An Education for "Practical" Conceptual Analysis in the Practice of "Philosophy for Children"

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Introduction

Thinking about and inventing concepts is the hallmark of the philosophical endeavor. Concepts like fairness, beauty, friendship and knowledge are some of those with a long philosophical lineage that start with questions like 'What is ...?', 'Why?', 'How is it different from ...?' and 'Does it then follow that...?' These questions are crucial, as they set up a relationship between concepts and conceptualizers such that practical concept-utilization can be done in better or worse ways. In daily life we are constantly confronted with situations that call for inquiries into these big topics. Thus, for instance, if I wonder if I should tell him that his new hair-style looks great, while I actually think it doesn't, that requires that I work through the concepts of friendship and beauty, as well as the concepts of truth and lying. "Should I tell her I think her marriage has taken a wrong turn?" "Should I tell him that his breath smells?" Several concepts play a role here even though we may not be sure which ones take precedence. Practical engagement with concepts through questions, in other words, matters.

In what is to follow, we will suggest that practical conceptual analysis, despite its sophisticated philosophical vibe, is, in fact, the responsibility of all of us as we go about our everyday lives. If this so, then it follows that those who are interested in practical educational strategies, such as those in the field of Philosophy for Children (P4C), need to have a "working view" of concepts, not only so that they can pass on that view to others, but also so as to empower the facilitator and, as a consequence, the Community of Philosophical Inquiry (CPI)—the pedagogical cornerstone of P4C.

We will undertake such an exploration here, while attempting to skirt the particular ins and outs of the philosophical landscape with regard to what precisely concepts are, such as: are they mental representations or images, can they be defined by necessary and sufficient conditions, or are they prototypicals. We will, in other words, rather than exploring the heavens of academic philosophical discourse with regard to concepts, explore how the practical application of value concepts, that is, those that underwrite individual behavior, can go well or poorly. In so doing, we presume that we will make the case that quality education for such concept application is imperative.

Along the way, it will become evident that the sort of dialogue that is undertaken in a CPI can be precisely the sort that serves as practice for real-world value-concept application. As well, we will suggest that there are certain kinds of questions, namely those that both establish a precise context, while simultaneously "laddering-up" into target concepts, that are optimal for giving practice in real world value-concept application. We will further argue that, precisely because competent value-concept application is so essential for both individual and collective well-being, that a deeper more flexible view of a target concept can be used as a measure of the degree to which a CPI can be judged as fruitful.

With regard to the set-up of what is to follow, we will begin with an outline of the basic distinction between concepts that emerge as a result of physical world interaction (baseline concepts) and those that emerge as a result of social interaction (value concepts); we will then analyze how the application of value concepts can go well or poorly; and finally, we briefly offer ways in which a CPI (with some tweaking) can be particularly valuable in nudging participants into being more competent in this life-altering practice of value-concept application. So let us begin.

Two Kinds of Concepts Corresponding to Two Kinds of Selves

In what is to follow, we suggest that much traction can be gained in understanding the human conceptual framework, as well as the degree to which individuals can be considered responsible for its use, if we categorize human concepts as a function of our two kinds of selves: our physical selves, which we will call 'inter-world' selves and our social selves, which we will call 'inter-personal' selves. That is, we will argue that qualitatively different kinds of concepts emerge as a function of our different kinds of selves. We will deal with these in turn.

Inter-World Selves: Base-line Concepts

Let us start our exploration at what might be conceived as the developmental dimension of the physical self or inter-world self. That is, we will presume that the capacity to conceptualize in the sense of organizing perceptions, emerges in a trajectory that is virtually simultaneous with the capacity to sense stimuli[1]. Indeed, it could be argued that the very notion of stimuli makes little sense unless it is presumed to be undergirded by conceptualization, which can be characterized as the capacity to organize stimuli in such a way that "similar ways of responding are elicited by similar stimuli" (i.e., classical conditioning)—a notion not dissimilar from *an abilities* view of concepts (Dummett; Kenny). In other words, the foundation of this exploration rests on Kant's precept that: "Percepts without concepts are empty, concepts without percepts are blind."[2]

The implications with regard to understanding the emergence of conceptualization this way are many. To begin with, it follows that the capacity for conceptualization is not a function of linguistic ability. That is, since non-linguistic animals can clearly perceive food, fire, trees, predators, and so forth, if we apply Kant's dictum, it follows that they clearly have the ability to view their environment

through a conceptual grid. Though this reference to non-linguistic animals is somewhat tangential to the exploration here, it is nonetheless important as it reminds us to be alert to the fact that many human concepts arise in a manner not dissimilar to that of our non-linguistic animal friends, namely, as a result of our embodied encounter with the environment (a thesis congruent with what Shapiro refers to as an *embodied mind* thesis). As with other animals, our concept of a tree as a solid entity, for example, emerged as a function of the fact that we cannot walk through it. As a result of this *embodied mind* thesis, we can also presume that conceptualizing entities who have similar bodies and who inhabit similar environments, will use fairly similar conceptual grids to organize their *base-line* experience of the world, with base-line referring to concepts that inevitably arise given bodily-environmental interaction. It is on this basis that we can presume that, with regard to base-line concepts, all humans have similar concepts: all humans will form a concept of fire that will be informative of the fact that a close encounter can result in burns. Importantly, it must be kept in mind, following Damasio, that all these concepts are "somatically marked" (175), meaning that they are perceived as having more or less positive or negative importance for the animal. Gardner (*Thinking Your Way to Freedom*) describes how this somatic marking can impact animal behavior in the following way:

> This value/behavior dialectic can be illuminated through an analogy with color. Let us suppose that all animals are pre-programmed so that red is appetitive (i.e., red elicits an approach response) and blue is aversive (i.e., blue elicits an avoidance response). With association, red and blue rub off on various objects and situations so that, with extensive experience, an animal's environment becomes a riot of color with many shades and variations of red, blue, and purple. Were we to have the appropriate metaphysical glasses, we would be able to predict an animal's behavior merely by seeing the colors of its world. We would know, for instance, that a vibrant red would be extremely appetitive, a pale blue mildly aversive, while we would predict that a deep purple would elicit a highly ambivalent response. (13)

Finally, following Kant's reasoning in the Transcendental Deduction, we can presume that any entity who perceives objects as a function of the capacity to conceptualize, must, thereby, also have a sense of self—at least in the sense of being aware of the self as an embodied agent, such as a self whose body is such that it cannot walk through trees; a self that we are referring to here as an *inter-world* self.

Inter-personal Selves: Interpersonal-Value (Practical) Concepts

Humans are not merely conscious animals. Unlike most of our other animal friends, we are also self-conscious. To understand the degree to which different kinds of concepts emerge as a result of the emergence of self-consciousness, let us turn to the account of the emergence of self-consciousness, or what might be referred to as the emergence of the social or inter-personal self, according to George Herbert Mead, as depicted by Susan Gardner in her article "Taking Selves Seriously" (2011). According to Mead, self-consciousness emerges as function of an

...emerging awareness that there is a correlation between the changing affect (or response) of the other and particular units of one's own behavior. A young child, in other words, becomes aware of her actions *through the fact* that a change in the behavior, verbal response, and/or attitude of the other sends the message that her actions are positively or negatively valued by that other. Thus, according to Mead, self-consciousness, rather than being some mysterious metaphysical exudate of the brain, is rather an awareness of one's behavior through the fact that it is valued either positively or negatively by others. (emphasis added, 81)

What Mead is saying, then, is that self-consciousness *as such* quite literally develops because of, and only because of, social interaction. Without interaction, in other words, there would be no self-consciousness—a theory, by the way, that is empirically supported by experiment carried out by Gallup who showed that the self-consciousness evident in chimps as measured by mirror-related activities is absent in chimps that are raised in isolation. (emphasis added, Gardner, "Taking Selves Seriously" 81)

Entities who are self-conscious, in other words, can be described as entities who organize their behavior with respect to interpersonal values—in contrast to and in addition to inter-world values—that are borrowed from prominent others in their social milieu; for example, that such-and-such behavior is considered rude, or courageous, or fair, and so on. It is in this sense, then, that self-conscious entities can be described as having a qualitatively different layer of concepts that impacts their organizational responses. Let us refer to these concepts that emerge as a result of social interaction as *interpersonal value concepts*, or pace Kant, simply as *practical concepts*, in contrast to the *base-line concepts* that emerge as a result of base-line interactions between the body and its physical environment.

What is important to note with regard to these different-in-kind concepts is that, with regard to base-line concepts, there is no choice in the matter: the concept of fire will inevitably contain the notion of potential harm. With regard to interpersonal values, however, here are several degrees of latitude for variance. To begin with such variance might be a function of the strength or weakness of the justificatory apparatus that supports concept application. That is, you and I can disagree as to whether a particular act of behavior is or is not cowardly by offering reasons in support of our views. We can think here of Garcin, the protagonist in Sartre's *No Exit*. He tried desperately to convince his "hell-mate" that, even though he ran from war, he had a good reason for doing so, since he was, after all, a pacifist. Secondly, even if we agree on the concept application, we might nonetheless disagree with regard to its degree of blame- or praiseworthiness, or its "depth of color": what you consider inexcusably rude (a deep blue), I might view as simply an innocent "faux pas" (closer to a pale purple) (see reference to color in Gardner above). Thirdly, how a practical concept is appropriately applied also depends very much on context, which, of course, can be infinitely variable. Thus, while "a rose is a rose is a rose"[3] regardless of context, the application of value concepts is *essentially* context-dependent. Such context-dependency ought not to be considered a defect but instead, following Habermas, is a necessary condition for the normal use of language: "In everyday communication an

utterance never stands alone; a semantic context accrues to it from the context the speaker presupposes that the hearer understands" (125).

This fact, that the analysis and application of value concepts can vary widely, is the source of *the call to account*. That is, to the degree that practical concepts can have a considerable impact on the actions of the conceptualizer, and to the degree that a conceptualizer can have at least some degree of "reasonable" control over the design of her conceptual lens, to that degree it can be argued that we conceptualizers have a responsibility, both collectively and individually, to ensure that the manner in which we apply concepts can indeed by justified.

Practical Conceptual Analysis

The Unmooring

It is important to emphasize that this claim that conceptual analysis and application is the responsibility of all agents refers only to a given set: there are only *some* concepts over which any conceptualizer has any control. As has already been mentioned, concepts that arise as a result of mind-physical world interactions are concepts over which an embodied conceptualizer has little or no control. What is interesting about this sort of rigid mind-world conceptual grid is that it may very well inform a person's "concept of concepts," that is, a conceptualizer may assume that concepts are categorizations over which a conceptualizer has little control. Thus, for instance, a conceptualizer might assume, as is quite typical of children, that something is or is not fair, or that something is or is not just, as a result of some sort of conceptual fiat, in the same way that a thing is or is not a tree.

This is where the imperative that one gain control over the analysis and application of one's practical concepts first finds breath. Conceptualizers, not just philosophers, need to understand that there are some concepts that are *up for grabs,* and that the interpersonal value concepts that guide their own behavior are precisely the sort that fall into this category.[4] And conceptualizers need to understand how relevant this is to their own lives. They need to understand, in other words, that to the degree that they can be held responsible for their own behavior, and to the degree that practical concepts guide that behavior, and to the degree that practical concepts are indeed up for grabs, it follows that, to that degree, conceptualizers can be held responsible for how they construe such concepts.

The first step to enhancing conceptual agency, in other words, is to unmoor practical concepts from their heretofore tyrannical grip.

Objectivity's Anchor

The mirror image of viewing interpersonal value concepts as authoritatively rigid is to view them as up for grabs in an anarchical sense. That is, so the reasoning goes, if the meaning of such

concepts is not locked in, then surely it is entirely up to individual whim as to how such concepts should be applied. This movement from "all to nothing" may indeed be the source of what appears to be wide-spread contemporary subjectivism, or what Matthew Crawford calls, in his book, *The World Beyond Your Head: On Becoming an Individual in an Age of Distraction,* rampant "moral autism" (184). In supporting his view, Crawford cites a 2008 study done by Notre Dame sociologist Christian Smith that investigated the moral views of 230 young American adults. Smith's findings were summarized as follows:

> Many were quick to talk about their moral feelings but hesitant to link these feelings to any broader thinking about a shared moral framework. . . As one put it, "I mean I guess what makes something right is how I feel about it. But different people feel different ways, so I couldn't speak on behalf of anyone else as to what's right and wrong". (183)

This "fixed to anarchical" swing with regard to conceptual application, interestingly, mirrors a not uncommon philosophical assumption with regard to fact and value: that value concepts are somehow basically meaningless since an evaluative conclusion cannot be inferred from factual premises.

What we want to argue here, by contrast, is that the degree of legitimacy of practical concept application is a function of the objectivity *of the process*.[5] That is, just as the legitimacy of the application of many factual concepts, in science for instance, is very much a function of the objectivity with which the evidence is evaluated, so, we argue, the application of value concepts is very much a function of the objectivity of the reasoning process.

In order to elaborate on this notion of "objectivity in reasoning," we will turn first to Jürgen Habermas and then to Stephen Darwell, both of whom argue that objectivity in reasoning is a function of a very particular kind of interpersonal dialogue.

Objectivity and Interpersonal Dialogue

Habermas takes issue with the notion that objectivity (what he refers to as rationality) can be approximated by any kind of solitary *intra*personal purely logical thought (pace Kant)—a view famously concretized by Rodin's *Thinker*. Habermas argues, by contrast, that rationality (or objectivity) can only be achieved through *inter*personal dialogue of a certain sort, namely one in which a valuer is prepared to expose her "reasoned" value claim to the critique of opposing viewpoints. Thus, in his book, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Habermas says:

> Anyone participating in argumentation shows his rationality or lack of it by the manner in which he handles and responds to the offering of reasons for or against claims. If he is "open to argument," he will either acknowledge the force of those reasons or seek to reply to them, either way he will deal with them in a "rational" manner. If he is "deaf to argument," by contrast, he

may either ignore contrary reasons or reply to them with dogmatic assertions, and either way he fails to deal with the issues rationally. (18)

Habermas is arguing, in other words, that "We must be willing to test with reasons and only with reasons whether the claims defended by the proponent (including ourselves) rightfully stand" (25). The most prominent implication of Habermas' view is that the estimation of the legitimacy of practical concept application requires that we dialogue with one another in a fairly intimate manner.

If we take Habermas' reference to "meaning" as similar to what we are here referring to as interpersonal value concepts, then the following quote is particularly germane to the argument presented here. He says that "Understanding meaning differs from perceiving physical objects: it requires taking up an *intersubjective relation* with the subject who brought forth the expression" (111). He goes on to say that "[t]o understand, one must become a potential member of that individual's lifeworld"; and that "Objectively, I can hear noises, but once I genuinely understand, then what is said is something that can be true of false. I am then challenged to react with a 'yes' or 'no.' It becomes a comment on our common world" (112).

Habermas, thus, suggests that a necessary condition of legitimate value concept application is a willingness to engage in a kind of interpersonal reasoning that requires that we listen to views that may be different from our own. Darwell fleshes out this notion by arguing that such an interpersonal reasoning process requires that we presuppose an objective standard that adjudicates as to what does and does not count as a good reason in any given situation—an attitude which he calls taking "a second-person stance." Thus, in his book *The Second-Person Standpoint: Morality, Respect, And Accountability* Darwell argues that "to enter into the second-person stance and make claims and demands of one another at all, you and I must presuppose that we share a common second-personal authority, competence, and responsibility simply as free and rational agents" (5). This "exchange thus involves reciprocal acknowledgment of norms that govern both parties and presupposes that both parties are mutually accountable, having an equal authority to complain, resist coercion, and so on" (48). And he goes to say, quoting Petit and Smith (1996) that "in taking up the conversational stance, both must assume (1) that there are norms that govern what each should believe, (2) that each can recognize these norms, that each is capable of guiding their beliefs by them" (433).

Darwell argues, as well, that to engage in such an interchange is to accord that other what he refers to as "recognition respect," which he distinguished from "appraisal respect," with the latter being characterized by a form of esteem. Recognition respect, by contrast is not about appraisal but how our relations are to be regulated (123). Recognition respect, in other words, allows me to vehemently disagree with your position, even to find it abhorrent, and yet to nonetheless engage with you in reasoned dialogue; which emphasizes again the degree of intimacy and commitment necessary for genuine dialogue.

In contrast to relationships of power, genuine interpersonal reasoning, or what Darwell calls second-personal interaction, requires the assumption on the part of all participants that the win is a function of the relative strength of reason-offerings and not a function of the desired outcome on the part of any one participant. And in that vein, Darwell argues, quoting Fichte, that we need to be alert to the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate forms of address with the former being characterized "summoning" the other's will, as opposed to "impermissible ways of simply causing wanted behavior" (Darwell 21), i.e., that second-personal address is reason-giving in its nature. It differs fundamentally from coercion in that it seeks to direct a person through her own free choice, and in a way that recognizes her status as a free and rational agent. It is, as it were, an attempt to guide rather than goad (Darwell 49).

Contextualization and de-contextualization

Though Habermas and Darwell have much to give us in terms of understanding how objectivity is possible with regard to value concept application, we need to be aware that we are not, as a result, seduced by a scientific or "universal" aura to such an extent that we fail to take account of the importance of being sensitive to context, to differing interpersonal perspectives, and to the "lives of concepts." Concepts do not operate in a vacuum but instead interact with other concepts, with the context, and as well, change as a result of interpersonal interaction.

With regard to context, Lipman (*Thinking in Education*) puts it this way: "[a]dvocates of better thinking have usually pointed out that [critical] thinking would generally involve an intense sensitivity to contextual individuality" (208) and that "readers must master the contextuality of meaning" (146; see also 224-225). We must always keep in mind, in other words, that contexts, even those that seem remarkably similar, virtually always have aspects or nuances that differentiate it from others. It is for that reason that, when we engage in thinking about concepts, we need to undertake a kind of dance that alternates between the context and concept, or between one contextualization or another. Moving first to contextualization, one might ask, "Was Garcin a coward because he refused to fight in his particular situation?" and then to a de-contextualization, "What is a coward?" and vice versa. This dance enriches both the context and the concept which, in turn, is also enriched by the interchange between conceptualizers. Thus, while Estelle buys Garcin's argument about pacifism: "no one could blame a man for that" (81), Inez puts that view into question when she says, "No doubt you argued it out with yourself, you weighed the pros and cons, you found good reasons for what you did. But fear and hatred and all the dirty little instincts one keeps dark—they're motives too" (81).

Thinking about concepts, then, requires a dance between interlocutors *and* between contexts and concepts. It requires an inquisitive attitude, a willingness to interrupt expectations, experimentation. It requires a certainty that, despite the importance of concept application in guiding behavior, and despite the possibility of objectivity through reasoned exchange in a public forum, one will never quite be certain, inquiry will always be necessary, and ultimately the dance will never end.

Summary Thus Far

In summary, then, it has been argued that, while the opposite of a rigid application of value concepts (in a manner similar to the application of base-line concepts) would appear to be anarchic subjectivism, there is a third alternative, namely objective anchoring via second-personal dialogue—an anchoring which nonetheless ought not to constrain the contextual/de-contextual dance necessary to gain an adequate view of practical concept application in any particular situation. This combination of objectivity and conceptual dance ensures that, despite the dance, the concept doesn't become "unhinged" with every differing opinion. This objectivity of process also has a fundamental impact on those conceptualizers who are willing to so engage. More specifically, from a Habermasian point of view, such individuals are worthy of considering themselves as genuinely "rational," and from a Darwellian point of view, such individuals are worthy of genuine respect, not only in the sense that they are willing to grant such respect to others, but as well, because they are willing to take responsibility for how they apply value concepts, as well as holding others to account. They are, as it were, willing to take responsibility for how they see the world. Matthew Crawford puts it this way: "Arguably, what it takes to be an individual is to develop a considered evaluative take on the world, and stand behind it" (184)—though, of course, not in the sense of having a static view but rather in the sense of being prepared to make a commitment to a view while nonetheless remaining open to the possibility of "dancing further."

Education for Practical Conceptual Analysis

If it is true that consistently engaging in practical conceptual analysis and application is the responsibility of all agents, and if it is true that engaging in second-personal dialogue is a necessary condition for doing this well, then it follows that, if we are to educate for competent practical concept application, then educators need to have a vision of the sort of mind that needs to be cultivated so that agents may become competent practical conceptualizers. We suggest this vision be informed by the following:

(a) a fundamental inclination, or *motivation*, to get the application of value concepts right, particularly with respect to context, in the sense of recognizing that such application underwrites behavior, and hence the identity of all concerned;

(b) a fundamental *understanding* of concept application in the sense of recognizing both that the application of contextualized value concepts requires reasoned negotiation in public space, along with contextualization and de-contextualization, and that the outcome of such a negotiation is a function of reason, not the reasoners involved;

(c) a fundamental *attitude* toward the process of concept application in the sense of being open to reasoned alternatives to one's own and showing an intense sensitivity to context;

(d) a fundamental *skill* in the sense of acquiring an understanding of the basic moves of contexualization/de-contextualization, as well as the sorts of logical essentials that are necessary to distinguish between good and poor reasons that support the various perspectives.

All of the above can be enhanced through education. Here we will argue that the worldwide educational initiative of Philosophy for Children (P4C), because of its *process* and *format*, is particularly well placed to excel in enhancing the fundamental motivation, understanding, attitude and skills that are necessary for individuals to become competent and responsible value conceptualizer. This framework also, intriguingly, offers an interesting way to measure the degree to which a philosophical inquiry is a success.

The CPI Process

With regard to process, the *modus operandi* of Philosophy for Children is the Community of Philosophical Inquiry (CPI). Within a CPI, participants engage in a *facilitated* inquiry with regard to the issue at hand. It is because of this facilitation—one that is (or ought to be) rigorous and often deeply involved with regard to the *process* rather than *content*, that a CPI can be said to provide the garden in which the sort of optimal dialogue, of which Habermas and Darwell speak, can flourish. Ann Margaret Sharp, one of the founders of the P4C movement, describes the Community of Philosophical Inquiry in the following way: "this education is an education in procedural principles (as contrasted with substantive principles) that can help young persons move towards objectivity, ...When I use the term 'objectivity', I mean an inter-subjective truth arrived at by human beings through inquiry, experimentation, consideration of the evidence and dialogue" (39-40).

Much has been written about the importance of facilitator transactions in this regard, (Gardner 1995; Kennedy 2004; Gregory 2007), so we will not labor this point here except to say that, with regard to the fundamentals that are needed for engaging in "second personal dialogue" in the interests of competent practical concept application, a competently run CPI underwrites both "c" (*attitude of openness*) and "d" (*reasoning skills)* above. That is, in a CPI, since participants must inevitably listen to opposing points of view, and since such a CPI can be enormously invigorating to all concerned, this experience serves as a positively reinforcing practice of being open to alternatives other than their own ("c" above). As well, to the degree that a facilitator is keenly attuned to the logic that underpins various claims, such as hidden assumptions, counter-examples, etc., and to the degree that problematic logical issues are made evident, to that degree participants learn that some reasons can be judged as better or worse than others, not on the basis of who made the claim, but on the basis of the degree to which they can withstand logical challenge ("d" above) (though, of course, a case can be made that, aside from participating in CPI's, participants could benefit enormously from receiving direct instruction with regard to learning logical essentials that help to distinguish good from poor reasoning) (Gardner 2015).

The CPI Setup

But what about "a" and "b," the motivation to get the application of value concepts right, as well as the understanding that legitimate concept application is a function of reasoned negotiation in public space? Here the set-up of the CPI matters.

The typical set-up for a CPI is one which begins with a stimulus of some kind, such as a story, which is then used to elicit questions about which participants wish to inquire (Gregory; Weber & Wolf). Though this format seems simple, it can be the source of much difficulty for facilitators, as it may be that relatively few of the suggested questions are appropriate for inquiry. In an effort to help facilitators in avoiding the pitfall of attempting to anchor an inquiry with a *non-inquiry question*, a number of authors have offered characterizations of the sort of question that should be avoided, e.g., questions whose answers can be found in the text, questions whose answers need expertise, questions whose answers is up to anyone's imagination (Cam), questions that already have definitive answers, empirical questions, religious/mystical questions (Gregory), Google questions, silly questions, "it doesn't much matter" questions (Dumas).

Here, we would like to add to the latter a positive suggestion that emerges from the present focus on practical conceptual application. That is, while certainly avoiding *non-inquiry questions*, we would like to suggest that facilitators ought to be particularly alert to *context specific questions that have the potential to ladder into target value concepts.* Examples of such questions might be the following: Was it unfair for Johnny not to share his homework with Sally? (targeting the concept of fairness), or, after reading *Anansi and the Moss Covered Rock*, a question as to whether it was alright for Little Bush Deer to deceive Anansi, since Anansi had deceived others (targeting the concept of deception (Wartenberg).

We suggest this for the following reasons. Though we have argued that becoming competent in value concept analysis and application is a responsibility of all agents, clearly learning about concept analysis and application *in and of itself*, such as what is it to be fair or what counts as being a coward, is virtually unintelligible. As mentioned above, the potential for concept application varies widely, potentially infinitely, as a function of context, justificatory support, and purported "colour." Referring again to Lipman (*Philosophy Goes to School*) with regard to context, he says that:

> Students should be able to recognize how assertions change their meanings—and possibly their truth values—when applied to a variety of contexts. Thus in asserting that something is true, one should be prepared to say *under what circumstances* it might be false and vice versa (214).

It is because of this essential variability that no rule book will do with regard to the analysis and application of value concepts; these are not knowledge factums. And it is precisely for this reason that it is being argued here that agents need to become competent in the reasoning *process* through which any given practical concept might be applied in any given specific situation. Thus, we suggest that if a CPI begins with a *context specific question that targets a specific value concept,* the resulting inquiry will indeed be the sort through which participants gain practice in the process of practical concept application.

To elaborate further by way of example, let us suppose that from a class of elementary school youngsters, after reading together "Dragons and Giants" from *Frog and Toad Together,* the following

sorts of questions (suggested by Wartenberg) become the focus of inquiry: Are frog and toad brave even though they jumped away? or Was it wrong for frog and toad to run away? or Was toad brave even though he was shaking with fear? Thereafter, in the ensuing CPI, youngsters can reflect together on whether there was a time when any of them ran away when maybe they shouldn't have, or whether there was a time when they were shaking with fear but nonetheless stood their ground. It is thus precisely through such communal inquiry into the fluid nature of concept application that youngsters (a) actually get practice in negotiating such application, (b) experience the exhilaration of recognizing that there are better and worse ways to describe such situations, and (c) begin to understand that getting a more accurate take on how such concepts are applied actually matters. It is in this sense, then, that a CPI that is set up in this way can nurture "a" and "b" above, i.e., (a) that *motivation* for getting the application of value concepts right will be enhanced and (b) a fundamental *understanding* of the process of concept application in the sense of recognizing that the application of value concepts requires reasoned negotiation in public space that is highly sensitive to context.

It is important to keep in mind with regard to the suggestion of anchoring a CPI based on a *context specific question that targets a specific value concept* that the value of the original question and the value of the resulting conceptual analysis are interdependent. On the one hand, the original question of whether or not Frog and Toad are brave is fruitful precisely because it ladders easily into the concept of bravery and thereby gives participants an opportunity to play with concept application not only in various alternative potentially personal scenarios, but with altering minutia (e.g., were they in mortal danger, did they think they were in mortal danger, should they have established whether or not they were in mortal danger, etc.) and in so doing, it alerts participants as to how complex value-concept application really is. On the other hand, however, the original question, precisely because of its precision, serves as a magnet to "corral in" the discussion so it doesn't wing off into infinite ruminations that would, in real life, paralyze practical reasoning.

The above, then, serves as a suggested guide to facilitators for picking and/or formulating "good questions" by which to anchor a CPI, namely those that are precise enough to keep the inquiry within an intelligible range, but that nonetheless ladder up into target concepts; it is the *tension* between these two that will afford participants an exhilarating practice in the vagaries of competent concept application.

The Measure of Success

Measuring the degree to which a CPI is successful has been an on-going challenge for Philosophy for Children. Valiant attempts have been made by many with regard to measuring specific moves that are undertaken in Communities of Inquiry; attempts to measure whether, for example, there are consecutive peer-to-peer exchanges uninterrupted by the teacher, or whether the teacher does not miss opportunities to ask students to explain and support their positions with reasons, examples, and evidence, etc. (Reznitskaya). Though such attempts are admirable and inspiring, they are beyond the scope of most individual facilitators.

By contrast, this focus on conceptual analysis, along with its companion notion of laddering questions, will help the facilitator informally measure the degree to which a CPI has been fruitful. That is, facilitators might first ask themselves if the inquiry was anchored in a precise or "situated," laddering question, and then, whether the ensuing inquiry did indeed result in a more complex, nuanced, riveting understanding of the concept in question. If the answer is yes on both counts, then it seems to us that the facilitator can give herself credit for nudging her co-inquirers toward becoming more competent responsible conceptualizers.

Conclusion

What does it mean to be brave? Are mothers brave for having children? Is a fireman brave for going into a burning building? Are lions brave when they take down an antelope? Is anyone who speaks their mind, regardless on what's on their mind, and regardless of the situation, brave?

Or

Is it wrong to deceive? Is it wrong to lie to a murderer about the location of his intended innocent victim? Is it wrong to tell Granny that she looks lovely when you think she doesn't? Is it wrong for parents to lie to their children about Santa Claus? Is it wrong for corporations to lie about the benefits of their products?

The above demonstrates, incontestably we believe, that attempting to answer questions like "what does it means to be brave?" or "Is it wrong to deceive?" in and of themselves, regardless of context is, quite literally, a meaningless activity. And, it is for that reason that it is evident that becoming "conceptually competent" cannot be a matter of simply learning what such-and-such concept means as a system of rules or, even, following Kant, how they might apply universally.[6]

We have argued here that becoming "conceptually competent" (rather than acquiring knowledge or learning a simple application formula) requires (a) that one is motivated to get the application of essentially variable value concepts right, particularly with respect to context; (b) that one understands that the application of contextualized value concepts requires reasoned negotiation in public space; (c) that, for that reason, one is open to reasoned alternatives to one's own and one shows an intense sensitivity to context; and (d) that one is able to utilize basic logical skills so as to distinguish between good and poor reasons in support of alternative viewpoints, all the while, being highly sensitive to context.

We have further argued that Philosophy for Children is well placed to enhance conceptual competence, particularly if the questions that anchor the Community of Philosophical Inquiry are context specific and are such that they can ladder-up into target value concepts.

What is particularly important to remember about all the above is that it demonstrates that conceptual analysis is not the sole prevue of arcane academic philosophy, but is, rather, the responsibility of all agents. If we can keep this in mind, it will go a long way to spur those of us involved in the practice of P4C to try to ensure that that practice is relevant to its core; and, to that degree, we as educators, will, at least in some measure, have fulfilled our responsibility for enhancing the agency of those in our charge.

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Endnotes

[1] To sense and to organize means to establish differences. We can also see this in the philosophical notion of critique (*kritein* in Greek), which means making a distinction.

[2] Critique of Pure Reason (A51, B75).

[3] See Gertrude Stein's *Geography and Plays* (1922). This sentence is from the poem 'Sacred Family'.

[4] Though there are other concepts, other than value concepts, that are also *up for grabs*, e.g., typical philosophical concepts like "mind." The analysis of these sorts of concepts, however, cannot so easily be described as critical for ordinary agency.

[5] Thus, in discussing Deleuze and Guattari, Bell writes "The objectivity of our claim, in other words, will be simultaneous to the subjective conditions of the grasp of this objectivity rather than it being understood, as it was traditionally, as the recognition of a truth that pre-existed our grasp of it. Instead of the independent objectivity of truth, it is consequently the certainty of our subjective grasp that becomes the benchmark of objectivity (50).

[6] It is of note what a difference it would have made had Kant suggested that we attempt to universalize a "situated concept," rather than a concept per se, e.g., asking yourself if you can universalize the maxim of lying to a murderer about the location of his intended innocent victim, versus asking yourself if you can universalize lying. This, interestingly, echoes "Sartre's critique of Kant's claim that moral conduct consists in obeying abstractly knowable maxims valid independently of situation, that is, independent of the historical, social, and political time and place" (Linesbard 65).

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