

The Reconstruction of Educators' Roles in Moral Education in the Age of Artificial Intelligence

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Abstract

There is an essential distinction between moral education and general knowledge education. The core of moral education is to address value propositions and cultivate sound moral personality, rather than the mere transmission of ethical knowledge. Mainstream global moral education practice has long been trapped in the inherent dilemma of intellectualization alienation and the disjunction between cognition and practice. The popularization of artificial intelligence (AI) has not only brought a more fundamental and subversive challenge to the traditional educator-centered authoritative paradigm of moral education, giving rise to unprecedented moral education risks, but also clearly delineated the irreplaceable value of educators through its insurmountable inherent boundaries in the transformation from cognition to practice, emotional connection, and value guidance. AI provides a historic opportunity for moral education reform: it frees up educators' core energy, compels the transformation of their roles, and drives moral education to return to its essential nature of nurturing people.

Keywords

Artificial Intelligence; Moral Education; Educator Roles.

1. Introduction

There is a fundamental distinction between moral education and general knowledge education. The core of knowledge education is to realize the transmission and construction of factual cognition, to answer the question of "what is", which can be achieved through standardized information delivery. In contrast, moral education is a complete practical activity that integrates cognition, emotion, volition, and behavior. Its core is to address the value proposition of "how one ought to act", with the ultimate goal of cultivating stable moral personality and conscious moral conduct, rather than the mere mastery of ethical knowledge. Precisely for this reason, mainstream global moral education practice has long been mired in an inherent dilemma: it replaces holistic moral cultivation with knowledge indoctrination, reduces moral education to quantifiable teaching of ethical provisions, and leads to a structural disjunction between cognition and practice, while no systematic breakthrough path has been found for a long time [1].

The rapid development and global popularization of artificial intelligence technology have exerted a profound dual impact on this long-standing dilemma. On the one hand, it has brought a more fundamental and thorough subversive challenge to the traditional educator-centered moral education paradigm than that in the field of knowledge education. On the other hand, with its technical characteristics and capability boundaries, it has provided unprecedented historic opportunities to solve the inherent problems of moral education and promote its return to the essence of nurturing people.

2. Subversive Challenges of Artificial Intelligence to the Traditional Moral Education Paradigm

The paradigm foundation of traditional moral education is a unidirectional teaching model characterized by "educator as the authority center, knowledge indoctrination as the core content, and unified norm transmission as the basic logic". The technical characteristics of AI have fundamentally undermined the legitimacy and feasibility of this paradigm, with the depth and uniqueness of its impact far exceeding that in the field of knowledge education, which is mainly reflected in two dimensions.

2.1. The Dual Dissolution of Educators' Moral Authority and Value Legitimacy

In the traditional moral education system, the core authority of educators is built on a dual monopoly, which is also the underlying support for the operation of the traditional moral education model. First, educators act as the monopoly suppliers of moral knowledge: the core channel for learners to acquire ethical knowledge and moral norms is the systematic teaching by educators, who hold the right to screen, interpret and transmit moral information [2]. Second, educators serve as the sole arbiter of unified moral norms: they represent definite and consistent value standards, hold the final interpretive power over moral right and wrong, good and evil, and the value transmission and behavior regulation functions of traditional moral education completely rely on this authoritative status.

This authority structure has been completely disintegrated in the age of artificial intelligence, and the impact is far more fundamental than that on knowledge education. In the field of knowledge education, the impact of AI is mainly to break educators' monopoly on knowledge supply; in the field of moral education, AI simultaneously dissolves the dual authority of educators. Learners can readily access massive, cross-cultural and multi-perspective moral viewpoints and ethical interpretations through intelligent tools, meaning educators are no longer the core information source in the moral field, and their knowledge monopoly has completely collapsed. More critically, the easy accessibility of diverse and even conflicting value narratives has stripped the inherent legitimacy of the single, standardized moral norms represented by educators, invalidating their status as the sole arbiter of value. This means that the traditional unidirectional indoctrination and norm-constraint moral education model centered on educators has lost its foundation for existence at the underlying logical level.

2.2. New Moral Education Risks and Educational Challenges in the Intelligent Age

The algorithm-dominated information dissemination model and the content generation characteristics of AI have brought multi-dimensional new challenges to learners' moral growth. These challenges are blind spots that the traditional moral education paradigm has never covered, as well as unique risks in the field of moral education, which are embodied in four aspects [3].

Moral cognitive fixation caused by algorithmic information cocoons. Algorithms push homogeneous moral viewpoints and value positions according to learners' browsing preferences, continuously narrowing their moral cognitive horizon, even reinforcing their one-sided and extreme value tendencies, and hindering the formation of their comprehensive and dialectical moral judgment ability.

Moral cognitive distortion caused by algorithmic bias. Implicit biases related to gender, race, class and other dimensions embedded in AI training data will be indiscriminately transmitted to learners through generated content, imperceptibly distorting their concept of fairness and justice, and forming wrong moral cognition and value preferences.

Value confusion and moral nihilism exacerbated by unbounded value narratives. AI can generate ethical narratives of any position according to instructions, and even provide seemingly self-consistent "rationalization" arguments for behaviors that violate the universal moral consensus of human beings. Without proper guidance, learners can easily fall into value relativism that "there is no standard answer to morality", even dispel their recognition of basic moral consensus, and breed moral nihilism.

Weakening of moral subjectivity caused by algorithm dependence. When encountering moral confusion or value dilemmas, learners can directly obtain ready-made judgments and answers from AI. Long-term dependence will lead to path reliance on algorithms, making them abandon independent moral reasoning and independent value choice. This will not only make them lose the ability of independent moral judgment, but also lead to problems such as moral responsibility evasion and moral practice inertia, which completely deviates from the core goal of moral education to cultivate autonomous moral subjects.

3. Inherent Limitations of Artificial Intelligence in Moral Education

Although artificial intelligence has a strong ability to replace the repetitive links of ethical knowledge transmission, it has insurmountable inherent boundaries from the perspective of the essential provisions of moral education. These boundaries precisely correspond to the core links of moral education, and are also the fundamental reasons why AI can never replace educators.

3.1. AI Cannot Bridge the Gap Between Cognition and Practice

The core closed loop of moral education is to realize the complete transformation from external ethical knowledge to internal moral belief, and then to conscious moral conduct, rather than mere knowledge transmission. The core capability of AI is only limited to the output, integration and logical deduction of factual knowledge about "what morality is", and it cannot touch the transformation link from "knowing" to "doing" at all.

On the one hand, it cannot break through Hume's is-ought dichotomy—factual judgments can never directly derive value judgments and willingness to act. AI can accurately output complete provisions of moral norms, but cannot awaken learners' internal moral motivation to abide by the norms; it can simulate the reasoning process of moral dilemmas, but cannot temper learners' will to adhere to moral principles in real conflicts of interest; it can present massive cases of moral conduct, but cannot drive learners to transform cognition into daily conscious actions [4]. On the other hand, moral growth is never a purely logical deduction activity at the thinking level, but is gradually generated in real interpersonal interaction, specific situational choices, and personal practical experience. AI can only provide virtual dialogue and abstract deduction, but cannot build a real practice field necessary for the generation of moral conduct, nor can it support learners to accumulate moral experience and shape moral personality in real interactions.

3.2. AI Lacks the Emotional Foundation for Moral Internalization

The internalization of external moral provisions into learners' own beliefs and behavioral norms relies not on logical persuasion, but on emotional resonance, identification and immersion. As revealed by Nel Noddings' ethics of care, the real, embodied care, empathy and acceptance between people are the core soil for the awakening of moral consciousness and the cultivation of moral personality.

Artificial intelligence can simulate empathetic language expressions through algorithms, but cannot generate real emotional experience, nor can it form genuine empathy and in-depth response to learners' moral confusion, growth perplexity and emotional trauma. It can complete standardized dialogue processes, but cannot establish a trust relationship based on

the encounter of lives. This kind of emotional connection and care experience is precisely the key to making moral education truly internalized in learners' mind and heart, and is an insurmountable core barrier for AI.

3.3. AI Cannot Undertake the Function of Moral Subjectivity Cultivation

The content generation of artificial intelligence is essentially algorithmic fitting based on training data. It does not have inherent moral beliefs, value persistence and ethical subjectivity. It can output normative content in line with the universal moral consensus of human beings, and can also generate extreme, biased value propositions that violate public order and good customs according to instructions. It does not have a stable value position, nor does it have the inherent ability to judge and adhere to moral right and wrong [5].

It cannot guide learners to establish a stable and self-consistent value system in the face of multi-faceted value conflicts, nor can it help learners anchor the value coordinates of life, let alone cultivate learners' independent moral judgment ability and moral responsibility. On the contrary, it may aggravate learners' value confusion through position-free content output, which is completely contrary to the core goal of moral education to cultivate autonomous and sound moral subjects.

4. Core Opportunities Brought by AI for Moral Education Reform and Educator Role Transformation

The subversive challenges of AI to traditional moral education, together with its insurmountable inherent boundaries, have jointly formed a dual driving force for the paradigm shift of moral education and the role transformation of educators, providing unprecedented historic opportunities to solve the long-standing dilemma of traditional moral education.

4.1. Freeing Educators' Time and Energy to Break the Resource Constraint Dilemma of Traditional Moral Education

The core realistic root of the long-standing dilemma of "valuing knowledge over nurturing" in traditional moral education is that the vast majority of educators' working time and energy are occupied by mechanical work such as moral knowledge explanation, standardized Q&A, and transactional processes, leaving them no strength to invest in the core links of moral education such as emotional guidance, personalized dialogue, practice guidance and value accompaniment.

Artificial intelligence can fully replace all the above repetitive and knowledge-based work, completely freeing educators from the heavy task of knowledge indoctrination. This enables them to have sufficient time and energy to focus on the core nurturing links that determine the effectiveness of moral education, which AI cannot complete, fundamentally breaking the resource constraint of traditional moral education and providing realistic conditions for educators to return to the nurturing essence of moral education.

4.2. Compelling the Reconstruction of Educators' Roles to Promote the Return of Moral Education to Its Nurturing Essence

On the one hand, AI's dissolution of educators' moral authority and its replacement of knowledge-based teaching functions have completely declared the obsolescence of the traditional role of "knowledge indoctrinator". The knowledge transmission function, on which educators used to establish their professional identity, is no longer necessary, forming a strong external driving force that compels educators to break away from the long-standing path dependence of knowledge orientation, abandon the traditional authority position, and redefine their core value in the field of moral education.

On the other hand, the clear capability boundaries of AI also point out a clear direction for the transformation of educators' roles: the irreplaceable value of educators lies precisely in the areas where AI is completely incompetent. Their role positioning will shift from knowledge transmitters to guides for the generation of moral cognition, constructors of emotional immersion and care relationships, guardians of moral subjectivity, and leaders of value beliefs. This role transformation is not a abdication of educators' functions in the field of moral education, but a thorough break from the essential deviation of traditional moral education, and a comprehensive return to the core essence of moral education: "fostering virtue and nurturing people".

4.3. Enabling Innovation in Moral Education Models to Support Personalized and Inquiry-Based Practice

In traditional moral education, limited by time and energy, educators find it difficult to realize personalized moral guidance, nor can they cover learners' moral growth needs outside the classroom [6]. They can only adopt a one-size-fits-all standardized indoctrination model, which is also an important reason for the insufficient effectiveness of moral education.

AI can serve as an auxiliary tool for moral education practice, providing learners with personalized ethical cases and moral dilemma materials, offering educators reference data on learners' cognitive characteristics, and supporting educators to design more targeted topic-based and inquiry-based moral education activities that fit learners' needs. At the same time, AI can break the constraints of time and space, provide readily available material support for learners' independent moral inquiry, and promote the transformation of moral education from standardized classroom indoctrination to personalized, full-cycle growth accompaniment, providing technical empowerment for the paradigm shift to learner-centered moral education.

5. Conclusion

The impact of artificial intelligence on moral education is, in essence, not a negation of moral education itself, but a fundamental correction of the traditional indoctrination paradigm that has deviated from the essence of moral education. Different from knowledge education, the core of moral education is never the transmission of knowledge, but the cultivation of sound moral personality, the awakening of moral consciousness, and the protection of moral subjectivity. This is not only the long-standing dilemma that traditional moral education has been difficult to break through, but also the core field that AI can never touch.

The subversive challenges brought by AI dissolve the monopoly of knowledge and the authority of value adjudication held by educators in traditional moral education, as well as the outdated teaching model centered on knowledge transmission. Its inherent capability boundaries clearly delineate the irreplaceable value space of educators, and anchor the unshakable essential core of moral education. Artificial intelligence can never become the subject of moral education; its core positioning is a catalyst to promote the return of moral education to its nurturing essence. It not only provides realistic possibilities for educators to get rid of heavy knowledge-based affairs and focus on the core nurturing functions, but also compels global moral education practice to completely break away from the long-standing dilemma of "valuing knowledge over nurturing", and truly shift to the essential goal of "centering on the moral growth of human beings".

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