Community and Hermeneutic Rationality

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INTERSUBJECTIVITY AS COMMUNITY EXPERIENCE

One of the fundamental pillars of the philosophy for children program is the idea of community of inquiry, given that it appears both as an objective- a goal that students should achieve - and as a necessary condition for the establishment of philosophic dialog, starting with the dialog achieved by the construction of knowledge in the classroom.

This idea that the members of that class possess the capacity to interact dialogically with respect to the construction of the shared meanings. The community is presented as the structural mark that makes intersubjective inquiry possible.

Nevertheless, this does not mean that the individual is lost or erased in the totality of the community. To the contrary; for this joint effort to be carried out, the personal dedication, active participation and responsability of each of the members of the community are essential.

In this sense, we can say that each person should be organized as a fundamental part of that heterogeneous unity, while maintaining the concern for each one's own personal development, which is invested in the development of the other. In this way, we can conceive of two levels of development. On one hand, the development that each individual gains on her or his own thanks to the interaction with the rest of the group, and on the other hand, the strengthening of the community as a function of the interpersonal enrichment gained from dialog.

In this context, I recognize myself in the other as a member of a community that includes us both in a common task of knowing the other, I know myself as a function of intersubjective dialog and not in a monologue that leads to a impoverishment of the same subjectivity. One assumption of the community of inquiry is that all true subjectivity is, in itself, intersubjectivity.

With special reference to this point, Sharp in his article "What is a Community of Inquiry?"[1] defines intersubjective dialog as the moment in which I truly become a person, when I truly establish a connection between my world and the world. When I express my self, I am at the same time creating my own thought and creating myself. At this point, there exists a relationship between language and thought - I am that which I am capable of communicating to the other.

At the same time, I discover in this communicative act that the ideas and thoughts of the other are also mine. When I finally realize what the other is saying and thinking, I also understand myself, in the way in which I am capable of reconstructing what the other is saying in order to interpret it according to my own experience.

It is in this manner that the enrichment in the community of inquiry presents or manifests itself - bridges are built, and the distances between my subjectivity and the subjectivity of the other, and between private, intimate experience and the collective, public experience of the participants are lessened. If the search for knowledge is understood in this way, as the search for intersubjectivity, related in essence to the interior life of the subject, then this is when education truly becomes significant work, connecting the internal with the external, the "I" with the "we".

DIFFERENCE AND THE CHALLENGES OF THE COMMUNITY

Nevertheless, the notion of community has suffered harsh criticism in recent years. One almost paradigmatic example can be found in the article by Iris Marion Young entitled "The Ideal Community and the Politics of Difference."[2] In it are found the most representative criticisms of the notion of community by certain contemporary philosophers (Derrida, Adorno, Kristeva, among others).

In this sense, Derrida, for example, plants as a presupposition of any community ideal the notion of "metaphysics of presence". This constitutes a form of thought that attempts to imagine a totality, tries in some way to represent unity, abstracting the contingencies or peculiarities, resulting in the description and characterization of an ontological dimension of this unity.

This can only be possible by establishing and strengthening a relationship of identity among its members, which is to say, reducing, isolating and even ignoring the essential differences that comprise it. What that produces is the development of strong dichotomies, such as "inside-outside", "authentic-inauthentic", "real-unreal", "good-bad", etc. Such a discriminatory operation ignores that it needs precisely what it rejects or denies in order to be able to define itself as opposition inserted into a hierarchical and discriminatory system. Added to this is a detemporalization and destatism of social dynamics, a violence confronting any form of becoming or difference that endangers the stability attained by the solidification of the shared meanings.

At the same time, this "metaphysics of presence" ignores or denies the difference, the dissidence of the established order. This difference is defined by Derrida in terms of language, with the intent of expressing that signs possess meanings, but that we do not agree to these meanings on their own merit, rather that we should know and interpret the chain of meanings into which they are inserted, thus accentuating the impossibility of ignoring the spatial-temporal, multiple and conflicting dimension of that which is presented to us as an eternally present totality.

Julia Kristeva, on the other hand, refers to this *difference* in terms of "heterogeneity," concentrating her interest not so much on the process of the assigning of meaning, like Derrida does, rather more on the speaking subject. This is never completely defined, to the contrary, it is always in process, producing meanings that oscillate between the literal and the figurative meanings. For Kristeva, difference presents itself not only as a presence which is foreign to the subject, but in the interior of that subject, in her or his own subjectivity and language.

The ideal of community also polarizes and presents the individual and the community as irreducible opposites, in the sense of a personal development centered on the "I", which can be characterized as egocentric on one hand, and on the other, as the idea of shared experience, or the intersubjective construction of individuality. The former is characteristic of the competitive model of modern society, and the other is related to the idea of community. In this appearance opposition, each term is defined by the negation or contrast of the other, in which the first term of the opposition is negatively valued.

Once again we see the mentioned supposition of what constitutes the Derridean "metaphysics of presence", the desire to eliminate and sidestep heterogeneity and the difference in unifying and globalizing totality. This carries with it the idea - no less important - that community is based on the mutual understanding of its components, that is, each of us has the faculties to understand the other as well we understand ourselves, and the ideal of transparency is clearly present in this point. This ideal assumes the supposition that each individual knows exactly which are his or her ideals and interests, and that he or she is also capable of correctly and effectively transmitting them to others. That is, not only does the individual know and accept his or her own subjectivity, but also that the individual can accept the subjectivity of the other, and this "other to me" is an open space in which the one who enters can see all, without clouds or obstructions.

It is on this point that Julia Kristeva questions the notion of community. Taking into account the psychoanalytic tradition, insofar as it relates to the unconscious, she suggests the impossibility of achieving a transparent understanding of difference and of ourselves, since, as Freud said, subjectivity is obscure, incoherent and heterogeneous, and that there are also hidden and inaccessible interests and desires for the subject. How, then to communicate something that we ourselves cannot understand completely?

It should be added that what I say does not have a single meaning, and cannot be understood simply in a sequentially, linear fashion. On the contrary, the subject that interprets my discourse can do so in different

ways, including in a way that is contrary to what I tried to express. In this sense, Young, in commenting to Kristeva, says: "What I say and do always has a multiplicity of meanings, ambiguities, plays, and these are not always coherent."[3]

In this context, it seems difficult to speak of conscience, meaning, subjectivity, but it is certainly possible in the way in which the subject can pass on her or his intentions and meanings, if the speaker can rise above his or her own subjectivity.

Kristeva conceives of the subject, as I said before, not as a unit, not as something finished, rather as heterogeneous, multiple, always in process, made up of difference. Taking this into account, it would not be genuine to think of a mutual and transparent understanding, when we know that even the subject is incapable of totally understanding his or herself. I can then understand certain aspects of myself, and therefore of the other.

On the other hand, Gould[4] warns us of another danger or risk that this ideal of community presents, which consists of conceiving of the community as the perfect space for the development of a "common subjectivity", and it is here that the germ of capitalist domination would prevail, as well as the basis for founding and legitimizing ethical and political chauvinism. This attempt of conceiving a shared subjectivity necessarily brings with it the desire to identify with others. In this sense, the moral values developed or built by the community would be destined for that community only, and the individuals would act morally only with their peers or equals since, as I mentioned earlier, this ideal of community dissolves the differences of the individuals that comprise it. In that case, what reason would exist for respecting the other, if the other is different from me, if he or she does not belong to my community and we do not share interests, life goals, norms, and values?

The answer to this question can be somewhat problematic for what interests the community of inquiry, in the sense of considering not so much the community itself, rather the relationships that are developed within it. But if we study this at a deeper level, taking into account its fundamental postulates, it is possible to create strategies that reduce the risks implied in the formation of philosophic communities, responding to the criticisms presented earlier.[5]

AN ETHICAL APPROACH TO THE LIMITS OF COMMUNITY

The scope of community of inquiry not only supports the acquisition and display of cognitive, affective and moral strategies by its members. It is true that its goal is for the members function as a self-regulating and self-correcting unit, but another is that these individuals be capable of widening their sphere of action, that is, that they open themselves to other communities, toward other individuals that are not necessarily their peers, and with whom they can form the same kinds of relationships (reflexive, affective and moral).

In order for this to be possible, the community emphasizes the lack of involvement of its members as ethical subjects, reevaluating the dimensions and the reach of ethical praxis, a possible means for conceiving of non-centered individuals, by which I mean subjects that are capable of putting their ego in perspective for the true consideration of the other positions. I am referring to the concept introduced and developed by Matthew Lipman, caring thinking[6], which, as we will see, not only has cognitive implications but also ethical, evaluative and affective.

We can conceive, according to Matthew Lipman, of the caring thinking as the dimension of thought that launches or introduces the other aspects of thought. In this sense, it possesses its own, singular characteristics, but draws from the development of the other dimensions of thought to fulfill and sustain itself as such. It presupposes the establishment of different types of relationships, the meticulous evaluation of alternatives, the discovery and creation of connections - bridges between that which exists and that which is new - and, certainly, the recognition of the "other", of difference.

So, when we "think critically" we are not doing anything more that putting our thought within the consideration of rules, criteria, looking for reasons to sustain what we are arguing, and trying to help the other to clarify his or her own thought. Thinking critically can be synonymous with judging the pertinence and consistency of our reasons in support of some argument.[7]

"Thinking creatively" would be to invent, discover or find mechanisms that promote or facilitate the path to be able to express our ideas, explain our manner of conceiving the world and others. To create unedited means for the reconstruction of our present, and for the creation of the past and prefiguring of the future.[8]

"Caring thinking" involves the unfolding of earlier strategies, but is not reduced to them. It necessarily requires taking into account as a first step what is important, discern what deserves attention from what does not, define what will be the object of our thought. In the words of Lipman, "caring thinking is not content merely to classify; it must rank and grade, assign priorities, distinguish between what is urgent and what is not."[9]

Regardless of whether or not we can separate these instances of thought in order to analyze them carefully, we should clarify that these are not concretized, depending on the context in which the thinking subject is found, and if it is possible to classify them in the context in which he uses them. That is, a critical or creative thought at the service of a particular context can become evaluative and vice versa; in this sense, Lipman reaffirms the contextual nature of thought.

In his article "Caring as Thinking" the author enumerates - without intending to be exhaustive - different forms in which caring thinking can appear. One of its manifestations is "evaluative thought", in which the attempt to direct our attention toward that which is worthwhile stands out, that which captures our attention and incites us to its consideration. To value is to appreciate, to consider the object in question, extending our action to the subject and toward the circumstance in which the valued action is performed, and we do nothing more than value the implicit relationships contained in the object or in the subject.

In what is referred to as "affective thought", Lipman makes his argument on the so-called theory of emotional-cognitive escape, which suggests the relationships between affect and cognition as a complex game of interrelationships in a process in which loss and recovery exist.[10] Making this suggestion his own, Lipman presents emotions and affects as a type of thought, rather, as activities that fall under the rubric of the cognitive.

At the same time, the actions are always accompanied by a strong affective or emotional charge, and the actions follow the charges. This is important in relation to moral education, as the education of the affects presents itself as an alternative, as an effective mechanism for avoiding socially undesirable actions, "...if we can temper the antisocial emotions, we are likely to be able to temper the antisocial conduct."[11]

A third manner of conceiving caring thinking is as a form of "active thought". This is presented as a type of "cared for", "an attentive glance toward", that is, different type of relationships that can be established with the other, the other being a member of my community or of other communities.

Actions are structures as a function of a chain of meanings that refer to the subject that executes them and to the world in which that individual lives and therefore projects. To decipher or interpret that chain of meaning, then becomes an essential condition for understanding that acting subject and his or her relationships with the world and with others.

In this sense, action is considered as conservative or protective in the way in which it permits the maintenance of the state of things, but at the same time transformational, capable of introducing the possibility of change. Finally, "normative thought", in which the evaluation/ valuation of the action converges with the consideration of the ideals of that action. The analysis of the current conditions is just as important as the consideration of the different possibilities to which we can aspire as regulating ideas that can drive or orient our action.

This kind of thought aimed toward the subject and toward the world, with specific intentions such as those presented earlier, is the kind that contributes to the ethical, evaluative dimension, to the superior level abilities, without which we would obtain a boarding of the individual and of the incomplete, insufficient individual. Likewise, the boarding would also be insufficient to the problems surrounding community issues. (?) We feel that the proposition of Lipman points to the development of a rationality removed from the purely instrumental sphere, which could also be referred to as hermeneutic rationality. That is, a rationality that is developed through dialogue and interpretation, and which at the same time integrates ethical elements into the hermeneutic process.

HERMENEUTIC RATIONALITY AS A MODEL OF COMMUNITY INQUIRY

A verification drives Lipman's research, rationality has become void of ethical content in becoming instrumental rationality, the Philosophy for Children program points to the development of broader forms of rationality that see the cognitive aspects of thought as also aspects connected to ethics, aesthetics and the affective realm. Contemporary hermeneutic reflection is founded on this very idea.

Following the suggestion of Gianni Vattimo, we can say that hermeneutics has become the new philosophic *koine* of our times in the sense that it is presented as a common place for all contemporary philosophic currents, it is the inescapable referent to which the better part of modern philosophy turns when it is time to think about reality.[12]

In 1983, Vattimo and other Italian thinkers give name to their hermeneutic proposal, that of weak thinking.[13] This is characterized as a kind of thinking that, through the crisis of the metaphysical foundation of western reason, it attempts to control this by way of the development of new forms of connecting us to the being, the truth and with subjectivity.

Since the founding of the existence of a strong relationship between metaphysical foundation and domination, hermeneutics suggests forms of access to understanding the being that doe not carry with them forms of violence for the subjects and objects involved. Drawing on Heidegger's postulation, experience of being is presented not as a *grund,* grounds, rather as a footprint, event, memory and above all a transmission, *ge-schick.* This manner of conceiving being supports his weakening - with regard to foundation and dominance - of classical metaphysics, allowing us to have an experience in which rationality is also that being that is transmitted, that is projected toward the future.

On the horizon of hermeneutic rationality, a new way of conceiving truth is constructed, ceasing to be the adjusting to reality, to being determined by linguistic conditions, rather, it does not possess in itself a metaphysical nature rather an essentially rhetorical one. It is formed in relation to the horizon and the limits of the community becoming interpretation, constituted of the members of that community in the interpretive process. Likewise, this way of conceiving or thinking of truth carries in its heart the recognition of its weakness, permitting the arising and subsequent consideration of multiplicity of truths at the heart of every hermeneutic community. As a result, we do not find truth in the passage from interior to exterior, rather we find it in that "within" of the community, and we therefore say that it is intersubjective construction.

If we now consider the individuals that participate in a community, it is possible to affirm that they interact in a free space in which each person is engulfed in his or her past and traditions, in a complex web of interpersonal and cultural relationships, this is precisely the horizon that prefigures the different interpretations and consequent intersubjective constructions.

In this context we can also recall Heidegger, the truth can be understood as freedom, amplification of the horizons in which any adjusting is possible, situated within a dialogical framework. Truth, understood as such, does not stem only from such broadening of horizons, rather it is also an event, it modifies these horizons in the game of integration and pertinence, in which all traditions actualize by way of language. The response that the members of a community give to that tradition, ever-present and ever-interpreted, is true for themselves and for others as a sending, as a message.

One feeling accompanies this hermeneutic process, and that is a respect for all forms that difference redresses (the past, other cultures, the other) within it, in the interpretive proposal of Vattimo, the name of *pietas.* Pity translates, in terms of personal experience, the ontological evidence of the finite nature of being. This promotes or reaffirms our connections to the past in the way in which it fosters the development of an attentive ear for messages, signals and traditions that stem from it. This search for the past carries with it a goal, and the hermeneutic approach attempts to make this accessible to us, searching it for - according to Vattimo - the *exempla.* These are the result of a permanent actualization of that legacy, a mechanism capable of providing us with tools to proceed not only in our present, but also to project ourselves toward the future.

In this way, the relationship established among the members of one community with another car only be based on mutual respect, indeed pious, due to the procedures that the members follow in the construction of their truths, that is, due to the heredity that each community is actualizing in the making of its philosophical praxis. The love for all living things, for all that is worthy of being valued, becomes definitive, consisting of a

"footprint", an imprint of the past in the present, a legacy.

It is necessary to say that this sentiment is shared but is -at the same time- visibly different not only in each community but in the historical process itself. The links traced by each community are contextual, non-repeatable, borne of needs and desires intrinsic to the dialogic community.

Precisely what permits us to access this sentiment is the recognition of the impossibility to access a homogeneous, total, single vision of the world, the making of the dissolution of metaphysics in the classic sense. To consider realities that are eternal, stable and removed from the individual is what prevents us from establishing pious connections with the other, with the difference, with the multiplicity of visions about the world, since the possibility of that "other", of what cannot be reduced to a unit, what does not fit into the established cannon, does not exist. It is easy to respect that which is equal, that which is similar; the problem lies in not allowing the appearance of the dissimilar, the heterogeneous, and even worse, the "what to do with it"? Many answers are possible. Omit it, refuse it, ignore it, refute it or try to begin to establish a connection with it in order to understand, recognize and vindicate the right of the other to express her or his world. What better path than the one provided by a friendly relationship, constructed through and in dialogue?

It is evident that the consideration of the *pietas* cannot ignore the ethical considerations that accompany it and that also support it. In this context, a *weak ethic*[14] is appealed to, built fundamentally on the strong structures of metaphysics insofar as they are incapable of legitimizing and recognizing life's multiplicity of forms. The reflection centered on the limits of rationality, thought of as they only possible way of knowing and arguing reality but recognizing its limits, the notorious apparition in our means of vindication of rights to the word of minorities inasmuch as legitimate forms of interpretation of the world constitute the new context of contemporary philosophizing. The challenge of the Philosophy for Children program lies in placing itself in this context and proposing solutions to the questions that face it.

We feel that a hermeneutic approach to the notion of community and the concepts driven by it is an effective method for critical reflection and analysis. Hermeneutics, conceived as a tool for analysis and interpretation, sheds light on concepts that are crucial for this program - community, dialogue, intersubjective construction of meanings, and caring thinldng for the other. This paper has attempted to collect and establish the possible relationships between said program and contemporary approaches to the understanding of our reality. A path to follow can be that of deepening the relationships that can form between *caring thinking* and *pietas,* both as non-identical but complementary ways of trying to respond ethically to the problem of difference, a problem that has become central in the thought of philosophers and educators in our time.

NOTES

1. See Sharp, Ann, "˜Que es una comunidad de indagacion?" (trans. by J.C. Lago Bornstein) in *Aprender a pensar, #2,* second semester, *1990,* Ediciones de la Torre, Madrid, *pp. 7-18.*
2. young, Marion, "The Ideal of Community and the Politics of Difference", in Weiss and Friedman eds. *Feminism and Community,* Philadelphia, Temple *UP, 1995, pp. 233-25*
3. *Op. cit., p. 243.*
4. *Op. cit., pp. 240-241.*
5. In this part of the paper, some of the most important critics of the notion of community are dealt with. To broaden this analysis, see Thiebaut, Carlos, *Los limites de la comunidad,* Madrid, Centro de Estudios Cons ti rucionales, *1992.*
6. See Lipman, Matthew, "Caring as Thinking", in *Inquiry: Critical Thinking Across the Disciplines, Vol. 15, #1,* fall *1995.*
7. For more on this concept, see Lipman, Matthew, *Thinking in Education,* New York, Cambridge University Press, *1991, pp. 101-126.*
8. *Ibid, pp. 193-211.*
9. Lipman, Matthew, "Caring as Thinking" in *Inquiry: Critical Thinking Across the Disciplines, Vol. 15, #1,* fall *1995, p.7.*
10. *Op. cit., pp. 8-12.*
11. *Op. cit., p. 11.*

12. See Vattimo, Gianni, *Etica de la interpretacion,* Buenos Aires, Paidos, *1992.*
13. See Vattimo, Gianni and Rovatti, Aldo, *El pensamiento debil,* Madrid, Citedra, *1990.* See
14. Vattimo, Gianni, *Mds alld de la interpretacidn,* Barcelona, Paidos, *1995, pp. 69-84.*

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