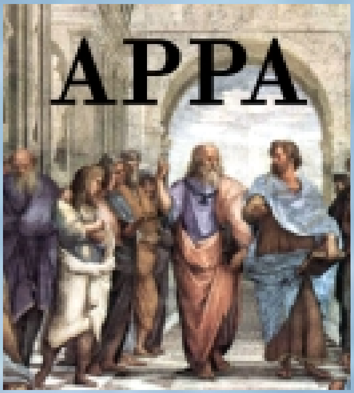

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Community of Enquiry and Ethics of Responsibility

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Abstract

The article assumes that Lipman's paradigm of 'Philosophy for Children' (P4C) as a 'Community of Inquiry' (CI) is very useful in extending the range of *philosophical practices* and the benefits of philosophical community reflection to collective life as such. In particular, it examines the possible contribution of philosophy to the practical and ethical dynamics which, nowadays, seem to characterise many deliberative public contexts. Lipman's idea of CI is an interesting interpretative key for such contexts. As a result, the article highlights the possibility of understanding a CI essentially in terms of an ethics of responsibility.

Keywords: *community, responsibility, philosophy for children, philosophical inquiry, education to democracy, public ethics, deliberation.*

Introduction

This essay assumes that Matthew Lipman's 'Philosophy for Children' (P4C), although developed in the 1970s, is still relevant to our contemporary age. Indeed, its application reaches beyond the sphere of childhood. Problematic aspects of democratic life—such as the teaching of the concept of civil liberties, the spreading of responsible participation and pluralistic dialogue, and the fulfilment of a common civil life based upon shared rules, procedures, and reasonable dialogue—are not yet solved and may indeed need to be frequently revisited and reviewed. It seems, moreover, that with the advent of globalisation, and its political and socio-cultural consequences, life has become more 'complex' (Carletto-Franzini Tibaldeo, 2004).

It may be that philosophy can contribute towards how we face or resolve the problems of this 'complex' world. Here, I try to develop a comparison with Lipman's thinking, in order to point out the relevance of his idea of 'Community of Inquiry' (CI) for public ethics and, specifically, for an ethics of responsibility. Indeed, I believe that this comparison will help to elucidate the potential role played by the philosophical discussion and the relationships built within a CI for the successful development of an individual and public ethics of responsibility.[1]

Lipman's 'Community of Inquiry' (CI)

Lipman's philosophical and pedagogical research begins with the proposition that 'the greatest disappointment of traditional education consists in its failure in generating persons who draw near to the ideal of reasonableness' (Lipman, 1988, it. tr. p. 17). This does not mean that this ideal is Utopian or beyond the reach of education. Indeed, Lipman's point here is not to cast doubt on the principle of reasonableness. Nevertheless, what is evident and problematic is the fact that traditional education has no efficacy in the spreading and consolidation among citizens of civil virtues (Lipman, 2003).

Beginning with theoretical premises close to pragmatism and constructivism, but also acquiring ideas from contemporary continental hermeneutics and from the epistemology of complexity (Lipman, 2003; Cosentino, 2002b; Cosentino, 2005b),[2] Lipman aims to go beyond the current idea of an educational system,[3] in search of a new philosophical and pedagogical paradigm so as to comprehend the overall formation of the individual's dispositions and main features of the citizen.

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Education and democracy can in no way be separated. This is a debt Lipman incurs directly from Dewey, who devoted important essays to this theme (Dewey, 1916; Cives, 2004). Like Dewey, Lipman believes that the democratic context is both the indispensable premise and the never sufficiently gained goal for a renewed education system, the aim of which is to stimulate the spread of reflective, autonomous, and critical thinking. Moreover, the aim is to give rise to dialogue, self-correction, and inquiry, in order to eliminate the 'forces which cause violence, ignorance, and injustice' (Striano-Oliverio, 2007, p. 264).[4] Democracy is, according to Lipman, the *space* and the *political environment* where human relations take place, and where also educational relations may happen. Two fundamental aspects are fulfilled by a democratic context: on the one hand, an aptitude to research distinguished by fallibility and self-criticism, and, on the other, the recognition of the value assigned to procedures and their respect by citizens.

In defining the new educational and political paradigm, Lipman points out two regulative ideals: the first—democracy—guides, and ought to guide, the development of social structure, while the second—reasonableness—guides, and ought to guide, the development of the individual structure of each child and, therefore, of future citizens (Sharp, 2005, p. 33; Lipman-Sharp, 1978; Lipman, 2003, pp. 235 ff.).

This outline is, however, incomplete without an indication of the extent to which philosophy plays a relevant role. Lipman refers again to Dewey, when he says, 'Our society could not be fully civilised and our schools could not be fully satisfactory [...] until students were converted to inquiry and thereby prepared to be participants in a society likewise committed to inquiry as the sovereign method of dealing with its problems' (Lipman, 2003, p. 34).

It is well-known that Dewey interprets 'inquiry' as 'scientific inquiry' (Dewey, 1933; Dewey, 1938; Peirce, 1935-58; Lipman, 2003, p. 20; Cosentino, 2005c, p. 75; Striano, 2002, pp. 139 ff.). Lipman, on the other hand, understands the idea of 'philosophical inquiry' in a wider sense, by referring to an idea of philosophy as a *philosophical practice*.[5] In keeping with this, Lipman defines inquiry as 'perseverance in self-corrective inquiry regarding relevant and problematic questions' (Lipman, 1988, p. 19). It is, however, important to notice that such a philosophical practice may take place in a community only with others who share the same desire to participate in a philosophical inquiry.

A CI, therefore, begins with this shared desire. Moreover, participants ought also to share the commitment to an aim (the will to undertake a philosophical inquiry), the 'commitment to reasonableness – that is, to rationality tempered by judgement' (Lipman, 2003, p. 111), and to reciprocally recognise these commitments and the need for a collective sharing. The heart and vehicle of expression of this inquiry is, according to Lipman, *philosophical dialogue*, which differs from conversation, debate, and mere communication (Lipman, 2003, pp. 87-93).[6] Philosophical dialogue is certainly argumentative, but at the same time it consists not only in argumentation.[7] What happens in a CI is what affects the participants, and this is complex and difficult to describe. Lipman synthesises the specific characteristics of a CI in this way:

> Every community of inquiry has about it a requiredness or *Prägnanz* that lends it a sense of direction, and every participant in such a community partakes of that qualitative presence, which is the tertiary quality of which Dewey speaks. It is a quality more readily possessed than described, but were it not present and acknowledged, the participants would lack any standard of *relevance* or *irrelevance* (Lipman, 2003, p. 86).

At the same time, not every communication is a philosophical dialogue or an inquiry. In a similar way, not every community is a community of inquiry, least of all because of the fact that to be such a community there have to be acknowledged and shared commitments, norms, procedures, and responsibilities.

This is what specifies a CI as such. However, what about the *effects* of a CI upon its members? What qualitative difference may a CI produce *on* its members? To what extent is it possible—supposing that the question makes sense—to talk about the ‘utility’ of a CI for the democratic context in which it works and to which it gives its contribution?

This final question especially invests in a wider sense the meaning of philosophy. Lipman leans to philosophy as *philosophising*, that is a specific way of practically interacting with the world. Philosophy is, therefore, committed to the inquiry of sense and meaning. This is the horizon against which Lipman’s ‘pro-reasonableness’ choice is to be set, the further development of which depends on the quality of philosophising which nourishes it. Finally, these aspects display the required centrality of philosophy for education and, moreover, for democratic society as such.[8]

In order to identify the effects produced on an individual taking part in a CI, Lipman points out some fundamental characteristics leading to the full achievement of a reasonable person and citizen. Among these aspects we find the following: autonomy, reflectivity, self-reflectivity, self-correction, sensitivity to context, ability to use critical and self-critical thinking as well as creative and caring thinking, competence to argue and to sustain the reasons of personal choices, actions and beliefs (Lipman, 2003, pp. 25-27). These characteristics not only point out the main features of Lipman’s new paradigm but, because they are of fundamental importance, both for the single person and for the community, they reveal a ‘thoroughly social and communal’ (Ibid. p. 25) quality as well.

Community of Inquiry, Democracy and Public Ethics

Any CI is closely connected *to* values and with questions *about the sense* of values. This happens because of the ‘caring’ thinking (that is, it being value-oriented), which together with the logical-critical and the creative thinking involved makes a person (and a collective discussion) able to put into practice a ‘thinking of a higher level’ (Lipman, 1995, p. 29). Also, it is important to recall the *Prägnanz,*[9] which—according to Lipman—marks the difference between a community in which a philosophical inquiry process takes place from one where this does not occur. Because of *Prägnanz*, the community and its members have a parameter—gained through the common inquiry—by which they are able to *evaluate* what is relevant and to distinguish it from what is not. Lastly, the philosophical inquiry deriving from a collective commitment is, as such, already oriented to action (and, therefore, is *as such* ethically relevant). This is possible because the community has previously developed its inquiry being stimulated by problems arising from praxis, and with the reasonable expectation of being able to synthesise them into a higher level of thinking or solution.

A second (and ethically relevant) aspect emerges from Lipman’s meditations upon the CI. It concerns the relationship between the individual and the community, and consequently between individual values and shared values. A similar question may, however, be posed in relation to the freedom of the individual facing the community in which he decides to participate. Experience says that the answer to these issues normally lies within a range of solutions displayed between two extremes: on the one hand, there is the defence of the irreducibility and intangibility of the individual, while, on the other, there is the nullification of the individual in favour of a new and amplified communitarian subject, which, therefore, seems to assume its own substantiality and individuality.

Lipman deals with the problem by avoiding both of the extremes. According to his renewed pedagogy faithful to *complexity*, his solution goes beyond any dualistic answer. From one aspect, Lipman states that there is a certain priority set by the world and the social environment upon individuality (because of a first movement proceeding from the social towards the individual).[10] However, for another, Lipman never forgets to point out that the relation between an individual and a community displays a *dialectics of freedom*. This dynamic avoids the rupture of the social relationship, recognising at the same time the unavoidable and dialectical tension and friction arising from the ingredients. The dialectics of freedom, as explained by Lipman, avoids the annihilation of the individual in the communitarian situation, but, at the same time it shows how any individual *belongs-to* and *is-placed-inside* a specific and historical context, into—expressed as contemporary hermeneutics—an horizon of pre-comprehension as the fundamental condition of possibilities for any human relation. Moreover, Lipman rejects the transformation of a community into a substantial and autonomous entity, while stating, at the same time, that the community is also characterised by a form of 'ulteriority'. This means that a community, being more than the sum of its individuals, represents a certain reserve of possibilities for its members. In addition, he insists that the plexus of individual freedom and responsibility can never come to a conscious and critical or self-critical realisation if separated from a social context. Lipman, however, does not intend to deny the freedom of individuals, or to remove the responsibility for individual behaviour.

Furthermore, the interpretative key of the productive *tension* and *friction* animating the space of human freedom may be applied also to other aspects of Lipman's meditation. For example, it may find application in the relation between the idea of 'community' (as a specific socio-cultural setting, which opens the possibility of making relations and inquiries) and the idea of 'inquiry' (as a self-corrective, multi-logical, perspective, and critical inquiry). In a similar fashion it might be applied to the relation binding logic and creativity, rationality and affectivity (Lupia, 2005, p. 77), or democracy and inquiry.[11] Lastly, and implicitly, human relations as such (together with their typical 'warmth') seem to gain some clarity from this idea of productive and cooperative energy, which (at least in part) seems to explain their essence.

As regards explicitly ethical issues, Lipman points out their relation to the two characteristics identifying practical reasoning: *self-correction* and *sensitivity to context*. Consequently, he derives two possible approaches of interest for a collective inquiry: 'self-realisation ethics' and 'good-reasons ethics' (Lipman, 2003, p. 54). These are, however, only two possible examples of ethically relevant themes, which must always be placed alongside other (ethically relevant) characteristics of human reasoning, such as the intrinsically *normative* feature of caring thinking (thanks to which it is possible to compare being with ought-to-being), or the *predictive* feature.[12]

Therefore, the ethical relevance portraying such human reason finds its match in the ethical colouring of the CI. These two dimensions inevitably reflect one another dynamically: on the one hand, the product gained by collective inquiry appears to be relevant for individual ethics (because of the active, motivated, and responsible participation of its members), while, on the other, thanks to its relational and social core, the subject always ponders, evaluates, and acts within a dialogical and a CI context. Since a CI shows an intentionality for ethical inquiry which goes beyond the merely ethical positions (individually speaking) of its members, it can certainly be said that *as such* a CI shows a certain relevance for public ethics.

However, it is interesting to notice that the application of the idea of 'public ethics' to a CI requires (and produces) an overall reconfiguration of the same idea, which takes it well beyond its current meaning. Indeed, the public-ethical commitment of philosophical inquiry led by a CI does not at all consist in the reproduction of the basic features of so called 'public ethics' (Da Re, 2001, p. 43). Instead, the public-ethical philosophising of a CI cannot be simply reduced to 'public ethics'. Indeed, a CI is interested in discussing fundamental questions of *sense*, which are by definition omitted by public ethics. Both attitudes, however, share some basic theoretical statements: pluralism of values; the possible conflict between them; the fact that the different options displayed may not be able to face each other rationally in order to achieve a fair and reasonable solution, together with their general aim (the attempt to handle existing pluralism), and, finally, the choice in favour of a democratic procedure of rational confrontation.

Nevertheless, an essential difference is, in both cases, the procedure. In the case of ‘public ethics’ the procedure aims at a mainly logical-argumentative confrontation, a politics controlling and orienting pluralism, and the mediation of interests in the first case. In the case of a CI, the aims are the following: a research involving the whole thinking project; a common procedure into which each member is at a stake with his values in order to come to a productive result; a filter which opens the possibility for mediation; a practice of self-regulation and formation aiming to assume the best choice.

For example: suppose that a group of individuals (for instance, the members of a town council) intends to discuss what to do with a certain plot of ground belonging to the community. Suppose that the participants—as often happens—express different and specific interests and are not able to arrive at a common decision about the problem. Suppose, however, that after much discussion they agree to the construction of a public park on this ground. In this case, the solution was found by mediating among several interests and the resulting deliberation cleared the initial problem. The questions may be, at this point: Did we assist a CI process? Can this discussion be assumed to be a concrete example of CI? The answer to both questions must be negative. Indeed, it has to be said that the aim of a community of philosophical inquiry *does not* consist in the mediation of interests, but (for example) in a dialogue upon *what to mean* by ‘interest’. The democracy of a CI is different from a mere ‘democracy of interests’. The democratic method practically adopted by a CI seems, on the contrary, to consist in a filter opening the possibility for a higher level of mediation. The aim of a CI is not immediately and exclusively the search for agreement but the *inquiry as such*.[13] In this respect, a CI definitely differs from a case of discourse or communication ethics.

A second difference between public ethics and CI concerns the possible range of application. A philosophical inquiry seems to be possible only at a ‘community’ level (where ‘community’ is *Gemeinschaft*), that is, in a context characterised by near and reciprocal relations (Lipman, 2003, p. 95). On the other hand, the meditations carried out by public ethics may find their application also at a ‘social’ level (where ‘society’ is *Gesellschaft*), that is, in a context of hierarchical relations, which probably is not only wider, but also subject to dynamics characterised by competition or will-to-power.[14]

However, it would be a mistake to conclude that public ethics and CI have nothing to do with each other. On the contrary, as far as application is concerned, they seem to be complementary. On the one hand, the public-ethical commitment to community needs, which, when set in a wider relational horizon, may stimulate a permanent inquiry that avoids the withdrawal of the community into an ideological shell; on the other hand, democratic *society* (and, moreover, the global democratic society) can in no circumstance do without the communities and their strong relational motivation. This resistance helps towards avoiding the risk of falling into forms of governance based upon bureaucratic procedures only.

Community of Inquiry and Ethics of Responsibility

It is necessary to return to the characteristics of a CI, in order to understand in what sense any community philosophical inquiry is involved in a process producing a *result* or a *product*.[15] In light of what has already been said, it should be clear that this result is a product of common knowledge, that is, a *cooperative construction* of sense and a process of negotiation of sense to which each member of the community takes part (Striano, 2005, p. 56-58; Lupia, 2005, p. 76). Because of its intrinsically philosophical character (that is, fallible, revisable, and self-corrective), this product ought to be continuously and dialogically discussed. The inquiry *product*—being a 'kind of settlement or judgement' (Lipman, 2003, p. 83)—appears to be the result of a 'deliberation', that is of a process of community 'weighing' specific reasons.[16]

Hence, the inquiry produced by a community appears to steer clear of the effective fulfilment of specific actions and decisions. The determination and planning of these seems, indeed, not to be *in primis* the aim of the inquiry. The philosophical inquiry refers to a different logic from the one driving *problem solving strategies*, whose aim is to discuss a specific question with the sole idea of coming to a specific deliberation for final practical application. The philosophical dialogue which occurs in a CI—according to Antonio Cosentino, who introduced Lipman's thinking into Italy at the beginning of the 1990s—is 'a kind of knowledge which does not correspond to the level of instrumental knowledge (acquiring of information, computing of data, problem solving). On the contrary, it has mainly to do with horizons of sense, values, cognitive paradigms, ways of interpreting reality, global attitudes towards experience' (Cosentino, 2005b, p. 42; Lipman, 2003, p. 26). In order to solve a problematic situation (as previously mentioned, this aim is implicit in the same idea of 'inquiry'), collective inquiry certainly takes off from singular circumstances and specific problems. Yet, as such, the process of philosophical reflection always preserves a sort of *ulteriority* with respect to this situation. It does, in fact, characterise the peculiarity of philosophical inquiry and of its method, according to which, in order to face a problem, it is first necessary to widen its context and horizon, which then makes it possible to examine deeply all philosophical devices (terms, ideas, interpretative keys, etc.) previously used. As a consequence, the initial problem is examined in a new light and in a renewed context of sense. For this reason, I believe that the 'deliberation' (that is the product of common thinking) may be followed by some kind of practical modification in the life of the community and of its members. Therefore, a kind of 'utility' can be expected from a CI—'community of inquiry', says Cosentino, 'assigns the logical products of the inquiry in order to restore its overall order and to improve the conditions of existence and of everyday life' (Cosentino, 2005b, p. 29).

The matter may be summarized as follows: reflection in the CI begins with a specific problem, but does not aim solely to find a specific solution. Nevertheless, the expected *result*—the nature of which has evidently to invest praxis—requires the overall involvement of a higher faculty of human inquiry. As a result, the problem finds its solution at the level of the *reflective* praxis. This operation is placed at an *ulterior* level compared with the one where the starting problem was specifically sited.

Being faithful to Lipman's dislike for any kind of dualistic interpretation, it is now important to avoid the involvement of a form of dualism in this delicate point of the pragmatics of the CI. Lipman fought to unify theory and praxis. The same effort must be made when examining the 'effects' produced by the *reflective* praxis upon specific actions or choices which the community as such (or individual members of the community), after having carried out a process of philosophical reflection, concretely intend to assume and carry out. It would be a cause of demotivation or incoherence if philosophical reflection was unable to produce any *effect* on the everyday praxis of the CI members. The same problem would arise in cases where the *effects* of a 'community' praxis had no chance of generating any influence upon 'social' praxis.

As previously illustrated, specific cases and questions (actions) offer opportunities for the constitution of the dialogical praxis and community research. It is now time to analyze the opposite movement, that is the achievement of the reflective praxis by means of single actions/*deliberations* (reached through collective *deliberations*), which may be concretely assumed or carried out individually or collectively.[17] In this respect, the question is: how can a CI as such implement—after careful meditation (deliberation 1)—specific actions or decisions (deliberation 2), without losing its specificity (that is, the philosophical character of its reflection)? Or, vice versa, which actions or deliberations (deliberation 2) are able to testify to and preserve the irreducible peculiarity of a CI (deliberation 1), which produced them?

These questions are relevant because it is of fundamental interest to make the following points clear. First, to what extent the community *reflective* praxis (deliberation 1) may actually make a difference in everyday praxis at the level of both social life and individual existence (deliberation 2)? Second, to what extent a community, which decides to face specific problems (see Dewey's idea of 'inquiry'), and *with the aim of finding a concrete resolution* (deliberation 2), may consider itself a community of 'inquiry' (deliberation 1)? The solution of this second problem is particularly relevant to any attempt at widely extending the philosophical practice of a CI. Indeed, such experiments could try to involve political-administrative bodies, cultural and professional associations, and business organisations, which only exist because they are committed to resolving problems and bringing about specific decisions. The effects of this broader application could have consequences on the community and its members and, moreover, upon the wider 'social' context.

I believe these questions may find a form of clarification through a meditation on the ethical-philosophical idea of responsibility. Its significance is testified to by the fact that the concept of responsibility is able to consider both the *effective consequences* of human behaviour and the wider and challenging *horizon of sense,* within which actions and consequences happen.[18] In other words, I believe that, thanks to an interpretation of the community pragmatics in light of the ethics of responsibility, it is possible to obtain important results: first, an overall interpretation of the sense of human action can be reached; second, the consequences of actions can be considered; third, the *reflective* praxis of a CI can generate positive effects for the *social* praxis highlighted.

Since fully demonstrating this last statement requires further research, here I will restrict myself to outlining a *hypothetical* solution by trying to imagine synthetically what actually happens when a CI begins. Assume, therefore, that a group of people (for instance, a town council, a spontaneous neighbourhood committee, or the managers of a business) intends to create a philosophical discussion (deliberation 1) concerning a specific topic or theme, in order to come to a concrete deliberation that can subsequently be implemented (deliberation 2). Assume that this group, though limited to the above-mentioned topic of discussion, aims to become a 'short-term CI'. From this, it is possible to propose hypothetically a series of considerations. First, the example demonstrates the possibility for a social praxis and to become reflective through the decision of the community to manage a dialogue according to a certain procedure (namely, the one that characterises a CI). This decision is based on the preliminary and free assent of the community members. Furthermore, this assent is joined to a freely assumed commitment (namely, a commitment undertaken by individuals who lead the community) to adhere to the procedure. Second, from these fundamental issues derive practical consequences, such as the fact that from now on people 'suspend' their ordinary social roles, that the discussion of selected topics will be characterised by a certain 'philosophical' style, and this will take place according to specific rules. Third, in cases where the experiment succeeds, it is reasonable to assume that certain consequences will follow. For example, it is highly probable that the participants receive an overall benefit in terms of personal reflective awareness. It is also probable that this awareness will increase if it finds further opportunities to be practiced (reinforcement effect). It is also probable that the acquired method of inquiry and the consequent increase of reflective awareness find further application—maybe within the same CI—to other topics some of which would have been previously unknown or unexpected. Fourth, it is likely that the growth of reflective skills within the CI and its members generates the improvement of other skills, such as the ability to evaluate questions (deliberation 1), cooperatively imagining possible solutions, imagining alternative scenarios, predicting their possible consequences and effects on praxis, and monitoring the effective fulfilment of assumed decisions (deliberation 2). Finally, from the effective achievement of the CI, it is legitimate to expect that its members receive from this experience an increased incentive in terms of personal motivation to realise further collective inquiry.

Hence, the mental experiment of a ‘short-term CI’ seems to reveal some advantages. First: it presents itself as a specific inquiry itinerary, which is, however, placed in a wider horizon of *sense*. For this reason, the inquiry is able to testify to fundamental characteristics of this overall sense, such as its complexity, relational essence, and practical constitution. Other specific issues revealed by the horizon of sense (evidenced by the CI experience), are, in summary: free acceptance of a specific procedure, participation of the individuals, commitment to inquiry, construction and negotiation of meanings, recognition of other beings, sensitivity to value rationality, recognition of the emancipative power of community philosophical practice (Cosentino, 2004; Casarin, 2005), and so on. Second: the mental experiment may outline an initial exemplification of the dynamics linking *reflective* praxis with *social* praxis, reflective thinking with instrumental-strategical action (Lupia, 2005, p. 76), and the collective inquiry/deliberation (deliberation 1) with the fulfilment of specific choices (deliberation 2). Moreover, the experiment points out the heuristic process by which the CI and the ethics of responsibility can come to a reciprocal elucidation: on the one hand, the ethics of responsibility may display a coherent and unitary interpretation of the practical-philosophical dynamics of CI, while, on the other, the CI may lead to an understanding of the multiple levels of responsibility.

The first result of this reciprocal elucidation is the fundamental connection between the ideas of freedom and responsibility; the one requires the other. Indeed, personal freedom comes to self-realisation only with the freedom of others, and according to the reciprocal relation of call-answer (that is of responsibility)[19] shown towards others. This means that before finding individual and specific fulfilment, freedom and responsibility are mutually implied as co-freedom and co-responsibility. In this respect, freedom and responsibility reveal a first (fundamental) level of meaning, consisting in an overall horizon of sense, of possibility, and of existence as such. On the one hand, the freedom and responsibility of the individuals and the community inquiry process find a consequent space and existence within this fundamental horizon. On the other, this horizon is liable to a process of continuous re-acceptance and re-configuration achieved by the freedom and responsibility of the individuals and of the CI.

However, a second element appears when a person chooses, consciously, to take part in a CI—the free choice coincides with the responsible acceptance of a limit, which opens a productive, dynamic, and ‘public’ space for inquiry and existence.[20] This freely accepted responsibility may find the following articulation: the individual is responsible a) *for his own actions*, and *for their consequences*, b) *towards* the other members of the community (responsibility as *care*), c) *towards* the community inquiry process (epistemic responsibility) (Striano, 2005, p. 51), d) *for* the philosophical quality of the results of the collective inquiry (deliberation 1), e) *for* the possible effects deriving from the practical fulfilment of specific decisions taken at a collective level (deliberation 2). It is important to notice that the achievement of points c), d), and e), does not depend *exclusively* on the goodwill of any single member of the community, but instead on the fact that the community *as such* accepts its commitment to inquiry.

Conclusions

In this essay I implicitly assumed two premises: a) the ‘political’ or ‘public’ relevance of philosophy—understood as a *reflective practice*—and the ‘utility’ of philosophy in order to gain an increase of civilization; b) the firm belief that Lipman’s paradigm of P4C as a CI is very useful in extending the range of *philosophical practices* and the benefits of philosophical community reflection to collective life as such. I have not focussed on the question of whether Lipman's paradigm is *the* best for this purpose, and I acknowledge that further research would be necessary in order to reach such a conclusion. Instead, I have tried to develop the two above mentioned premises in order to discuss the possible contribution of philosophy to the practical and ethical dynamics which, nowadays, seem to characterise many relational and deliberative public contexts. In doing this, I have tried to apply to these contexts the interpretative key supplied by Lipman's CI. Subsequently, I have attempted to interpret a CI essentially in terms of an ethics of responsibility which is committed to two aims: on the one hand, to give a unitary (and non-dualistic) picture of human action, and of the plexus of freedom and responsibility, and, on the other, to re-interpret fundamental philosophical issues, such as the emancipative power of philosophical practice for the individual, the fact that philosophy ought to inquire about the reasons for participation in democracy, and the contribution that this reflective practice may offer to the comprehension of the productive tensions of the individual and community existence.

Notes

[1] In this respect, the comparison has the opportunity to show its originality. In fact, Lipman developed the idea of 'Community of Inquiry' within the school context, and did not aim to extend it to society as such (Lipman, 2003). However, I believe that there are very interesting reasons which can support this possibility.

[2] For possible common points of interest with contemporary hermeneutics see Da Re, 2001, pp. 115-117. For the relationship between pedagogical theory and epistemology of complexity see Morin, 1973; Morin 1985; and Morin, 1991.

[3] Indeed, Lipman believes that the present education system has lead students to ignore how to deal with logical competences. See, for instance, Lipman, 2003 and Striano-Oliverio, 2007.

[4] For the relation between democracy and reduction of violence, see Lipman, 2003, pp. 105 ff.

[5] For the definition of 'philosophical practices', see Volpone, 2004, pp. 20-21.

[6] For the difference between Lipman's CI and Habermas' discourse ethics, see Laverty, 2005, pp. 158, 163 ff. and 177.

[7] For the articulation of human rationality according to Lipman, see Lipman, 1995, p. 37 and Lipman, 2003.

[8] 'And if reasonableness prevails in the classroom today, then tomorrow, when today's students are adults and beginning to have children of their own, it will also prevail in the home. In time, other institutions may be transformed in a similar fashion, but it must all begin in the schools' (Lipman, 2003, p. 123).

[9] With *Prägnanz* Lipman refers to the capacity of a CI to distinguish what is relevant and what has a value for the collective discussion (Lipman, 2003, p. 86).

[10] This movement explains the development of the individual's rationality, of his psychological characteristics, and of his cognitive capacities. The same movement may also show how reflection originates from dialogue (Lipman, 2003; Lupia, 2005, pp. 74-75 and p. 76). In this respect, Lipman's thinking appears to be evidently influenced by Vygotskij (Vygotskij, 1934).

[11] In this respect, Dewey had already remarked that democracy and inquiry may not happen to be naturally allied. Thus, according to Lipman, it is necessary to make efforts in order to harmonise them (Lipman, 2003, pp. 35-36).

[12] For the *normativity* of caring thinking, see Lipman, 2003, pp. 34-35 and Sharp, 2005b, pp. 51-52. As regards the *predicative* feature, it characterises rationality as such. In fact, to comprehend something implies being able to single out its relations with the conditions and reasons producing it and with the effects deriving from it (Striano-Oliverio, 2007, p. 259; Cosentino, 2002b). The derivation of this idea from American pragmatism is evident.

[13] However, as I will argue further, I do believe that this inquiry is 'interested' in its own achievement and in influencing behaviour.

[14] For the complex and controversial distinction between *community* and *society*, see Tönnies, 1887 and Reidel, 1975. See also Esposito, 1998, Viola 1999 and Donati, 2006. See, finally, Esposito, 2002 and the meditations of P. Coda, R. Mancini, M. Signore, and S. Zamagni, in Signore-Scarafile, 2005. For the relevance of Lipman's thought on this debate, see Lupia, 2005, p. 72.

[15] According to Lipman, each CI has a goal: a CI is ‘a process that aims at producing a product—at some kind of settlement or judgement, however partial and tentative this may be’ (Lipman, 2003, p. 83).

[16] Lipman gives the following definition of ‘deliberation’: ‘This involves a consideration of alternatives through examination of the reasons supporting each alternative. Since the deliberation usually takes place in preparation for the making of a judgement, we speak of the process as a “weighing” of the reasons and the alternatives’ (Ibid. p. 96).

[17] The philosophical problem of the ‘realisation/fulfilment’ of the reflective praxis is already evidenced by the meaning of the word ‘deliberation’. Indeed, ‘deliberation’ ordinarily assumes two meanings. The first indicates the ‘internal’ process of weighing and evaluating reasons in order to formulate a judgement (deliberation 1). Lipman uses ‘deliberation’ with reference to this meaning (Lipman, 2003, p. 96). However, a second meaning seems to emerge from the everyday use of the term. This meaning insists on the ‘what for’ of the deliberation (the deliberative weighing is never neutral, but has the aim of a practical fulfilment, and has always to be prepared to respond for the possible consequences deriving from the realisation) (deliberation 2). It is important to notice, that in a CI the realisation of a deliberation 1 by means of a deliberation 2 (expressed by a specific norm, commandment, or measure) ought never to consist in a *poietic* or *technical* process only, but—better—in a *practical* (in a philosophical sense) fulfilment. In this essay, I cannot enter into the question of the relation between individual deliberation and intersubjective or collective choice. Several works examine this problem in light of the fundamental role played by Aristotle (Bubner, 1976; Arenas-Dolz, 2006; Totaro, 2006).

[18] For an overall reappraisal of the idea of responsibility beyond the bare consideration of the consequences of human action, see the thinking of Hans Jonas (Jonas, 1979).

[19] The word ‘responsibility’ derives from the Latin *respondere* and *responsum dare*, which imply the idea of being committed to giving an *answer* to someone to some extent. It is curious to notice that also the German word meaning ‘responsibility’, namely *Verantwortung*, has conserved this responsive meaning (*Antwort* = answer).

[20] See above, for the *productive tension/friction* of human relationships.

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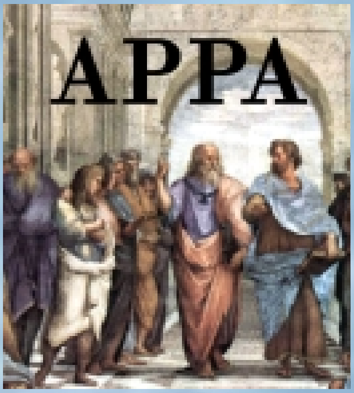

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