

Happiness and Education—Response to Mitsutoshi Takayanagi’s Paper, ‘Desire, Pleasure, and Education: The Perfection of the Teacher through the Pursuit of Happiness’

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Reading Mitsutoshi Takayanagi’s paper (Takayanagi, 2010) makes me raise questions like these: ‘What is education for, not only for students but also for teachers, who participate in an enterprise called “education?” ’; ‘Whatever it may be for, are we happy in teaching and learning?’ As a matter of fact, happiness seems to be the last thing we have in mind in the school culture today where preoccupations with exams, grades, and entering to college are so widespread and pervasive in our educational consciousness both as teachers and as students. Even if we are concerned with happiness in relation to education, we tend to consider it to be something to be added to our learning process, because it makes the leaning *effective*, not because it is *essential to educational process* or *part of* what makes learning be learning. But the latter account seems to be what Takayanagi pursues in his paper. As a way of responding to his paper, let me reconstruct Takayanagi’s argument first. I will add my comments and questions along the way and raise a few questions at the end.

The paper attempts to answer the question of what the relation between teachers’ and students’ happiness should be at the school. Here Takayanagi puts into question our common sensical idea that teachers’ happiness should be sacrificed for students’ happiness at the school. In doing this, he seems to presuppose a concept of the *proper* connection between teachers’ and students’ happiness, even if he does not make an explicit suggestion about what sort of connection it would be. But what does Takayanagi mean by happiness? He defines the concept of ‘happiness’ in the utilitarian, especially Mill’s utilitarian, sense, namely, ‘happiness as pleasure’ (or the satisfaction of one’s desire). While wondering about the specific reason why he takes Mill’s view, we can take it as a view of happiness we usually tend to understand in our everyday life.

Then Takayanagi begins to argue against Mill’s utilitarian *moral* principle, that is, ‘greatest happiness principle’ (the greatest good for the greatest number of people) on the ground that it does not allow us a proper way of conceiving the relation between teachers’ and students’ happiness, or a proper way of ‘avoiding conflicts’ between them in Takayanagi’s terms. According to him, it does not allow so, whether we interpret happiness in applying the utilitarian moral principle as ‘lack of pain’, ‘maximization of one’s pleasure unless it harms others’, or ‘enjoyment of self-sacrifice’. But the ground of his complaints against the utilitarian account sounds a bit weak when he claims that it cannot solve the conflicts between teachers’ and students’ happiness, as if his only concern in regard to the relation between teachers’ and students’ happiness were the removal or the relief of the conflicts between them. I think that if he criticized the utilitarian account on the *educational* ground, rather than on the political/moral ground, his argument would be stronger and more relevant to the concern he has in raising the question on happiness and education.

Now Takayanagi turns to Cavell's moral perfectionist interpretation of Mill's concept of 'higher pleasure' to find a better answer to the question he set up. Here Mill's statement 'happiness is desirable' is interpreted as saying that 'it is *good* to have happiness (as higher pleasure)', instead of saying that 'happiness (as higher pleasure) *ought to be desired*'. This means that happiness as higher pleasure is not a moral *command*, but a moral *aspiration*. And then, Cavell's interpretation of Mill's idea on 'individuality' from his work *On Liberty* against cultural conformity is introduced to conclude that the problem with unhappy controversy over teachers' happiness *versus* students' happiness lies in the fact that 'we (teachers) don't desire what we (they) *truly* desire'. In other words, we desire what others desire, so that we are deprived of (our own) true desire. This is suggested to us as a diagnosis of the whole problem, i. e., the confrontational common sensical understanding of the relation between teachers' and students happiness, and at the same time as a way of solving the problem. That is, as long as we know how to desire what we truly desire, the problem would disappear or at least be weakened.

The rest of Takayanagi's discussion is now devoted to showing how this is the case. He gets into the discussion on Cavell's view of moral perfectionism, worrying about human voicelessness pervasive in our highly conformist culture. And the recovery of the voice is said to be the same as knowing how to desire what we truly desire. He also discusses how we can recover the voice in such a way as to become democratic members in the society, emphasizing *questioning* the condition in which one makes choices, and *reengaging* in the society with one's own desire, and so on. But the discussion here was a bit obscure and not fully developed. I think some of important terms of Cavell's, such as 'aversive thinking', 'closeness' and 'remoteness' should be further articulated to specify what it means to recover one's voice in the society.

Finally, with his concluding remarks, we as readers are in a much better position to understand how Cavell's idea helps Takayanagi to answer the question he sets up in the beginning. Now, it can be said that teachers should learn *how to despair* (and then how to recover from the despair) to get out of this pervasive cultural conformity (of not desiring what they truly desire). Takayanagi calls teachers' 'despair' an *educational* emotion in the classroom. Teachers are expected to interact with their students in the classroom in search of their happiness, that is, their own voices as to what they truly desire, while examining and reconfirming the voices. This may be also a (educational) way of conversing with their students as to what the students truly desire, not in order for all of them to reach the same ideal, but for them to help each other questioning the condition of what each desires and making sense of the choice one makes and the kind of desire one desires in pursuit of one's own ideal about oneself. Takayanagi seems to assume that this conversation would slowly change the whole relation between teachers' and students' happiness in such a way as that one's pursuit of happiness tends to promote the other's rather than to compete against the other. I think this may be the very picture that Takayanagi's moral perfectionist conceives of as a proper relation between teachers' and students' happiness.

Let me raise a few questions or comments, which I hope will be helpful to his further development of the argument. I will start with conceptual points. First, what sort of relation can Cavell's moral perfectionism exactly imply to us in regard to teachers' and students' happiness? By shifting his focus from 'pleasure (or happiness) in general' to 'higher pleasure (or higher happiness) in particular' in Mill's account, Cavell makes the question of happiness *essential to* education, but not in the utilitarian moral sense, but in the moral perfectionist sense. Happiness is a kind of

pleasure not as a maximum satisfaction of our desires but as a sensation from our inner fulfillment in pursuit of our self-ideal. We can see that in this picture teachers' *moral obligation* to promote students' happiness turns to their *educational aspiration* for moral perfectionists for themselves. We can also see that the role of teachers in relation to their students seems to shift from being a 'caretaker' to being a 'friend', at least in the sense that teachers and students are now expected to help each other to become better or happier persons. But, to make this paper educationally more interesting and stronger, what it means to be a better or happier *person* and what kind of friendship Cavell's moral perfectionism presupposes need to be further developed and articulated.

Second, there seem to be two senses of 'the moral' that are addressed in this paper. I think they should be made conceptually distinct. When Takayanagi discusses a *moral* way of resolving the conflicts between teachers and students' happiness on the *utilitarian* ground in Section 2, it is 'moral' in the sense that we *ought to do* something *as moral obligation in relation to others*. We call this 'rule-governed' morality since what is a morally right thing to do is supposed to be justified on the basis of a certain principle. On the other hand, when Takayanagi discusses happiness as a *moral* aspiration in Section 3, it is 'moral' in the sense that questions like 'What kind of person *I* aspire to be?' or 'What kind of life *I* truly desire to lead?' are more relevant, as a question that is concerned with *one's relation to oneself*. Bernard Williams distinguishes these two concepts of morality in his book *Ethics and The limit of Philosophy* (Williams, 1985, p. 6) by calling the former 'the moral' and the latter 'the ethical' (He relates the latter more specifically to the Socratic question, 'How should I live?'). If we accept this distinction of Williams, I wonder what the conceptual distinction between 'the ethical' and 'the educational' would be. And how would Cavell (or Takayanagi) respond to this question?

There are some practical points I want to make as well. Takayanagi describes in the conclusion 'despair as a sign of teachers as learner'. If this is the case, our society is not short of teachers as learners, at least in the Korean context. We can easily encounter teachers in despair over their educational environments where genuine teaching-and-learning experiences always come secondary to all those exams imposed by the government in the name of education reform, as well as to constant administrative demands on teachers for managerial convenience. Serious-minded teachers in Korea are in despair over their everyday teaching conditions; they complain that they would like to *teach* but they cannot. Most teachers often confess that they would be very *happy* if they were allowed to engage themselves in genuine teaching and learning activities with students. I think this is *real* despair. But is this a good sign? I think we as teacher-educators need to find a way of re-channeling this despair of teachers into good educational energy, rather than leaving them drained out of it. But, more often than not, their sheer despair in the face of the brutal reality of our educational environments makes the language of 'moral perfectionism' sound too weak or too remote to respond to it. Even I, as a professed advocate of moral perfectionism, cannot help asking myself, 'Is this the best thing we can offer to them?' But I don't think this self-doubt would work against moral perfectionism. Quite on the contrary! We teacher-educators may have to ask ourselves how to better address and frame the remote-sounding educational concern of moral perfectionism in such a way as to be deeply in touch with teachers in despair, surrounded by daunting challenges from their educational reality.

REFERENCES

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