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Elizabeth Telfer's View on Self-Respect: An Applied Ethical Analysis.

Shamim Ara Pia*

[**Abstract:** *Self-respect is an aspect of human personality. It denotes showing respect to oneself. In other words, self-respect is such a quality or characteristic of an individual that he always wants to maintain in his life. It assists a man to acquire self-confidence, self-satisfaction, and self-realization. In the history of contemporary philosophy, applied philosophy is one of the several branches. Applied philosophy deals with Human Rights, Euthanasia, Feminism, Abortion, Animal Rights, Bonds, Self-respect, and so on. Elizabeth Telfer is a notable name in the history of contemporary applied philosophy. Telfer discusses self-respect from moral viewpoint. She explains conative and estimative aspects of self-respect and the value of self-respect in her discussion. However, she gives more importance to the conative aspect of self-respect than estimative aspect. In my paper, I will elucidate self-respect, two aspects of self-respect according to Telfer and the value of self-respect. Likewise Telfer, I will also provide more emphasis on the conative aspect of self-respect. And finally I will offer arguments for showing the significance of self-respect in this paper.]*

Introduction:

There are some qualities of human beings which carry great moral value. Self-respect is one of them. Self-respect is so valuable that life becomes meaningless if anyone loses self-respect. Strong and confident self-respect is vital to living a meaningful and flourishing life. Autonomy plays a significant role for acquiring one's self-respect. An autonomous person is a master of himself. He is able to fulfill his all motives and desires. On the other hand, a person who is reliant on others behaves like a machine. Moreover, it is very difficult to respect others if anyone lacks self-respect. Elizabeth Telfer intends to discuss self-respect in her article titled

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*Self-Respect.*¹This article illustrates Elizabeth Telfer's conception and provides arguments for analyzing the importance of self-respect in human life.

Self-Respect:

Self-respect is a sense of showing proper respect to oneself. It reveals in when I say 'I respect myself'. It creates a sense of self-satisfaction, and a pleasant feeling about oneself. Additionally, self-respect is one kind of self-consciousness. It brings a sense of consciousness in a person's mind. A self-respecting person is conscious of his intelligence, proper valuation, and judgment. This is why, he cannot tolerate any scandal to himself. He knows that he is not the type of person who can be liable for any delinquency. He also thinks if he does disrespectful actions he will not respect himself again.

Self-respect is associated with the discussion of value. Values are of two types such as, intrinsic value and extrinsic value. Intrinsic values are valuable of their own values. These are end in itself and independent. On the other hand, extrinsic values are dependent. Happiness, truth, and beauty are considered as the most significant intrinsic values. For instance, happiness is valuable by its own value. It is desired for its own sake. On the other hand, money is a way to get happiness. Therefore, money has extrinsic value. Similarly, self-respect is a quality that has an intrinsic value because it brings self-satisfaction and self-satisfaction is the ultimate source of mental peace.

Intrinsic values are also called higher or supreme value. Self-respect is a quality that carries higher or supreme value. However, this supreme quality does not denote that self-respect carries neither any mystic quality nor does a person who respects himself carry any extraordinary merits. Rather it signifies praiseworthy and self-satisfactory characteristics of a man. It also represents that he is self-confident to himself. Thus, every person performs valuable actions to acquire and retain self-respect in his character. If anybody's self-respect loses, he suffers from dissatisfaction and remorse. Life becomes meaningless to him. Therefore, self-respect carries a higher value and it is valuable to every human being. Brenda R. Boxill says, "Self-respect is valuable. It contributes to an individual's worth."²Brenda R.Boxill reckons that self-respect is a valuable quality. It not only makes a man valuable to him but also to others. It has a great impact on human lives.

Self-respect consists of integrity, truthfulness, and pride. These are the elements of self-respect. A person who respects himself is endowed with immense Integrity because it makes sure of being honest and presents a

constant obedience to strong moral and ethical values. Integrity is also regarded as honesty, truthfulness and accuracy of his work. A man also gets value depending on these elements from others. When a man loses his self-respect he loses his integrity, truthfulness, and nobility. Subsequently, his preference and value start decreasing toothers as well as he suffers from inferiority complexes. Humiliation becomes a powerful component of his remorse.

Immanuel Kant considers self-respect as an intrinsically valuable property. In his Lecture Kant says, “humility, on the one hand, and true, noble pride on the other, are elements of proper self-respect; shamelessness is its opposite. We have reason to have but a low opinion of ourselves as individuals, but as representatives of mankind, we ought to hold ourselves in high esteem.... This self-respect in comparison with others constitutes noble pride. A low opinion of oneself concerning others is no humility; it is a sign of a little spirit and a servile character.”³ Self-respect is an important part of Kant’s moral philosophy. Kant discusses self-respect from a moral perspective. He considers humility, truthfulness, pride, and nobility as the appropriate aspects of self-respect, and a self-respecting person holds these qualities in himself. In addition, he illustrates shamelessness as its opposite aspect. Kant describes that if anyone carries a low opinion of oneself, it represents a sign of no humility as well as he has a servile quality. That means he is dependent on others. As the highest creature of the creator, Kant regards that every person regardless of character deserves and should maintain self-respect. Thus, self-respect carries an ethical value in our life.

Likewise Kant, Elizabeth Telfer considers self-respect from a moral point of view. She illustrates self-respect as the quality of a person’s character and disposition. She holds self-respect in her disposition as an admirable and self-satisfactory quality. According to Telfer, “self-respect is some kind of favorable opinion of oneself. It might be said that respecting someone is admiring him or thinking highly of him, and so self-respect is having this view of oneself, perhaps with an appropriate emotional accompaniment as with admiration of others.”⁴ Telfer regards self-respect from the aspect of a person’s character and disposition. She considers that self-respect denotes holding a favorable and satisfactory view of one. Giving an example of the others, she also says that when we respect someone, we think highly of him. We praise his qualities as well as we feel positive and supreme ideas about him. A person holds this type of view of him when he respects himself and he holds praiseworthy qualities as well as feels confident to himself. Consequently, he gets other’s support and admiration.

Telfer regards self-respect as a man's belief in himself in the same sense. This is because, when a man thinks that he has self-respect then he establishes some belief about himself. Telfer says, "self-respect then seems to be a man's belief that he attains at least some minimum standard, and the emotion which goes with this, if any, is something like peace of mind. Loss of self-respect is the loss of this belief."⁵ According to Telfer, self-respect brings belief about himself in a person's mind. Then he starts to realize that he at least has attained some standard which brings his mental peace. This is why, when a man loses his belief, he loses his self-realization because loss of belief hampers growing proper self-realization. Then he suffers from inferiority complexes and it weakens his personality. Afterward, depression turns him into a man who does not have any self-respect and it is very destructive. Women are becoming the victim of this type of disrespectful condition in human society. Society does not provide any scope for gaining self-realization for them. "Patriarchal society had provided this degraded position for them." "Patriarchal societies do not recognize women's participation in every sector of society. Patriarchal values and rules were prevalent in society. The society learns that women are inferior to men. Therefore, an inferior tendency has taken a significant place in women's mentality. Thus, women lose their self-confidence to themselves. As well as, they considered themselves as inferior to men.

Telfer discusses self-respect as a quality of a man's behavior and she thinks that it is the most important part. That means self-respect can be a manifestation of how a man behaves. People are seen to say that self-respect inspired me doing this work or I did it out of my self-respect. For example, I do not like to copy in the exam because I respect myself. If I copy I cannot respect myself again. In other words, when someone behaves badly with others we say that he does not have any self-respect. If he had, it would prevent him from doing such a type of behavior. Actually, a person behaves out of his self-respect. Thus, Telfer gives more importance to acquire and maintain self-respect in our life. Telfer says, "self-respect is something which everyone ought always to have; whereas it seems quite appropriate that someone who says, I could never respect myself again if I did that."⁷ Telfer thinks that everyone should always hold self-respect. The importance of self-respect can be understood when a man does disrespectful actions and cannot respect himself.

Two Aspects of Self-Respect:

Elizabeth Telfer categorizes self-respect from two points of view.⁸ Such as-

1. Conative Aspect of Self-Respect.

2. Estimative Aspect of Self-Respect.

1. Conative Aspect of Self-Respect:

The word 'conative' comes from the Latin word 'conatio' that refers to an inclination, an instinct, or a wish of an individual to act purposefully and conative behavior comes from a way to act according to a person's impulsive sense. Thus, when an individual desires to do a worthy behavior of him and does not want to do unworthy behaviors is called conative self-respect. Telfer considers conative self-respect as the basis of a person's worthy behavior and manner. According to Telfer, "it is roughly a desire not to behave in a manner unworthy of oneself, or a disposition which prevents one from behaving in a manner unworthy of oneself."⁹ Telfer considers that conative self-respect arises from a desire of human psychology which inspires an individual to do worthy behavior to himself and deters him from doing disrespectful behavior. This is because a man thinks that unworthy behavior is despicable, contemptible and degrading. If he does unworthy behavior he will be inferior to his conscience. He cannot respect himself again. Therefore, he does not want to behave unworthily. By doing this, he wants to deter him from future unpleasantness. Telfer says, "this is like doing one's duty in order to avoid the pain of a nagging conscience."¹⁰ Conscience is the criterion of morality. A person knows that if he does disrespectful actions he will suffer from the pain of his conscience. Thus, he does not want to make himself disgraceful to his conscience. He considers self-respect as a duty to his conscience.

Telfer mentions that the desire to behave worthily of oneself can take two forms. It can be for an individual's own sake. That means, a person can do respectful behavior from the egoistic perspective or also for the sake of others. Telfer divides conative self-respect into two forms.¹¹

a. Egoistic Conative Self-Respect.

b. Non-Egoistic Conative Self-Respect.

a. Egoistic Conative Self-Respect:

Egoistic persons are self-interested or self-centered persons. Egoistic conative self-respect talks about the desire of behaving worthily to himself of a self-interested person because a self-interested person always desires to behave worthily for seeking his own self-respect. He does not behave in a way which will bring dishonor for him. According to Telfer, "A man's chief interest may be in his own worthy behavior, his chief concern may be that he should not be dishonored."¹² Telfer reckons that an egoistic man

always desires to behave worthily for fulfilling his own motives and good. His main aim is that he will always behave admirably for retaining self-respect. Besides, he wants to behave so worthily to himself that he should not be dishonored, for example a teacher is a person who always maintains worthy behavior in himself as he does not want any disrespect from the others.

Egoism holds egoistic discussion as right and reasonable. Telfer's egoistic conative self-respect is similar to egoism. According to Egoism, "it is reasonable for a man to act in the manner most conducive to his own good."¹³ Egoism is a theory of ethics which suggests behaving in a way that is favorable for one's own good. An egoistic person always craves for his own sake. He behaves in a way that is most benefiting for himself. Similarly, egoistic conative self-respect holds that a man should desire to behave in a way that he can achieve his self-interests and his self-interests increase his self-respect. Though egoistic attitude of a man is criticized as selfish attitude but we find that Telfer approves of egoistic attitude as an element of conative self-respect. This egoistic position of a man does not impede other people's life and career but it helps in enhancing one's own value to oneself. Telfer accepts egoism to a certain extent as ethical.

Telfer's egoistic conative self-respect appears to be similar to Aristotle's concept of proper self-love. Self-lovers always behave in a way that is most advantageous for their own interests. According to Aristotle, "self-love is rightly censured in them who are lovers of self in this sense. And that it is those who take too large a share of things of this sort whom most people usually mean when they speak of loves of self is clear enough."¹⁴ Aristotle considers that self-love is seen in the conduct of the people who love themselves more and their self-love inspires them to take a significant part of a thing for themselves. Like Aristotle, Telfer also says that egoistic persons always seek their own good most importantly because they love themselves more. That is why they do worthy behavior to themselves for fulfilling their self-interests and their self-interests bring self-satisfaction.

b. Non-Egoistic Conative Self-Respect:

Conative self-respect can also take non-egoistic form. Non-egoistic conative self-respect arises in the behavior of the persons who give more importance to the noble love than the self-love. Self-lovers value worthy behavior only for seeking their own interests. On the other hand, noble lovers value worthy behavior for benefiting themselves by acting nobly and aid their fellows. The actions of social workers for his society are a prime

example of non-egoistic conative self-respect. They benefit themselves by doing noble deeds and gets respect from others. Thus, they desire to behave worthily not only for themselves but also they consider worthy behavior as valuable for others. According to Telfer, “ a man may value worthy behavior in itself, not merely as being his; this valuation will in practice be manifested mainly by his attempting to behave thus himself.”¹⁵ Telfer considers that non-egoistic conative self-respect has a moral motive as his love is noble and he thinks for the others. Thus, non-egoistic individuals value worthy behavior not only for themselves but also to do worthy behavior in case of others. They think that commendable behavior is valuable for everybody. They give emphasis on the love that is noble and brings nobility for them.

Non-egoistic conative self-respect carries a moral motive as it suggests behaving worthily to others and respecting them. It is comparable to Aristotle’s moral motives, the love of what is noble. This is because a noble man desires to behave justly not only for him but also for others. He prefers to hold virtuous qualities in his character, for instance nobility, morality, and honesty. According to Aristotle, “for if a man were always bent on outdoing everybody else in acting justly or temperately or in displaying any other of the virtues, and in general were always trying to secure for himself moral nobility, no one will charge him with the love of self nor find any fault with him.”¹⁶ Telfer considers that a non-egoistic person exceeds everything for behaving justly and acquires virtues in his life. By doing this he wants to gain moral nobility for him. Therefore, he is not considered as lover of self. Rather everybody regards him as a noble lover.

A noble man chooses noble qualities such as, generosity, courage honesty, integrity, truthfulness and praiseworthy actions for him as well as he performs noble deeds in every time. This is how a person becomes noble. Aristotle also says, “at all events he takes for himself the things that are noblest and more truly good. Also, it is the most dominant part of himself that he indulges and obeys in everything.”¹⁷ Nobility is expressed by noble man’s character and disposition. He always wants to maintain noble qualities in his character. For example, he helps his friends or his fellows when they fall in danger. He does not claim anything for that. In addition, it is so valuable to him that he obeys it in every time. Thus, a noble man holds virtuous qualities in his character.

In the ethical discussion, altruism is a moral ideal. Altruism stands for self-sacrifice whereas egoism stands for self-interests. Telfer’s non-egoistic conative self-respect is similar to the altruistic ideal of ethics. According to altruism, “it is the moral duty of an individual to seek the good of other

individuals with no regard for his own. If he serves his community he ought to do so entirely for the sake of other people than himself.”¹⁸ Altruistic persons always employ them for the interests of others. They think that it is their moral duty to serve their community. They do not care about their own health and interests. The aims of the voluntary workers are altruistic, for example the service of the BNCC (Bangladesh National Cadet Corps) members in a certain flood-affected area. The BNCC members do not think about their own interests in the time of a devastating flood. They rush to the flood-affected area and provide food, medicine among the people of that area for their betterment. Hence, non-egoistic conative self-respect denotes a noble aspect.

Conative Self-respect and Autonomy:

Telfer regards that there is a close relationship between conative self-respect and a person’s autonomous power. When a man does conative behavior, it indicates that he is not led by others nor is he controlled by others. Rather he is the master of himself. On the other hand, when a man wills not to be his own master, refuses to stand for himself, he is considered as a dependent person. His dependency shows that he has no autonomous power. Therefore, he behaves like a machine because a machine is controlled by other’s command. In addition, he is not able to desire for his own sake. Telfer says, “a man who allows others to “push him around” who refuses to stand up for himself, who lets himself be dependent or dominated, is naturally regarded as despicable, to be looked down upon. He can also be looked upon as less than human, in the sense that a human being is characteristically an autonomous being.”¹⁹ Telfer considers that every human being is an autonomous being. He is always ready to stand for himself. He does not tolerate any scandals to himself and this is called self-respect. Telfer also says that he cannot be considered a proper human because a human naturally holds autonomous power. If he does not have autonomy we cannot call him as a proper human being. In a sense, he leads a slavery life.

Jean Paul Sartre is an existentialist philosopher. Sartre emphasizes on the individual freedom and his existence. Individual freedom is the subject matter of Existentialism. Sartre explains that man is free. He chooses for himself. He is not determined by his fate. Sartre believes in freedom as against religion. Sartre says, “a man who refuses to acknowledge his autonomy is behaving like a thing.”²⁰ A thing or an object has no autonomy but man is different from a thing by virtue of his freedom of will. Man creates law for himself and guides himself according to his law. In fact, man

is an autonomous being. He cannot deny his autonomous power. Naturally, he claims autonomy for living a satisfactory and meaningful life. For holding autonomous power, he feels respect for himself. If it does not happen, he behaves like an object which has no freedom and always depends on others for its value. Likewise Sartre, Telfer relates autonomy to self-respect. She argues that one who is independent can feel respect for himself. Telfer says, “a man with self-respect, then, will have the quality of independence; he will also have tenacity, the refusal to be overcome by adverse circumstances.”²¹ Thus, Telfer relates self-respect not only with the term independence but also with tenacity which makes a man stronger for overcoming disgraceful situations which turn him into a dependent person. His independence assists him to take decisions freely. In this sense, Telfer holds independence as a strong basis of self-respect.

Along with autonomy, Telfer’s conative self-respect is also based on human’s rational power. Man is a rational being. Reasoned behavior is the characteristic of a rational man. From logical and rational perspectives, a man who does reasoned behavior can realize the value of self-respect. Telfer says, “we naturally identify the self with the reason and speak of a man as “not his own master” if reason is not in control: reasoned behavior is characteristic of mankind and so behavior which is unreasoned is thought of as sub-human.”²² Telfer regards that if an individual fails to carry out logical behavior, he cannot control himself. He does unreasoned behavior in many cases. Therefore, he is considered as despicable as well as looked down upon; for example, a rapist, a liar, a cheat. These people are addicted to obnoxious activities. He cannot differentiate between logical and illogical behavior. That means when a rapist performs the action like rape he fails to do rational behavior.

In addition, a person who is directed by emotion is also accused of lack of self-respect because emotion sometimes sways a man from his purposes as well as emotion indulges in injustice or accepts unreasoned or disrespectful behaviors. Conversely, self-respect needs some virtuous qualities which control human being’s disrespectful behaviors. Telfer says, “self-respect demands those virtues which are pre-eminently forms of self-control such as courage and temperance.”²³ Self-respect is related to the discussion of virtue. Virtue consists of courage, tenacity and temperance. A virtuous person holds enough courage and temperance to control him. He holds these virtues in his character. Self-respect are not changeable. In most of the cases, it is durable but it can be strong or weak or it may increase or decrease depending on the proficiency of autonomy. This type of analysis leads to the question of how autonomy is

related to the concept of self-respect. Daina T. Meyers explains it in her essay named *Self-Respect and Autonomy*.²⁴ Meyers says “low proficiency in the skills of autonomy can attenuate self-respect. Though virtually all people have sufficient autonomy competency to form a base for self-respect, the self-respect of minimally autonomous people is compromised, and it is less intrinsically good than that of more autonomous individuals.”²⁵ Actually, autonomy plays an important role for sustaining proper self-respect in our life. Meyers illustrates that self-respect depends on the competency of autonomy. One who is more competent to hold his autonomy is more confident to his self-respect because low proficiency of autonomy can weaken one’s self-respect. She also maintains that everyone has enough autonomy for retaining self-respect. However, persons who compromise with their self-respect suffer more than that of the individuals who have more self-respect. That means, people who are not master of themselves or sometimes refuses to stand up for themselves are considered as minimally autonomous people. They sometimes compromise with their self-respect and they lack of self-respect. Thus, self-respect can stay in a good position depending on the proficiency of autonomy.

2. Estimative Aspect of Self-Respect:

The second point of view regarding self-respect is estimative self-respect. It is just an attitude of oneself. It is a fleeting and changeable attitude. Telfer says, “ estimative self-respect is merit-based self-respect: a favorable opinion of oneself, grounded in conduct and qualities of character and arising from the belief that one meets these standards that one believe one ought to meet.”²⁶ Estimative self-respect depends on the merit of a person. It is landed on a person’s quality and remains according to his belief. If a person thinks that truthfulness is good so he holds this quality in his character if not he may not hold this.

Estimative self- respect does not carry any virtue. Virtue is a permanent trait or disposition but estimative self-respect is just an attitude of oneself and it has temporary existence in human character. It does not denote any permanent trait. When an individual feels that it as an important disposition he can hold to this type of respect in himself but he may discard it anytime. That is why, Telfer does not want to judge estimative self-respect as it does not denote any permanent trait or disposition. Telfer says, “we cannot in evaluating estimative self-respect ask whether it is a virtue; a virtue is a permanent trait or disposition, whereas estimative self-respect is an attitude to oneself, which a man may have in different degrees at different times.”

²⁷Telfer does not want to evaluate estimative self-respect. This is because

variable facts are not judgmental. Human attitude is always changeable. For instance, one does not have the quality of tenacity and he cannot think it to be more essential. But the man who has this quality can feel pride and regards the first man guilty for not having the tenacity whereas other people may not get any relevant reason to regard him as guilty. This is because tenacity is an attitude and there are so many scopes for improving it. If a man thinks that tenacity is necessary he can add it as a quality in his attitude if not he may not hold to it. Thus, estimative self-respect does not discuss about any permanent trait. It is ground in the attitude and belief of an individual.

Telfer mentions that a man may lack of conative self-respect and may have estimative self-respect and vice-versa. Conative self-respect is not equal to preserve estimative self-respect. There are many people who merely maintain estimative self-respect. They may not bother with a sense of duty. According to Telfer, “someone can be accused of lacking self-respect or a sense of duty even when (because his standard are too low or inept) he feels no self-disgust or no remorse.”²⁸ Telfer suggests that someone may not feel remorse that he lacks sense of duty to his conscience. As well as he not only care about the pain of nagging conscience but also future unpleasantness. He may give importance only to his attitude and accused of lack of conative self-respect.

In fact, conative self-respect is evaluative and it is related to virtue. On the other hand, estimative self-respect is descriptive and regarded as merit-based attitude. It can be said that, conative self-respect is more valuable and essential than estimative self-respect.

Conclusion:

Self-respect is something which carries a great moral importance. Two types of self-respect prevail in human character such as conative self-respect and estimative self-respect. However, I think, conative self-respect is more necessary for us. This is because; it not only provides essential incentives for leading a moral life but also it delivers necessary motivations for acquiring virtue. That means, conative self-respect helps a person to acquire moral quality and lead a moral life. Telfer says, “it is a quality which is at least very useful in the moral life, providing very powerful incentives to virtue. An appeal to it is a good piece of moral strategy which can be applied to others or oneself.”²⁹ Conative self-respect is divided into two forms- egoistic conative self-respect and non- egoistic conative self-respect. Egoistic conative self-respect indicates self-love. It helps a person to seek self-motives and goodness. His self-motives increases his self-

realization. It also advises him to behave in a way that is most conducive for acquiring his own good.

On the other hand, non-egoistic conative self-respect has a good piece of moral strategy which benefits others. It suggests working for others and acquires nobility. Besides, it recommends observing duty to our conscience. Furthermore, conative self-respect consists of independence, self-discipline, and tenacity. Thus, conative self-respect plays an integral part for leading a moral life.

Self-respect is the ultimate source of leading a satisfactory and meaningful life. This is because when we realize that our plans are of little value, we cannot take delight in their accomplishments. We feel self-doubt. All desires and activities become vacant and hopeless. We sink into indifference and despair. Thus, nothing seems so valuable without self-respect. In the history of contemporary applied philosophy, John Rawls upholds the concept of self-respect in his book named *A Theory of Justice*. He regards self-respect as a person's most important primary good. He considers the importance of self-respect from two aspects. According to Rawls, "First of all, it includes a person's sense of his own value, his secure conviction that his conception of his good, his plan of life, is worth carrying out. And second, self-respect implies a confidence in one's ability, so far as it is within one's power, to fulfill one's intentions."³⁰ Rawls considers self-respect from a person's sense of own valuation and self-confidence. A person's self-respect makes sure that he is conscious of his proper valuation and his plans are worthy. Thus, life becomes meaningful to him. In addition, he is self-confident that he has autonomy for fulfilling his purposes. Therefore, self-respect is valuable not only for leading a moral life but also leading a meaningful life.

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