

# The Properties of Relevance Between Philosophy and Education

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## I. INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PHILOSOPHY AND EDUCATION? What are the rules for making legitimate connections between the two? Does a given philosophical theory have consequences as prescriptions for education? If so, what are the correct ways of determining them? Does a given educational theory or practice have philosophical presuppositions? If so, what are the correct ways of determining them? Can the same position in education be supported by conflicting philosophies? Can the same philosophy be used to generate conflicting prescriptions for education? Can philosophical theory adequately guide educational practice when action must be taken to deal with a novel problem whose urgency or complexity leaves insufficient time for adequate reflection? Can philosophical theory guide the unforeseen moment-to-moment activities of the educational practitioner (teacher, administrator) even though no conscious thought is given to philosophy? By what mechanisms, if any, does theoretical training affect practical conduct?

All of these questions could be answered if the properties of relevance between philosophy and education were known. A characterization of the relevance between philosophy and education would provide a valuable tool whereby research in philosophy could be made useful in education, and educational theories and practices could be more readily and more adequately guided and criticized philosophically. Standards might be developed for judging technical writing in philosophy of education, and teacher training might be improved.

## II. RELEVANCE

The questions listed in the opening paragraph are elaborations of a single question which constitutes the focus of this investigation: What are the properties of relevance between philosophy and education? The use of the term "relevant" suggests that there is more than a haphazard or loose connection between the things which are related. Relevance is a strong, quasi-intrinsic kind of intellectual relationship. The logical properties of the general concept "relevance" have been studied elsewhere in considerable detail, along with the epistemological problems associated with defining the concept.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Kenneth Robert Conklin, "The Relevance Problem in Philosophy of Education" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Illinois, Urbana, 1967), Chapter 2. All parts of the present paper draw heavily upon several chapters in the dissertation.

The history of philosophy is the report of a war between two polar, comprehensive theories of relevance. Like opposing generals, these theories of relevance have remained out of sight while directing the activities of their troops in countless major battles and minor skirmishes. The generals speak such different languages that accurate translation is impossible. No compromise or truce is possible because each side paradoxically considers the other to be both profoundly evil and officially non-existent.

Absolutism and relativism are familiar names for the opposing theories of relevance. In order to avoid certain previous uses of language, and to call attention to the metaphysical commitments of the advocates on both sides, these will be called the "structure theory" and the "game theory" of relevance. According to the structure theory, relevance is intrinsic, exists *a priori*, and is discovered. We intuit the relevance structures of the universe and we are objectively right or wrong. According to the game theory, relevance is created by human action and stipulated by convention. We invent games and may choose to play or not to play for any reason, including the "fruitfulness" of the game or the pleasure we have in playing it.

The dispute between the structure and game theories of relevance is reflected in every traditional problem area of philosophy: metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, aesthetics, and logic. The structure theory is best exemplified in the work of Plato, Plotinus, and the Absolute Idealists. The game theory is best exemplified in the work of the Sophists, the Epicureans, Hume, and Wittgenstein (especially the "later" Wittgenstein). Conventionalists of all varieties espouse the game theory, including language analysts (acceptable uses of language conform to the generally accepted rules of the "language game"), believers in *crescive law* (Sumner) as opposed to Natural Law, and existentialists (relevance is created by arbitrary choice in an unstructured universe). Every dispute on any philosophical topic is an operational manifestation of the basic dispute between the polar theories of relevance. A synthesis of the structure and game theories will be presented in section five, although the synthesis gives far more satisfaction to the structure theorists than to the game theorists and thus may not be a genuine synthesis.

The war between the polar theories of relevance is manifested in the disputes about how philosophy and education are related. The orderly discussion of these disputes will be facilitated by organizing the discussion according to the various types of relevance which might exist between philosophy and education. Although there has never before been a general study of relevance as such, a number of different types of relevance have been enumerated by people who were studying something else. Aristotle's four causes, Sorokin's four types of cultural integration, and the traditional problem areas of philosophy combine to suggest a taxonomy of relevance. The four major types of relevance are:

- (1) Logical (explicitly formulatable relations among statements);
- (2) Causal (empirical relations among things and events);
- (3) Aesthetic (harmonious contribution to a collective gestalt or meaning);
- (4) Teleological (intentions or purposes joined to actions or events).

A derivative type is a weakened version of causal relevance:

- (5) Correlational (tending to occur contiguously-successively in space-time; or related by way of an external factor).

There are also two extreme types of relevance:

- (6) Merely phenomenal (the relevance of the junk pile or hallucination);
- (7) Identity (an entity as related to itself, whose aspects are related to themselves by way of all the other kinds of relevance).

### III. LOGICAL RELEVANCE BETWEEN PHILOSOPHY AND EDUCATION

As the term will be used here, "logical relations" are all and only those relations which exist among statements and which can be exhibited on paper in ways which are at least somewhat amenable to objective scrutiny. The mere juxtaposition of sentences on a scrap of paper does not suffice to establish a logical relation between them. On the other hand, we commonly recognize the presence of logical relations between statements even though no formal chain of words or symbols is exhibited to connect them. The usage described here eliminates from the domain of logic such common notions as "the logic of scientific discovery" or "the logic of the traffic pattern in Chicago." The logical relevance between philosophy and education is the joining of statements in philosophy to statements in education.

The dispute between the game and structure theories of relevance is reflected in a dispute over the question whether philosophy and education are logically related. Advocates of the game theory contend that the act of stipulating logical connections between philosophy and education creates such connections and answers the question "yes," while a complete lack of such stipulated connections would require a "no" answer. Advocates of the structure theory of relevance contend that there may be correct and erroneous stipulations of logical connections, and that in any case the question whether there are such connections, together with the question whether any particular system of connections is correct, require metaphysical inquiry before good answers can be provided.

Several authors have tried to characterize the properties of "correct" logical connections between philosophy and education. The proposed characterizations have varied in the rigor and abstractness of the connections. Although no proposal has yet advocated a computerized philosophy of education (where philosophic axioms are fed into a computer and educational prescriptions are provided in the output), such a possibility represents the limiting case of rigor and abstractness. Godel's proof of the impossibility of demonstrating the consistency of an axiomatic system by internal means, **and** the essential incompleteness of any axiomatic system, suggests that no axiomatization of philosophy is possible. However, strings of syllogisms can provide feasible connections between philosophy and education, when the original major premises are taken from a philosophic system and the minor

premises are descriptions of the cultural or educational context. A somewhat different approach is also feasible, drawing upon recent work in philosophy of science: epistemic correlations (Northrop), correspondence rules (Margenau), or rules of interpretation (Hempel) may be used to convert philosophical statements into educational ones, and *vice versa*.

Philosophical systems can also be used as models, metaphors, operational definitions, or slogans for educational programs. Although strict logical rigor here is poor, usefulness and communicative power are great. Most of the debates about education employ philosophical systems in these quasi-logical ways, and there is practical recourse to more rigorous exposition only when that is demanded by the criticism or the crucial importance of a stated position. Axiomatic systems, strings of syllogisms, slogans, models, metaphors, and operational definitions all depend upon arbitrary stipulation of philosophical antecedents and arbitrary stipulation of connections to education; however, the arbitrariness of the stipulations is more covert in axiomatic systems (except "at the top") and more obvious all along the way in operational definitions.

Although the "educational implication" is usually conceived as moving from philosophy to education, it also goes the other way. We often speak of finding the philosophical presuppositions of an educational action or prescription. The philosophical presuppositions of an educational action are the same as the philosophical presuppositions of the prescriptions approving the action as described; the presuppositions are statements which stand as premises in implications yielding educational conclusions. Finding the philosophical presuppositions of an educational action may be compared to finding the scientific explanations of an empirical phenomenon, while deducing educational prescriptions from a philosophic system may be compared to deducing empirical predictions from a scientific theory. The question whether explanation and prediction are structurally identical (except for the time factor) is parallel to the question whether philosophical presuppositions and educational implications are found by means of identical logical structures.

Neither the law of excluded middle nor the law of non-contradiction apply in philosophy of education. The law of excluded middle does not apply, in the sense that it is possible that neither a certain prescription for education nor its opposite is deducible from a given philosophic system, while it is also possible that neither a given philosophic statement nor its contradiction is a philosophical presupposition of an educational action. The law of non-contradiction does not apply, in the sense that both a prescription for education and its opposite may be deducible from the same philosophic system, while two conflicting philosophic systems may agree in supporting the same conclusion for education. In spite of these difficulties, philosophy of education is a perfectly rational enterprise: the relations between philosophical systems and educational prescriptions outlined in this paragraph are parallel to the relations between maps and itineraries. In addition, certain non-logical considerations (to be developed in section four) may eliminate philosophic statements or educational prescriptions which logic alone would allow, and the same considerations may require statements or prescriptions which logic alone would fail to establish.

IV. NON-LOGICAL RELEVANCE BETWEEN PHILOSOPHY  
AND EDUCATION

The taxonomy presented in section two described seven types of relevance. Merely phenomenal relevance and the relevance of identity are limiting cases which are of no special significance here. Thus, we are left with four types of non-logical relevance which may exist between philosophy and education: causal, correlational, aesthetic, and teleological.

Since causal and correlational relevance exist (by definition) only between physical things, there can be no causal or correlational relevance between philosophy and education unless both are conceived as physical things. Education is easily seen as a physical thing if we consider "educational phenomena" involving classrooms, buildings, books, teaching-learning episodes and practices, hands, brains, etc. Although it is difficult to think of philosophy as a physical thing, there are two ways in which such a conception is possible: (1) philosophy as a collection of marks on paper (philosophical writings) or vibrations of air (philosophical utterances); (2) philosophy as a cultural institution, consisting of certain people, their actions and interactions and folkways, certain books, etc. Causal relevance between philosophy and education would be difficult to prove, but it is easy to see that there is at least correlational relevance between philosophy and education.

Educational deeds and philosophical opinions are correlated by way of personality dispositions. Psychologists who study human personality recognize that a personality can be broken down into certain factors or dispositions. A cluster of statements to which someone assents can be highly correlated with a cluster of actions in which he engages whenever environmental conditions permit or induce those actions. It would seem reasonable, then, that there should be a correlation between the advocacy of a set of philosophical opinions and the tendency for an educational practitioner to behave in a certain way in the classroom or administrative situation. Furthermore, if particular philosophical tenets are correlated with particular personality dispositions, we would expect that each major personality type (as a gestalt of harmonious dispositions) is correlated with a major philosophical system (as a harmonious combination of tenets). Empirical studies have actually been done which tend to confirm these predictions.

Since a personality and its dispositions are formed and reconstructed by the totality of all perceived experiences, it follows that instruction in philosophy of education can change the personality of the prospective educational practitioner so that his educational actions years later are different from what they otherwise would have been. In this way theory can inform practice without conscious deliberation by the practitioner. Likewise, practical experience in educational situations can reconstruct the personality of the theoretician and thereby produce a change in the philosophical tenets to which he subscribes.

Just as philosophical opinions and educational deeds are correlated as verbalizations and manifestations of an individual's personality, so also we

may say that philosophy and education as cultural institutions are correlated as verbalization and manifestation of a culture's ethos. Since the ethos of a culture (national character; *Volksgeist*; *paideia*) is the gestalt of all its institutions, a change in one institution (either philosophy or education, for example) may produce a change in one or more other institutions. If philosophy is viewed as Utopian (in Mannheim's sense), then it performs its classical function by promoting a reconstruction of the social and educational order in conformity to the tenets of some great Truth. If philosophy is viewed as ideological, then it serves as a verbal battle-ground between the expressed rationalizations of vested interests. Current social reconstructionist theories view philosophy as ideological and express the belief that a prior harmonization of social conflicts is the only way in which philosophical disputes can be settled. If philosophy and education are correlated as cultural institutions, it follows that both the ideological and Utopian interpretations of the function of philosophy will agree that comparative philosophy and comparative education have much to offer each other.

Pareto's sociology of knowledge explains the personality correlation between philosophical opinions and educational deeds, while Sorokin's sociology of knowledge explains the cultural correlation between philosophy and education as institutions. Pareto suggests that there are two basic personality types in any culture (the "lions" and the "foxes"), and it is interesting to note that one of these would be highly correlated with espousal of the structure theory of relevance (the lions) while the other type is highly correlated with the game theory (the foxes). Pareto himself espouses an ideological view of the nature of philosophy, and such a view is correlated with the game theory of relevance. Sorokin suggests that there are two basic types of cultural ethos (the "ideational" and the "sensate"), and it is obvious from his characterization of these types that one type corresponds to the structure theory of relevance (the ideational) while the other corresponds to the game theory (the sensate). Sorokin himself espouses a Utopian view of the nature of philosophy (he claims that pure, spaceless, timeless ideas become embodied in cultural systems which develop the ideas to the "logical limit"), and such a view is correlated with the structure theory of relevance.

Aside from causal and correlational relevance between philosophy and education, there is aesthetic relevance. The term "aesthetic" is here used in its broadest possible sense, as a synonym for "immediately known" or "intuitive" or "non-discursive" or "known by acquaintance." The aesthetic gestalt of an educational situation either coheres or clashes with the spirit (or overall meaning) of a philosophic system. The spirit or meaning of a philosophic system is itself the aesthetically perceived gestalt of all the tenets, while the tenets are the discursive expression of the spirit of the system. The concept of aesthetic empathy applies here as we observe that students understand a philosophic system better if they temporarily agree with it. By identifying with the spirit of a philosophic system, the prospective practitioner can recognize hosts of educational practices as harmonizing or clashing with it, in precisely the same way as an actor fills in the gaps in a script by temporarily "becoming" the person whom he portrays.

Finally, there is teleological relevance between philosophy and education in the sense that philosophical ends are realized by educational means. Dewey recognized that a philosophy comes alive with practical meaning only if it is embodied in educational practices. Likewise, it is possible to determine in a general way the philosophical commitments which covertly or overtly find their furtherance in given educational practices.

#### V. A SYNTHESIS: THE USES OF KNOWLEDGE AND THE THEORY-PRACTICE RELATION

Should philosophy of education be oriented toward training prospective practitioners by giving them rules of practice, or should philosophy of education be a liberal discipline to be studied for its own sake? Many authors have written on this problem, and their opinions span a continuum from one extreme to the other. The lag between theory and practice in education is so great that some authors believe the lag should be eliminated by making theoretical statements labels for practical actions (perhaps by means of operational definitions), while other authors believe the lag will always remain great because the theoretical foundations of education are liberal arts. Should philosophy of education, like philosophy or art, be used purely for enjoyment and appreciation, or should it play an active role in directing the phenomena which it studies?

Sometimes knowledge is used applicatively — for example: using theoretical knowledge of mechanics to build a race-car engine. Sometimes knowledge is used interpretively without practical application — for example: using theoretical knowledge of physics to understand and appreciate the achievements of the astronauts.<sup>2</sup> Every applicative use of knowledge includes an interpretive use of knowledge, since a situation must be perceived and understood before it can be dealt with properly. The perception and understanding of a situation are usually immediate and unnoticed whenever practical problems are dealt with swiftly and well; but if the problem is complex or if error occurs, the perception and understanding of the situation may be noticed and dealt with as problems in themselves.

Since every applicative use of knowledge includes an interpretive use of knowledge, it is clear that an improvement in the latter will tend to produce an improvement in the former. Whenever fragmentation of problem-solving into separate stages occurs, there is a tendency to view theory so far apart from practice that it becomes difficult to translate theory into practice. Thus, in philosophy of education it becomes necessary to study the properties of relevance between philosophy and education in order to produce mechanisms whereby the practical applications of theory can be more or less rigorously spelled out (e.g., logical syllogisms, models, slogans, operational definitions). Once theory is studied for its own sake and separated from practice, it is

<sup>2</sup>Four uses of knowledge, including the applicative and interpretive uses being discussed here, were developed in Harry S. Broudy, B. Othanel Smith, and Joe R. Burnett, *Democracy and Excellence in American Secondary Education* (Chicago: Rand McNally and Co., 1964), Chapters III and IV.

difficult to ensure that improvement in the interpretive use of knowledge will produce improvement in the applicative use of knowledge.

But when the fragmentation of problem-solving into separated stages does not occur, there is no need to restore the theory-practice connection since that connection is immediately in the making. In this case statements are never formulated and there is no need to employ logical mechanisms to deduce the implications of theory. Whenever action is taken immediately in response to a situation, the personality dispositions of the actor determine his response. If those dispositions have been conditioned and reconstructed through the study of theory the actor will perceive and interpret the situation with new insight, and (possibly) a different overt response will occur. Thus the interpretive use of knowledge mediates between theoretical study of philosophy of education and practical direction of educational phenomena. The process of mediation makes use of the non-logical properties of relevance between philosophy and education, discussed in section four.

The logical relevance between philosophy and education is therefore both an outgrowth of and a vehicle for the non-logical relevance between the two. Having insights, we formulate them in statements. Studying statements, we may have insights. The philosopher of education understands practical and theoretical situations, and expresses what he understands by using the mechanisms of the logical relevance between philosophy and education. Upon hearing or reading the utterances or writings of the theoretician, the prospective educational practitioner may be led to have the same understandings. Having significant understandings is all one with undergoing a reconstruction of personality dispositions, and such a character-building process naturally overflows into actions informed with theory.

As used in section four, "aesthetic" is taken in its broadest sense as a synonym for "immediately known" or "intuitive" or "non-discursive" or "known by acquaintance." Aesthetic expressions are always discursive public embodiments of non-discursive private intuitions. Communication is always a form of aesthetic expression in which the person who receives the communication is to be led through the discursive embodiment to the same intuition which the sender is expressing. Communication fails if the receiver does not achieve the same insight which the sender expressed, although there may still be enjoyment or appreciation of the vehicle itself. Likewise, there are vehicles which either do not embody a message or were never intended to do so. The results of the last few paragraphs may now be summed up by saying that the logical relevance between philosophy and education is the aesthetic expression of the non-logical relevance between the two, and in training prospective educational practitioners we philosophers of education use the logical mechanisms as communication vehicles.

Indeed, all teaching is aesthetic expression and communication in the sense developed here. Rules express practices. For those persons interested in the interpretive use of knowledge, rules are descriptions, while for those persons who are also interested in the applicative use of knowledge, rules become prescriptions as well. Grammar tables express the linguistic practices

of fluent speakers, and may be used to lead students toward the development of fluency in a foreign language (or their own!). Recipes express good cooking. Proofs express truths. Paradigms for teaching (sometimes taught in educational methods courses) are the grammar tables of the educational profession. In every case, the mistake called "pedantry" consists of confusing the expression with the intuition: for example, a professor of "education" who over-emphasizes the need to follow a rigid sequence of steps in teaching a lesson may impair the ability of his students to develop genuine finesse when they teach.

The game and structure theories of relevance may now be synthesized in the language developed here. Games express structures, and we make a vicious error if we deny the validity of either one or if we confuse them with each other. Games as aesthetic expressions are always discursive, public embodiments of non-discursive, private intuitions of structures. All communication takes place by convention through the playing of some game, while that which is communicated is the intuition of a structure. Of course, there are games which are invented and played merely "for fun" without embodying any structure or without intending to embody one.

If a game is offered "just for fun" one way it may be criticized is to show that it embodies a structure of which the game's author disapproves. If a game is offered as an embodiment of some structure, one way it may be criticized is to show that it fails to communicate that structure; likewise, such a game may also be criticized by showing that it embodies a structure of which the game's author disapproves (thus, educational practices may be criticized by exposing their philosophical presuppositions). These are the only ways in which games may be criticized. Games which can withstand these criticisms are acceptable games because they either succeed in embodying or communicating some structure, or else they are really innocent, "just for fun" games.

Behind all that has been said here is a general epistemology which is very old and very familiar. Plato developed this epistemology, especially in the *Republic* and the *Meno*. Plotinus elaborated the position. St. Augustine (in *De Magistro*) applied the epistemology in discussing the nature of teaching. Zen (Buddhist) masters have used it for thousands of years in the process of instructing their pupils. More recently, Michael Polanyi has written in a way which seems to espouse portions of this tradition.

Truth, Beauty, and Goodness are all One. Truth exists *a priori*, awaiting discovery. Its beauty seduces the beholder, making him a pilgrim and a seeker of Truth. Through grace and humility, Truth is obtained and produces a spiritual conversion which alters the personality of the wise man, making him good. The goodness of the wise man is obvious to all who see with unclouded eyes, and his deeds lead others to salvation.

Perhaps the study of philosophy of education can help a teacher become a philosopher-king in his classroom.