cover: picasso, *las meninas* (1957)

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emotion, disequilibrium and attentive compassion

confronting emotions in the community of philosophical inquiry with simone weil & ann margaret sharp

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abstract

The expression of emotions within the Community of Philosophical Inquiry (CPI) can be challenging. Despite Matthew Lipman's insistence that emotions *are* choices and judgements, there can be a tendency to conflate the CPI's reasonableness with an emotion-free space of rationality. Where feeling in the CPI is theorised, it is often read on a general level as atmospheric collective feelings that facilitators might 'check-in' with at the end or beginning of a session. However, the reality within CPIs is quite different. Emotions can arise suddenly, making their negotiation challenging for the facilitator. We theorise that, rather than calling for empathy, these moments require compassion, resourcing that account of compassion with the thought of Simone Weil and Ann Margaret Sharp. Theorising the negotiations of emotional contributions in inquiry with Sharp and Weil reminds us of the risk of reductively reading others whose emotions and situations are radically unlike us. Their account provides us with resources to explain how the productive CPI explores emotions together. In particular, Simone Weil supports our account of attentive

compassion towards the world of the other, to theoretically explore what happens between participants in a fruitful CPI when emotions are expressed. To do so, we take Sharp's account of the CPI, which we argue is deeply inspired by her reading of Weil. This paper frames the phenomenon of emotion expressed in the community through examples from practice, provides an account of attentive compassion through recent Weilian scholarship, and applies this to the CPI to frame it as a space of attentive compassion.

keywords: simone weil; attention; inquiry; compassion; emotion.

emoción, desequilibrio y compasión atenta: enfrentando las emociones en la comunidad de investigación filosófica con simone weil y ann margaret sharp

resume

La expresión de las emociones dentro de la Comunidad de Investigación Filosófica (CIF) puede resultar difícil. A pesar de la insistencia de Matthew Lipman en que las emociones *son* elecciones y juicios, puede existir una tendencia a confundir la racionalidad de la CIF con un espacio de racionalidad libre de emociones. Cuando se teoriza sobre los sentimientos en la CIF, a menudo se interpretan a nivel general como sentimientos colectivos atmosféricos que los facilitadores pueden «comprobar» al final o al principio de una sesión. Sin embargo, la realidad dentro de las CIF es muy diferente. Las emociones pueden surgir de repente, lo que dificulta su negociación para el facilitador. Teorizamos que, en lugar de pedir empatía, estos momentos requieren compasión, basándonos en las ideas de Simone Weil y Ann Margaret Sharp. Teorizar sobre las negociaciones de las contribuciones emocionales en la investigación con Sharp y Weil nos recuerda el riesgo de interpretar de forma reduccionista a otras personas cuyas emociones y situaciones son radicalmente diferentes a las nuestras. Su explicación nos proporciona recursos para explicar cómo la CIF productivo explora las emociones de forma conjunta. En particular, Simone Weil apoya nuestra explicación de la compasión atenta hacia el mundo del otro, para explorar teóricamente lo que ocurre entre los participantes en una CIF fructífera cuando se expresan las emociones. Para ello, tomamos la explicación de Sharp sobre la CIF, que, en nuestra opinión, está profundamente inspirada en su lectura de Weil. Este artículo enmarca el fenómeno de la emoción expresada en la comunidad a través de ejemplos prácticos, ofrece una explicación de la compasión atenta a través de los recientes estudios sobre Weil y la aplica a la CIF para enmarcarla como un espacio de compasión atenta.

palabras clave: simone weil; atención; indagación; compasión; emoción.

emoção, desequilíbrio e compaixão atenta: confrontando as emoções na comunidade de investigação filosófica com simone weil e ann margaret sharp

resumo

A expressão das emoções dentro da Comunidade de Investigação Filosófica (CIF) pode ser desafiadora. Embora Matthew Lipman insista que as emoções *são* escolhas e julgamentos, pode haver uma tendência a confundir a razoabilidade da CIF com um espaço de racionalidade livre de emoções. Quando o sentir na CIF é teorizado, geralmente é interpretado em um nível geral como sentimentos coletivos atmosféricos, que os facilitadores podem "verificar" no início ou no final de uma sessão. No entanto, a realidade dentro das CIFs é bastante diferente. Emoções podem surgir repentinamente, o que torna lidar com elas um desafio para o facilitador. Teorizamos que, em vez de exigir

empatia, esses momentos requerem compaixão, fundamentando essa concepção de compaixão no pensamento de Simone Weil e Ann Margaret Sharp. Teorizar as negociações das contribuições emocionais na investigação com Sharp e Weil nos lembra do risco de ler de forma reducionista os outros, cujas emoções e situações são radicalmente diferentes das nossas. A concepção das autoras nos oferece recursos para explicar como a CIF produtiva explora as emoções em conjunto. Em especial, Simone Weil apoia nossa compreensão da compaixão atenta em relação ao mundo do outro, para explorar teoricamente o que acontece entre os participantes em uma CIF frutífera quando as emoções são expressas. Para tanto, partimos da concepção de Sharp sobre a CIF, que, argumentamos, é profundamente inspirada por sua leitura de Weil. Este artigo enquadra o fenômeno da emoção expressa na comunidade por meio de exemplos da prática, apresenta uma concepção de compaixão atenta com base em estudos recentes sobre Weil e a aplica à CIF, compreendendo-a como um espaço de compaixão atenta.

palavras-chave: simone weil; atenção; investigação; compaixão; emoção.

emotion, disequilibrium and attentive compassion

confronting emotions in the community of philosophical inquiry with simone weil & ann margaret sharp

> *to interact with others responsively and responsibly is to treat them with compassion, humility and reverence. Our compassion is inspired by their vulnerability and suffering; our humility is inspired by their ultimate unknowability; and our reverence is inspired by the revelation that they bring us.*
>
> Sharp & Laverty (2018, p. 124)

introduction

This paper applies Simone Weil's account of attentive compassion to the expression of emotions in the Community of Philosophical Inquiry (CPI). Although these observations may apply to the emotions that may arise from stimulus material provoking doubt or frustration in the participants, our focus, rather, is on the moments of emotive expression within the inquiry dialogue itself. These can be an expression of emotion relating to the recounting of lived experiences, or a response to (or judgement on) the ideas expressed within the inquiry. In the following, we will recount an instance from inquiry as illustrative of the phenomenon we describe. Additionally, we will explore how the CPI as a compassionate space can prompt participants to attend judiciously to the world of the emotive inquirer in order to appreciate the significance of their contribution in answering or indeed exploring the questions and concepts at hand. In following Weil, like Ann Margaret Sharp, we frame the attentive compassion of the CPI as a space where emotions, irresistibly elicited by lived experience and reflection on the same, are not subordinate to rational tools but become a meaningful part of our thinking of and about the world.[1]

Here, the collective nature of inquiry offers the emotive participant the unique freedom to engage in two kinds of sense-making; i) the emotional reactions to the experience, thoughts, and ideas of others and ii) the understanding the community of fellow inquirers gains from acknowledging and examining the

[1] In a sense, this paper develops Shea's suggestion that Weil might be key to understanding the difficulty faced by inquirers in sharing certain experiences in the CPI (Shea 2018, p. 171).

world of meaning from which these feelings arise. We begin by recounting an example from an inquiry where emotions arose as part of the process of inquiring into the relationship between loss and growth. Following this, we give an account of attentive compassion informed by Simone Weil, building on recent Weilian scholarship and the interests of Ann Margaret Sharp, founder of the Philosophy for Children movement. Next, we explore the potential of the Community of Philosophical Inquiry as a space for practising compassion and suggest that this feature of caring thinking should be more prominent in accounts of collaborative philosophical dialogue practised by communities of philosophical inquiry. In closing, we propose that this account of compassion can usefully clarify what happens to and for the inquirer faced with the emotions of a peer, but also when presented with emotional content as a provocation to inquire or who feels emotions for imagined others who may be maligned by a course of thinking or overlooked by certain myopic lines of inquiry.

emotion as disequilibrium

In a recent inquiry into the question "Does loss necessitate growth?", one community member claimed that while growth entails loss, not every loss necessitates growth and nor should it. To illustrate this claim they provided the example of the death of a grandparent, with whom they had been close, as evidence to support their contribution within the community, who had, up to this point, maintained a positive dialectical relationship between losses of all kinds and the growth of the individual that survives the loss. Prior to this, the examples that had been offered related to less permanent losses (jobs, sports matches, and failing tests). In giving their contribution, and sharing the experience and impact of bereavement, the participant of our opening sentence became visibly emotional. As a relatively new community, participants reacted in ways somewhat typical of quotidian reactions to expressions of feeling. Some attempted to explain this expression of emotion away (the same way adults might urge children 'don't be upset') and others avoided engagement with the topic presented by attempting to swiftly move the conversation to new ground by changing topics. This risked neither the emotion nor the contribution being addressed by the community.

Novice facilitators can also be prone to fearing the expression of emotion, selecting stimuli in order to avoid eristic outbursts in the belief that this will protect the inquiry, maintaining the comfort of the participants (or even perhaps themselves). However, this misses the important role of feeling or emotion in bringing both depth and energy to inquiry through their unexpected arising. In this sense, we might think about emotions as a potential bringer of 'disequilibrium', something that disrupts the incremental process of inquiry by confronting the members of the community with something unexpected.[2]

Of course, emotions can arise in response to the process of inquiring together– arising from a feeling of frustration at repeatedly being passed over by peers when sharing the talk, at the confrontation of having one's own privilege exposed through the content of dialogues relating to social matters, or at the disruption of ordinary social hierarchies within a group (for instance, once divergent thinking becomes valuable, community members who maintain a particular social position through conformity can be challenged by the fact that the CPI is not a forum where reproducing another's ideas is valuable). This form of disequilibrium contains its own value i) creating material the group can reflect on in relation to the health of their philosophical community and ii) allowing individuals to reflect on the values that matter to them in relation to their identity and iii) providing an example of what it means to engage passionately with thinking itself. For Sharp, to build understanding within the CPI requires willingness to reach toward the oftentimes inaccessible world of another person:

> Participants in a community of inquiry are trying to understand each other. Thus, they must learn how to listen. But they also must do more than just listen – they must enter into the world of the other and see it from the other's perspective. Such an individual has a sympathetic, compassionate, open mind and actively relates her personal expectations to the goals, purposes and beliefs of others, while maintaining an intellectual humility, an *authentic willingness* to self-correct. (Sharp, 2018a, p. 55)

Both Sharp and Lipman discuss emotions as moments of judgment or, indeed, judgments in themselves (Lipman 2003, p. 130). These moments of

[2] Murris speaks about the facilitator introducing disequilibrium to the community (Murris, 2000). In this example of course, the facilitator is tasked rather with a moment of disequilibrium that is often as unexpected to them as the rest of the community. This is particularly the case when 'following the inquiry where it leads' (Lipman, 2003) entails tackling challenging content that might not be directly suggested by the concepts readily available in the stimulus or by the facilitator's initial impressions of the question itself.

emotive thinking radically expose our values through our emotive reactions to persons, actions or situations.[3] But these moments of judgment are, of course, different to the reasoned constructions of the critical thinker carefully choosing between criteria in the formation of an argument from premises to conclusion. The relation of reasoning to emotion expressed in Lipman and Sharp's accounts of caring thinking can be conceptualised as reconstructive rather than constructive. The retracing of a path from impassioned reaction to value by one thrown suddenly into a moment of knowing and feeling. Sharp acknowledges this interpretive challenge:

> [t]o do philosophy well with others is to be actively engaged in helping each other interpret the meaning not only of the text, but the meaning of one's experience and to collaborate in seeking richer, broader interpretations of this experience'. (Sharp, 1993, p. 11)

Thus, these moments, where the CPI is challenged to engage with the emotions of one of its members, require richer theoretical description, and different support from facilitators and community members than moments of critical scrutiny or creative innovation. In the next section, we turn to Simone Weil to explore attention and how we ought to attend to emotions.

attending to emotions

Weil both lived and philosophised about how best to respond to and act in the face of others' oppression. From her projects with fellow workers in factories to her work as a school-teacher, an appreciation of the experiences of others as calling for her attention was apparent. In early 20th-century Europe, Weil saw the illusion of what she calls "force" as sovereign, a dynamic of power and violence emanating from the Self. At the same time, she identified a common trait among the oppressed: the implicit question of "why" in their suffering. Whether caused externally or self-generated, the suffering human being always wordlessly poses this unanswerable "why" with their eyes. For Weil, the appropriate first response is attending to the suffering other, making joining them compassionately possible through sympathy. Attention, for Weil, meant a selfless disposition towards the

[3] They (Lipman and Sharp) fictionalise this moment in the opening chapters of Lisa, where the titular character passionately claims to be a dog when confronted by her neighbour mistreating his pet (Lipman, 1998).

Other, preventing ourselves from projecting our own Self onto them, thus allowing them to disclose themselves as they are.

Returning to the example in the opening of this paper, the CPI with the question "does loss necessitate growth?", and the participant's disclosure of the feeling of loss and grief, we might ask why empathy isn't the appropriate capacity to be fostered for moments such as these. Firstly, if our concern is the depth of the dialogue, and finding an answer, having each participant enter into the emotive moment that is the "leading edge" of the judgement, leaves no person able to integrate that contribution and its illustrative power into the conceptual whole that community is weaving together. Secondly, Sharp's recourse to Weil gives us good ground to question, at minimum, the efficacy of such mental operations, their propriety, and, at maximum, their possibility. This reduction and rejection of moments, agents, and entities that look for our attention is something Simone Weil critiques in relation to our attempt to "read" the other, reminding us of the vagaries of self-reference in this sensitive space. She writes: "Forcing someone to read himself as we read him (slavery). Forcing others to read us as we read ourselves (conquest)" (Weil, 2003, p. 135).

Much like Weil's analogy to reading, Sharp claims, with the support of Nussbaum and Johnson (and, we add, implicitly Murdoch), that our grasp of the world is narrative and that this narrativity informs our self-understanding and our capacity to radically reimagine our world (hence the focus on philosophical novels as the core vehicles for the P4C curriculum) (Sharp, 2018b, p. 238).

Numerous proponents of the CPI have promoted its use as a form of pro-social or empathy-building education, describing the ways in which moral imagining can be fostered through collaborative dialogue. However, aside from being one attribute Lipman lists as a component of caring thinking, compassion is relatively under-theorised (Lipman, 2003). In the following section, we chart a path through Weil's account of what we've called attentive compassion (Dianetti, 2025) and recent interpretations of the same to show how this concept can be fruitfully applied to relations within the CPI. Our focus on Weil follows the interest of Ann Margaret Sharp who not only wrote extensively on Weil, but also uses the language of attention, a fundamental idea in both Weil's philosophy and

her educational approach (see Dianetti & Elvis, 2025; Elvis & Dianetti, 2023) in her accounts of the CPI, in particular the transformative effects communal dialogue can have on the individual who approaches the process with open-mindedness and "intellectual humility" (Sharp, 2018a, p. 55).

Not only did Sharp and Weil share striking biographical similarities, each a radical educator, and each living a life of inquiry, but they share philosophical priorities for the importance of community as a relational pole in an individual's quest to live a life of meaning, the importance of a reasoning method in the face of individual and collective obstacles and a priority of the beautiful and the good (see Sharp & Gregory, 2018).[4] For both Sharp and Weil (as well as Iris Murdoch), the constructed self can become a barrier to encountering one another as persons. Attention is the faculty that allows us to see beyond the selves we consistently try to live up to, a task shared by adults and children. This letting go of the self is essential in the community of inquiry as Sharp (2018a) describes:

> We read in spiritual literature the imperative to "let go of the ego." This has often been understood in ways that have diminished the value of persons, particularly those persons who have scarcely been allowed individual personhood at all. The classroom community of inquiry assumes the integrity of personhood, assumes that young persons are capable of reasoning and learning how to put their egos in perspective – the only real "letting go" of the ego. The practice of communal inquiry calls on us to affirm the integrity of all persons. (p. 55)

In the following section, we describe attentive compassion as a mode of "being with" another, before progressing to a description of how this might function in the CPI.

attentive compassion

When Weil speaks of compassion, she does so in combination with affliction, which might make her seem ill-suited as a speaker who has insight into

[4] In our research, we are focussing on Weil's influence on Sharp and especially the role of the following Weilian ideas that we find in Sharp and that we are exploring in the space of CPI: joy and desire in the CPI (initially sketched in Dianetti and Elvis 2025); the role of methodic thinking and work in relation to action; the notion of the transposition of truth onto different levels of meanings as a feature of critical thinking in CPI; the role of rituals in CPI; the creative side of attention as a shared feature of creative and caring thinking. Ultimately, we are exploring the CPI as a space for shared attention and to foster attention – especially through the stimulation of a Murdochian 'new vocabulary of attention' through literature as a stimulus, following the aforementioned Weilian notion of reading and Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics.

the workings of the CPI.[5] However, through recent Weilian scholarship (Caprioglio Panizza, 2022; Dianetti, 2025; Düringer, 2022; Jesson, 2017), we define compassion as the result of looking attentively at the situation in which the other finds themselves. As Jessen explains, the sufferer needs someone willing to pay attention "not just to me but to the situation to which I am attending, in the way that I am attending to it" (Jessen, 2017, p. 133). Weil's idea of compassion is a form of "attending-with someone" (Düringer, 2022, p. 314). Attention seems to be a precondition for compassion, for compassion is, ultimately, an attending-with the other to their personal experience. In the CPI this entails a patient interest in the feelings of the one experiencing emotion. This attentive compassion that we draw from Weil implies a) renunciation of our egotistic way of looking at the other – "The man accepts to be diminished by concentrating on an expenditure of energy, which will not extend his own power but will only give existence to a being other than himself, who will exist independently of him" (Weil, 1951, pp. 88–89); b) a recognition of the independence of the other; c) stop "reading" them through the meanings I project onto them; d) and finally, make space for their narration of their personal experience to attend to it together. As Weil writes in her 1942 essay "Reflections on The Right Use of School Studies":

> The love of our neighbour in all its fullness simply means being able to say to him: "What are you going through?" It is a recognition that the sufferer exists, not only as a unit in a collection, or a specimen from the social category labelled "unfortunate", but as a man, exactly like we are, who was one day stamped with a special mark of affliction. For this reason, it is enough, but it is indispensable, to know how to look at him in a certain way. (Weil, 1951, p. 59)

Weil's account of compassion requires "reading others without reading them too much" (Teuber, 1982, p. 224). That is, an attempt to appreciate and recognise the other without what Weil thought was an all-too-common recourse to a reduction of difference, simply by asking the question "What are you going through?" (Weil, 1951, p. 59) which already implies the recognition that the person speaking really "exists".

With Weil, and Sharp, we have this as a compassionate relationship that maintains separation and eschews assimilation of the other as friendship. Through friendship, in a Weilian sense, which, as Sharp explains: "(…) is characterized for

[5] On a similar account in relation to suffering with a Weilian and Murdochian perspective, see Zanetti, 2024.

Weil by a respect for the uniqueness of each party and the distance which separates them" (Sharp, 1978, p. 269), the friend becomes "an occasion for [their] friend's seeking the good" – being this good, as Sharp observes: "the free disposal of oneself according to one's need". Ultimately, this kind of friendship, that can flourish in the space of CPI, is, as Sharp defines it, "the means by which we learn what it is to seek and move towards this good – what it is to excel and to be someone of worth" (p. 272). This "moving towards the good" is thus ignited by the other's presence, and their expression of emotion, which is able "to move" the other. As Sharp writes, "the perception of a moral need in most cases rests on an emotion, one that can be described as a moral perception. Moral perception, understood in this way, takes the form of preoccupation – a caring from the inside" – this, referring explicitly to Weil and Murdoch, Sharps calls it "a quality of active receptive attention to the other" (Sharp, 2009, p. 19) Further, she integrates this resistance to reducing others to different versions of ourselves into her account of friendship:

> Friends can distinguish between the self and its needs and friends and their needs. Friends are not projections of ourselves and our own desires. Rather, our friends' growth and happiness ought to mean as much to us as our own. (Sharp, 2018b, p. 236)

The "attentive" element here is very important and what makes the attentive compassion described above different from empathy. In this paper, we take empathy as a non-inferential and immediate part of perception. As Caprioglio Panizza observes, "empathy allows us to detect and respond to others' inner states without any inferential process" (Caprioglio Panizza, 2022, p. 154). In situations where the other's world appears inaccessible, empathy is insufficient to motivate us to care, feel compassion, and eventually act: we need attention.[6] Ultimately, attentive compassion arises when a selfless gaze is directed onto someone else's world of experience. It is a "cum-pathos", being moved by another person's situation, to which I pay attention, allowing me to see what is salient to them (as Caprioglio Panizza explains). Empathy, instead, involves relating to another

[6] Bourgault also holds that "attentive listening" may be more apt in cases that resist empathy. She writes: "we ought not to insist on strong empathy as a necessary requirement to listening … For one thing, most socio-political situations entail listening to others with whom we have fairly little in common – and at times, with people we do not like very much. And it is precisely in these tough cases that listening is of utmost importance" (Bourgault, 2016, p. 327). On attentive listening see also Elvis (2023).

person's mental states and emotions, or, on a more colloquial level, being moved by another person's feelings. However, this does not necessarily entail paying attention to the situation they are in. In a well-functioning CPI this would seem to be a requirement, if the goal of the process is to foster moral imagination as Fletcher and others have claimed (2021). A necessary precursor to moral imagining is a moment of shared (moral) wonder where I say to the other "how does this appear to or for you?" This does not entail seeing and experiencing as the other, but rather a situation where we can look together for unforeseen conceptual relations of salience that are hidden perhaps even to the one engulfed in a moment of emotion. Such a fostering of compassion can become a resource beyond the CPI allowing its participants an experience of the joyful possibilities of responding to expressions of emotions not with further emotions, but with an open curiosity.

Lipman when speaking about "caring thinking" mentions empathy as having a fundamental role – defining it as "what happens when we put ourselves into another's situation and experience that person's emotions as if they were our own." (Lipman, 2003, p. 269) Sharp, in a more Weilian manner, seems to stress "sympathy" and "compassion" as key elements when we are faced by the others' emotional states (Sharp, 2018a, p. 55). She writes: "this is the experience of caring. It is based on a trust that whatever happens in the external world, communication, love, compassion, solidarity, creativity and sharing ideals are what really matter" (Sharp, 2018c, p. 214). In the following section, we explore the CPI as a space for attentive compassion to flourish, especially in cases where emotion is expressed by one of its members.

the compassionate CPI

Thinking about the CPI as a place where compassion can be fostered requires an understanding of what it might look like for this compassion to be realised. The description offered below does not, however, entail the claim that all attempts to transform a classroom into a community of inquiry will yield compassion or that every well-functioning community will meet each moment of

emotion with compassion. Indeed, as Sharp and Laverty (2018) note, the challenge posed to us by the other might be steep:

> Others challenge our sense of self and world, by claiming us in responsibility and revealing to us a world that exceeds our limits. And yet, to be claimed we must be receptive to the radical alterity and uniqueness of others. Whether or not an individual is receptive is due, in part, to education. As educators, we must ask ourselves: What experiences contribute to the formation of such receptivity? What interactions cultivate compassion, humility and reverence?' (p. 124)

The "attending with" another can be thought of as the "going visiting" that Sharp describes as being made possible through collaborative, structured dialogue (Sharp 1996). Here, visitation is the operative word. We use compassion here to capture the immediacy of emotion and its attendant reminder of difference. When emotions are present in the CPI through the contribution or reaction of an individual, everyone is reminded that despite a shared ritual, we inhabit different worlds, and occasionally conflicting narratives. To think the world of another person requires an acknowledgement that the feelings and experiences of others are just this, not my own, and as such irreducible to my own account of the world. Prior to their becoming epistemically useful in the way Lipman and Sharp suggest, emotions expressed in the CPI benefit from the distance created by the renunciation and recognition described above. This may require thinking of the CPI not as a space of Aristotelian friendship, but rather as Weilian friendship, a space of attentive distance where harmony between persons aware of their dissimilarities can flourish. Attentive compassion can be the foundation for communities extending their philosophical curiosity beyond their own self-interest, as Pierce describes such a spirit should: "inexorably require that our interests should not be limited. They must not stop at our own fate but embrace the whole community" (Pierce, 2012).

Moments in which emotions arise can catalyse inquiry by bringing with them the necessary instability captured in Lipman's analogy between inquiry and walking ("where you move forward by constantly throwing yourself off balance" (Lipman, 2003, p. 87). Matters that seem settled for a given community or topics that have previously appeared unproblematic are cast in a new light when one person within the community responds with strong feelings. We may ask what this being thrown off balance might demand of the facilitator and members of the

community of inquiry. Surely, such moments require more than simply turning the tools of critical thinking to "explain away" emotions, or creating a cathartic space for emotion such that their influence in future judgements is diminished. Rather, by thinking of the CPI as an attentively compassionate space, participants are asked not to "stand in another person's shoes", as commonplace accounts of empathy might suggest, but to consider their world with them "putting their ego in perspective". In drawing a sharp contrast between pity (which might arise from empathy) and compassion, Sharp (2018b, p. 233) makes this clear:

> Pity connotes condescension, which, in turn, implies separateness: "I feel sorry for you because you are so different from me." Pity often regards its objects as not only suffering, but as weak or inferior. There is less involvement in the sufferings of another in pity than in compassion. Compassion never considers an object as weak or inferior. It works from a strength born of awareness of shared weakness.

This account is, of course, reminiscent of Weil's and Murdoch's idea of selfless attention, where the ego steps back to leave space for the reality of the other. As Sharp (2018a, p. 50) observes, in the space of CPI we can "diminish the grasping ego's perpetual self-referencing and wanting (…) putting your ego in perspective". In so doing, the world of another becomes a place not only for idle curiosity but a vista of care the implications of which are not neutral nor merely fascinating but a potential call to action and consideration. The immediacy of compassion accurately describes the ways in which emotions confront participants within the CPI providing a point of resistance to the homogeneity that democratic communal activities can be a risk of. As Sharp (2018b, p. 232) reminds us, "one must realize that this kind of sympathy or compassion is a democratic virtue."

For Sharp, compassion can thus be what results when careful philosophical reflection is applied toward the object of our emotions. Our claim is that the compassionate community supports the one feeling emotions to potentially tread this path by showing them the unseen relations between their feelings and the object that gives rise to such passions.

Compassion should be shared as an outcome of inquiry that entails a joyful displacement of my own viewpoint for a moment in order to "follow another's attentional path" not in order to enlarge my own view, but to build new knowledge together (Burnett et al., 2019).

What can the facilitator do here to aid the interpretation of these emotional moments? We suggest that inserting a form of "hermeneutical distance" can be helpful here. Asking the community what the feelings being expressed can show us about the concepts in question can be a way to begin this project. Facilitators should work to kindly curtail responses of community members who attempt instead to reorient the understanding of the one feeling or expressing emotions by asking them to read their own experience otherwise, by encouraging them to approach the example itself and not the one providing it. In so doing, they can mitigate for the risk that the one expressing emotion might have their vantage point removed from the discussion or their hermeneutical horizon collapsed into that of the group or its most strident interlocutors. Likewise, facilitators need to create distance between their personal reactions to the expression of emotion and think instead about what the arising of feelings might mean for the inquiry as a whole. Attention to the unfolding dialogue is needed here:

> [A]ttentive teaching . . . is characterized by emptiness. Teachers must be empty of their own thoughts so that they are free to pay attention to what the student is saying either to classmates or to the teacher. . . . [Weil's] remarks in her essay on school studies lead us to think that she did have a sense of the prerequisites of good dialogical teaching. If teachers are concerned with their own answers and theories, they are not likely to really hear what children are saying, nor are they likely to take the initiative to help them develop their own ideas and thus their own autonomy. (Sharp, 1984, pp. 508–509 as cited in Oliverio, 2018, p. 72)

When asking, "what can these feelings show us about our question/these ideas/our approach to one another/our feelings about our thinking?", facilitators invite their community to think of the experience and the emotions arising as a closed whole for analysis, not unlike the approach to individual stories described by practitioners in who have used the Story Circle within inquiry (See Fletcher et al., 2021). But more than just a mapping of the feelings themselves and the relations they illuminate, Sharp further suggests that compassion should be understood as a precursor to action (as opposed to the "luxury of sentimentalism") either in a changed thinking about persons or as interventions brought about by "seeing the nature of suffering in the world" (Sharp, 2018b, 233). She writes:

> To view life compassionately is to begin to understand the conditions that give rise to certain consequences. Have you ever had the experience of feeling

> angry or resentful toward another, only to have a subsequent insight into the possible causal explanations of why he acted as he did, thus changing your anger, bitterness or resentment into what? Wasn't the anger changed into – what? – compassion? (Sharp, 2018b, 233).

Although Weil particularly applies compassion to the afflicted, the dispositions of compassion and its processes can be productive in meeting other emotions in the community of inquiry. For instance, anger at the situation of others oppressed by capitalism, distress at climate collapse, unease at the metaphysical or existential issues exposed by uses of AI or the realisation that one's thinking beyond the circle is not taken as seriously (everyday epistemic injustice in societies, families and schools where children's thinking is not taken seriously) are all legitimate responses that deserve careful negotiation.[7] Sharp (2018b, p. 233) identifies this compassion as a fundamental requirement of those living in a globalised world:

> If it is the case that compassion or intelligent sympathy . . . is a prerequisite for global ethical consciousness and action, a position espoused both in the East and West, it would follow that children must not only learn to think critically but creatively and ethically.

This sets a high bar for those facilitating the philosophical thinking of young persons. It may demand that they reexamine their own attitudes towards emotion, and that they engage more frequently in the enterprise of inquiring itself in order to appreciate the vulnerability and courage that an emotional response to thinking requires. Sharp and Laverty (2018, p. 124) remind us of this task: "As educators, we must ask ourselves: What experiences contribute to the formation of such receptivity? What interactions cultivate compassion, humility and reverence?".

conclusion

Of course, the example with which we opened our paper is not the only kind of emotion that might be expressed within an inquiry. Righteous anger at the unforeseen implications of an idea, the "joy and terror" that arises from the often tension-filled process of inquiring together, or emotions that emerge after the fact as questions remain with participants, are other spaces where these conceptual

[7] Further thinking might be required to understand whether more stereotypically "positive" emotions might benefit from attentive compassion in the ways described here, but this would be a question for a future paper.

tools might apply (Kennedy, 1997, p. 66). For the one experiencing the emotion, the company of another inquirer standing in their world as a "visitor" not engulfed in that feeling but invested in its understanding and exploration **both** provides a moment of Weilian compassion and serves to illustrate the value of emotions as cognitive content and constitutive of the self as Sharp (2004) describes. In this moment, the one experiencing the emotion may experience the loss of voice that Weil (2015, p. 117) ascribes to the afflicted in her accounts of compassion – "Affliction is by itself inarticulate. The afflicted silently beg that somebody give them words to express themselves". Thus, thinking of the CPI as attentively compassionate can help chart a course in which emotions become a window to the other's world and a bridge to problematising what is causing that emotion – injustices systemic, personal or epistemological for instance. As Sharp (2009, p. 19) writes "it is through emotions 'that we first "see" a moral problem as a problem"; thus where emotions are neither avoided, assimilated or explained away. Rather they can productively unsettle the community by having others examine an emotive moment alongside the one experiencing or expressing it, without attempting to "step into the others' shoes" or reconstruct their mental states. Lipman reminds us powerfully that disequilibrium is necessary for progress in the CPI. Emotional moments are a powerful reminder of the subtle contradictions that make collective inquiry productive.[8] In the end, acknowledging difference and distance is attentive compassion, for as Weil (2003, p. 145) writes: "Every separation is a link".

Of course, the claim that meeting emotions with compassion when inquiring together to appreciate their significance for thinking and potential to catalyse our philosophical understanding and the appreciation of the implications of our thinking, is not identical with the claim that *every* emotional outburst in the CPI can be integrated or indeed fully explained. It may be the case that emotions also arise in space where our language or understanding runs out. However,

[8] Of course, this account of the CPI as a context where compassion can be practised for the flourishing of all its members holds significant implications for facilitators. We hope that this will be the subject of a future paper informed by our current work focused on the CPI as a practice in fostering Weilian attention.

without the attentive compassion described above, differentiation between different moments of emotion is not possible.

Above all, this account of compassion can act as a counterweight to the implications commonly associated with 'compassion fatigue.' Namely, that compassion itself is a finite resource that leaves us drained and underlines feelings of impotence or apathy. Instead, Weil and Sharp highlight compassion as a means of seeing more of the world through the ways that approaching others compassionately can help us see and appreciate new relations between previously settled matters, or to understand emotion not as a conflict but as a source of understanding and the beginning of action.

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