Relational Goods and Educational Justice

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INTRODUCTION

In this article, I argue that education, which here I use interchangeably with formal education, is a social practice in which relational goods are realized. The relational normative standards that pertain to educational relationships and the institutional conditions of such relationships cannot be subsumed under comparative standards of distribution as part of a distributive account of educational justice. Furthermore, given that relational educational goods are a function of the social aims of education, the internal educational process, and the structural position of education, an account of educational justice must be attentive to their irreducibility and interrelation of extrinsic, intrinsic, and structural educational injustices.

DISTRIBUTIVE STANDARDS

Many contemporary accounts of educational justice defend distributive standards such as equality and adequacy as the right way to assess the relation between educational inputs (resources) and educational outputs (outcomes).[1] For example, an aim of educational policy is often taken to be the promotion of labor market outcomes, and educational systems are assessed as just insofar as they promote those outcomes in conformity with a standard of distributive justice such as equality or adequacy. I will call any account that is focused primarily on defending distributive standards in this way a distributive account of educational justice. Such accounts may defend different distributive standards: educational resources should be distributed equally so that differences in educational outcomes are a function of individual merit; adequately so that students are equipped for civic participation in the political sphere, the economy, and private life; on prioritarian terms so that the naturally least advantaged students have the best chance possible at a flourishing life.

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Such accounts of educational justice, to make such prescriptions about education, must also assume that it is possible to understand how education brings about educational goods according to the right distributive standard. Otherwise, the standards of distributive justice defended by such accounts would not be salient indicators of educational justice on the terms of the accounts, namely, as conducive to the educational outcomes that are thought to be a function of educational resources. Even if such an account includes other non-distributive standards of justice, the relationship of those standards with distributive principles must be clarified in order to avoid implicitly conceiving of education as a distributive mechanism.[2]

An account of educational justice should articulate the terms on which educational institutions are assessed. Such an account therefore ought to account for the social aims of education and its distinct institutional value; formal education is not a means to certain outcomes, nor an arm that serves other social institutions. For example, there is reason to think that other social institutions cannot reliably contribute to individual development in the ways that formal education does.[3] Education works through relationships, and the norms that shape educational practices are influential in shaping individuals' development in a more basic sense than the promotion of skills and learning outcomes. Individual development is also a matter of developing perspectives on oneself and on the social world one is a part of.[4] Formal education's influence over aspects of individuals' personality such as cognitive skills, motivation, the ability to participate in communities and political movements, and awareness of one's relations to others across diverse, global contexts, even has a bearing on the way that other social institutions are organized and the requirements for participation within institutional practices.[5]

So, although distributive outcomes, such as the adequate or equal attainment of educational credentials, are a concern of educational justice, educational practices are not merely a means to such ends and should not be assessed as such.[6] This is especially salient given that many practical discussions about educational policies and institutions center on resources and costs.[7] Although the distribution of educational resources is a concern of educational justice, the

justification of any standard of educational justice depends on its intersection with the extrinsic, intrinsic, and structural aspects of educational institutions—not merely its furtherance of outcomes. I shall argue below that relational standards of educational justice are better suited than distributive standards for engaging with such non-distributive facets of educational justice because they pertain to relational educational goods.

RELATIONAL GOODS

In this section, I distinguish between distributable and relational goods. Education is a social practice that works through the developing and sustaining of relationships; some of the goods of education are relational and thus not distributable. Furthermore, some standards of educational justice pertain to the relational goods made available within formal education.

Ice cream is a distributable good. If we have five people in a room and a quart of ice cream, we can distribute a part of the quart to each person. Once it is distributed, it becomes possessed by each person, and it is possible to redistribute the ice cream after the original distribution. We can formulate comparative standards of justice to articulate how the ice cream should be distributed and decide when the distribution has reached that standard of justice. Perhaps every person should get an equal amount; or we should prioritize the hungriest person, or the most deserving person. It is possible to distribute the ice cream in a way that satisfies such comparative standards, or to use a procedure in order to satisfy those standards. We could therefore realize some state of affairs that is normatively justified on comparative terms—for example, a state of affairs in which everyone is equally well-off, or adequately so, or equally able to earn and enjoy a lot of ice cream.

Authority, on the other hand, is a relational good.[8] Insofar as one has authority, one exercises and benefits from it in relationships. Authority does not exist independently from an interaction between two people and it is implicated with other interpersonally recognized features in a relationship, such as one's gender or social status.[9] As something that individuals recognize and respond to in their relationships, authority influences what the relationship is like, and how

they may benefit from being in the relationship. Whether authority is conducive, for example, to educational goals depends on how it is exercised and the particular needs of students. In an educational relationship, the authority exercised by teachers and students can empower students, belittle them, motivate them, challenge them, or support them—all of which have further implications for those students' development in that relationship and in future relationships.[10] Even if one could try to distribute authority, for example, by equally distributing roles and responsibilities among people, this is still different from "giving" authority to them because whether the authority is actually equally shared among those people depends on the shared recognition of authority among them in their relationships. Furthermore, authority is interpersonally meaningful and beneficial in ways that are impossible to simply distribute.

Authority contrasts with ice cream, then, because ice cream can be distributed to people who passively accept it according to different distributive standards. Each person can possess different amounts of ice cream (for better or for worse), this distribution can be recreated among many different relationships, and the possession of the ice cream can subsist regardless of changes in those relationships. Authority, on the other hand, is a relational good that one only possesses as part of relationships. It thus cannot be distributed to people separately as passive receivers removed from their relationship and its substantive social context. How one "possesses" authority will differ across relationships, and changes in those relationships will affect relations of authority within them. Some people may have more authority than others, and this may be better for them, but it is not possible to redistribute authority in the way that ice cream is redistributed. If there are ways to change the "distribution" of authority in any given relationship, doing so is a relational matter that is contingent on substantive features of that relationship's context and the people within it.

So, the relational goods arising, and made available, within different relations of authority—its motivational force, its role in personal development, its support of social order—differ from goods that could be distributed independent of such relationships. The normative standards we use to assess the availability of relational and distributive goods should be sensitive to such

differences, moreover. Because each person possesses part of the ice cream individually, we can make sense of a distributive standard that tells us how much ice cream each person should possess. Such a standard will be comparative in nature because it compares the possession of different persons. In comparative terms, I can get more or less ice cream than another, and adjusting distributions might make the state of affairs more or less just.

Misapplying comparative standards to a relational good such as authority, however, misconstrues the goods of authority as things that individuals possess separately and that can be redistributed among them. It is possible to compare different relationships and judge that one relationship has a better authority relation than the other according to some normative ideal, but this comparison could not serve as the basis for "redistributing" authority between different relationships. Authority cannot be given to any one person as a passive recipient because it only exists within relationships, and how individuals will experience and benefit from authority depends on substantive features of the relationship, its aims, and its context.

The standards of assessment that are implied by relational goods are relational standards of interaction and the institutional conditions of these of interactions; such relational normative standards do not prescribe a certain outcome that conforms to comparative standards of distribution. Relational standards, for example, call for relating to another person in a certain way, such as on terms of respect.[11] Such a relational standard is justified on grounds other than its usefulness for promoting distributive outcomes. Self-respect is a way of viewing oneself as a person with rights and responsibilities towards others. Insofar as every person is entitled to the good of self-respect, they are entitled to be treated with respect by others and to have this institutionally sanctioned with laws and rights; they are entitled to certain kinds of relations with others that are the condition of them coming to respect themselves, and to exercise the value of respect in relation with others.

Formal education does in some ways produce comparative, measurable goods: credentials, skills, behavioral habits, and cognitive abilities can be possessed by individuals independent of their relationships with others. Insofar

as those goods depend on resources, moreover, we can justify different educational resource distributions according to comparative standards. But there are relational goods that arise within educational relationships: self-confidence and self-esteem,[12] as well as the abilities to empathize,[13] trust,[14] provide and respond to reasons,[15] communicate and listen to others effectively,[16] and relate meaningfully with others.[17] These relational goods, which often take the form of dispositions and interpersonal skills, are something that individuals themselves develop, but they develop them in relation with others and the value of their exercise is grounded in relationships.

So, since formal education has an influential bearing on individual development, and this is a distinctive aim of educational institutions within a just society, educational justice needs to account not only for the comparative goods of distributive justice, but also for relational normative demands. Individual development into one's stance as a person cannot be divided up and allocated; it rather entails the realization and exercise of relational goods. The relationships made available within educational institutions, and the terms on which such relationships proceed, influence individuals' development within those institutions. Distributive standards, which are comparative in nature, do not apply to the relational goods of educational practices. The value of a relational good, and what it is, is intricately bound up with the relationship in which it arises and is not possessable independent of that context. Hence, standards of educational justice should not only be articulated in comparative terms as they apply to the distributable goods of education because such relational goods are an important part of what education does and should do.

INTRINSIC, EXTRINSIC, AND STRUCTURAL INJUSTICES

Above, I argued that educational justice must account for the value of relational educational goods. In this section, I argue that such relational educational goods are a function of the social (extrinsic) aims of education, the internal (intrinsic) educational process, and the structural position (social context) of education. Given that these three considerations have a bearing on the kinds of relational goods that are made available to individuals within formal edu-

cation, educational justice therefore must be sensitive to the irreducibility and interdependence of extrinsic, intrinsic, and structural injustices.

The social aims of education include things such as labor market outcomes, civic competencies, and cognitive skills. Educational policies are often designed to promote such aims. Although education does serve a number of instrumental ends which may be an essential part of a just society, not all educational aims are extrinsically justified, and educational institutions do not merely exist to serve other institutions' aims. To the contrary, the realization of intrinsic educational aims has a bearing on the nature of other social institutions, how individuals interact in them,[18] and, for example, whether individuals can support inclusivity as participants in diverse communities.[19] It is an extrinsic injustice if extrinsic aims are imposed on educational institutions a means for outcomes that compete with students' educational development and other intrinsic aims of education. For example, insofar as testing is used to satisfy extrinsic aims by sorting students into career paths in a way that impedes educational aims, the imposition of testing on a school is an extrinsic injustice.[20] This is the case even if having a testing regime would lead to more egalitarian socioeconomic outcomes; students could become better earners by becoming more passive, obedient, and less focused on the pursuit of subjects that they find intrinsically valuable and interesting.

Furthermore, there are intrinsic educational injustices when the internal aspects of educational practices impede educational aims. The internal educational process itself includes all the aspects of educational relationships, classrooms, and school structures that are explicitly, and implicitly, a part of the educational process. Understanding the intrinsic features of educational practices that are compromised by testing requires engagement with the internal aspects of testing. The imposition of testing is an intrinsic injustice insofar as this puts teachers and students in the roles of test score maximizers, which in turn disrupts the educational development of students, the flexibility of teaching, and the extent to which the curriculum is conducive to skills, experiences, and forms of knowledge not served well by testing. These internal effects on education, moreover, are not reducible to, even if they are interdependent with,

the ways that the imposition of testing is justified in terms of extrinsic aims. Education provides conditions of self-development and the acquisition of autonomy, the ability to express oneself, and the abilities to empathize, learn, and reason with others, for example. Even if such development is extrinsically valuable, and conducive to extrinsic aims, it is intrinsically important for education, too, and it is not merely a function of educational resources.

Apart from one another, moreover, intrinsic or extrinsic injustices may also be implicated with structural educational injustices. The structural position of education includes the larger social context in which such formal education takes place, and the features of that context—cultural diversity, economic structures such as an industrialized market economy, and social challenges such as poverty, racism, and sexism. Injustices within the larger social structure can become manifest within an educational institution and constrain the internal aspects of educational practices. For example, the inability of teachers to relate to and motivate their students could be a manifestation of cultural, class, and racial segregation within society, and a school's adherence to gender norms could stem from and reinforce gender inequalities.[21] If testing as a tracking device is used to sort students along class lines, it can also reinforce injustices faced by already disadvantaged groups of students.[22] Although structural injustices can be implicated with the imposition of extrinsic aims that, say, correspond to the aims of one dominant social class, and are manifest within the internal aspects of educational practices, structural injustices are not reducible to extrinsic aims nor internal features of education. Nor are the relational manifestations of the structural position of formal education themselves merely a function of how educational resources are distributed.

An example can help to further illustrate the irreducibility and inter-dependence of such injustices. In school, Sarah does not learn how to read at a high level despite her potential to and her interest in reading. This is impedes her access to many relational goods of education, such as increased self-esteem, the ability to read more books and discuss them with others, satisfaction at having reached this goal, and motivation to pursue more educational goals. This is an extrinsic injustice if it results from an institutional focus on teaching content

on standardized tests that are designed to further students' extrinsic economic aims. This is an intrinsic injustice if it is due to a lack of internal school opportunities for students to develop and pursue their interests in reading together. It is a structural injustice, too, if the teacher was unable to reach Sarah because of class barriers between them, or if the school is set up to treat working class students who don't have job prospects that require high levels of reading as if they should not work on such a skill. There may also be structural barriers that keep her parents from influencing what happens in the school and communicating with teachers about her needs. All of this may also be implicated with issues of structural racism within the society at large, and the perpetuation of racial inequalities through educational policies.

Addressing one of the injustices would not automatically solve the others. If an account of educational justice only assesses extrinsic injustices, it can overlook intrinsic injustices. If someone happens to get a high paying job despite not having their interest in reading supported within school, there is still an intrinsic injustice. If a school uses a harsh regime of punishment to motivate low-income students to achieve educational outcomes, but thereby reinforces rigid class differences in access to other intrinsic educational aims such as the development of self-respect and personal autonomy over one's own educational goals, a structural injustice is reinforced despite extrinsic economic successes. If a student develops into their own interests and does not happen to gain a lot of money in the labor market, there may be an intrinsic success that should not be overlooked for the purposes of addressing what may be an extrinsic injustice.

Such injustices are also interdependent; they work together and reinforce one another. Sarah may lack motivation to learn how to read at a high level if she is unable to relate to her teachers in a meaningful way, or if she is thought to lack the job prospects that others do because of her class, gender, or race. Her development as a person, her self-esteem, and personal interests, may be stunted by such structural injustices, especially if her other classmates suffer from such injustices, as well. Institutionally, such barriers to intrinsic educational goals may be exacerbated by the teacher's requirement to meet mandated standardized testing goals that are extrinsically justified as a way to match students to educa-

tional and career paths. Because of this, Sarah may not even be able to participate in the economy to her fullest potential. The interdependence of these injustices is manifest within the relationships, policies, and practices within the school. The barriers to Sarah's educational development are social, institutional, and structural all at once; they are not merely a function of resource distributions. This is because educational development happens through relationships, and those relationships are shaped by extrinsic, intrinsic, and structural factors. The relationships among students, and between teachers and students, are shaped by the actions and judgements of those within those relationships, as well as the substantive context of those relationships, and the policies that apply to them in their institution. The nature of those relationships is affected by resource distributions within the educational institution, but the effects of those distributions do not determine how those relationships will be, nor whether individuals can, or will, live up to relational normative standards. Comparative justice, in focusing on distributable educational goods, hence cannot capture the irreducibility and interdependence of extrinsic, intrinsic, and structural injustices as they are manifest within such relationships. Accounts that articulate educational justice fundamentally in distributive terms will obscure the non-comparative, relational facets of education that should be part of an account of educational justice given their role in supporting the intrinsic aims of education, such as individuals' development.

Relational justice is better equipped than comparative justice to capture the irreducibility and interdependence of such injustices. Relational justice articulates not how to obtain the right distribution between people, but how to bring about the right relations among them. In education, this requires an articulation of educational aims in particular (e.g. individual development), how they are separate from other institutional goals such as economic success, what intrinsic normative standards are justified within educational practices to support such aims, and how these are in tension with other aspects of the world such as structural inequalities that constrain the choices of individuals. If education reaches distributive outcomes, it does so at least in part through relationships within a substantive social context.[23] Yet we cannot redistribute

meaningful relationships, experiences, an optimistic mindset, and motivation to pursue goals between individual students. Furthermore, redistributing educational resources to address one problem, such as an extrinsic injustice, will not necessarily address the other injustices that are present and that separately contribute to the extrinsic injustice. In fact, there is the potential to worsen other injustices by focusing on one at a time and using distributive standards to redistribute resources, or change educational methods, without paying attention to the ways that educators, parents, and students actually make use of such resources or methods in substantive social contexts.

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1 For defenses of distributive standards of educational justice, see: Harry Brighouse, *School Choice and Social Justice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Harry Brighouse, "Educational Equality and Justice," in *A Companion to the Philosophy of Education*, ed. Randall Curren, 471–86 (Malden: Blackwell, 2003); Amy Gutmann, *Democratic Education* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987); Elizabeth Anderson, "Fair Opportunity in Education: A Democratic Equality Perspective," *Ethics* 117, no. 4 (2007): 595–622; Debra Satz, "Equality, Adequacy and Education for Citizenship," *Ethics* 117, no. 4 (2007): 623–48; Gina Schouten, "Fair Educational Opportunity and the Distribution of Natural Ability: Toward a Prioritarian Principle of Educational Justice," *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 46, no. 3 (2012): 472–91; Gina Schouten and Harry Brighouse, "The Relationship Between Philosophy and Evidence in Education," *Theory and Research in Education* 13, no. 1 (2014): 1–18; Harry Brighouse and Adam Swift, "Educational Equality Versus Educational Adequacy: A Critique of Anderson and Satz," *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 26, no. 2 (2009): 117–28.

2 In this article I do not defend at length the claim that contemporary accounts (such as those in note 1) do have a tendency to treat education as a distributive mechanism; elsewhere, I have engaged with this claim at greater length. See: Jenn Dum, "Ends, Principles, and Causal Explanation in Educational Justice," *Ethics and Education* 12, no. 2 (2017): 184–200.

3 I have elaborated on this elsewhere in Jenn Dum and Robert Guay, "Hegel and Honneth's Theoretical Deficit: Education, Social Freedom and the Institutions of Modern Life," *Hegel Bulletin* 38, no. 2 (2017): 293–317.

4 E.g., Kohlberg, Lawrence, and Rochelle Mayer, "Development as the Aim of Education," *Harvard Educational Review* 42, no .4 (1972): 442–96; Patricia Gurin, Eric L. Dey, Sylvia Hurtado, and Gerald Gurin, "Diversity and Higher Education: Theory and Impact on Educational Outcomes," *Harvard Educational Review* 72, no. 3 (2002): 330–66; Del Franco, Nicoletta, "Aspirations and Self-Hood: Exploring The Meaning of Higher Secondary Education for Girl College Students In Rural Bangladesh," in *Migration, Education, and Socio-Economic Mobility*, ed. Nitya Rao, 11–30 (London: Routledge, 2012); Nitya Rao, "Aspiring for Distinction: Gendered Educational Choices in

an Indian Village," in *Migration, Education, and Socio-Economic Mobility*, ed. Nitya Rao, 31–48 (London: Routledge, 2012).
5 See: David Baker, *The Schooled Society: The Educational Transformation of Global Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014); David Kamens, "The Expanding Polity: Theorizing the Links between Expanded Higher Education and the New Politics of the Post-1970s," *American Journal of Education* 116, no. 2 (2009): 99–124; Dum and Guay, "Hegel and Honneth's Theoretical Deficit."
6 See note 2.
7 E.g., Gene Glass Berliner, et al., "Money Doesn't Matter!," in *50 Myths & Lies That Threaten America's Public Schools* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2014); Laura Mazzoli Smith, Liz Todd, and Karen Laing, "Students' Views on Fairness in Education: The Importance of Relational Justice and Stakes Fairness," *Research Papers in Education* (Mar 2017), https://doi.org/10.1080/02671522.2017.1302500; Susan L. Robertson and Roger Dale, "The Social Justice Implications of Privatisation in Education Governance Frameworks: A Relational Account," *Oxford Review of Education* 39, no. 4 (2013): 426–45.
8 Charles Bingham, *Authority is Relational* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2008).
9 E.g., Sharon Lamb, "Toward a Sexual Ethics Curriculum: Bringing Philosophy and Society to Bear on Individual Development," *Harvard Educational Review* 80, no. 1 (2010): 81–141; Hana Kawai, Emily Taylor, "The Work Children Do: Unpacking Gendered Conflict in an Elementary Classroom," *Harvard Educational Review* 81, no. 4 (2011): 646–786.
10 E.g., Gill Rutherford, "Doing Right by Teacher Aides, Students with Disabilities, and Relational Social Justice," *Harvard Educational Review* 81, no. 1 (2011): 95–151; Luo Yun, Zhong Jingxun, and Zeng Rongguang, "An Examination of Distributive and Relational Justice in the Issue of Education Fairness for Urban Migrant Workers' Children," *Chinese Education & Society* 50 (2017): 368–92.
11 Anthony Laden, "Learning to be Equal: Just Schools as Schools of Justice," in *Education, Justice, and Democracy*, eds. Danielle Allen and Rob Reich, 62–79 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).
12 Axel Honneth, *Freedom's Right: The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, trans. Joseph Ganahl (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).
13 Chris Lebron, "Thoughts on Racial Democratic Education and Moral Virtue," Theory and Research in Education 13, no. 2 (2015): 155–14.
14 Danielle Allen, *Talking to Strangers: Anxieties of Citizenship since Brown v. Board of Education* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004).
15 Gutmann, *Democratic Education*.
16 Laden, "Learning to be Equal."
17 Randall Curren, "Judgement and the Aims of Education," *Social Philosophy and Policy* 31, no. 1 (2014): 36–59.
18 See note 5.
19 Anderson, "Fair Opportunity"; Elizabeth Anderson, *The Imperative of Integration* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010); Meira Levinson, *No Citizen Left Behind* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014); Melissa Williams, "Citizenship as Identity, Citizenship as Shared Fate, and the Functions of Multicultural Education,"

in *Citizenship and Education in Liberal-Democratic Societies*, eds. Kevin McDonough and Walter Feinberg (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).
20 I am drawing off of a similar discussion of testing in Dum, "Ends, Principles, and Causal Explanation."
21 Berliner, et al., "Teachers in Schools that Serve the Poor are Not Very Talented," and "Education Will Lift the Poor out of Poverty and Materially Enrich our Entire Nation," in *50 Myths & Lies*.
22 Iris Marion Young, "Education in the Context of Structural Injustice: A Symposium Response,"
Educational Philosophy and Theory 38, no. 1 (2006): 93–103.
23 This is elaborated on in Dum, "Ends, Principles, and Causal Explanation," as well as in the sources in
note 10.