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Rawls and the Justice of Teachers: Morals and Conversation in Teacher Education

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1. CONVERSATION AND JUSTICE

A teacher's re-education as a re-engagement with language has two aspects. First, it revisits a crossroads presented by an existential question, namely, whether a teacher conforms one's teaching to the provision of commodified knowledge or averts from this. Second, it leads teachers to face a critical moment in their society, in terms of how the society justifies the way its members simply do what they do.

In Wittgenstein's depiction of the scenes of instruction, a teacher has exhausted her justifications (PI, §217).¹ From the viewpoint of the audit culture,² what is emphasised in teacher education, in connection with this scene, is the technique and due process for justifying oneself. In contrast to this, the alternative discourse pays attention to the potentiality of questioning whether such justifications are really justified. To put it differently, when one's justifications are exhausted, what is at stake is not whether one should end the conversation or not, but, rather, the notion of justice in *that* justification itself.

One may ask, however: What is the point for teachers, as a part of their education, of questioning the notion of justice? How does it relate to the existential question of teaching as conformity or aversion? These are the questions that this paper discusses.

2. RAWLS AND CAVELL IN CONVERSATION

Stanley Cavell elaborates an idea of justice by studying the mythological metaphor of justice, namely, what is generally referred to as Lady Justice. In most cases she is depicted as a goddess with the following characteristics: (1) blindfolded; (2) holding a balance in one hand; (3) taking a sword in the other (Cavell, 2004, p. 167). Cavell interprets what these features signify respectively: (1) she is blind to certain differences such as social station or established social hierarchies in respect to letting justice be done; (2) she balances differences in order and in weight of conflicting claims; (3) she yields decisions or choices that are final, which is sometimes fatal (pp. 167-168). As for (3), though, he further

excavates its connotations by raising a question as follows:

Intuitively, the issue may be expressed as a question about the image of justice's sword, namely whether it is drawn in offense or in defense (p. 172).

The implication of finality that her sword holds, it seems, has two sides. On the one hand, the sword may connote the fatal execution of the judgment. On the other hand, however, it can be understood that the Lady tries to defend the solemn practice of judging from people's easy conclusions.

If this posture of defense is simply understood as an attitude of carefully following due process, it is a procrastination of the point at which one's justifications are exhausted. Nevertheless, Cavell emphasises the fact that when 'my spade is turned', 'it cannot keep going straight' (Cavell, 1990, p. 82). So, instead of a linear continuation of justification as such, how could the Lady Justice's pose be interpreted? One plausible answer would be that she cautions us about confinement of the idea of justice within the present state and practice of justification. If that is the case, then what she symbolises is not only the image of justice, but also the human communication that Cavell calls the 'conversation of justice'.

The term connotes the communication that elucidates, and is made possible by, the notion of justice. It is 'something prepared by the debate explicitly required in establishing the principles of justice in the original position' (Cavell, 1990, p. 102). As is evident in this sentence, the term justice is discussed by Cavell in line with his reading of John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice*. More specifically, Cavell understands the writing in the book to be 'a *part* of the conversation of justice' (p. xxxii). This enables us to restate the chapter's initial questions in the following way: What is the point for a teacher to participate in the conversation of justice, in the sense of reconsidering one's personal standing at the crossroad of teaching? Cavell's reading of Rawls will be of help in answering this question. In order to elucidate the notion of the conversation of justice, we need first to take a look at the connections between Cavell and Rawls concerning this theme.

An important point is that Cavell often explains his Perfectionism in comparison with Rawls's understanding of elitist perfectionism (e.g., Cavell, 1990, p. 1; p. 102; pp. 48-50; 2004, p. 224; p. 248). Indeed, Saito points out that 'Cavell's EMP is in some degree a response to John Rawls's' (Saito, 2011, p. 4).³ It is interesting to see, in turn, that Rawls refers to Cavell in *A Theory of Justice*. In discussing self-worth as a primary good, Rawls claims that a sense of shame is firmly connected with one's moral feeling (Rawls, 1971, p. 443). Then he provides some notes: 'For the intimacy of shame, see Stanley Cavell, "The Avoidance of Love", in *Must We Mean What We Say*?' (p. 443n). The notion of shame is and has been a significant element in Cavell's moral thinking, evidenced by, for example, his

saying that '[a] text such as Emerson's "Self-Reliance" is virtually a study of shame' (Cavell, 1990, p. 47). It is possible to say, therefore, that a part of *A Theory of Justice* is a response to Cavell's earlier philosophy.

Their shared interest in the notion of shame, though, exemplifies their difference. The difference is not a question of what justice is, but of our relation to such a question. In 'The Avoidance of Love', Cavell says that shame is not only 'the most primitive, the most private, of emotions', but also 'the most primitive of social responses' (Cavell, 1969, p. 286). One feels shame toward one's own actions and being as well as toward that of 'those with whom one is identified' (ibid). They are those whom one loves or commits to (ibid). Sometimes one is ashamed of oneself, but one is also ashamed of one's family or relatives or colleagues. In this sense, shame expresses one's connection with other people. Rawls also pays attention to this aspect of shame. He claims that moral shame involves 'our relation to others' (Rawls, 1971, p. 446). In fact, someone is liable to moral shame when she becomes aware of defects in her virtues (p. 444). Shame, in Rawls, is even 'an expression of our acceptance' of his first principle of justice (p. 446).⁴ This is because one's feeling shame is tantamount to one's sensing anxiety about receiving less respect from others. In this case, one feels shame because one fails to live up to the principle and it disappoints people (p. 446). This explains why self-respect is a primary good in Rawls. Self-respect drives people to strive to achieve things that have value (p. 440). One feels shame when one fails to live up to these values. Thus, if it were not for self-respect, all desire and activity would become 'empty and vain', and we would 'sink into apathy and cynicism' (ibid).

Despite the affinities in their interests in shame, this is a point at which divergence between Rawls and Cavell appears. Cavell addresses what puts people into a state of cynicism through his reading of the Rawlsian conception of justice, in particular his second principle.⁵

I assume that the consent of the relatively advantaged does *not* take care of itself, but that...it is subject to an oppressive helplessness—I have described its signs as a sense of compromise and of cynicism—Emerson calls it being ashamed—that distorts or blocks their participation in the conversation of justice (Cavell, 1990, p. 30).

Here, the difference becomes clearer. On the one hand, Rawls believes that cynicism prevails where self-respect and shame (an expression of self-respect) are absent. On the other hand, in Cavell, one's being ashamed signifies a sense that one is blocked from participating in the conversation of justice. In other words, contrary to Rawls's cynicism, which means total separation or resignation from the principles of justice, a sense of cynicism in Cavell insinuates ambivalence in one's awareness of being distanced from her ideal state of a

society and, hence, one's possibility for re-engagement with participating in reconstructing one's society. This interpretation is backed up by the fact that Cavell parallels a sense of compromise with that of cynicism, as in the quote given above. Coming to know that one is compromised can be understood either as an end of efforts to go further or recognition that there are further possibilities.

It becomes clear, at this point, that shame in Rawls means one's failure to comply with the principles of justice, while shame in Cavell encompasses a sense of being attracted to yet blocked from the conversation of justice, i.e., an examination of the principles of justice as such. This brings us back to the initial concern of this chapter, namely, the justice of a teacher's justification. In order to elucidate the question of justification of one's teaching in a democratic society, the next section will focus on Rawls's promotion of, and Cavell's criticism of, the idea of being 'above reproach'.

3. RAWL'S JUSTIFICATION OF BEING 'ABOVE REPROACH'

'[T]eaching how to respond' to democracy's inevitable failures, and 'to one's compromise' by those failures is essential to perfectionism that is compatible with, and necessary to, democracy (p. 18). Although Cavell praises *A Theory of Justice* for its commitment to the task of such teaching, he shows a feeling of unease about the content of it. The unease is caused by Rawls's instruction that people in a democratic society should find a way of life that is 'above reproach' (Rawls, 1971, p. 422 cited in Cavell, 1990, p. 18).

In *A Theory of Justice*, the idea of being 'above reproach' appears in a context in which Rawls addresses the notion of 'goodness as rationality' (Rawls, 1971, p. 404). The definition of the term is a 'person's good as successful execution of a rational plan of life' (p. 433). In short, the criteria of 'something's being good' is 'its having the properties that it is rational to want' (p. 405). For example, when A is asked for advice on what is *best* for B, it is assumed that A will say what is *rational* for B to do. Of course, people's knowledge of their own situation is limited and their forecast for the consequences of their choice is incomplete. Thereby it is often difficult to make sure *what* is rational for them. To respond to this fact, Rawls specifies that a 'rational plan' means the best plan that a rational person can make 'with the information available to him' (p. 417).⁶ The author of that plan ought not to be faulted even if 'his real good' is different from his 'apparent' good (ibid). Rawls calls this sense of being rational 'deliberative rationality' (p. 416).

This relates to a form of self-justification:

Nothing can protect us from the ambiguities and limitations of our knowledge, or guarantee that we find the best alternative open to us. Acting with deliberative rationality can only issue that our conduct is above reproach... (p. 422).

According to Rawls, a rational individual never needs to blame him or herself no matter how his or her plans finally work out. It is possible to see this as his position toward, or finalisation of, the conversation of justice—the communication over the question of what is just.

Cavell casts doubt on this state of being 'above reproach'.⁷ He points out that such a state presupposes a requirement: When someone attempts to question another's justification, one 'must be prepared to show why certain institutions are unjust or how others have injured them' (Rawls, 1971, p. 533). Otherwise, in Rawls, one's claim of suffering is considered to be 'envy', which is not a moral feeling and, therefore, is not given any room for further elaboration. Unlike a moral emotion of resentment or of indignation, envy simply exhibits a sense of 'rancor and hostility' toward 'the better situation of others' (ibid).⁸ Is it really plausible to exclude the envious from the conversation of justice as long as the envied proves him or herself to be 'above reproach'?

What is problematic about the secured position of being above reproach and its foundation of deliberative rationality is that rules are justified above any attempt to reconsider the rules themselves. As a consequence, there seems to be a sense that the discussion of a just society is reduced to a matter of positivistic reasoning. On the one hand, the advantaged (or envied) is required to prove that he or she is above reproach, i.e., he or she has acted upon the best and most rational plan according to the maximum information available. On the other hand, the less advantaged (or the envious) is required to prove that certain institutions or others have caused them harm.

The reality is, however, that such preset rules of argument *per se* actually harm the disadvantaged. The most severe aspect of injustice relates to a case in which one's indignation is devalued as mere envy. As Cavell writes, '[i]t may be part of the resentment that there is no satisfactory hearing for the resentment' (Cavell, 1990, p. 108). Without such a perspective, the notion of deliberation in 'deliberative rationality' is characterised not as *careful* but as *intentional* operation.

The following statement of Cavell's exemplifies a feature of one's (continuous) participation in the conversation of justice:

No rule tells me when I may end the conversation unilaterally; it is my judgment, not a rule, that lets me conclude that I did what I could (Cavell, 2004, p. 179).

A tendency to confine the issue of justification to substantiated rules resonates with the prevailing discourse of education, namely, the narrowed emphasis on accountability. One

task of the conversation of justice is, as Cavell says, to examine how the 'justice of justice' can be assessed (p. 25). Borrowing this expression, reconsidering the discourse of the audit culture necessitates inspecting the 'accountability of accountability'. In order to elaborate further a different discourse of the teacher's justification of teaching, the next section will discuss the concept of rules (and morality) in Rawls and Cavell.

4. GAMES AND MORALITY: RULES OF DEMOCRACY

For examining the issue of rules in EMP, according to Stephen Mulhall, it is best to compare Rawls's essay 'Two Concepts of Rules' and Cavell's criticism of it (Mulhall, 1997, p. 171).⁹ Nadav Arviv concurs with Mulhall. Arviv states that linking Cavell's early criticism of 'Two Concepts...' to the later criticism of *A Theory of Justice* helps to elucidate some of 'enigmatic features' of EMP (Arviv, p. 186). It is plausible, then, to see another set of traces of interactions between Rawls and Cavell.

Rawls points out that there are two ways in which the concept of rules is captured: (1) the summary view, which regards rules to be 'summaries of past decisions' about particular cases (Rawls, 1955, p. 19)¹⁰; (2) the practice view, which pictures rules as defining a practice (p. 24).¹¹ Rawls himself is sympathetic with the latter conception of rules. He criticises the former by pointing out that it overlooks the difference between 'justifying a practice' and 'justifying an action falling under it' (p. 28). To support the practice view of rules, he takes the example of baseball.¹² If it were not for the rules of baseball game, there would be no such thing as striking out or base stealing (Rawls, 1955, p. 28). Therefore, rules in the practice do not tell us what one should do or decide on a particular occasion. Rather, they tell us what one's action is at all.

In response to Rawls's distinction between two conceptions of rules, Cavell's criticism takes two phases. First, Cavell claims that Rawls falls short of distinguishing 'actions *in accordance with* rules' from 'actions *determined* by rules' (Cavell, 1979, p. 304). In a game of baseball, one can either 'bunt' or 'draw a walk' because these choices are totally *in accordance with* rules, while being struck out is *determined* by the three-strike rule. This echoes the contrast between 'what one ought to (or should not) do' and 'what we *must* do' (p. 308). While the former tells us 'how to play the game *well*', the latter indicates playing the game itself (p. 304). Second, and more importantly, Cavell argues that Rawls misses the difference between references to rules in games and moral argument about rules. Within games, what one must do and what one ought to do is 'completely specified and radically marked off' (p. 308). Given a clear presupposition about oughts and musts, we can totally concentrate on playing a game, winning a match, or receiving praise. In contrast, the moral world in which we live is 'outside the arena of defined practices' (p. 311). In an argument about our moral life, therefore, there are no preexisting rules that define practices prior to

particular cases.13

The lack of clear distinction between what we ought to do and what we must do causes anxiety. It is attractive to imagine that there are such things as guiding rules to suggest what we ought to do and what we must to do in each case, like the rules in Rawls's summary view do. It is also seductive to think that there are rules that define what is an action that one ought to (or must) commit oneself to in the first place, as with rules in the practice view. The fact is, however, that guidelines are deduced from past cases and, thus, they cannot be the single and final rules (as Rawls suggests). Also, our world is not composed of defined practices, but, rather, we are always in a process of denying and determining rules to determine our practices (as Cavell suggests).

Returning to the issue of assessing the 'justice of justice', in a justified position of being 'above reproach' one can appeal to some of the existing rules in the society. Nevertheless, it does not mean that such a position can be finalised and secured. Justification of one's position is grounded in justification of the rules that one appeals to. One can prove that one is not to be blamed within the domain of given rules, but the domain of our moral life in which rules are composed and perfected is still open to discussion.

This leads us to Cavell's discussion of democracy. Our disappointment with criteria—our sense of our inability to fully express our position—is connected to a feeling that the present state of the society in which one is positioning oneself is not the state one desires. Furthermore, one's sense of partiality and separation cannot be voiced without the shared language. One needs not only to affirm the existing state of language and its community but also to depart from them. Conversely, it causes one pain because departure from the language and society as it stands necessarily means departure from the existing state of oneself who lives in them. Cavell puts this as follows:

[W]hat must be shown...that I know change is called for and...beginning with myself. But then I must also show...that I continue to consent to the way things are, without reason, with only my intuition that our collective distance from perfect justice is, though in moments painful to the point of intolerable, still habitable, even necessary as a state for continued change (Cavell, 1990, p. 112).

As is indicated here, our pain is double-layered. First, we live at a painful distance from the perfect state of the society. Second, it is painful to see that our communal life departs for the next state only through each of us feeling pain. In the same vein, the conversation of justice is not about who should be ashamed or respected but about in what way each member of the society is disappointed with and is hoping to elaborate the criteria of justice. This hints at the change of the discourse of education. The major requirement of the dominant discourse is to

follow the fixed rules that the audit culture predetermines. According to Cavell's idea of the conversation of justice, the change in the discourse does not emerge from judging and criticising from a secure position. Rather, it becomes possible only if each one of us appreciates the disappointment with the criteria of our ordinary words and world through the conversation of justice. In the last section of this chapter, then, I will argue why and how re-engagement with language matters to teachers in relation to such conversation.

5. READING OF PAIN

In order to elucidate the relationship between the conversation of justice and language, Cavell's reading of Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* is brought into consideration. Cavell discusses this work in connection with the conversation of justice in two ways. First, Nora, the heroine, exemplifies a state in which one is deprived of the conversation of justice. Torvald, her husband, treats her 'like a child' (p. 114). In their marriage, therefore, rules on what is just are provided and judged only by Torvald. All Nora is allowed to do is to follow the script that her husband has set. This makes their house like a doll's house, with Nora the doll played with by her husband. Second, Nora's final exchange with Torvald displays the characteristics of the conversation of justice (Cavell, 2004, p. 249). Ironically, however, her claim is that the justification that her husband asserts cannot be justified from her side. She finally has an opportunity to participate in the conversation of justice in which she states that she has been blocked from the conversation of justice and, as a consequence, she is leaving her husband. So what does reading a text such as *The Doll's House* mean to the teacher as a reader?

Concerning the pain in the conversation of justice, readers are actually engaging with Nora's departure from Torvald's house through the very act of their reading the lines of *The Doll's House*. There is a script in front of the reader. Reading means following the prearranged play. The drama emerges, however, when one departs from the lines as they stand and recreates them into one's own story. This is why serious reading requires effort. It inflicts pain when one enters the house and when one exits again. As Cavell mentions, 'Nora and Torvald are on opposite sides of this pain' (Cavell, 1990, p. 112). Hence, he imagines that 'each member of the play's audience is to see this division in himself and herself' (ibid). Torvald's drive for securing one's sense of justice is ours. At the same time, Nora's cry for release from false totalities (p. 124) is also ours. Readers of *A Doll's House* are not only following the conversation of justice, but also practicing it with the text.

This relates to the fact that René Arcilla's calls perfectionist texts 'a sympathetic equal' (Arcilla, 2012, p. 160). The expression 'a sympathetic equal' helps us to appreciate the connection between language and the conversation of justice. We need to accept the present state of words and concepts, even if it is sometimes painful, in order to change them in the

future. The 'equal' in Arcilla's terms also signifies the next move—dividing oneself from the state that one has familiarised oneself with. At this stage, a different notion of '*equal*' comes to the fore, namely, the role of *equa*tor. A reader is divided in half—one in the domain of the familiar and the other in motion toward de-conformity. A teacher as a reader engages with texts as a practice of the conversation of justice.

This brings us back to our initial question: what is the point for a teacher to participate in the conversation of justice, in the sense of reconsidering their existential understanding of teaching profession? From the viewpoint of EMP, a practice of teaching is always accompanied, and challenged, by an act of questioning what the teacher is trying to teach. Unlike the audit culture's presupposition, teaching is not merely automatic reproduction of knowledge. Rather, it is an enterprise that involves seemingly contradicting hope. It is hope that one's teaching will be accepted and, at the same time, hope that one's pupil will re-create (therefore depart from) it. This parallels with the issue of language. People learn language to share it with others and to participate in the community. Nevertheless, one tries to show, via that very language, that one is different from others, that one has something new and unique in the community and its heritage. In other words, one needs shared language in order to express one's own voice. The conversation of justice touches upon the core of such contradiction. What the teacher sees as natural and right and just is put into question. The process takes a form of language learning to the pupil. The process implies a vision of education of the teacher because one is led to reconsider rules and morals that set one's teaching itself.

Notes

¹ According to a general manner in the field, reference from Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* is abbreviated as PI, and a section number is indicated instead of a page.

² Fujita uses the term of 'the audit culture' in a way in which 'the principle of market efficiency and the quasi-public accountability' is implied. Such principle is embodied in 'achievement-oriented' system in education (Fujita, 2007, p. 52).

³ EMP stands for Emersonian Moral Perfectionism.

⁴ Rawls's first principle of justice is: 'Each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive total system of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar system of liberty for all' (Rawls, 1971, p. 302).

⁵ Rawls's second principle of justice is: 'Social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both: (a) to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged, consistent with the just savings principle, and (b) attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity' (Rawls, 1971, p. 302).

⁶ Rawls explains: 'An individual's good is the hypothetical composition of impulsive forces that results from deliberative reflection meeting certain conditions' (Rawls, 1971, p. 417).

⁷ Again, despite all the criticisms Cavell makes of Rawls, it is also important to note that Cavell places a high value on *A Theory of Justice* for the 'originality of Rawls's moral

theorizing' (Cavell, 1990, p. xxiv). This originality lies in the fact that the idea of the conversation of justice threads through *A Theory of Justice* (ibid). He mentions that there are two representative points at which the conversation of justice takes place. Stephen Mulhall summarises the two points as follows: 'the conversation eventual citizens must have about the fairness of the original position in which the principles of justice are chosen' and the one 'actual citizens must have in judging the degree to which those principles are embodied in the actual society of which they are part' (Mulhall, 1997, p. 181). In this manner, Cavell displays his affinity with Rawls's idea that citizens in different social positions can speak to one another about the justice of their differences (Cavell, 1990, p. xxiv). Nevertheless, Cavell is not convinced by Rawls's argument on how these transactions shall be concluded.

⁸ It is interesting to see, at this point, what Rawls calls the feeling of those who think of themselves as the object of others' resentment. It is a sense of guilt (Rawls, 1971, p. 446). He considers that guilt and shame are two sides of the same coin in light of the principles of justice: while shame is perceived as loss of the respect of others or failure to respond to one's own or others' ideals, guilt is understood as infringement of the just claims of others or the probability of the occurrence of others' resentment (ibid).

⁹ Mulhall confesses that he once failed to emphasise the degree to which Cavell's criticism of *A Theory of Justice* is 'a successor to, and perhaps a reiteration of, his much-earlier criticisms of an early paper of Rawls's that is primarily devoted to issues in moral philosophy' (Mulhall, 1997, p. 171). One essay that Mulhall refers to is his 'Perfectionism, Politics and the Social Contract: Rawls and Cavell on Justice' in 1994. This does not, however, mean that Mulhall has paid no attention to the significance of Cavell's interest in Rawls's work prior to *A Theory of Justice*. In fact, Mulhall writes: 'In short, Cavell's early criticism of Rawls's view of morality is that it is excessively contractual, just as his later criticism of Rawls's view of politics is that it embodies an unduly contractual notion of consent: in both fields, Rawls presents the precise range and scope of our responsibilities as fixed in advance by impersonal principles' (Mulhall, 1994, p. 237). The case Mulhall has tried to make in the above passage is retained and given a primary position in his 1997 essay. ¹⁰ In this view, rules guide what each person shall do in each case (Rawls, 1955, p. 19). ¹¹ On this conception, the practice is 'logically prior to particular cases' (Rawls, 1955, p. 25).

¹² Another example that Rawls adopts is promising. To summarise, breaking a promise could be sometimes justified as long as that particular promise causes more harm to larger amount of people than breaking it. Here, justification of one's particular act of keeping or breaking a promise is confused with justification of keeping or breaking of promises as a social institution. On the contrary, the practice conception of rules states that, even though there are some cases of a broken promise, the understanding that a promise is something one has to commit to remains intact. Of course some may break a promise. This, however, does not prove that one need not commit to his promise. This is because if there is no such understanding that a promise is something one ought to keep, there is no case of promising at all. One cannot even break a promise where there is no social institution of promise prior to each case of promising. Therefore, an occasional failure of one's justification of his action falling under the practice does not automatically mean a failure of justification of that practice itself. Rawls states: 'It would be absurd to interpret the rules about promising in accordance with the summary conception. It is absurd to say, for example, that the rule that promises should be kept could have arisen from its being found in past cases to be best on the whole to keep one's promise' (Rawls, 1955, p. 30).

¹³ Cavell relates this sense to Nietzsche's saying, 'There are no moral phenomena; there are only moral interpretations of phenomena' (Nietzsche, 2002, p. 61 cited in Cavell, 1979, p. 310).

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