A Response to Anna Strhan's Paper: A Clue for Discussing Another Religious Education

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INTRODUCTION

Reading Anna Strhan's paper led me to think about the problems of locating religious education and moral education in current Japanese education. I will respond to the question of religious education in Strhan's paper and consider her interpretation of the insights within Levinas's thinking. Then, after exploring the problem of the relation between morality and education in Japan, I will consider relations between morality and religion from a Levinasian standpoint.

Religion is assumed to be private rather than public in modern Japanese society; it is not located within society as a public institution. I would like to consider Strhan's paper with reference to moral education as related to social norms and individuals' values, while considering carefully the difference between religion and morality.

In a general sense, moral education involves not only indoctrinating moral norms but also guiding and supporting the student to 'become moral' and provide their own answer to the question 'what is morality?' or 'what is a morally desirable being?' In other words, it is to guide and support the student to acquire social customs and to be able to respond to social demands. This purpose is expressed as 'Cultivating Morality' ('Guidelines for the Course of Study for Junior High School').

The Fundamental Law of Education was revised in 2006 with respect to how morality was to be evaluated, and it included the ideal of 'patriotism'. They were indoctrinating a kind of social norm and 'desirable sense of value' through locating 'morality' as 'subject' under the slogan 'Cultivating Morality' in school.

This approach is problematic, in that it makes morality an object of compulsory evaluation. This problem relates to Strhan's doubts about the phenomenological model that aims at 'deepening interfaith dialogue' and 'being more tolerate'. This raises some questions:

- What are the criteria of human internal development?
- Should religion or morality be evaluated?
- Should we (teachers) teach the students conventional right or wrong?
- Does understanding follow on from belief, or does belief follow understanding in religion?

The different answers to this question would have significance for reconsidering the problem of indoctrination in religion. We do not consider morality at the stage of 'belief' to have rationality within itself and if we can think like this about morality, it would make sense to ask the same kinds of questions about morality as Strhan asks about religion. In other words, the problems of religion and morality are the same as those of belief and reason. In relation to belief and understanding, Levinas said that

'understanding' is 'seeking for the origin of all the semantic generations to existence in the relation of existence', 'belief' is 'the relation to the divine itself' that transcends existence. The important thing is to consider 'the relation to the divine' as discourse, 'the idea of infinity come to me' in Levinas' thinking.

THE PROBLEM OF SUBJECT(IVITY) IN THE CRITICAL REALIST MODEL

WE ARE GROWING UP WITH LEARNING WHAT WE CAN AND CANNOT DO. (Advertisement aimed at preventing minors from smoking)

Last year, a smoking room had been set up in a dormitory of a private high school. With the setting up of this room, the issue of high school students smoking in school was highlighted. This case, I would like to suggest, provides a foothold to respond to Strhan's paper that overlaps with my own concerns.

The fundamental principle of this approach is to stop young people under 20 years old smoking. However, minors' smoking is not such a simple problem that they come to stop smoking by being taught that 'smoking is unwholesome,' which is the social norm about smoking. In school, school personnel try and err to solve this problem repeatedly, but these practices are apt to fail. In this type of conflict situation, the study of 'Ethics' demands that students are able to deepen their reflection on their own problems, by understanding ancient sages' ideas as knowledge in an inclusive sense. In that process, struggling with various insoluble problems in human life, they come to try to form their inner life.

This idea of ethics education is connected with the question of how the critical realist model of Religious Education (RE) might bring 'awareness' within each student in relation to the ideal of 'cultivating the student's autonomy'. Let us reconsider Andrew Wright's argument. Strhan agrees with his idea that the role of RE should not be to indoctrinate within Christianity and learn the Bible, but should offer the learning opportunity to reconsider religious and social truths critically. However, she doesn't seem to agree with the emphasis on rational justification in this model. Rather, she highlights the fundamental questions of what we can and should examine under the name of God within RE. Considering this in relation to classroom planning, the following questions arise:

- Should RE have a curriculum appropriate for training the elite, to acquire the skills of problem-solving and to improve social adaptability, to deepen self-understanding?
- Or should RE have similar teaching methods to other subject disciplines?

The first quotation of this chapter, *'We are growing up with learning with what we can and cannot do'* describes the process of human growth from the point of view of 'possibility and impossibility'. I wonder whether the discourse of 'We are growing up with …' can only interpret these issues in relation to ideas of 'possibility or impossibility'. Ethics is not, I would argue, a question of 'can/cannot' but whether I am accepted or not in the relation to others.

If we follow Levinas, the autonomous subject doesn't transform herself to belong to social discourses, before responding to others, but substitutes herself for the other as the subject takes on responsibility for others. RE might contribute to disclosing the manifestation of the other as far as RE keeps asking the question 'what is human maturity?' with respect to the relation between the human and God. It is necessary to refer to Levinas's use of the idea of ethical subject (tivity) in relation to this, which he considers to be suffering, atoning for the other. Because [I] become as substitution for the other by not [I] identifying but being dis-identified. In other words, it is as a sensitive being who is receptive to the approach of the other that I have already been accepted by others unconditionally, whilst at the same time, I am always already responsible for the other. This describes how I become through the revelation of the other in a way that is different from how ethics education conceives of becoming moral as becoming someone who can give faithful judgment to traditional moral and social norms. I understand Strhan as suggesting that RE cannot lead to ethical subjecticity in a Levinasian mode as long as it follows the critical realist model in trying to explain relations with God. In addition, the location of self-understanding in a model of RE that aims to follow Levinas's insights will be somewhat flexible, depending on whether the relation between deepening 'self-understanding' and listening and responding to the Other can be explained as causal relationship or not.

THE MEANING OF 'BEING RELIGIOUS' AND 'ETHICS' WITHIN LEVINAS' THOUGHT

Religious Education can be divided into the following five categories for the purposes of clarity; 1. Confessional religious education, 2. Religious knowledge education, 3. Safety education against religion, 4. Religious tolerance education, 5. Religious cultivation of aesthetic sentiments. Strhan's paper would appear to favour 'Religious cultivation of aesthetic sentiments' especially.

To be taught knowledge in religious education was to have talked about and examined ideas about God within religious doctrines or 'being religious'. It might be different to approach religiosity through a discourse that talks about 'what is religion?' Levinas described the experience of religiosity by means of the word 'transcendence'. For example, when we learn 'tolerance', that will be more deeply learned by facing others than knowing what tolerance is. However, I also think that it is very important to investigate various ethical problems critically, in the process of the formation of autonomous subjects. Ethical subjectivity in Levinas' thought is not manifest in the process of learning. In that respect, it is different from the critical realist model. Levinas expressed the ethical relation as follows:

> The ethical fact owes nothing to values; it is values that owe everything to the ethical fact (Levinas, 1986, p. 147).

The ethical relation is not the same as 'Morality' or 'Communication'. It is not an ethics about anything but rather ethics as existing for another; the meaning of ethics is not constructed but searched for. Ethics will start where (or when) [I] acknowledge 'the Other' beyond 'the self'. Ethics is not like practical knowledge (or applied

knowledge) from the view point of Levinas' thought. Transcendence within ethics is to tear off the individual from the social totality, at the same time, to be reflected within that totality under the responsibility for others. An education that emphasizes this aspect of the ethical, 'knowing' that 'God is merciful' means 'Be merciful as well as God', this might be to hear and follow the other's voice. We do not learn practical knowledge but break into the relation with God through others.

CONCLUSION AND PERSPECTIVE: THE POSSIBILITY OF ANOTHER RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

To conclude, I would like to comment upon how we might search for an-other religious education from the point of view of ethicality in Levinas' thoughts as a reconsideration of daily life. It is difficult to establish universal religious education. It might be argued that the public role of religious education might be to prepare dialogical places where people who have different senses of value and belief talk mutually, on the assumption that it starts from the soil of a different (religious) experience. As a result, I am led to reconsider religious education through the perspective that Levinas opens up, to retain the possibility of speaking about religion after being released from various theoretical forms of 'private' religion, in other words, speaking about 'religiousness' beyond the framework of 'belief'. In both senses, Strhan's study contributes to the question of what religious education is.

So far, specific aims and purposes of education have existed through the way that capitalism has dictated. Perhaps within our current situation, their meaning and importance have lessened. Communication with others and social norms itself are unsettling and therefore in these circumstances, the relation between self and other might be seen as a manifestation of the processes of ethical subjectivity that demonstrate the 'missing' or rather 'missed' ethical core of the current frameworks of education. It is possible that a model of RE that attends to the challenges of Levinas may produce a new style of speaking in our educational daily life, always maintaining tense relations to public education, without being subsumed within such frameworks. And, I would like to pay attention to what direction religious education in Britain and Japan advances towards in the future.

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