An Ameliorative Analysis of the Concept of Education

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Abstract

Ameliorative analysis is a powerful new approach to understanding concepts, stemming from cutting edge work at the intersection of philosophy of language, philosophy of mind and metaphysics. It offers the potential to improve our understanding of a range of subject matters. One topic to which it has not yet been applied is the concept of education. Doing so can enhance our understanding of this vital subject matter and, in particular, help in the push for educational justice. While philosophers and policymakers alike have preferred a broad understanding of education that encompasses many aspects of human development, ameliorative considerations favour a narrower concept, tightly connected to formal schooling. This is because effective pursuit of an egalitarian agenda requires education working alongside a range of other welfare priorities, and it is important that our concept of education does not muddy the waters or undermine other aspects of the pursuit of justice.

Keywords

Educational justice, political philosophy, philosophy of language, metaphysics, ameliorative analysis, conceptual engineering

1. Introduction

Ameliorative analysis is a powerful new approach to understanding concepts, stemming from cutting edge work at the intersection of philosophy of language, philosophy of mind and metaphysics. It offers the potential to improve our understanding of a range of subject matters. One topic to which it has not yet been applied is the concept of education. Doing so can enhance our understanding of this vital subject matter and, in particular, help in the push for educational justice.

Ameliorative analysis of concepts provides a methodology capable of offering a way out of the internalism-externalism dichotomy that has gripped analytic philosophy since, at least, Kripke's (1972) *Naming and Necessity*. Instead of relying on ordinary language intuitions or the

presence of natural kinds, this approach looks to what normative goals we are trying to achieve with a concept and searches for the account that allows us to best meet these goals. It is relevant here, as the concept of education is clearly of great normative significance, especially for those of us committed to pursuing egalitarian goals. Ameliorative analysis allows us to refine our understanding of education so as to pursue egalitarian justice most effectively.

This article will begin by offering an explanation and rationale for ameliorative analysis in general. It will then argue that the concept of education, in particular, is a good candidate for such an analysis. Next, we will look at how previous philosophical accounts of education bear on our analysis. Finally, we'll outline and defend the preferred account – a *narrow* institution-focused concept of education. While philosophers and policymakers alike have preferred a broad understanding of education that encompasses many aspects of human development, ameliorative considerations favour a narrower concept, tightly connected to formal schooling. This is because effective pursuit of an egalitarian agenda requires education working alongside a range of other welfare priorities, and it is important that our concept of education does not muddy the waters or undermine other aspects of the pursuit of justice.

2. Ameliorative Analysis

When giving an account of a concept, recent analytic philosophy has, to paint with a broad brush, looked to one of two competing methodologies: internalist conceptual analysis or externalist naturalism.[1] According to conceptual analysis, a concept's meaning is determined by the various ideas we, the concept's users, associate with it. In general, many ideas we associate with a concept may only be implicit or may even be in tension with each other. The process of conceptual analysis, therefore, requires making all these ideas explicit and weighing them against each other, often by means of elaborate thought experiments. The correct account of a concept is the one that allows us to reach *reflective equilibrium* by balancing competing intuitive judgements in an optimal manner.[2]

On an externalist account, concept meaning is not determined by user intuitions; instead, it depends on empirical factors. In particular, it's often thought that it is the natural kinds out there in the world that determine meaning. The process of understanding a concept is, therefore, more a matter of scientific investigation than introspection.[3] It's also possible to adopt a view

somewhere between these two extremes, such that a concept's meaning is determined in part by the ideas we associate with it, and in part by the natural kinds it is connected to.[4]

Granted, this sketch is extremely rough, and elides a great many significant distinctions between the many theories of concept meaning that have been proposed in recent years, but it will suffice for the goal of drawing a contrast with ameliorative analysis. The key point is that both kinds of approach, at least on the surface, assign meaning through a value neutral process. The mechanism a theorist employs for weighting concept users' intuitions or associating a concept with a natural kind is not meant to be affected by the theorist's own moral beliefs.[5]

For many concepts, though, what their meaning turns out to be may have significant moral *consequences*. We can see this by looking at one of the examples most discussed by ameliorative theorists: the concept of *woman*. What it is to be a woman is of great importance – both in terms of how those classified as women are treated, and who is included in the category.

A traditional version of conceptual analysis leaves us at the mercy of the prejudices of the general population. If a majority of the population associate being a woman with traditional feminine activities such as motherhood and domestic work, then, on this account, that's what being a woman amounts to. On a traditional externalist account, the meaning is determined by what natural kind, if any, is appropriately correlated with the concept. In both cases, we could be forced to adopt a concept that is an impediment to the pursuit of justice, both in terms of its intension and extension. With regard to intension, conceptual analysis attaches reactionary ideas about gender role to the concept, while the externalist account ignores the social and political component of womanhood entirely. Both also threaten to entail an extension of the concept that misclassifies various people – for example, trans-people or those whose behaviour does not conform to a traditional gender role.

Ameliorative Analysis provides a way out of this dilemma, by tying meaning to normative considerations *directly*. Its proponents argue that the concept philosophers should aim to first identify and then use is the one that best fits with their normative project. For example, feminist philosophers aim to oppose injustice faced by women, and so they should adopt a concept of woman that best aids this goal. As Haslanger herself puts it:

> *Ameliorative* projects, in contrast [to traditional approaches], begin by asking: What is the point of having the concept in question; for example, why do we have a concept of knowledge or a concept of belief? What concept (if any) would do the work best?... those

> pursuing an ameliorative approach might reasonably represent themselves as providing an account of our concept—or perhaps the concept we are reaching for—by enhancing our conceptual resources to serve our (critically examined) purposes. (Haslanger 2012, p 386)

Building off Haslanger's work, Jenkins provides a concise statement of how to apply this general ameliorative method to the concept of woman, "An ameliorative inquiry into the concept of woman invites feminists to consider what concept of woman would be most useful in combatting gender injustice" (Jenkins 2016 p. 395). To get a fuller sense of ameliorative analysis, it's worth seeing it in action, so we will look at how Haslanger reasons about gender, and the account that it leads her to:

> Given the priority I place on concerns with justice and sexual inequality, I take the primary motivation for distinguishing sex from gender to arise in the recognition that males and females do not only differ physically, but also systematically differ in their social positions. What is of concern, to put it simply, is that societies, on the whole, privilege individuals with male bodies… societies have found many ways—some ingenious, some crude—to control and exploit the sexual and reproductive capacities of females. The main strategy of materialist feminist accounts of gender has been to define gender in terms of women's subordinate position in systems of male dominance (Haslanger 2012 p. 229)
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> S *is a woman* iff df S is systematically subordinated along some dimension (economic, political, legal, social, etc.), and S is "marked" as a target for this treatment by observed or imagined bodily features presumed to be evidence of a female's biological role in reproduction. (Haslanger 2012 p. 230)[6]

It is worth noting the surprising nature of this account; one might expect ameliorative analysis to lead a concept of woman that emphasizes the traits feminists want women to exemplify, but instead it defines womanhood in terms of oppression. As the quoted passage indicates, and Haslanger's wider work argues at length, a more systematic analysis of the current state of injustice reveals that progress requires an honest reckoning with the current state of affairs. For this, we need a better understanding of women's subordinate role in our social hierarchy, which leads to the proposed definition. This point is worth emphasizing since a related pattern of reasoning will emerge when we turn to education.

The foregoing discussion should give a sense for how the ameliorative approach works in practice. It is important to note that this is not intended as a comprehensive defence of the legitimacy of the methodology – as it has been provided ably elsewhere. It should be noted that some theorists are sceptical of ameliorative analysis, with many arguing that it fails to present a new analysis of the target concept and instead inadvertently changes the subject, potentially resulting in mere 'verbal disputes' (Deutsch 2020, Knoll 2020). For a response to this, as well as the works already cited, see in particular Cappelen's (2020) "master argument" for a theoretical justification.

This paper will also remain neutral on a number of issues as to how ameliorative analysis relates to other issues in philosophy: particularly, whether it is *revolutionary*, offering a new meaning to work with; *evolutionary*, modifying the existing meaning; or even *conservative*, uncovering an already existing meaning.[7] The answer to such questions depends in part on the broader question of internalism vs externalism for concepts. Part of the appeal of the ameliorative approach is that we don't have to wait on these decades long debates to resolve themselves, and can press on with the philosophical work relevant to pursuing justice regardless.

We are assuming that ameliorative analysis is a valid methodology; however, this does not mean it is universally applicable. For example, it doesn't seem likely there is a substantive ameliorative account of our concept of *hydrogen*: the scientific account is clear, and there do not appear to be any relevant normative goals that would be served by modifying it. A central goal in this paper is to show that the concept of *education*, specifically, is in need of ameliorative analysis, before offering an account of what such an analysis might look like.

3. The Concept of Education

Education itself has great moral and political significance – it is an essential component of a just society and of an individual's development. What we need to show is the additional claim that the *concept* of education is also of such significance, so that ameliorative analysis is required. If the correct account of the concept of education was straightforward and beyond dispute, there might be no normative traction to be found in analysing the concept – with all the action located instead in the first order analysis of education policy and practice. The following discussion will show that this is not the case.

A first point to note is that neither of the traditional methodologies yield a clear-cut analysis of the concept of education, at least on a first pass. With regard to conceptual analysis, our intuitions about the application of the concept of education are muddled and contradictory. First, there are various metaphysical categories we may be referring to: discrete educational *events* – either individual psychological events or social events involving, for example, teacher and student; alternatively, we may mean education as a longer *process* or part of someone's life as a whole – we often talk about "my education" in the singular; finally, we also talk about education as a *political institution* – "the education system".

These are, of course, related uses rather than homonyms, but we need to decide which of them is prior and which derivative. For example, we might take individual educational experiences as prior, and derive the concept of an education system as simply being the set of institutions in which such experiences take place. Alternatively, we might take the education system as prior, and understand educational experiences as simply being whatever psychological events occur within the system. It's not intuitively clear which is the correct option here.

A further, somewhat related, ambiguity concerns the *scope* of the concept of education – is its range of application broad or narrow? One can employ a broad concept of education such that any learning experience is educational. It is intuitive in natural language to describe any instance in which you learn something of sufficient importance as an "educational experience". This can be extended so that education includes almost all aspects of human development. As Rousseau puts it in *Emile*: "All that we have not at our birth, and that we need when grown up, is given us by education" (Rousseau 1892 p 12). Narrower applications, by contrast, are tied to formal educational institutions – we commonly use the term "education" to refer to a person's schooling, and, in general, there seems a particularly tight conceptual association between education and schools. These intuitive patterns of use appear inconsistent. Perhaps a sufficiently sophisticated conceptual analysis can resolve this, but current usage seems highly indeterminate.

If we turn to the externalist approach, things do not become any clearer. The key question is what *level* of natural kind we are looking for. The concept is not going to refer to a perfectly natural kind from logic or fundamental physics.[8] Instead it would have to pick out a *relatively* natural kind from a higher level of explanation.[9] It could be a psychological kind, or it could be a social kind.[10] Both somewhat track with our usage. It's not clear, though, whether one level is more natural than the other or if there is a single determinate candidate for reference in either

case – for example, if we were looking for a psychological kind to identify with educational experience, we'd have to decide which out of the whole range of psychological states associated with knowledge acquisition to include.

We see then that when working with a traditional methodology, there is a lot of indeterminacy and confusion about the concept of education. This is bad for achieving political goals even if we remain ideologically neutral. It's hard to create effective education policy when we are unclear what areas of policy education includes. For a start, we need to be able to carve out a specific role in domestic policy to be overseen by the department of education. There is a case, therefore, for using ameliorative methods to get a precise definition of education on purely technocratic grounds.

This paper, though, is not intended to remain ideologically neutral. Instead, we will adopt an egalitarian perspective, committed to fighting poverty and inequality, and look at how the concept of education relates to the goals of this framework. The indeterminacy discussed above leads to some particularly problematic consequences for egalitarians. It invites a reactionary line of argument that we'll refer to as *the pernicious equivocation*. The argument proceeds by identifying a social problem to which education in a broad sense is a natural place to find a solution, but then restricts attention to a narrow definition when specifying what such a solution might be.

If one looks at almost any disadvantage currently faced by particular social groups in adulthood – be it regarding finance, health, or social standing – the solution to ensuring future generations fare better lies in education in the broad sense, almost by definition. If the relevant advantage is not something that people are born with then, according to this conception, whether they acquire it in adulthood is necessarily down to their education. Crucially, though, under the definition we are working with in this line of argument, changing education could involve changes to healthcare, housing, or family income, since these all have a significant role in human development.

In practice, however, once the problem has been identified as concerning education, permissible solutions are restricted to schooling reforms. In this way, the possibility of improving the prospects of disadvantaged children through, for example, expanding welfare is taken off the table without ever being discussed. One notable example of this phenomenon, which makes clear the non-hypothetical practical stakes, is found in then President Barack

Obama's (2011) famous speech in Osawatomie, Kansas. His primary concern here is to address the lack of economic opportunity for Americans growing up in low-income households, restoring, as he puts it "the promise that's at the very heart of America: that this is a place where you can make it if you try… that in this country, even if you're born with nothing, work hard and you can get into the middle class."

To achieve this goal, Obama focuses on education: "[Rebuilding the middle class] starts by making education a national mission… Investing in things like education that give everybody a chance to succeed." The claim that education "gives everybody a chance to succeed" might be acceptable on a broad conception of education, but Obama's specifics are all focused on schooling:

> [W]e shouldn't be laying off good teachers right now -- we should be hiring them. (Applause.) We shouldn't be expecting less of our schools –- we should be demanding more. (Applause.) We shouldn't be making it harder to afford college -- we should be a country where everyone has a chance to go…It will require parents to get more involved in their children's education. It will require students to study harder. (Applause.) It will require some workers to start studying all over again.

Similar claims about education are made by other prominent politicians.[11] In addition, the promise of education is extoled by a range of influential think tanks.[12] However, there is good reason to think that schooling reform alone is insufficient to achieve egalitarian goals and that a broad range of welfare expansions is necessary. Though this form of argument has particular prominence in the United States, it is of concern for egalitarians everywhere. We will say more about the forms this argument can take and why it can be so powerful below.

Given this discussion, we are now in a position to state precisely the criteria for an ameliorative account of education. The account is underpinned by a commitment to egalitarian goals. In particular, the need to significantly reduce inequality and ensure no one is in poverty – so that everyone receives a sufficient minimum of material comforts including food, housing and healthcare – as a requirement of justice.[13] Our concept of education as it stands in everyday usage has been used as a tool to undermine effective policies to fight inequality and poverty. We've shown that the problem, in part, stems from an indeterminacy between broad and narrow scope. This motivates conducting ameliorative analysis to fix the indeterminacy. Our task, therefore, is to decide whether a broad or a narrow concept of education is better suited to

bringing about egalitarian conditions for justice. Of particular significance is ensuring our concept of education allows us to resist the pernicious equivocation and to fit education policy effectively within an egalitarian agenda.[14]

4. Existing Philosophical Accounts

Though previous philosophical accounts of education have not employed ameliorative analysis, they still provide an important starting point for our work. They are not, in general, articulate about their methodological commitments; however, they are not working with a traditional internalist or externalist approach, and are guided by the kinds of normative considerations that are relevant to amelioration, as we will see below.

One striking feature of philosophical accounts of education is that they have tended to be extremely broad in scope, from Plato onwards. In *The Republic*, Plato outlines his program of education for members of his ideal society, which involves state control of virtually every aspect of citizens' lives from birth until old age (for the Guardian ruling elite, at least). This includes requiring that the stories told to children by their nurses meet strict moral standards, as well as subjecting youths to extreme psychological hardship to test their resolve.[15]

We've already mentioned Rousseau's commitment to a broad understanding of education, and similar ideas are defended by Locke, who states: "Of all the men we meet with, nine parts of ten are what they are, good or evil, useful or not, by their education. It is that which makes the great difference in mankind… [T]he difference to be found in the manners and abilities of men is owing more to their education than to anything else." (Locke 1970 §1,32) Going one step further, Dewy argues that education is virtually indistinguishable from life itself, stating that "living has its own intrinsic quality and that the business of education is with that quality." (Dewey 1916 p. 78)

This approach is also the norm in contemporary philosophical accounts. R.S. Peters, perhaps the theorist most dedicated to applying the tools of analytic philosophy to our understanding of education, was committed to embracing an expansive account of education, in line with that of his predecessors. He advocates a notion closely tied to that of *child rearing* and claims education is responsible for producing a *cultivated* person. (Peters 1970)[16]

Why are philosophical accounts of education so broad? As mentioned above, the authors are not explicit about their methodology, so we have to do some rational reconstruction. Aside

from a couple of places that draw upon conceptual analysis,[17] for the most part their motivation is normative. Though they differ greatly in their details, philosophical accounts of education tend to be teleological in nature. Roughly speaking, they start by looking at the *aims* of education, then work backwards to discover what practices or experiences are required to achieve these aims and include all such practices and experiences as aspects of education. In general, what is required to meet the proposed aims of education extends far beyond the confines of the classroom. Therefore, this kind of teleological approach favours broad accounts.

According to accounts of this nature, the aim of education is to bring about some benefit, either for the individual being educated, or for society in general. Plato and Aristotle understood the aim of education in terms of the good of the state. For Plato, this meant testing citizens to identify the role in the state they were best suited for and training them to excel in this role. Most importantly, the goal was to produce the best possible rulers, or 'Guardians' of the state.

In contemporary work, many philosophers claim that education should aim to create an *equitable* society. Brighouse and Swift (2009) argue that education must aim to provide equality of opportunity to all citizens. Others claim such a broad goal creates unwanted consequences, and that education must have more focused egalitarian goals. Satz (2007) argues that education must ensure that all members of society achieve "equal citizenship" so that everyone, even the worst off, has the rights and opportunities justice requires (though this may fall short of *equal* opportunity). Anderson (2007), echoing Plato, argues that education must produce the right kinds of ruling elites for a just society; however, she understands this in egalitarian terms, such that elites must be representative of, and responsive to, all segments of society.[18]

An alternative normative approach views the aim of education as conferring some benefit on the *individual* being educated. Being educated should make a person's life better. Often, these benefits are taken to be quite profound. Peters (1970), for example, sees the aim of education as producing what he calls "the educated man". Such a person is to have a deep and interconnected understanding of the fundamental aspects of the world, and to have developed an intrinsic love of knowledge and learning. Achieving this "makes a difference to the level of life which he enjoys; for he has a backing for his beliefs and conducts and organizes his experience in terms of systematic conceptual schemes" (Peters 1970, p. 208).

Complementary to this line of thought, is an understanding of education based on Aristotle's notion of a person's nature as a *rational creature.* On such a view, the purpose of

education is to allow a person to realize their nature – as defended by Haldane (1989) and Curren (2013). Another aspect of the Aristotelian view that is relevant to education is that it is in a person's nature to be *virtuous* – therefore, education must have a moral component. This idea is emphasized by Martin (1981), who requires education to inculcate moral actions, emotions, and habits, as do White and White (1986).

As a somewhat refreshing counterpoint, Locke suggests that education should aim to produce a much more prosaic form of well-being in the student. He opens his notes on education by stating that "A sound mind in a sound body, is a short, but full description of a happy state in this world" (Locke 1970 §1). In what follows, he offers instruction on how a proper education may produce "a sound body in a sound mind" in the mature student.

Though there is much more that could be said on existing philosophical accounts of education, this will suffice for an overview. The key point is that whatever the precise aim of education, if it concerns producing model citizens, in one sense or another, it's clear that this cannot be ensured by what goes on in the classroom alone. As common-sense dictates, and a wealth of empirical evidence confirms, many aspects of a child's life that occur outside of school play a huge role in determining the various traits they develop as an adult. This includes their pre-school upbringing, the neighbourhood they grow up in, their diet, their family life, the pollution levels in their environment, and their housing – to name just a few.[19] Therefore, an account of education that takes as its starting point an aim of this kind will necessarily be broad in scope.

5. Ameliorative Considerations

Though these normative considerations are relevant to an ameliorative analysis, as already mentioned, the authors do not perform such an analysis explicitly when defending them. Without this, we do not have the means to decide between the competing proposals, or to assess the shared underlying presuppositions. We can move forward by using the ameliorative criteria we summarized above: we are looking for the concept of education that is best suited to realizing egalitarian goals. This allows us to draw a couple of preliminary conclusions. First, because of the *political* nature of the normative project, our concept of education must be sensitive to the effects of education on society as a whole. This rules out a strongly individualist normative

conception, such as Rousseau's, which is completely indifferent to how education is realized in society as a whole and to its downstream effects upon it.

Second, though, the egalitarian perspective requires a kind of *minimal* individualism, insofar as we are assuming that the goal of a just state is to promote the wellbeing of its citizens, rather than *vice-versa*. This precludes the kind of strong statism adopted by Plato, in which the flourishing of the state is an end in itself that has priority over the wellbeing of individual citizens. Therefore, ameliorative analysis favours ideas along the lines of those mentioned by Locke, Satz, and Brighouse and Swift. Our concept of education should be such as to promote well-being in citizens in terms of "a sound mind and a sound body" as well as allowing them to be responsible members of a well-functioning democracy with sufficient social and economic opportunity.

The precise details of such a proposal should not concern us for now, as our main concern is whether ameliorative considerations favour a narrow or broad conception of education. In other words, should our concept of education apply to all aspects of human development relevant to realizing egalitarian goals, or just apply to how formal schooling can do so (in a more limited capacity). The existing views, as mentioned, all favour a broad approach; however, none of them provide an explicit argument as to why.

6. The Need for a Narrow Account

It might seem that having a broad conception is an obvious choice, granting the ameliorative project. If our aim is to use education to pursue egalitarian goals, it seems obvious that the wider education's remit, the greater its ability to realize these ends.[20] The premise of this argument, however, is a misstatement of our ameliorative concerns. Our goal is to find a concept of education that allows us to best pursue egalitarian goals (by whatever means are effective), not to find a concept of education that allows us to best pursue egalitarian goals *through education*. This is an important distinction when we recall that education is only one component of an egalitarian policy agenda. Other key aspects include housing, healthcare, and nutrition, as well as labour policy. As we saw with Haslanger's analysis of *woman*, ameliorative analysis may not favour building our positive normative goals into the target concept, but instead require looking at how it fits into a broader political framework.

For a concept of education to best promote egalitarian goals, it must not only facilitate such ends being realized through education but also complement the other aspects of the egalitarian project. As we have seen, the broad conception of education favoured by many philosophers brings large amounts of seemingly distinct policy areas under its umbrella. This could serve to muddy the waters in attempts to delineate and defend the various components of the egalitarian agenda and hamper the ability of distinct projects to operate effectively.

If we can't separate education from upbringing, it's hard to carve out a specific role for education *policy*. A child's upbringing is intractably tangled up with their housing, healthcare, and virtually all other aspects of living covered by domestic policy. In this context, it's hard to understand why there should be a self-contained department of education, with specific goals that it pursues with relative autonomy – currently, of course, departments of education around the world are concerned primarily with schools and schooling.

One might embrace this line of reasoning and argue that a department of education in its typical form should be abolished, and instead education policy should be fully integrated with the rest of domestic policy. This leaves us with the problem of whether schools provide anything of unique value since, on this view, what they uniquely provide cannot be education. If they do provide something, it would be helpful to understand what that is, and if they don't, one must face up to the implication that their role in a child's upbringing should be significantly decreased.

An alternative approach is to formulate a robust, schooling-focused conception of education. This requires, though, that there is a suitably robust narrow concept available. As we've discussed, for the most part, philosophers of education have rejected such an approach; however, a passage from Dewey provides a promising starting point:

> [A]s civilization advances, the gap between the capacities of the young and the concerns of adults widens. Learning by direct sharing in the pursuits of grown-ups becomes increasingly difficult except in the case of the less advanced occupations. Much of what adults do is so remote in space and in meaning that playful imitation is less and less adequate to reproduce its spirit. Ability to share effectively in adult activities thus depends upon a prior training given with this end in view. Intentional agencies – schools – and explicit material – studies – are devised. The task of teaching certain things is delegated to a special group of persons. Without such formal education, it is not possible to transmit all the resources and achievements of a complex society. (Dewey 1916 p. 13)

As Dewey notes, much of the knowledge we wish children to acquire during their upbringing can be learned more or less *naturally*. That is, it will be learned over the course of day-to-day experiences, through play, or "on-the-job" – either in performing familial duties or, later on, in formal employment. Crucially, though, Dewey points out that not all essential knowledge can be acquired this way: some learning requires dedicated training activities that would not be pursued for other reasons.

By analogy, consider skill development in sport. Certain skills can be acquired simply by playing the game over a sufficient period of time. This learning is natural since playing the game is, presumably, fun, and so is an activity that children will perform in their everyday lives. On the other hand, certain sporting skills will not be acquired simply by playing the game – instead, they require dedicated training routines. For example, one will not learn how to make three-point shots in basketball simply through playing live games. Instead, one needs to perform shooting *drills* where one develops the fundamentals of shooting technique while not being harassed by an opposing player. What's important to note is that these drills are not particularly fun, and one would not perform them for their own sake in everyday life – they are only performed with the end of improving skill in basketball proper in mind.

The same pattern holds, as Dewey notes, for what is learned in school. Consider the canonical goals of schooling: literacy and numeracy. A child will not in general learn to read simply by hanging about in a newspaper office and engaging in "playful imitation". Similarly, they will not pick up arithmetic if only they spend a sufficient period in the company of an accountant. Developing these abilities requires being guided through specific activities which do not count as play and serve no direct practical purpose. Children would not perform them in the natural progression of their lives, but only when directed to do so with the goal of eventually acquiring valuable skills in mind.

Based on this, it's natural to view the purpose of schooling as providing children with the dedicated training activities required for developing certain skills or knowledge that adults require in order to live appropriately – where we can understand "living appropriately" in terms of the egalitarian goals discussed above. Further, we can give a narrow definition of *education* in terms of the institutions and experiences related to these dedicated training activities.

7. Evaluating the Accounts

With the two possible accounts outlined, it's time to compare and evaluate them. First let's state them explicitly:

> **Broad Account:** A person's education includes all developmental processes that, if done correctly, allow them to be a happy and productive member of society. Education policy includes all policy that affects the outcome of these developmental processes. Education institutions are all institutions that influence these developmental processes.
>
> **Narrow Account:** Educational institutions are institutions that aim to give people the knowledge and skills that cannot be acquired in the natural course of life, but are required to be happy and productive members of society. Education policy is policy concerned with educational institutions. A person's education is what they learn within educational institutions.

As well as differing in scope, the two accounts differ in which aspect of education they prioritize – the broad account prioritizes individual developmental processes while the narrow account prioritizes institutions. With this understood, we need to decide between them. According to our ameliorative analysis we make the decision based on which concept will be more effective in helping us realize egalitarian goals. Three key considerations favour the narrow account:

1. The narrow account allows for a clearer division between the different components of domestic policy, leading to a more effective policy agenda.
2. The narrow account ensures attention and resources are dedicated to the specific goal of developing knowledge and skills that cannot be acquired in the natural course of life.
3. The narrow account more effectively undermines the pernicious equivocation.

The first point should be clear, given the previous discussion. On the broad account, education policy ends up overlapping with virtually all aspects of welfare policy, so it is unclear how to separate the distinct agendas for each. The second point should also be clear on its face – it is worth noting, though, how this can manifest in practice: there are currently many cases in which scarce class time is dedicated to the kinds of practical and social skills that are plausibly best learned in the natural course of life, because the distinctive aims of formal education are not sufficiently well understood.[21] The narrow account of education, by making these goals, explicit would be a remedy to this.

The third point takes a little more explaining. It is clear why the narrow account undermines the pernicious equivocation. Education, on this account, only applies to processes

that develop knowledge and skills that are not acquired in the natural course of life, and this clearly does not cover all developmental processes. Therefore, the initial premise in the pernicious equivocation – that the solution to improving the lives of the young must lie in education – is obviously false, and the argument cannot get going.

It may be less clear, though, why the broad account is less effective in this regard. The account does not seem to imply a privileged connection between education and schooling, so it might appear that it doesn't allow for the shift of attention away from welfare and towards schooling that the pernicious equivocation attempts to engineer. However, things get more complicated when we think about exactly *how* different areas relate to the broad account's goals.

Though many areas of policy affect developmental processes, not all do so as their primary purpose, or directly. Formal schooling, and other practices that teach or train, do have development as their primary goal and they achieve it directly, through the teaching or training process. Welfare programs, on the other hand, do not necessarily have development as their primary goal – as they are aiming to alleviate immediate hardship – and they promote development indirectly, by allowing recipients to learn more effectively in other areas of their life. This means that when thinking of education policy, the canonical programs associated with it will be schooling, as well as other kinds of teaching and training. When talking about education policies, there may be ambiguity between whether this concerns all policy areas that are relevant to the success of educational goals or just the canonical educational policies – those whose primary purpose is addressing the goals, and which address them directly. This lays the groundwork for the pernicious equivocation to be compelling.

Further, by subsuming welfare policy under education, there is a danger of undermining the independent egalitarian case for such proposals. Though such programs have an essential role in developmental processes, they are also beneficial for independent reasons. Even if providing children with healthcare, food and housing didn't promote their learning and development, there would still be strong egalitarian reason to do so, in order to raise their quality of life. Trying to shoehorn such policy areas into education raises the danger of obscuring this and blunting the arguments in favour of such projects.

Before moving on, we should consider whether there are competing ameliorative considerations, pointing in the opposite direction.[22] In particular, one might turn to some of the richer goals that broad accounts of education have been concerned with – for example, human

fulfilment and informed citizenship. If these are goals that the broad account allows us to promote and the narrow account doesn't, these could be seen as ameliorative considerations favouring the broad account. In pursuing these richer goals, we might aspire to expansive education policy that is interlinked with other areas rather than segregated from them – this is sometimes referred to as 'joined up policy making'.

This line of argument does not succeed in undermining the narrow account, however. When it comes to these richer goals, there are two possibilities: either are they best promoted through specialized training or in the natural course of life. If it is the former, then they will be accounted for within the formal education structure which is a part of education on both accounts, and so the narrow account is equally effective at promoting them. If it is the latter, so that the qualities are developed by factors outside of formal education structures, the narrow account does not devalue these goals, it just says they are not within the remit of *education*. Suppose, for example, that human fulfilment is promoted, at least in part, by various forms of material welfare alongside a sense of belonging within a supportive community. There's no reason to think that including these material programs under 'education policy' would improve their effectiveness. In fact, we've seen with the pernicious equivocation how doing so can in fact undermine them. [23]

Turning to the issue of 'joined up policy', it's undeniable that, even on the narrow account, education will have shared goals with other policy areas and that communication between different policy making departments will be essential. There's no reason to think, though, that making everything fall under the concept of education is necessary to do this. Further, despite the need for intercommunication between different areas of policy, the key deficiency of current welfare policy is not that it is poorly coordinated with (formal) education policy, but that it is severely underfunded. For this reason, it is essential that such programs are given their own distinct and privileged remit.

In relation to this point, it is crucial to note that ameliorative analysis is designed for *non-ideal situations* – we are concerned with what will move us closer to a given normative goal from where we are now. It may be that the best concept in an ideal society would be very different from the one ameliorative analysis currently demands. Haslanger (2012) argues, for example, that in an ideal society, the concept *woman* would not apply to anyone as there would no longer be a need for gender concepts. Similarly, in a society where extreme inequality and

material impoverishment had been overcome and the political structures that ensured them were taken as given, we might have more room for a broader concept of education. Crucially, the situation would change if we were in a society without strong anti-egalitarian political forces, committed to misusing the concept of education to oppose and rollback welfare expansion. Conversely, in our current situation, where there do exist pressing issues of inequality and strong anti-egalitarian political movements, we need a political approach with a clearly delineated welfare push and a concept of education suited for a complementary role that doesn't muddy the waters. For these reasons, ameliorative analysis favours the narrow account of education.

8. Conclusion

If we accept the narrow account, what comes next? As well as pursuing the overall egalitarian agenda with improved conceptual tools, the account can guide our thinking as to the specifics of education itself. A crucial empirical project is deciding which kinds of skill, knowledge or understanding are best learned in a formal training environment as opposed to being learned through everyday life. Only the former will be appropriate subject matter for education, according to our account. It's plausible that many of the core academic areas, especially those requiring the development of mathematical skills, fall into this category. On the other hand, it's much less clear that various social and moral behaviours are best developed by such means.

An additional question is which out of the skills and knowledge it is within the remit of education to develop do we in fact want to cultivate in a just egalitarian society? This will depend on normative questions as to what features citizens in such a society must possess. It will also depend on empirical questions, as to what skills lead to economic benefits for individuals or society, and potentially provide psychological benefits too. It is not the aim of this paper to answer these questions. We see, though, how a narrow definition of education can guide an effective investigation.

A final point to note is that though the primary goal of this article has been to defend a narrow account of education, there are also more general lessons to be learned here. It is philosophically significant that ameliorative analysis can be fruitfully applied to the concept of education – even if one is not convinced such analysis entails a narrow account. As well as being of interest to philosophers of education, this points to the underappreciated power of ameliorative analysis: its use plausibly extends beyond analysing race and gender to a broad range of political

concepts, particularly the other components of an egalitarian agenda we've discussed – for example, housing, healthcare, nutrition and labour. Conducting such further analysis is a vital philosophical project.

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[1] This debate dates back, at least, to Kripke's (1972) lectures on *Naming and Necessity,* which brought ideas about externalism into the mainstream.

[2] This approach has its roots in Russell's (1905) descriptive theory of names but reached its canonical form in the work of internalist philosophers responding to Kripke – see, for example, Jackson (1998) or Chalmers (2012).

[3] Kripke (1972) argued that the descriptions we associate with words do not determine meaning, while Putnam (1975) emphasized the role of natural kinds. See, further, Dretske (1981) for an account of how concepts can be associated with natural kinds by means of *tracking* them, and Millikan (1984) for an uncompromising defense of the view that concept meaning is a scientific matter.

[4] Lewis (1984), for example, argues that the correct interpretation of our concepts is the one that does the best job of maximizing both the number of true intuitions and the naturalness of referents. See Williams (2015), for a detailed discussion of the technicalities.

[5] This is not to say that, prior to the introduction of ameliorative analysis, normative considerations have not been invoked in analysis of concepts, either implicitly or explicitly. However, they are not given a systematic theoretical role in orthodox contemporary internalist or externalist theories, which is something ameliorative analysis aims to rectify. It's worth noting that earlier 20th century philosophers did allow a systematic role for normative considerations in meaning, particularly Carnap's (1950) ideas on *explication*, and Quine's (1960) on *regimentation*. See Novaes (2020) on the connections between amelioration and explication.

[6] It's worth noting that this is not necessarily Haslanger's final account, as it a topic she has revisited in subsequent work. Notably, Jenkins (2016) argues that this version fails to classify all trans people in line with their gender identity.

[7] Haslanger, at least when she first introduced the idea seemed to think of ameliorative analysis as revolutionary. Richard (2020) offer an explanation of how it may be evolutionary, while Diaz Lion (2020) argues that under some circumstances it may be meaning preserving. See also Marley-Payne (2016) ch. 1 for an explanation of how ameliorative analysis may be meaning preserving based on a modifications of Lewis' (1984) theory of reference.

[8] Discussion of perfect and relative naturalness is found in Williams (2015).

[9] On levels of explanation, see Garfinkel (1982).

[10] See Mason (2016) for a discussion of social kinds.
[11] For example, Joe Biden (2020): "Education is at the heart of the American Dream, and essential for the United States to compete globally in the decades to come. Every American should have the opportunity throughout their lives to obtain the skills and education to realize their full potential."
[12] See, for example, Rivlin, Rivlin & Rivlin (2019), written for the influential moderate think tank, the Brookings Institute.
[13] The egalitarian requirements for justice may go significantly beyond this, but the paper will only assume this relatively uncontroversial minimum. We will therefore remain neutral between, for example Rawlsian liberalism and socialism. That these egalitarian requirements are an essential component of justice is an assumption of the paper. For a justification, see, for example, Rawls (1999).
[14] One might argue that if our goal is to resolve the indeterminacy, we can simply select either the narrow or broad account by *fiat* – there's no need to engage in lengthy analysis deciding between them. However, this would be unsatisfactorily arbitrary. Moreover, since we would already be using ameliorative considerations to justify making such a decision, methodological consistency requires looking further to see if such considerations favour one account over the other.
[15] See Reeve (2004) Book III. Similar ideas are posed in Aristotle's *Politics* who also requires that citizens be subjected to hardship to test endurance – this time as infants – and that "Directors of Education" must determine what stories young children are allowed to hear. Barker (2009) Books 7-8.
[16] Along similar lines, Martin (1981) argues that education is responsible for instilling "all that we deem valuable" in people, including skills, habits and emotions, alongside knowledge. Further, Satz claims that education must provide students with "equal citizenship", which encompasses "intergroup knowledge, social integration, accommodation, and understanding" (Satz 2007 p. 640).
[17] See, for example, Hirst & Peters (1970).
[18] For more on the debate over equality of opportunity, see also Jacobs (2010) and Warnick (2015).
[19] For an overview of how various factors outside the classroom affect cognitive development, see Butcher (2017). For a theoretical discussion of how to think about the effect of environment on educational outcomes, see Marley-Payne (2021).
[20] One can find hints of this line of thinking where philosophers of education do consider formal education specifically – at times they seem to dismiss such a focus as simply small minded. For example, Wilson and Cowell (1983) argue that "under philosophical pressure" it must be granted that a notion of education that concerns knowledge and learning has conceptual priority over one concerning educational institutions.
[21] Note that the claim that practical social and skills are best learned in the natural course of life is an empirical assumption, not entailed by the natural account itself. If these skills are in fact better learned through classroom studies, they will fall within education's remit, on the narrow account.
[22] I'm grateful to an anonymous reviewer for suggesting this line of argument.
[23] Further, note that just because schools are primarily focused on specific training, it doesn't mean that they cannot also be harnessed for other activities and goals – e.g., anti-bullying culture, after school clubs etc – that are furthered outside of the central classroom learning. It's just that the narrow account sets the fundamental goals that everything else builds around.

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