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A Reply to Bridging Gulfs Within and Between East and West

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I find myself fundamentally in sympathy with Attila Horvath's desire to build bridges between philosophical thinking about education in East and West, although not necessarily between schools of thought which currently exist: we may need to start in a different place. I would like to salute, too, his role in helping, along with Otto Mihaly, to organize the international conference in Pecs, Hungary, in August 1988, which laid the first foundations stones in this bridge-building. It will prove, I think, to have been a significant event in the history of our discipline.

I would differ from Dr. Horvath on the description of the 'gulf' between East and West and, perhaps, also on the way the bridge may now be built.

On both issues, I feel that matters are more complicated than he allows. He writes as if there are two opposing philosophies of education: (a) the Western one committed to conceptual analysis, politically right-wing, pivoting on the notion of the rational individual, and taking Western-style democracy as given, and (b) the Eastern one based on a Marxist notion of community, but having to make uneasy adjustments to fit Stalinist political demands. Both schools see themselves as founded on a-historical, timeless truths. The way forward, he hints, is to reject both these theories and find common ground in a relativist philosophy.

He may be right about the monolithic character of much Eastern thinking - at least during the period of Stalinism and its long aftermath. Whether it is true of all Eastern thinking, restricting the 'East' to the USSR and Eastern Europe, I do not know. Certainly over recent years, things have been changing fast: Dr. Horvath himself does not fit into his paradigm, and neither do Soviet philosophers of education with whom I am in contact. And has Yugoslav work in our field moved in a different direction since the breach with Stalin?

The 'Anglo' scene, which I know better, seems to me much more heterogeneous than Dr. Horvath claims. Incidentally, 'Western' philosophy of education presumably covers what we in Britain would call 'continental' philosophizing which draws, for instance, on Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, or Habermas. But it is not as though the latter belongs only to such places as France and West Germany. If 'Anglo' philosophy is that produced in English-speaking countries, much of it is deeply indebted to recent continental philosophy. Even that which is not, or is so to a lesser degree - and this is my main point here - is very varied. There are linguistic analysts among us, applied philosophers, those who are sceptical of applied philosophy, Kantians, utilitarians, Aristotelians, relativists, materialists, Nietzscheans,

Hegelians, Kierkegaardians.... Neither are we mainly right-wingers, but embrace a variety of political positions from the Hegel-inspired traditionalism of a Roger Scruton through various shades of liberals and liberal-socialists to diverse Marxists (not least in Australasia). This last fact - that there are Marxists among the Anglos - makes Dr. Horvath's initial dichotomy especially hard to maintain. Perhaps his analysis fits the time when Richard Peters and his school had such a dominating influence on the Anglo world; but as I read things, this paradigm has been increasingly under challenge from the late 1960s onwards and by, say, 1980 had given way to the pluralism which is now so marked - and in my view, so welcome - a feature of Anglo philosophy of education.

How can bridges best be built? I wish Dr. Horvath had had more space to develop his brief advocacy of relativism. I am sympathetic to the idea that we need to be wary of philosophizing in a timeless way - as if we could make prescriptions for the education of any person in any society. We need to work out educational aims suitable for the industrialised societies in which we all now live or are coming to live. I would argue, for instance, that whereas personal autonomy cannot be written into personal well-being in general - people in wholly tradition-oriented societies have led and do lead lives of greater or lesser well-being - it makes good sense to write it in as far as Western societies are concerned, based as they are (in theory, at least) on choice of government, marriage partner, occupation, place of residence, goods and services and so on. In the East, the breadth and intensity of people's desire to base well-being on self-determination is becoming daily more evident. Whether locating our ideas in such a way entails relativism, however, depends on what one means by this term, if, indeed, one can succeed in giving a coherent account of it.

Bridge-building, I agree, should be between those of us who want to build bridges, not at some grandiose level, say, between capitalism and communism. What we need to do is seek agreement, but not be at all alarmed if we do not always achieve it. We should welcome the existence of a plurality of views and approaches: on many educational issues, there are no clear-cut answers, only differences of weighting among relevant ethical values. Picking up from Dr. Horvath's paper, may I suggest three topics which he mentioned on which further joint work could be done in the interests of seeking consensus: (1) the adequacy of Marxism as an ethical guide; (2) the nature of individual well-being; and (3) the place of rationality in education. On (1), Dr. Horvath suggests that Marxist theory 'is flawless on its own grounds' and (if I have understood him correctly) that difficulties only arise when it is harnessed to actual political regimes, as in Eastern Europe. That Stalinist politicians have based oppressive policies on appeals to Marxism is all too clear, but is

Marxism itself (as an ethical guide) impervious to telling critique? Easterners and Westerners need to discuss frankly together such things as the often-alleged thinness of Marx's own ethical thought, or the taken-for-granted historical determinism which pervades it, and which many, besides Karl Popper, see as a jettisonable legacy from Hegel. (2) Most philosophers of education on both sides would, I think, accept that individuals are in some sense social creatures; but as to whether individual well-being necessitates altruism or concern for the well-being of communities there is much more reflection to be done. It is true that many Westerners, myself included in the past, have tended to split the individual's well-being off too rigidly from others'; perhaps, on the other hand, Eastern thought has overweighted its communal elements. There is work to be done here. One aspect of this would be a joint investigation of our historical antecedents. The line that goes back from Marx to Hegel to Aristotle converges with that leading back from such critics of extreme individualism or utilitarianism, indebted in different degrees to Aristotle, as Alasdair MacIntyre, Charles Taylor, John Rawls, and Bernard Williams. (3) Dr. Horvath is right to point to an excessive emphasis on rationality in the Peters' school. Ethics cannot be based wholly on reason: we need, and are now getting, Hume and Aristotle as a supplement (I was about to say 'antidote') to Kant. Yet acquiring the virtues of practical reason is an immensely important part of a child's upbringing. I am sure that in some form this proposition will be common ground to Easterners and Westerners. But it, too, needs a lot of further discussion - as do the relationships between practical reasoning and forms of theoretical reasoning, including those which play a part in thinking about school curricula.

These are only three among a great number of possible topics for exploration. How can we now proceed? Attila Horvath and Otto Mihaly have started the bridge; *Paideusis* is continuing it. We need more debates in journals, conferences, books, and exchanges of scholars. Who wants to join in the work?