

Gender Education as Moral Education: A Curricular Ideal

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Abstract

Gender education is increasingly recognized as a critical aspect of moral education, particularly in the context of promoting social justice, inclusivity, and equality. At the heart of this shift lies the understanding that gender identity and expression are not merely personal attributes but powerful social constructs that shape individual lives and the structures of society. An inclusive approach to gender education, especially within the context of a philosophy curriculum, provides an opportunity to critically engage with traditional concepts of gender, challenge societal norms, and encourage students to reflect on the ethical dimensions of gender relations. This article examines the integration of gender education as a moral education tool in philosophy curricula, with particular emphasis on gender sensitivity, gender-inclusive pedagogy, and the role of critical thinkers in shaping inclusive educational frameworks. By addressing gender as a salient aspect of the self, promoting gender equity, diversity/disability, and social inclusion (GEDSI), practicing gender sensitivity, and incorporating inclusive language therein, the paper aims to demonstrate how an inclusive curriculum promotes critical thinking and moral development and ultimately contributes to a more equitable and just society.

Keywords: Philosophy, GEDSI, gender education, moral education, gender mainstreaming

Introduction

There has been a steady and growing interest in conversations involving gender-related ideas, issues, and sometimes, even disputes. In the Philippines, very recently, the introduction of Comprehensive Sexual Education in Senator Risa Hontiveros' sponsored Senate Bill 1979, otherwise known as the Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Bill, has drawn enormous yet varied reactions from various stakeholders in the Philippines with some sectors of the society pushing for it and considering it urgent (United Nations Population Fund, 2024), while some condemning it as an overt promotion of "solo and mutual masturbation, gender fluidity, and sexual right" among young Filipinos (Abanto, 2025). Meant to complement the



Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health Law, the new bill is an attempt to respond to the growing number of babies who were born to mothers under the age of 15 in the Philippines. Data from the Philippine Statistics Authority of the Philippines, the national agency tasked to “primarily be responsible for all national censuses and surveys, sectoral statistics, community-based statistics, consolidation of selected administrative recording systems, and compilation of national accounts” has shown that babies born to mothers under 15 have been progressing steadily. In 2020, it was 2,113. The numbers increased to 2,320 in 2021, and in 2022, 3,135 babies were born to these young mothers (Bordey, 2025). The proposed law aims to provide the needed resources to curb this “national emergency” and to legislate a comprehensive sexual education that is geared towards providing young Filipino men and women a basic understanding of their sexuality, which is meant to empower them, most importantly the young women upon whom the responsibility of childbearing is expected from, to make informed decisions about their own lives.

Across the globe, a similar urgency to discuss these matters has been noted. In the United States, current President Donald J. Trump wasted no time and immediately signed an executive order on January 20, 2025, titled, “Defending Women From Gender Ideology Extremism and Restoring Biological Truth to the Federal Government” (The White House, 2025). Virtually dividing his entire country, the executive order has launched kilometeric debates on Trump’s initiative to eliminate the concept of “gender identity” as a separate category from sex in the federal government (Kurtzleben, 2025). Many have expressed fears that these initiatives will only exacerbate the plight of transgender people, especially women who will now be transferred to men’s prisons, migrant housing, and other spaces that place them at greater sexual and physical risks and harm. Recognizing people as only men or women profoundly affects how those who do not identify as either of these two binary categories make sense of their own identity. What the Trump administration is doing is undermining the rights of many American people and denying their lived experiences. Worse, by employing his understanding of the language of gender equality and women’s rights, his administration is trampling upon those who identify and who have lived as women themselves.

All over the world, including the Philippines, the need for more conversations on gender and issues of sexuality has never been more urgent than today. Because gender issues and studies have steadily gained traction in the present day, the place of an education that addresses the need for a fuller understanding of these issues and topics and provides sufficient opportunities for individuals to explore, learn, and consider various perspectives becomes imperative. As such, a space for gender education in the total development of the human person also demands a focused inquiry.

While moral education is often thought to be a “range of practices aimed at moralizing individuals and rectifying social arrangements through structured learning” (DeNicola, 2011), moral education, more importantly, has for its goals two things: one, the good of an individual



and two, a good in the society. If moral education is concerned with the good of an individual, the education of the total human person, issues of gender identity, and expression, which are salient aspects of the human person, cannot be sidelined. As essential attributes that shape individuals, any moral education program should render sufficient space for education on gender awareness and its related concepts and issues like gender equity, disability, inclusion, language, and sensitivity. A decent and good human person is not just generous, kind, and courageous; the present society demands civic virtues too such as respect, justice, inclusive, and the like, which a thorough gender education can also help equip individuals. Only when individual members of a community can harness these virtues can a society truly be considered good.

This article then attempts to respond to these issues and gaps by first elucidating the nature of moral education. It then zooms in on the role of gender as an aspect of the self, the locus of any moral education program. By doing this, it will be argued that gender education is a salient form of moral education. The article will end with a proposal for gender inclusiveness and a possible gender education perspective.

Gender Education as Moral Education

A general theory of education can be said to aim at one thing: “to produce a certain type of person, an educated” (Moore, 2010) being. An educated being, elucidates Moore, is an improved version of oneself, a desirable end product, and someone who ought to be produced, whether in schools or otherwise. While normally conceived as someone whose intellectual abilities have been developed through years of drilling in school, an educated individual is also thought to be someone who is equally sensitive to matters of value: morality and aesthetics. An educated individual does not just aspire for truth but rises up to the challenges of being good. Such an individual is expected to have their moral compass in check, and their taste sharpened.

For this reason, moral education has always been one of the hallmarks of formal education. The goal of improving humanity has never been confined to the sphere of intellect and reason alone. The Greeks themselves, the recognized leaders and progenitors of knowledge and inquiry as we now know, coupled the investigation of the universe with examining the self. Pythagoras, known in the history of thought as one of the foremost mathematicians and thinkers of the Western world, led a group of kindred spirits who not just marveled at the powerful explanatory and metaphysical potential of numbers and mathematics but sought the salvation of their soul for the possibility of its transmigration by following a set of beliefs and moral codes. Alongside their pursuit of understanding reality through mathematics, their lives were governed by a code of ethics that specified how they should live and what they should not do (Anton, 2025). Plato, one of the most important thinkers of Ancient Greece, offered a curriculum in his work *The Republic* that places utmost

importance on attaining the 'Good.' In the same dialogue, Plato explicitly declares that the education of philosopher-kings must include philosophy in order to attain the cardinal virtues and, most especially, the all-encompassing virtue of goodness, *Agathon*, or justice (Dillon, n.d.). Equally, Hypatia of Alexandria, the most famous ancient female mathematician (Lambruo, 2003), centered her Neoplatonic philosophy on the soul and intellectual ascent, engaging with the themes of self-knowledge and personal virtue.

Ever since the dawn of time, educationalists have placed a steady place for the education of the total human person through moral education. Countless research sought to examine foundational questions about moral education. These studies span from the actual nature, aims, and traditions to what is more often investigated, strategies in moral education. One seeming gap in the literature is the sparse focus on moral education as a tool for gender education and, conversely, gender education's role in the complete moral education of every human person. This limitation in the literature is further magnified if one localizes the investigation within the Philippine educational context, where cultural and religious considerations limit moral education. For instance, in some educational institutions, a set of dogmas or tenets from a particular religion is being taught exclusively. This can be problematic when one considers the plurality of religions of people not just in the Philippines but across the globe. In relation to moral education, whose morality is being taught by whom if religion were the sole basis for teaching morality? In the case of gender, some religions carry baggage when it comes to their views on religion. One of the aims of this paper is to fill this gap.

Moral education has always been understood as an attempt to teach learners to become better versions of themselves, that is, to become better human beings. One can only understand what it means to be a better human being if one understands what it means to become a good human being in the first place. "Moral education has to do with influencing behavior, and this presupposes a certain amount of knowledge to be acquired by the pupil (Moore, 2010). Pupils inside a classroom are not born moral. No one is. They need help to become so. Aristotle himself clarified that virtue or one's excellence is not acquired through birth. It can only be acquired by education and habituation. Providing an apparatus to understand what it means to be a good human being and, eventually, a better human being becomes the substantial task of moral education. Speaking about moral virtue as a prerequisite to moral education, the English feminist philosopher Mary Wollstonecraft, advocated for women's education and empowerment. She thought that women should have the same educational possibilities as men, allowing them to develop their intelligence and contribute effectively to society (Das, 2023). Seeing educating oneself as a precursor in shaping the body, mind, and emotions, she called for more opportunities to be given to women beyond needlework and social graces subsequently giving women a sense of independence. This could be surmised as Wollstonecraft's position on what makes a good person.



In order, however, to pin down what makes a good person a good person, one has to take a deep dive into what makes a person a person. What are the dimensions of this personhood that affect how every individual goes through their life? One aspect of contemporary life that cannot be denied is gender, a necessary aspect of a human being's sex. It is, therefore, crucial to differentiate sex and gender. Sex refers to the biological and physiological characteristics that define humans as male, female, or intersex. These include chromosomal patterns, hormonal profiles, internal and external reproductive organs (World Health Organization, 2022). In contrast, gender refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviors, expressions, and identities associated with being male, female, or non-binary within a given society (Butler, 1990). Gender can thus be further understood as the roles, attitudes, attributes and behaviour associated with and/or assigned to each sex (Hatchell & Hatchell, 2007). In which case gender can be seen as subjective depending on how it has been constructed, deconstructed, and reconstructed, and can take various forms accordingly.

Gender, as a spectrum, covers discussions on identity, expression, roles, and sexual orientation. It influences one's norms and affects one's behavior. The recognition that gender plays a huge role in shaping individual lives is of primacy. Therefore, becoming a better human means fully understanding the implications of gender and its impacts and nuances thereby acting accordingly.

The following section will tackle the importance of integrating gender education into moral education from two vantage points: gender education as a form of moral education and moral education as a conduit for gender education. Next, we will look at the possible aims of gender education that can be addressed in any curricular intervention, especially in philosophy classes, the locus of moral education in higher education in the Philippines.

Gender Education as Moral Education: Core Concepts and Shared Values

Gender education focuses on understanding gender identities, roles, concepts, and social constructs surrounding these ideas. The end goal of gender education is to promote awareness of these ideas to fulfill the vision of a gender-responsive education for a gender-equal world. This includes, among others, eliminating gender biases and discrimination.

In primarily driving home the aims and ideals of gender education, teachers and education leaders alike also contribute to educating individuals to be better human beings, whether intentionally or otherwise. To educate learners to become gender-responsive, sensitive, and just, schools inadvertently contribute to making them virtuous individuals as well. Fully functioning human beings are, at the very core, persons who are virtuous. Gender-related ideals are virtuous as well. Having them makes an individual closer to the ideal of an excellent being in the world: respectful of the rights of women and men, of those gender non-



conforming individuals, and considerate of the feelings and vulnerabilities of anyone. How can gender education become an aspect of moral education?

Gender education can help achieve the aims of moral education in making an ideal version of individuals by introducing and emphasizing to the learners the need to understand gender concepts such as gender equality and gender equity, and how they must be appreciated as essential elements of becoming a better individual. While seemingly a given, many learners come to school with limited moral socialization inside the house. The primary agents of socialization may not themselves be fully cognizant of these concepts. Parents may very well be passing on ideas of gender bias and traditional stereotypes that have been taught to them by their parents from previous generations, who may not have any inkling of these new ideas and ideals affecting one's sex and gender. Recognizing the influence of family as an agent of socialization, Ann Oakley, the British sociologist and feminist, articulates four mechanisms of gender socialization.

1. **Manipulation** – encouraging or discouraging certain behaviors depending on gender
2. **Canalization** – directing children's interests toward gendered toys and activities
3. **Verbal appellation** – using language that labels behavior according to gender norms
4. **Different activities** – encouraging participation in gender-appropriate tasks

The influences of these mechanisms emanating from the children's dwelling or their exposure to the family are what children bring to schools which may be reinforced therein absent proper gender education as moral education.

By educating learners the definition and importance of gender equality, for example, gender education teachers expose learners to new and unfamiliar terrain. Much like initiating young kids on the concepts of fundamental virtues like kindness, respect, and courage, among others, that involves beginning with concept familiarization, any gender education program should begin with conceptual introduction and historical context until it progresses into other significant ideas such as gender rights. By introducing students to this fundamental vocabulary, gender education contributes to making them better individuals, which is essentially what moral education is all about. Gender education offers a rich context to explore concepts such as equality, equity, justice, and respect. By examining gender roles, stereotypes, and issues, learners can better understand the principles of fairness and empathy. For instance, discussing historical gender inequalities provides a unique opportunity to explore the impact of societal norms on individual rights and freedoms. This can lead to valuable discussions about the importance of inclusivity and diversity, which are also moral ideals that educated individuals should possess.

Aside from contributing to moral education by adding supplementary dispositions that a virtuous individual should possess, another important aspect of moral education is



providing guidance to people on ethical matters and issues. As a science of conduct, ethics aims to promote systems of morality and theories that allow moral agents to make nuanced, intelligent, and justified moral positions. Gender education contributes to this dimension of moral education by advancing ethical obligations that are otherwise neglected by those without any view of gender as a salient aspect of our morality. For example, the ethical obligation to educate about gender issues and building empathy and respect through understanding diverse gender identities seem to be both important moral responsibilities that any individual who lives in a pluralistic society like ours today should embody. The exploration of societal norms and stereotypes and moral considerations in challenging or overcoming these generalizations is another ethical mandate that has been given birth because of the ever-increasing knowledge we have been accumulating about this aspect of our personhood.

Moral Education as Gender Education: Aims and Impacts

It has been asserted time and time again, whether in this present work or other iterations, that moral education aims to make every individual better than they were prior to the process of education. The goal is to stimulate these individuals' moral faculties and lead them closer to the goal of a virtuous existence. Gender education need not only lead to moral education. Moral education can likewise spill over to gender education.

Crucial to any moral education program is clarification and elucidation of the concept of values and how values form the bedrock of moral reasons and actions. The things that moral agents put value spell out the moral reasons that support their moral decisions and, effectively, their moral actions. By tackling values in moral education classes, it will be inevitable to examine how moral values or even sometimes societal values shape perceptions of gender. Classic phenomenological examples in the Philippines involve the use of non-gendered pronouns in Filipino in contrast with highly gendered pronouns in Western languages. While third-person pronouns in most Western languages are either masculine or feminine (e.g. he, she, el, ella, ze,xe, etc.), the third-person singular pronoun in the Philippines is gender-fair, if not gender inclusive (i.e. siya). The pronoun is used for both male and female referents, including gender non-conforming individuals. If one is to base this example alone from the Filipino language, it is thought that Filipinos in general are arguably not gendered in the way that they think of the world. We purport, however, that there are articulations in the Filipino language that are gendered, in fact, to some extent are sexists, such as the underpinnings of the Filipino mythology story of *Malakas at Maganda*. The former, described as strong and the latter as beautiful, became the first human beings and ancestors of the Filipino people. Interestingly, strength is associated with the man and beauty with the woman. This, among others, is consistent with the view of the so-called traditional ideal Filipina, ascribed to *Maria Clara*, who is meek, modest, obedient, resonant of the cultural and

social stereotypes of the woman as weak, submissive, fragile, and passive. We argue that this calls for further exploration which deserves another academic venture.

Moral education can also spill over into gender education because gender issues can be utilized in concretizing, demonstrating, and analyzing moral frameworks. Furthermore, engaging with gender-related issues allows for examining ethical dilemmas in real-world situations. Learners can discuss scenarios involving workplace equality, equitable pay, gender representation in leadership roles, or shared responsibility in the family. These discussions encourage critical thinking and moral reasoning, helping learners develop the ability to analyze and assess complex situations. Through exploring these themes, learners can also reflect on their biases and assumptions, fostering personal growth and ethical awareness.

The question that now begs to be asked is how to do this in the curriculum, particularly in philosophy classes in higher education, as this is a critical tool in shaping learners' values and virtues.

Curriculum as a Moral Compass: Mainstreaming Care Ethics in Philosophy

Recognizing the interrelatedness of gender education and moral education leads us to framing its concretization through the curriculum that necessarily influences the syllabus as a powerful philosophical and pedagogical instrument.

In the work of Tyler (1949), the curriculum is described as the fundamental tool for promoting the desired outcomes of education, including the development of character and citizenship. Such being the case, moral education—concerned with instilling principles such as justice, respect, compassion, and responsibility—is embedded both explicitly through lessons and implicitly through classroom culture, teacher behavior, and institutional practices (Nucci, Narvaez, & Krettenauer, 2014).

It is essential that gender education and moral education are integrated into the curriculum to aid in challenging long-standing stereotypes and power imbalances yielding to what has been established as its advantages. As United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (2015) notes, gender-responsive curricula can help dismantle discriminatory practices and promote inclusivity by teaching students about gender equality, gender identity, and respect for diversity. Having an exposure to gender-fair content and critical discussions, learners become more aware of social injustices and are better equipped to contribute to an equitable society (Subrahmanian, 2005).

Zooming in on the Philosophy curriculum, this paper argues that mainstreaming feminist ethics perspective as a central moral theory therein is indispensable. In the Philippines, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) No. 26, Series of 2017, Policies,



Standards, and Guidelines (PSG) for the Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy Program serves as the basis of colleges and universities of the minimum standards in teaching Philosophy at the college level (Opiniano, Ramolete & Burbano, 2024). In its current state, the philosophy curriculum presents an androcentric lens which anchors mainly on the thoughts and narratives of the male philosophers. This has led to having a discipline that is slanted presenting a history without women philosophers, teaching canons and narratives that is void of feminist perspective, insinuating that no such entities ever existed, subsequently molding a skewed schema and impression about Philosophy. This is not the Philosophy education the learners deserve.

In particular, for example, the traditional Ethics syllabus, a core course in the Philosophy curriculum, is dominated by mainstream male-centric theories rooted on justice, autonomy, and rational universality, representing deontology, utilitarianism, and virtue ethics, often sidelining or entirely neglecting the moral voices and experiences of women and other marginalized groups. As a response to this perceived lacuna, Feminist Ethics, particularly Care Ethics, developed and championed by thinkers such as Carol Gilligan and Nel Noddings, offers a vital corrective to these gaps by emphasizing relationality, empathy, responsiveness, and context in moral reasoning.

The Ethics of Care or Care Ethics foregrounds the moral significance of relationships and interdependence, challenging the abstraction and “impersonality” of justice-based theories. It addresses aspects of the human condition that other moral theories overlook—our vulnerability to injury, inevitable dependencies, and ubiquitous needs (Miller, 2020) which centers on the context of a situation and the moral importance to responding to other’s needs.

Gilligan’s (1982) pioneering work in *In a Different Voice* exposed how dominant models of moral development were gender-biased, failing to account for the ways women and girls often reason morally in terms of care and responsibility rather than abstract justice. This insight has significant pedagogical implications: it calls for a rethinking of moral education in ways that validate diverse moral voices and expand the criteria for ethical reasoning to include emotion, context, and lived experience. This relational and contextual approach is particularly resonant in gender education, where issues of power, vulnerability, inequality, and emotional labor are central to ethical inquiry. This is what entails mainstreaming Care Ethics in moral education. It means recognizing that moral development does not occur in isolation but through caring engagements that acknowledge human needs, emotions, and the asymmetries of social structures.

Moreover, incorporating Care Ethics into the philosophy curriculum means aligning with the goals of GEDSI by promoting a moral framework that values attentiveness to difference, nurtures inclusive relationships, and affirms the moral agency of those traditionally excluded from dominant discourses. It supports gender-sensitive pedagogy by



providing learners with tools to reflect on ethical issues from a standpoint of compassion, solidarity, and social responsibility.

Doing so likewise challenges binaries that separate reason from emotion, mind from body, and public from private—binaries that have historically marginalized both care and those associated with it.

Philosophy as a discipline should come as a venue where education becomes inclusive, liberating, emancipating, and empowering. Nonetheless, this can only be realized if the learning materials or even suggestive learning materials are inclusive, liberating, emancipating and empowering. Rather than having dominant male-centric sources of learning materials, women authors and authors from across gender and cultures should be given due attention and recognition (Opiniano, Ramolete & Burbano, 2024) including in particular a feminist lens in teaching moral education. Having such a state, one achieves becoming a better version of themselves, not blind to vulnerabilities, not apathetic to structural inequalities. Thus, a curriculum that intentionally integrates ethics of care which also means, considering gender sensitivity and inclusivity can cultivate empathy, ethical reflection, and respect for human dignity. As Noddings (2002) argues, moral education must include caring relationships and social responsibility as core components, recognizing that values are learned not just through instruction but through interaction and lived experience for the good of the individual and the good of the society.

Conclusion

Educating about gender has never been more urgent than it is now. Across the globe and even locally, educating for gender sensitivity, awareness, and inclusivity, among others, has become imperative. Gender education can perfectly fit into the agenda of moral education as being educated in the sphere of gender has been established as an important aspect of moral education, and alternatively, moral education can inevitably lead to discourses on gender. As gender has prominently figured as a salient aspect of the self and, in turn, the concept of self is the indubitable locus of any moral education program, any moral education program should integrate gender education. This means making courses, their curricula, and syllabi adaptive and congenial to issues of gender. In the context of the Philippines, one of the most compatible fields of study that may integrate this vision smoothly is philosophy. In the spirit then of what has been argued in this paper, it is recommended that philosophy and ethics curricula should be revisited for possible inclusion and assimilation of concepts, ideas, thinkers, and even materials that are sensitive and inclusive to other genders. Themes and theories that amplify women's voices within the field should be included to attain the ends of critical thinking and moral development that, by and large, will result in a more inclusive, equitable, and just society.



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