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Knowing With the Other: The Encounter Experience

Abstract

The aim of this study is to emphasize that “the encounter experience” is an important opportunity for “knowing with the other” by doing a philosophical analysis of the concept of experience. To this aim, firstly, I will discuss John Dewey and Hans-Georg Gadamer’s conceptual analyses about the experience. Although there are some differences in the opinions of these two philosophers regarding the experience; their mutual opinion is that it is a relationship, and man has a different kind of knowledge with this relationship. Secondly, from these analyzes, I will answer the question of how “the encounter experience” enables “knowing with the other”. Finally, by giving examples from the bases of Islamic religion that promote “the encounter experience”, I will conclude that this opportunity is also valid for Islamic religious education.

Introduction

The fundamental problem we have with this research is that *"the experiences that people have through their relationships with another who is different in many respects make it possible to know with the other."* In looking for the answer to this question, I will take advantage of the Dewey and Gadamer's conceptual analysis on the experience.

Method

The method of this research will be a concept analysis. From Dewey and Gadamer’s conceptual analysis about the experience, I will defend my thesis with "the encounter experience" has an important potential for "knowing with the other".

Main Point

The concept of experience generally refers to a knowledge that is achieved through practical relationships established with a reality. (Vergote, 1969, 26-27.) John Dewey is the person who brought it into the field of philosophy of education by making philosophical analysis of this concept. He establishes a bond with education by explaining the experience in terms of interaction and continuity principles. According to him, experience does not occur in space, just as it does not take place within man; it occurs in a real world with objective conditions. For this reason, both human internal conditions and external world conditions are influential on it. He names it “the principle of interaction of experience”. (Dewey, 1963, 39-43.)

He also deals with continuity as another principle of experience. This principle means that every experience takes some things from previous experiences and influences the quality of the later experiences. These two principles of experience are not separate from each other; instead they are their transversal and longitudinal stages. Educational meaning and value of an experience emerge when these two principles actively combine with one another. Thus the experience becomes a force in motion, and this force compels man to change. So man changes with this force and gains a new knowledge. (Dewey, 1963, 38-45.)

Hans-Georg Gadamer is the other philosopher who analyzes the concept of experience on a philosophical level and establishes a relationship with education. He draws attention to the direct relationship that the person has established with a reality, and the permanent / deep conclusion that he has achieved from this relation. Moreover, he gives the name of "erlebnis", is a German word, to permanent / deep experience. According to him, the word "erlebnis" is derived from the verb "erleben". "Erleben" means "still alive when something is happening" and expresses the concept of immediacy of a person in grasping something. There is also a "das Erlebte" (lived) form to express the permanent content of the thing being experienced. The importance and continuity of this content is like a permanent product or result that evolves from the experience of the past. For this reason, the

derivative Erlebnis word has both of the following meanings: 1. Immediacy 2. Its discovered product and the permanent result. (Gadamer, 2008, 83-84.)

In this context, he indicates that the experiences are not things that get lost in the past quickly, and they can't be immediately forgotten, by quoting from Nietzsche: *"Every experience continues to live in deep people for a very long time."* He underlines that experience not only becomes an idea, it also turns into one of the elements of life process, and it enriches and matures the person along the way. (Gadamer, 2008, 91-96.)

As can be seen so far, Dewey and Gadamer draw our attention to different aspects of experience, but what they have in common is that they consider the experience as a relationship which a person has with external reality, and the person has a deeper and different knowledge with this relationship. Moreover, the person opens a new door of knowledge through this dynamic relationship established with external reality that is now and here. The mental and emotional world of a person who crosses this threshold expands and gets enriched. Moreover, this expansion and enrichment are not temporary and leave deep traces on the people.

After these explanations on the concept of experience, we can pass on "the encounter experience" that is related to it. First, the reason why we include the concept of experience is to better analyze "the encounter experience" that we will consider it as a different form of experience. In this research, "the encounter experience" means an experience which a person obtains through a practical and dynamic relationship with another person who has a different religion, language, race and culture. Based on Dewey's opinion that experience is a force in motion, and Gadamer's idea that each experience leaves a deep influence on human beings, it can be said that this encounter experience has a force that can deeply affect both people. Because in this encounter, the view of both people about themselves and others may have changed profoundly. Both people can emerge from this experience by collecting a new knowledge about themselves and the other, and by having a new awareness. In particular, it can open the door to a new knowledge about the other by leaving the bias, and the person can be more understanding, respectful and tolerant towards the other. Here, "the encounter experience" includes important opportunities in terms of enabling one to return to himself and to think again about himself and to contribute to being more understanding, respectful and tolerant towards the other.

When we look at "the encounter experience" from the perspective of Islamic religion, we see that the meeting others- *tearuf* - is encouraged in the Qur'an, the main source of Islam. (Qur'an, 49 Hucurat, 13) In her article in which she analyzes the concept of "tearuf" in terms of religious education, Selçuk states that this concept holds an intellection seeing the "other" as an element enriching the person and developing the existence. And she says that despite all differences, all the people can meet on a common ground. (Selçuk, 2005, 239-240.)

However, it is obvious that this will not be easy. For before entering into the world of the other / traveling with him, we may have prejudices about him. What is important is to carry out mutual understanding for deeper and new knowledge about the other. As you can see, Islamic religious education encourages people to meet with different societies and cultures and live "the encounter experience" with them. In addition, Islam invites Muslims to meet with the others on the common ground of humanity. In a world that is becoming increasingly smaller, it is our duty to obey to that invitation and open ourselves to "the encounter experience" that became a necessity. Because knowing with the other is much more enriching and stimulating than the theoretical knowledge about them.

Conclusion

As a result, Dewey and Gadamer have a common understanding on the experience, that they both see it as a relationship, and at the end of this relationship, one has a deeper and different knowing. In this context, we can arrive at the conclusion that "the encounter experience" has the potential to deeply affect both people, based on Dewey's opinion that each experience is a force in motion, and Gadamer's idea that each experience leaves a deep influence on person. Because, both of them can go out from this encounter experience by collecting a new knowledge about themselves and others, and can have a new awareness. As a last word, "the encounter experience" that has significant opportunities for "knowing with the other" is also encouraged in the Qur'an, which is the main source of Islamic religious education.

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