audacity of those falsely accusing us.

We should not take any such resort to punish children to extract the truth, unless their lie immediately leads to harm. Punishment may be meted out for the specific mischief caused. The withdrawal of respect stands as the sole appropriate consequence for lying.

In the realm of punishments, there exists a dichotomy of negative and positive measures. Negative punishments find application in addressing issues like laziness, vice, lying, and disobedience. On the other hand, positive punishment is suitable for tackling acts of spitefulness. It is paramount, however, to harbour no resentment toward children, ensuring that grudges are never held.

iii) Sociableness:

A third noteworthy attribute of a child's character should be sociability. The child ought to cultivate friendships with peers rather than remaining in solitude. While some educators may

object to fostering friendships in schools, this perspective is misguided. Children need to acquaint themselves with the delightful experiences of companionship.

If a teacher shows a preference for one child over another, it should be based on the child's recreational character rather than any specific talents they may possess. Otherwise, jealousy may emerge, undermining the spirit of friendship.

Children should exhibit openness and cheerfulness in their demeanour, akin to the radiant sun. A joyful heart is essential for finding happiness in the goodness of life. A religion that induces gloominess is a flawed one; serving God should be a joyful expression, not a matter of constraint.

Occasional breaks from the confines of the school environment are necessary for children; otherwise, their inherent joyfulness may diminish. When given freedom, a child swiftly reclaims their natural exuberance. Engaging in games where children, enjoying unrestricted freedom, strive to surpass each other will serve this purpose admirably, rejuvenating their minds and restoring cheerfulness.

IV. Discipline and Punishment: Moral Correction versus Physical Constraint

Kant believed that moral culture is essential for the development of a just and harmonious society. He believed that education should focus on cultivating the moral character of students, rather than simply imparting knowledge and skills. He believed that a moral education should include the development of the student's sense of duty and responsibility, as well as their ability to recognize and respect the moral worth of others.

In this particular context, Kant underscores the concept of punishment, a theory that holds significance in ethics as well. In the realm of child education, punishment is deemed highly important, as per Kant says, "Every transgression of a command is disobeyed through inattention, punishment is still necessary. This punishment is either *physical* or *moral*. It is moral when we do something derogatory to the child's longing to be honoured and loved (a longing which is an aid to moral training); for instance, when we humiliate the child by treating him coldly and distantly. This longing of children should, however, be cultivated as much as possible. Hence this kind of punishment is the best, since it is an aid to moral training-for instance, if a child tells a lie, a look of contempt is punishment enough, and punishment of a most appropriate kind.

Physical punishment consists either in refusing a child's requests or in the infliction of pain. The first is akin to moral punishment, and is of a negative kind. The second form must be used with caution, lest an *indoles servilis*¹ should be the result. It is of no use to give children rewards; this makes them selfish, and gives rise to an *indols mercenaria*. ”³

Punishments administered in a state of anger are ineffective. When children perceive punishment as a manifestation of anger, they see themselves merely as victims of that anger. Consequently, it is crucial to exercise great caution when inflicting discipline, ensuring that children always recognize its primary purpose: their improvement. Requiring children to express gratitude for punishment, such as by kissing hands, is counterproductive and transforms the child into a submissive figure. Frequent physical punishment can lead to stubbornness in children, particularly if the cycle persists. Parents punishing their children for

obstinacy may inadvertently intensify this trait. It's important to note that obstinacy is not exclusive to the worst individuals, and kind remonstrance often proves more effective than harsh discipline.

By explain all these; Kant wants to give emphasis that a proper educational environment will imbibe some moral virtues by following a consistent way. If we follow this balanced way, then the moral virtues like autonomy, responsibility, integrity and respect for other will evolve automatically. And not only all these but also Kantian educational philosophy emphasizes the importance of creating a supportive and nurturing learning environment that encourages students to develop these virtues. It also stresses the importance of modelling ethical behaviour and providing students with opportunities to practice ethical decision-making in real-world situations. In this philosophy places a great emphasis on developing a moral culture within individuals. According to Kant, education is not just about acquiring knowledge and skills, but it is also about developing a moral character.

V. The Categorical Imperative and the Universal Foundation of Moral Education

Kantian philosophy is based on the concept of categorical imperative, which is a universal moral law that should be followed by all individuals regardless of their personal desires or interests. Now the question arise what is categorical imperative? In Kantian ethics, the foundation rests upon the categorical imperative. Kant Says, “But what kind of law can this be the thought of which, even without regard to the results expected from it, has to determine the will if this is to be called good absolutely and without qualification? Since I have robbed the will of every inducement that might arise for it as a consequence of obeying any particular law, nothing is left but the conformity of actions to universal law as such, and this alone must serve the will as it principle. That is to say, I ought never to act except in such a way that *I can also will that my maxim should become a universal law*. Here bare conformity to universal law as such (without having as its base any law prescribing particular actions) is what serves the will as its principle, and must so serve it if duty is not to be everywhere an empty delusion and a chimerical concept. The ordinary reason of mankind also agrees with this completely in its practical judgements and always has the aforesaid principle before its eyes.”⁴

His categorical imperative based on universal principle. According to him, individuals should act in a way that they would want others to act towards them. This means that individuals should always act with respect for others and with a sense of duty towards the moral law.

Kant also believed that moral education should be grounded in religious and cultural traditions. He believed that these traditions provide individuals with a sense of purpose and meaning, and help to guide their moral development. However, he also believed that individuals should be free to explore different moral and religious traditions, and to form their own moral judgments based on reason and universal principles.

VI. Autonomy and Humanity as an End in Itself in Educational Praxis

Kantian educational philosophy also emphasizes the importance of autonomy in moral decision-making. According to Kant, individuals must be free to make their own choices and

determine their own moral values in order to be truly autonomous. Therefore, Kantian education encourages individuals to develop their own moral judgment and to take responsibility for their own actions.

He says the fundamental tenet of humanity, applicable to every rational agent, asserts itself as an end in its own right. It serves as the paramount constraint on the freedom of action for all individuals. Importantly, this principle is not derived from empirical observations. Firstly, its universality extends to all rational beings, and no empirical evidence can sufficiently establish such universality. Secondly, it envisions humanity not merely as a subjectively perceived end for individuals, but as an objective end that, by the dictates of pure reason, inherently governs and limits all subjective ends. In other words, irrespective of individual pursuits, this principle stands as the ultimate limiting condition arising from pure reason.

Consequently, the foundation for any enactment of practical law resides objectively in the rule and its universal form, rendering the rule capable of being a law, even a law of nature, as dictated by our primary principle. Subjectively, however, the basis lies in the end. According to our second principle, the subject of all ends is inherent in every rational being as an end in itself. This leads us to our third practical principle for the will, serving as the supreme condition for the will's alignment with universal practical reason. This principle revolves around the conception of the will of every rational being as one that establishes universal law.

VII. Conclusion

Finally Kantian educational philosophy emphasizes the cultivation of moral character through the development of rationality, critical thinking, and moral autonomy. Education should promote moral virtues, ethical behaviour, and empathy, and contribute to the creation of a just and harmonious society. Kant's moral culture can inform the principles and practices of physical education by emphasizing autonomy, universalizability, respect for humanity, the development of moral virtues, and a sense of duty and responsibility. Educators can use these principles to guide their approach to physical education, promoting not only physical health but also moral development and ethical behaviour in students.

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