

**On Rationality, Normativity and Justification: Harvey Siegel on Epistemology and Education**

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[Author's name] Koichiro Misawa

[Institutional affiliation] Institute of Education, University of London, Ph.D candidate

[Postal address] Room 1, House 16, Woburn Square, London, WC1H 0NS, England, UK

[Email address] [fmmt21nm@gmail.com](mailto:fmmt21nm@gmail.com)

[A]s epistemology waxed in the world of general philosophy, it waned in the philosophy of education community.—Harvey Siegel

## 1

Both education and philosophy, no matter how they may be defined, are concerned with human knowledge. Despite this obvious affinity regarding knowledge, their relative lack of interaction seems to be widely felt. This meagre relation appears to corroborate the existence of an excessively fragmentary development in the institutionalised and compartmentalised academic disciplines of ‘philosophy’ and ‘Education’ in general as well as ‘epistemology’ (or the theory of knowledge) and ‘the philosophy of education’ in particular.<sup>1</sup> What I set out to do in this paper is to attempt to draw more attention to the fundamental interrelation between philosophy and education—one whose relative lack of emphasis weakens the best practice and understanding of both.

One crucial trigger causing the discrepancy between general philosophy and the philosophy of education vis-à-vis questions of epistemology could be ascribed to an ever increasing ramification of complicated theories in academic philosophy.<sup>2</sup> This tendency has been prompted by the turbulence in traditional epistemology in the previous century, caused by, say, W. V. Quine’s ‘Two Dogmas of Empiricism’ (1951) and Edmund Gettier’s ‘Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?’ (1963).<sup>3</sup> This crisis has brought to light ‘the psychological sub-processes’, which ‘causally generate states of belief’ in the analysis of knowledge beyond ‘the logical relations among propositions believed by the subject’ (Kitcher, 1992, p. 60). This line of argument is called naturalistic—in particular, psychologistic—epistemology. The strong version of naturalised epistemology—especially, Quine’s sort—‘leaves aside questions of *justification* and considers only the genetic, causal question’ (Dancy, 1985, p. 235, my italics).

It may be no surprise that, for many philosophers of education, such detailed complication of theories has little relevance to what the philosophy of education is—or should be—concerned with. Notwithstanding this widespread outlook about the weak relation between philosophy and education, recent philosophical scholarship, I will argue, shows a much closer alliance of philosophy with education. This coalition between philosophy and education is achieved by raising concerns about what I call the ‘social’ and ‘pragmatic’ aspects of what it is for humans to know. To disclose this issue, in what follows, I will focus on three ingredients of human knowledge: rationality, normativity and justification.

One hallmark of these three components is that they are all *epistemic* notions in the sense that they are essentially related to *human* knowing or cognition. In contrast, other relevant items constitutive of the theory of knowledge such as truth, objectivity

and reality are open to discussion in terms of whether they are epistemic or non-epistemic. The dispute over this issue has engendered various camps represented, say, by ‘strong realism’ and ‘social constructivism’. However, no attempt to reduce one binary opposition—e.g. the claim that truth is epistemic—to the other—e.g. the claim that truth is non-epistemic—appears successful in construing the nuanced subtlety concerning human knowledge. My aim is to shed light on this subtly delicate matter by demonstrating how barren such binary oppositions are through reconfiguring the above components of human knowledge.

This attempt will be made by critiquing the work of Harvey Siegel who is a leading American epistemologist (of education). There are three reasons for this. Firstly, he frequently refers to the notions in question in a limited, though rigorously analytical, style. Secondly, most pertinently, his vigorous defence of ‘traditional, “conservative,” Enlightenment epistemology’ (Siegel, 1997, p. 152) serves as a touchstone as to how far what I call the ‘social’ and ‘pragmatic’ dimensions of human knowledge requires a departure from a traditional epistemology. Siegel’s defence of traditional epistemology bridges between epistemology and education in a way, where he argues that both in the practice and study of education, modern epistemology endorses the view that rationality is indispensable for all people and accordingly that fostering rational ability is a crucial role of education universally. Thirdly, he casts doubt on a currently prevailing strand in the philosophy of education community, particularly in the U.S.: (neo-) pragmatism.<sup>4</sup>

I am willing to admit that Siegel’s formulation of the affinity between epistemology and education is more rigorously analytical and watertight than that of most other philosophers of education. Nevertheless, his scheme seems inadequate in certain important respects. My dissatisfaction with it largely derives from his misconstrual of rational justification and truth. Mainly because of this misdirection, Siegel’s line of thought, I claim, does not do full justice to several philosophical issues relating to education—e.g. rationality, normativity, justification and what I call the ‘social’ and ‘pragmatic’ domains. I (i) begin by articulating why Siegel’s account of rational justification and truth is insufficient and next (ii) pay heed to recent developments in Hilary Putnam’s ideas to demonstrate a better way of grasping the above issues which I suspect Siegel fails to fully capture. I then (iii) analyse whether Siegel’s critique of (neo-) pragmatism is persuasive.

## 2

I start with Siegel’s reaction against Charles Taylor’s challenge to the assumptions of traditional epistemology. Taylor’s challenge is ‘to views of knowledge which regard it as representing an independent reality, and which do not recognize that knowers are

agents' (Siegel, 1998, p. 32). In his 'Overcoming Epistemology', Taylor declares that the whole enterprise of modern *representational* epistemology bound up with the faith in foundationalism—on the grounds of the 'disengaged subject' and atomism—should come to an end. Drawing on Heidegger's notion of 'being-in-the-world'—put crudely, the idea that 'we are not disengaged subjects, but *agents*, and that our knowledge depends upon this fact' (Siegel, 1998, p. 28, italics in original)—, Taylor claims that:

The notion that our understanding of the world is grounded in our *dealings* with it is equivalent to the thesis that this understanding is not ultimately based on representations at all, *in the sense of depictions that are separately identifiable from what they are of.* (Taylor, 1995, p. 12, my italics)

At the heart of this sentence lies the rejection of the so-called representationalist theory or, put otherwise, correspondence theory of truth. Today criticism of the conventionally accepted dichotomy between the knowing subject and the known object is widely recognised in philosophy. One vital result of this line of criticism, I believe, is that the lingering philosophical pathology—especially in the empiricist epistemological tradition—of how human minds (or thought or concept) can be in touch with reality (namely, the non-epistemic physical world) is exorcised to a large extent.

However, Siegel says that: 'This [Taylor's argument] in no way undermines the view that knowledge consists in beliefs which (among other conditions) accurately portray "an independent reality"' (Siegel, 1998, p. 28). Siegel then feels able to incorporate Taylor's point by adding 'infallible certainty' to the traditional constituents in modern epistemology that I suggest need to be re-assessed—e.g. abstract rationality, theoretical justification, theoretical reason, objective knowledge, absolute truth, the *a priori*, conceptual clarification, immediate universality and so forth. What Siegel advocates is, therefore, traditional epistemology *with fallibilism*—the idea that '*all* claims are fallible and open to challenge, and *no* claims are certain' (Siegel, 1997, p. 121, italics in original).

I doubt that Siegel's argument fully reflects Taylor's point. Certainly, Siegel rightly repudiates the traditional correspondence theory of truth. He argues that '[c]orrespondence cannot be a *criterion* of truth, for we have no independent access to an independent reality and so cannot tell when or whether the criterion is met' (Siegel, 1997, p. 206, italics in original). Yet this reason already shows a sign of his failure to fully acknowledge Heidegger-Taylor's view insofar as Siegel tacitly holds on to the idea that independent reality exists *out there* and identifies it with *bona fide* truth. It is a *particular form of justification* that Siegel brings as a means to mediate us to truth out there. He succinctly writes: 'Because we lack direct access to truth, we have no choice

but to approach truth by way of justification' (Siegel, 2005, p. 352). Coupled with his endorsing of fallibilism, Siegel's view concerning justification and truth runs as follows: 'the *upshot* of rational justification is a prima facie case for truth; rational justification is a *fallible* indicator of truth' (Siegel, 1997, p. 34, italics in original).<sup>5</sup> Still, his understanding of fallibilism, justification and truth is not without its own set of problems.

To illustrate what is at issue, let us turn to an instance about which Taylor and Siegel diverge. Taylor says that '[w]e can draw a neat line between my *picture* of an object and that object, but not between my *dealing* with the object and that object'; on the other hand, Siegel argues that 'I can...perfectly well distinguish...between my *dealing* with the keyboard on which I am now typing, and the keyboard. (Siegel, 1998, p. 27, italics in original). Siegel fails, in my eyes, to fully comprehend the most crucial point, the point that one single object cannot be intelligible to humans *ontologically* while the object itself does exist *ontically*. That the content of an object makes sense only in one's *dealing* with the object means that it becomes intelligible only when one relates to it *by reference to the necessarily historically conditioned conceptual content of that relationship or engagement*. This also requires us, and always already, to know other objects—precisely as a condition for knowing that particular object itself. (In this respect, the term 'understanding' might better grasp the way humans conceptually engage in our world than the term 'knowledge'.) For, to ontologically understand, say, what a keyboard is, we need to know what keyboards look like, what we use them for, and what it is like to play one. Without being acquainted with this sort of (latent) *historical, practical and relational knowledge* of what dealing with a keyboard means, Siegel *cannot* even see it as an objective entity. In other words, Siegel does not consider the full meaning of 'dealing with' in Taylor's terms; that is, Siegel's account of 'dealing with' is merely an action of fingers striking the keys.

To be sure, Siegel's view is worth attending to as a warning against the tendency towards an excessive relativisation and subjectivisation of discourse—which is particularly rampant in educational research.<sup>6</sup> We do not need to regard Taylor's point, however, as a consequence of sheer relativism or subjectivism. For human conceptual commitment does not necessitate a repudiation of 'objectivity' as such. It is futile, therefore, to reduce this fertile philosophical view to an all-or-nothing issue by dichotomising possible ways of thinking into two kinds: One is the deviation of abstract and immediate universalism—i.e. the idea that truth is the absolute *non-epistemic* reality that is out there once and for all; the other deviation is to abandon the notion of truth and reality by seeing them as merely relative to human *epistemic* differences.

Siegel is right that the world is by no means constituted by the human mind alone; yet, he seems to underestimate the point that the world we inhabit *qua* humans

does not exist independently of humans. What I dub a *social* and *pragmatic* aspect in the theory of knowledge is related to this point—namely, an awareness that we are *always already* in the world we live in, not in a meaningless natural world. For clarification of this thread of thinking which avoids Siegel’s formulation that rational justification is epistemic whereas truth is non-epistemic, I find helpful Heidegger’s (provisional) distinction between the *world* and the *earth*.

In ‘The Origin of the Work of Art’, Heidegger offers a lucid distinction between the world and the earth. Although his discussion is complicated and poetically depicted, my purpose here is just to borrow that distinction to illustrate my point by slightly interpreting it in my own way. That is to say, the world is where we actually live; the earth is meaningless things that are just there. In the world, there is everything we know: e.g. natural things, *physical human products*, *abstract and fictitious beings* such as, in order, cars, nation states and Sherlock Holmes, a memory and record of the past events and figures, *names* and *categories* of things, conceptual *relations* of things, *negation and contradiction*; on the other hand, on the earth, it is only natural things like stones, plants and animals that exist.<sup>7</sup> In other words, the world is where, in addition to artefacts, human conceptual commitment and inferential relations are already embedded. Therefore, for example, in the world, there are situations describable in negative and even contradictory sentences; by contrast, there is no negation or contradiction on the earth.

Should we, then, dismiss the earth from our discussion as something intellectually unreachable like Kant’s ‘*Ding-an-sich*’? Certainly not. The earth is the foundation for our embracing of *realism*. It is true that we occupy a multitude of standpoints and thus each person lives in a more or less *different* world from that of others. However, the difference does not amount to total incommunicability. Now we can ascribe our communicability between different worlds to the existence of the earth. It is notable that a parallel can be drawn between mind and body—put precisely, between human *qua* human and human as purely physical. Our bodies are biologically convergent in that, for instance, no one can be 3 meters tall, see 5 kilo meters ahead or live for 200 years. Because of these kinds of biologically in-built constraints of our bodies, we basically react to the earth in such a way that we can, in varying degrees, communicate with one another—even if people live in different cultures, using different languages. Furthermore, the earth is the ground of human mistakes. An aspect of the earth not yet disclosed may tell us that a human perspective that has been seen as right so far needs modifications. Put the other way round, the earth is a source for the infinite variety of human knowledge.

However, this distinction between world and earth should not be confused with the complete separateness of them. They can be described distinctively for expedience’s

sake, but the fact is that *they form a totality*.

Noteworthy here is that *it is impossible for a person to try to inspect the earth by bracketing her world*. Bald naturalism, it might be argued, is the idea that conceives of this inspection as possible. However, as the considerations thus far show, the earth *simpliciter* is not intelligible to humans, for the environment we inhabit is not the ‘thingly’ earth, but a human world. This signifies that the idea of truth independent of humans can have no space in the world we live in, because it is misdirected to assume that we have reality on the one hand and knowledge on the other.<sup>8</sup> If I may be allowed to speak with a somewhat constructivist connotation, truth can be understood as ‘truth *humanly speaking*’. Just because truth is nothing more than ‘truth humanly speaking’, nonetheless, it never follows that what Wilfrid Sellars calls ‘the space of reasons’ goes all the way down. In other words, ‘truth humanly speaking’ means neither that truth is one-sidedly epistemic nor that ontology can be reducible to epistemology. We do not have to abandon the Enlightenment notions I adduced earlier such as objective knowledge, absolute truth, etc. However, these notions need to be recognised in the way just mentioned, rather than in the conservative, that is, Siegel’s way. What we must bear in mind is the fundamentally organic and inseparable relation between world and earth. Heidegger says:

World and earth are essentially different from one another and yet *are never separated*. The world grounds itself on the earth, and earth juts through world. Yet the relation between world and earth does not wither away into the empty unity of opposites unconcerned with one another. (Heidegger, 1993, p. 174, my italics)

I here want to emphasise the dynamic and shifting character of the unity between world and earth.

Siegel, whilst denying the correspondence theory of truth, adheres to the binary oppositions between rational justification as epistemic and truth as non-epistemic—i.e. independent of humans. As long as we oscillate between them, no one would be able to resolve the age-old difficulty of how to reconcile the non-epistemic character of truth with the human epistemic capacity of rational justification. Siegel adverts to ‘an earlier Putnam’ as considering truth ‘radically nonepistemic’ (Siegel, 1997, p. 216). However, in my understanding, Putnam these days has an outlook quite congenial to the story described above.

### 3

The most crucial point of the present Putnam<sup>9</sup>, I argue, is the insight that value judgement, description of fact and human linguistic convention are all *interpenetrating*.

In other words, mind, body and world are, from the very beginning, interpenetrating. ‘An earlier Putnam’, with whom Siegel has an affinity concerning the concept of truth, embraced what Putnam now calls *metaphysical realism*—a doctrine that ‘the mind and the world are separated by an epistemological chasm’ (Heil, 2001, p. 402). Clearly, the Cartesian mind-body dualism is one extreme form of metaphysical realism. His gradual dissatisfaction with metaphysical realism drove Putnam 1 to the next stage, where he sees truth as ‘idealised rational acceptability’ rather than as ‘radically nonepistemic’. His further shift to the present Putnam is, I think, a promising extension of the previous line which placed slightly too much emphasis on the internalistic—i.e. subjectivist—explanation of truth.

Obviously, Siegel is averse to the internal realist Putnam (Siegel, 1997, p. 216). In line with Putnam 1’s scheme, Siegel holds the following view as to critical thinking which he highly appreciates as ‘the educational cognate’ of rationality (Siegel, 1988, p. 127):

[T]ruth is *independent* of rational justification: we can be justified in believing that *q* even though *q* is false; and we can be justified in rejecting *q* as false even though it is true. (Siegel, 1997, p. 18)

Based on this view, Siegel gives priority to rational justification rather than truth as the aim of critical thinking (Siegel, 1997, p. 34).<sup>10</sup> The view cited above is in tandem with his understanding of ‘fallibilism’. I concur with fallibilism inasmuch as the epistemological program of foundationalism as it is cannot be tenable.<sup>11</sup> However, I do not believe that there could happen a total or massive failure in our recognition of truth, given that we live in our world rather than the ‘thingly’ earth. Everything in the world is bound up in complex ways within a social, historical and relational matrix, a *de facto* reliance upon which cannot possibly be dropped out of view, as one thing implies and is imbricated with many others. Nor can this complex interacting web be forgotten as a crucial condition of our ability to live in our world *qua* humans. As was mentioned, the earth is always a source for our mistakes, but the mistakes are revisions and modifications, not a massive failure which proves that our engaging in our world so far is completely misoriented.

I do not mean to say that Siegel’s fallibilism implies a massive or total failure. But, what seems to be missing in his account of fallibilism is the acuteness towards the present Putnam’s subtler insight. When Siegel says that we can be justified in believing that *q* even though *q* is false, how can we arrive at a conviction that *q* is in fact false despite our rational justification that *q* is right? His answer is that:

Even very powerful reasons for or against some claim  $q$  can be wrong, misleading, or overturned by *evidence not yet available*. (Siegel, 1997, p. 18, my italics)

This reply seems *prima facie* good enough and ideally scientific. However, I am afraid that a sort of pitfall may lie here: this view is in fact scientific.

As referred to, Siegel thinks of critical thinking as the educational cognate of rationality and regards fostering critical thinking as one fundamental aim of education. Given that our world is already filled with a great deal of scientific, and correlatively technological, frameworks, it is inappropriate to devalue science. Yet, I would take issue with Siegel if he is inclined to confine rationality to scientific—i.e. the presently most dominant—one, which appears to be a covert aspiration shared by many analytical philosophers. What he seems to be mistaken about is his likely assumption that *evidence not yet available* will (presumably scientifically) be disclosed to us in a non-epistemic, namely, human-independent form. In brief, what Siegel fails to fully apprehend is that *evidence not yet available will partly be a result of the way humans live*. What I am saying is that it is collaboration between us and the earth in our world as a totality that constitutes the relevance of evidence. It is not *a priori* determined.

This is why *education* is important. As noted, all that is given in our world has and involves a relation to history. Due to concrete social and historical determinations and determinacies, opacities of the interpenetration between concept and being, rational justification and truth, word and world and so on are unavoidable. The role of education is—abstractly speaking—both to make people understand their complex interaction and deeper imbrication and thereby to lead them to re-construct their interrelatedness in better ways because the unity can shift. Put another, perhaps somewhat Hegelian way, truth, though not immediately revealed and transparent, is nonetheless present. There are therefore levels or degrees of truth. Insofar as truth is only revealed through human experience and practice, education has vitally important roles to play in order to improve the breadth and depth of our experience as human beings collectively as well as to become full and free human beings individually.

In other words, the advancement of evidence not yet available, whether it is scientific or not, goes hand in hand with *human rationality*—a basic conceptual web which has been historically conditioned and the *de facto* reliance on which makes it possible for humans to live in our world. In a nutshell, what will be unpacked by evidence not yet available is not easily describable as a non-epistemic truth which is out there. Siegel, therefore, has to abandon his (implicit) acceptance of metaphysical realism—the view that ‘the things we talk and think about are whatever way they are independently of our thoughts’ (Cormier, 2006, 110). The source of Siegel’s struggle with regard to the relation between rational justification and truth, I claim, resides in

the fact that whereas he repudiates the correspondence theory of truth, he does not dismiss metaphysical realism by adhering to the idea that truth is radically non-epistemic.

With the aid of Heidegger's distinction between world and earth as well as Putnam's idea of the interpenetration of mind, body and world, I have strived to reveal that we can overcome an obsessing worry of philosophy, the worry about explanation of how humans can be in touch with the 'external' world. The fact is that they bleed non-reductively into as well as out of each other and thus that they figure as a complex and subtly nuanced totality. In this, there is no room for either the proposition that Reality is as it is totally independently of humanity on the one hand, or the notion that the mind one-sidedly constitutes the world on the other.

The vital point is that considerations so far tell us that we *can* retain a sort of 'representation'—accordingly, most of the Enlightenment notions listed earlier—even after we jettison the correspondence theory of truth. Here, this representation, as Putnam puts it, is entailed by the activity 'in which we engage', not the idea of a representation as 'an *interface* between ourselves and what we think about' (Putnam, 1999, p. 59, italics in original). The following example Putnam adduces serves to encapsulate this point: 'Wittgenstein says that "This chair is blue" (imagine he had a blue chair in front of him) corresponds to reality, but he can only say to what reality by using the sentence itself' (Putnam, 1999, p. 197). Put another way, the kind of representation we endorse is by nature *normative*, which is decisively distinct from non-normative 'representation' in the correspondence theory. True, Siegel also stresses the normative character of rationality and its importance for education, but, as far as this matter is concerned, his understanding of normativity seems not to reach the point where the notion of 'correspondence' or 'representation' is already normative.

Siegel is right in locating rationality 'between an overly *formalistic* conception of rationality, and an overly *contextualist* conception' (Siegel, 1997, p. 102, my italics); that is, 'substantively' (ibid., p. 104). Nonetheless, his locution makes me somewhat uneasy about the way rationality is to be understood. For his mode of speaking might give the impression that rationality is, though normative and fallible, inert. Still, rationality essentially requires open variety—on the basis of rationality we now have. Human flourishing evolves, as does rationality—intertwined with a refinement of normativity and justification. In summary, his path still appears to run nearer the formalistic one. My lane is slightly closer to the contextualist one, which results from my emphasis on what I call the 'social' aspects of human knowledge with which the next section is concerned. More accurately, I would argue for a reconfigured account rather than one that attempts to straddle the formalistic and contextualist conceptions of rationality. I thereby aim to emphasise the organic and plastic character of

rationality.

#### 4

I will move on to the last reason I choose Siegel as a springboard for developing my ideas: his aversion to pragmatism.

Siegel casts a critical eye on the orthodox pragmatist view. He asserts that pragmatist epistemology is ‘deeply flawed’, on the grounds that ‘[p]ragmatic utility will serve as a relevant criterion only on the assumption of a generally pragmatist epistemology’ (Siegel, 1997, p. 126). In ‘Justification by Balance’, Siegel scrutinises Nelson Goodman’s pragmatic account of justification and concludes that Goodman’s (and Israel Sheffler’s) version of justification is not satisfactory. Their view relies, Siegel claims, on the tenuous assumption that ‘if we take some systematization to be justified—if we are committed to it, have confidence in it, find it highly credible—it is’ (Siegel, 1992, p. 42). Siegel goes on to argue: ‘The justification of the *initial* commitment, confidence, or rating of credibility cannot be gained, for it is on that commitment that justification rests’ (Siegel, 1992, p. 42, my italics). For him, this type of pragmatist account of justification is question-begging. He is reluctant to give privilege to the initial commitment by which subsequent justifications are made possible, on the basis of his understanding of fallibilism—the view that ‘we can always be mistaken in our judgement that something is justified or credible; our confidence can be misplaced’ (Siegel, 1992, p. 43). In Siegel’s eyes, fallibilism and pragmatism cannot stand in harmony. He asserts:

It [Fallibilism] requires.... that we do not *uncritically* regard our estimates of *initial* credibility, our confidence in our beliefs and (inferential) practices, as either *automatically* warrant-enjoying or as warrant-conferring—that is, as the basis of justification. (Siegel, 1992, p. 43, my italics)

In brief, doubt about our own existing measures or criteria is the very central thrust of Siegel’s fallibilism.

Orthodox pragmatism, Siegel says, is misleading insofar as it sees an *initial* commitment, confidence or rating of credibility as immune from justification, namely, rational enquiry. I also do not subscribe to pragmatism if it is interpreted as follows: pragmatism identifies what is the case with what we take to be the case or what the majority of people agree on as the case. However, as I have reiterated, *without some sort of initial human conceptual and social commitment to, or involvement in, the world, no one can even begin a non-foundational explanation of human knowledge*. As long as we are humans, put another way, there is no way out of epistemological

presuppositions. We are always in some sense on the way.

This initial commitment on the part of humans to the world is a desideratum for our being able to see this world in the way we actually do and this is precisely what I dub the ‘pragmatic’ side in our enquiry into human knowledge. What is involved in this initial commitment constitutes what I would call *rationality*: namely, a basic conceptual web which cannot be specified but which *functions* as if it were *certain, rational, objective, true, a priori* and even *foundational* insofar as it cannot be intelligible to doubt it. Without the *de facto* reliance on this basic conceptual web, no one could see the world as they actually do. The present Putnam uses the term ‘conceptual truth’ to describe something similar to what I argue for. A conceptual truth functions as *a priori* to the extent that ‘it is impossible to make (relevant) sense of the *assertion* of its negation’ (Putnam, 2004, p. 63, italics in original). *Impossibility of making sense of the assertion of its negation* well captures the salient feature of what I call a basic web for human conceptual understanding. As has been adumbrated, the basic conceptual web is fallible, revisable and changeable in accordance with human flourishing, but nevertheless there cannot be a massive failure of the network at least in the short run.<sup>12</sup>

It goes without saying that an initial commitment to the world is one thing and an initial commitment to a particular form of, say, politics or religion is another. Thus, an initial commitment to, for example, Christianity does *not* confer enough warrant to the justification of believing in Christianity. However, as we have seen, we are *always already* in our world as a totality underpinned by our world-views, even though they are changing. If so, it would be reasonable to think that the difference in the initial commitment to existing systems makes some difference to basic conceptual networks that each individual has. The difference between the basic networks is, of course, not large enough to generate an utter incommunicability. It is far from convincing, however, to assume *the same* conceptual network for, say, a person whose initial commitment was to a strong Christian culture and another person whose initial commitment was to a far less religious culture. Not to mention, it is misleading to focus on some specific factors like polity or religion as ones which *alone* decisively constitute one’s ways of thinking, since there is no specifying and aligning an infinite number of such factors in a neutral way. My point is just to confirm that *basic conceptual networks are overlapping and criss-crossing but no two networks completely coincide*. Note again, though, that this does not entail that initiation into different religious cultures, for instance, seals off two people from each other. There *is* room for conversation.

The reflections pursued above begin to indicate the impasse between the alternatives of ‘individualism versus collectivism’. Spurred by the widespread predicament of Cartesian individualism, community-based accounts of reasoning and

their justification have recently come to the fore through what is sometimes called ‘social epistemology’. Yet, we should be reminded that *no* clear-cut definition of ‘social’ can be provided. To fully understand this point, we need to analyse the scope and limits of the notion of ‘standpoint’.

Indeed, it is a great step to raise awareness of particularities and contingencies that each society has by dismissing ‘a view from nowhere’ or ‘God’s eye view’ which potentially lends support to the currently dominant view. But what constitutes the definition of ‘each society’? This utterly depends on *standpoints* which themselves are constituted by a myriad of interests and concerns. With various standpoints, ‘society’ *arbitrarily* stretches, say, from non-Christian society to a particular Buddhist society. Just as the notion of standpoint is vulnerable, so that of society is vulnerable, to the extent that they *can* be defined *in whatever ways* in accordance with arbitrary interests and concerns.

This does not imply, nonetheless, that the notions of standpoint and society are completely useless. Wittgenstein’s ‘family resemblances’ illustrate this point. He suggests *not* detecting ‘something common’ in what we call ‘games’ or ‘members of a family’. Just because he says so, Wittgenstein is not claiming that game and family members are useless notions. What he draws attention to instead of something common is ‘a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail’ (Wittgenstein, 1998, § 66). A complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing is *enough*<sup>13</sup>; put the other way round, it is not necessary—presumably not possible—to specify and line-up the common characteristic traits of what we categorise as something like ‘game’ or ‘members of a family’. This insight of Wittgenstein’s applies to what we have discussed concerning standpoint and society. In short, indeed, it is impossible to neatly align and enumerate every standpoint or society, but nevertheless such standpoints and any given society clearly do have a *relative* but *substantial* effect. Therefore, for example, Indians, middle-class, women, Catholics, etc. all count as a standpoint. However, I need to hasten to confirm that a ‘standpoint’ can be defined only *arbitrarily* rather than neutrally. Thus, it is a matter of various interests and concerns how individual standpoints and societies come into focus.

Going back to our issue of concern, the point is that neither individual nor society is reducible to the other. Although I do not subscribe to ‘social epistemology’ of the sort I touched upon earlier, we are obviously no longer left with Cartesian individualism. It fails to expound, as mentioned earlier, the key point that one single individual cannot live *qua* a human without a social world which always already lies behind her.

In an early part of this essay, I wrote that part of recent philosophical scholarship shows a close alliance of philosophy with education. This line of philosophical argument can be summarised, I assert, as a growing awareness about the ‘social’ and ‘pragmatic’ dimensions of human knowledge. The view is well explained, for instance, by Richard Rorty in his introduction to Wilfrid Sellars’s philosophy: ‘*knowledge is inseparable from a social practice—the practice of justifying one’s assertions to one’s fellow-humans. It is not presupposed by this practice, but comes into being along with it*’ (Rorty, 1997, p. 4, my italics).<sup>14</sup> Knowledge is never divorced from social practices of justification to fellow-humans; but, it is by no means reduced to a determined set of social practices or conventions. This goes precisely to the heart of my argument in this paper. The view pursued here, if taken seriously, urges us to see the traditional outlook towards the relation between philosophy and education differently; that is, philosophy must in essence be seen to be interwoven with *educational* aspects. Paul Standish convincingly adverts to this point:

[F]orms of enquiry central to philosophy (into ethics, epistemology and metaphysics) themselves necessarily incorporate questions about learning and teaching: they ask questions not only about the nature of the good (for the individual and for society), but also about *how we become* virtuous; and not only about the nature of knowledge, but also about *how it is acquired*. In other words, these essentially educational questions of teaching and learning are not external matters to which the philosophy is applied, but internal to philosophy itself. (Standish, 2007, p. 162, italics in original)

This line of thinking reminds me of Quine’s favourite parable of Neurath’s boat: the *parable of the mariner who has to rebuild his boat while staying afloat in it* (Quine, 1988, p. 24, my italics). Quine appeals to this parable to stress that philosophy is part of science in the sense of no first philosophy outside of science. In contrast, I make appeal to this parable to emphasise that we are always already in our world which ‘socially’ and ‘pragmatically’ co-varies with rationality, normativity and justification. Assuming that our world is intrinsically normative, however, has yet to answer the more imperative question whether this has any implications for content, namely, how we should live or what education we should envisage. What I have attempted to do in this paper is to prepare the ground for further fruitful discussion about this.<sup>15</sup>

## Notes

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- <sup>1</sup> What I mean by ‘mainstream philosophy’, ‘academic philosophy’ and ‘general philosophy’ designates other philosophical areas—such as the philosophy of mind, language, science, etc—most of which are distinct from the philosophy of education insofar as they are taught in Departments of Philosophy. Note also that what I mean by ‘epistemology’ in this paper almost entirely coincides with the one in the Anglo-American analytical tradition.
- <sup>2</sup> The internalism and externalism distinction, reliabilism, virtue epistemology, feminist epistemology and many other theories typify this tendency.
- <sup>3</sup> These papers caused upheaval in the empiricist epistemological tradition of philosophy insofar as they putatively undermined traditional assumptions and formulations in the explanation of how we attain knowledge in philosophy: e.g. the Kantian distinction between analytic and synthetic statements and the Platonic account of knowledge—justified true belief—were damaged.
- <sup>4</sup> In addition to pragmatism, Siegel is critical of the later Wittgenstein’s view (which is also highly acknowledged in the philosophy of education circle, especially in the U.K.). Both of these run on the same track insofar as they are anti-Platonist to the effect that human knowledge is never legitimated from outside of the human cognitive domain. A close examination of Siegel’s aversion to the later Wittgenstein’s view is in progress in my ongoing doctoral thesis.
- <sup>5</sup> Insofar as Siegel sees justification as necessary, he opposes the idea of any naturalistic epistemology of the sort I touched upon earlier. For detailed discussion, see his ‘Naturalism and the Abandonment of Normativity’ (1996).
- <sup>6</sup> ‘It [the Rortian relativisation of knowledge] seems more widely accepted in education than it is within epistemology’ (Winch and Gingell, 2008, p. 75).
- <sup>7</sup> This description is, strictly, not accurate. For on the earth, there is neither name nor any category for understanding, say, what a stone is. By the same token, the earth is *not* even the mere collection of physical entities. For the idea of collection, for example, already presupposes something belonging to the world.
- <sup>8</sup> Robert Brandom insists, inspired by Hegel, that ‘[t]he study of natures itself [e.g. physics] has a history, and its own nature, if any, must be approached through the study of that history.’ (Brandom, 2000, p. 33); Putnam, elucidating the impossibility of science as purely naturalistic, argues that ‘[o]ur views on the nature of coherence and simplicity [which enable the conducting of science] are historically conditioned, just as our views on the nature of justice or goodness are.’ (Putnam, 1990, p. 138). It should not be considered, however, that these philosophers sign up for a thoroughgoing historicism.
- <sup>9</sup> There are at least three stages at which Putnam has deployed distinct views. Christopher Norris, calling the three Putnams Putnam 1, Putnam 2 and Putnam 3 respectively, describes Putnam 1 as a ‘strong causal-realist’, Putnam 2 as an ‘internal realist’ and Putnam 3 as a ‘commonsense’ realist (Norris, 2002, p. 25). I feel friendly towards Putnam 3, while Siegel towards Putnam 1.
- <sup>10</sup> Siegel recently professes his modification of the earlier view concerning the importance of rational justification and truth as aims of education. His sustained discussion with Israel Scheffler and Alvin Goldman urges Siegel to come to see that ‘both true belief and rational belief (and, relatedly, critical thinking) are rightly regarded as crucial epistemic aims of education’ (Siegel, 2005, p. 347). However, the

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problem of how rational justification and truth are to be mediated has yet to be defused. This is why the trouble, I think, still abides even in his present view.

- <sup>11</sup> I do not endorse any sort of foundationalism when it is defined as follows: ‘what all foundationalisms share in common is the belief that any adequate account of human knowledge must not only explain how our knowledge-claims about “the world” can be justified beyond all doubt, but also how we arrived at such an account of justification itself’ (Wachterhauser, 2002, pp. 68-9).
- <sup>12</sup> A total change in a basic web cannot be an immediate occurrence. In one place, Putnam says that ‘it is not clear what becomes of the concept of rationality itself when there is an epistemological catastrophe—catastrophe that comes to doubt *all* our past *counting*’ (Putnam, 1983, p. 125).
- <sup>13</sup> The notion of ‘family resemblances’ is not a panacea, however. Thus there remain opaque boundaries. For instance, some people might see romantic love as a game and others do not; and there might be a person who does not resemble any one of her family members. Nevertheless, these opaque boundaries are never an *a priori* red herring that precludes human communication.
- <sup>14</sup> I admit indeed I even argue that Rorty often goes too far. However, we should not throw out the baby with bath water. His views are, on many occasions, insightful though he sometimes, nay frequently, takes a further step, which is all too often both needless and bewildering. The quote I cite here is incisive unless it is interpreted as a form of linguistic idealism.
- <sup>15</sup> I am grateful to Jan Derry, Judith Suissa, Paul Standish and Nik Howard for helpful comments and discussions on the content of this paper. It should not be assumed, however, that anyone agrees with the final ideas presented in this paper. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Philosophy of Education Research Seminar at the Institute of Education, University of London, in November 2009. I thank the audience for their questions and comments.

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