



article

no visitors allowed:

facilitating philosophical dialogue in the presence of guarded faith

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abstract

This paper considers the case of participants of faith who refuse to subject their beliefs to discussion in general, let alone philosophical inquiry. I call this modality of faith “guarded faith.” I do not simply consider guarded faith as a challenge stemming from practicing P4C in a global context, but also as an opportunity to reflect on and refine facilitators’ conceptions of the overarching aims and values of the community of philosophical inquiry (CPI). After outlining the salient features of guarded faith, I show why it calls for a practice of caring-critical thinking. I argue for a robust conception of caring-critical thinking as a skill that cannot be straightforwardly reduced to either critical or caring thinking pure and simple. Through the lens of caring-critical thinking, I examine the universality of Ann Sharp’s notion of “visiting” as a model for the relationship between participants in CPI. The leading question here is the following: Should guarded faith disqualify individuals from participating in CPI? By the lights of Sharp’s “visiting” model, guarded faith presents intractable challenges to the facilitator, possibly threatening to



undermine the aims of inquiry. However, I argue that Sharp's model should be supplemented by a broader approach, one that seriously takes into account the epistemic, affective, and meta-ethical determinations of guarded faith. Instead of "visiting," the community of inquiry should rather adopt an ethics of "making room" when presented with the challenges of guarded faith, to avoid excluding the guarded believer who might otherwise be interested in philosophical inquiry, while maintaining the delicate balance between the ends of inquiry and the ends of community, which is arguably a universal value of P4C/CPI practice. As a result, to Sharp's "Visitor," "Assimilator," and "Traveler" typology, I add and recommend the following type: the Neighbor. In closing, I draw out the implications of this alternative model for facilitator and participant alike, suggesting some caring-critical thinking questions to guide P4C/CPI sessions, if and when needed.

keywords: critical thinking; caring thinking; interpersonal communication; faith and philosophy; community of philosophical inquiry.

proibido visitantes: facilitar o diálogo filosófico na presença de uma fé cautelosa

resumo:

Este artigo analisa o caso de participantes religiosos que se negam a submeter suas crenças ao debate em geral e ainda menos à investigação filosófica. Denomino essa modalidade de fé como *fé cautelosa*. Não considero a fé cautelosa como um mero desafio derivado das práticas de FcC em um contexto global, mas como uma oportunidade para refletir e refinar as concepções dos facilitadores sobre os objetivos e valores gerais da comunidade de investigação filosófica (CIF). Após delinear as características salientes da fé cautelosa, mostro o porquê ela requer uma prática

de pensamento crítico-cuidadoso. Defendo uma concepção sólida do pensamento crítico-cuidadoso como uma habilidade que não pode ser reduzida meramente ao pensamento crítico nem ao pensamento cuidadoso puro e simplesmente. Através das lentes do pensamento crítico-cuidadoso, examino a universalidade da noção de "visita", de Ann Sharp, como um modelo para o relacionamento entre os participantes da CIF. A principal pergunta aqui é: Deve a fé cautelosa desqualificar indivíduos para participar na CIF? Sob a luz do modelo de "visita" de Sharp, a fé cautelosa apresenta desafios complicados ao facilitador, ameaçando enfraquecer os objetivos da investigação. No entanto, defendo que o modelo de Sharp deve ser experimentado a partir de uma abordagem mais ampla; uma que leve em conta, com seriedade, as determinações epistêmicas, afetivas e metaéticas da fé cautelosa. Em vez de "visitas", a comunidade de investigação deve adotar uma ética de "abrir espaço" quando confrontada pelos desafios da fé cautelosa, evitando excluir os crentes cautelosos que podem estar interessados na investigação cautelosa e mantendo o delicado equilíbrio entre os objetivos da investigação e os objetivos da comunidade, que é indiscutivelmente um valor universal da prática de FpC/CIF. Como resultado, aos conceitos de Sharp de "Visitante", "Assimilador" e "Viajante", adiciono e recomendo um outro: o Vizinho. Em conclusão, destaco as implicações desse modelo alternativo para o facilitador e para o participante, também sugerindo algumas questões de pensamento crítico-cuidadoso para guiar as sessões de FpC/CIF, se e quando necessário.

palavras-chave: pensamento crítico; pensamento cuidadoso; comunicação interpessoal; fé e filosofia; comunidade de investigação filosófica.

no se permiten visitantes: facilitar el diálogo filosófico en presencia de una fe cautelosa

resumen

Este artículo analiza el caso de los participantes religiosos que se niegan a someter sus creencias a debate en general, y mucho menos a la investigación filosófica. Denomino a esta modalidad de fe «fe cautelosa». No considero la fe cautelosa simplemente como un reto derivado de la práctica de FpN en un contexto global, sino también como una oportunidad para reflexionar y perfeccionar las concepciones de los facilitadores sobre los objetivos y valores generales de la comunidad de investigación filosófica (CIF). Tras esbozar las características más destacadas de la fe cautelosa, muestro por qué requiere una práctica de pensamiento crítico cuidadoso. Defiendo una concepción sólida del pensamiento crítico cuidadoso como una habilidad que no puede reducirse de forma sencilla al pensamiento crítico o al pensamiento cuidadoso puros y simples. A través de la lente del pensamiento crítico cuidadoso, examino la universalidad de la noción de «visita» de Ann Sharp como modelo para la relación entre los participantes en la CIF. La pregunta principal aquí es la siguiente: ¿debería la fe cautelosa descalificar a las personas para participar en la CIF? A la luz del modelo de «visita» de Sharp, la fe cautelosa presenta retos difíciles de resolver para el facilitador, que pueden amenazar con socavar los objetivos de la investigación. Sin embargo, sostengo que el modelo de Sharp debería complementarse con un enfoque más amplio, que considere seriamente las determinaciones epistémicas, afectivas y metaéticas de la fe reservada. En lugar de "visitar", la comunidad de indagación debería adoptar una ética de "dar cabida" ante los desafíos de la fe reservada, para evitar excluir al creyente reservado que, de otro modo, podría estar interesado en la indagación filosófica, manteniendo al mismo tiempo el delicado equilibrio entre los fines de la indagación y los fines

de la comunidad, lo cual constituye, sin duda, un valor universal de la práctica de la FpN/CPI. En consecuencia, a la tipología de "Visitante", "Asimilador" y "Viajero" de Sharp, añado y recomiendo el siguiente tipo: el vecino. Para concluir, destaco las implicaciones de este modelo alternativo tanto para el facilitador como para el participante, sugiriendo algunas preguntas de pensamiento crítico y comprensivo para guiar las sesiones de FpN/CPI, cuando sea necesario.

palabras clave: pensamiento crítico; pensamiento cuidadoso; comunicación interpersonal; fe y filosofía; comunidad de investigación filosófica.

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introduction

In his introduction to Ann Sharp's writings on religion, Peter Shea (2018) asks: "What risk does Philosophy for Children pose to closely held beliefs?" (p. 163). The question is certainly relevant to Ann Sharp's vision of the Community of Philosophical Inquiry (CPI).¹ However, facilitating (and participating in) CPI sessions in several Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, where the author is based, confronts the facilitator with a unique set of challenges and opportunities.² The majority of inquirers in any given session are likely to identify as practicing Muslims, many of whom may be curious about philosophy yet at the same time concerned about philosophical inquiry threatening to undermine their closely held beliefs. Facilitating CPI sessions in such a context gives us an opportunity to reflect on the ultimate goals of CPI pedagogy and suggest novel solutions to the challenges that the facilitator may confront therein.

In particular, the presence of guarded faith within the community of inquiry invites us to reflect on the universality of an influential approach to facilitation, namely, Ann Sharp's (2007) model of "visiting," as delineated in her article, "Let's Go Visiting," and expanded in her other writings. In what follows, I will explain what I mean by "guarded faith," before highlighting its tensions with Sharp's "visiting" approach. Finally, I will suggest an alternative, arguably more inclusive approach to facilitation, supplementing the ethics of "visiting" with an ethics of "making room," and Sharp's classification of the inquirer as "visitor" with an understanding of the inquirer as "neighbor."

guarded faith

One thing I want to avoid is making sweeping declarations about faith, Islamic or otherwise. It is rather a specific modality of faith, arguably present in all

¹ I will refer to the Community of Philosophical Inquiry (CPI) instead of Philosophy for Children (P4C) in this paper, simply to highlight that my reflections relate to inquirers of all ages.

² I only speak in this paper autoethnographically, from my experience as a facilitator in the aforementioned countries. Whether what I say in this article applies to other sorts of believers, e.g., Evangelical Christians and Puritans in the US or even in terms of non-religious (e.g. ideological) belief, will have to be determined by practitioners and scholars with experience facilitating in those contexts.

living religious traditions, that presents itself as potentially incompatible with philosophical inquiry and which the facilitator in some Muslim-majority countries might encounter, at least judging by my experience as a CPI facilitator. I therefore choose to concentrate my reflections on a hypothetical type of participant, somewhat exaggerated to better highlight the potential challenges—and opportunities—entailed by their involvement in a CPI session. Let us call this hypothetical participant “the guarded believer,” and their modality of faith, “guarded faith.”

It would be helpful at the outset to list and elaborate on some positive and negative traits of guarded faith and the guarded believer, based on my observations as a facilitator. Positively, the guarded believer exhibits at least the following epistemic, affective, and meta-ethical characteristics:

- Epistemically, the guarded believer not only rejects the idea that their religious principles draw their validity from reason, but actively shields those principles from becoming an object of inquiry. Arguably, the implication is that subjecting those principles to inquiry would amount to a fundamental misunderstanding of their nature, a profanation of something holy, and an affront to the believer (see next).
- Affectively, the guarded believer is uncomfortable with exposing some or all of their religious beliefs to philosophical inquiry. Guarded faith is sequestered faith, unapproachable, off-limits as an object of casual discussion, let alone sustained inquiry.
- Meta-ethically, the guarded believer is happy to relate to religious commandments as absolutely binding rules to be obeyed without further reflection or deeper understanding.

To avoid straightforwardly identifying guarded faith with obtuse dogmatism, fundamentalism, puritanism, or close-mindedness (though it may overlap with some of these, depending on the individual in question), I present the following partial list of characteristics to indicate what guarded faith is *essentially not*. I say “essentially not” to account for the possibility that the guarded believer may indeed exhibit some or all of the characteristics negated on the list below, while cautioning that said characteristics should not be understood as definitive, singly or collectively, of what guarded faith in fact is:

- Guarded faith is not a (set of) self-sealing belief(s): These are beliefs that seal themselves off against challengers by being based on faulty, often circular, justifications. There is nothing in the nature of self-sealing belief that precludes the outsider from pointing out the faulty logic upon which it is based, whereas guarded faith is at odds with the very idea of approaching it as a set of beliefs open to critical inquiry.
- Guarded faith is not unfounded opinion: Unfounded opinions are in principle open to further grounding and justification. The articles of guarded faith are not endorsed with an eye to how well-founded they are, because they are not endorsed in the way one would endorse a “justified true belief.”
- Guarded faith is not a hypothesis: Guarded faith is not wanting for further evidence, of whatever sort, to authenticate its commitments. It is neither an inference from past experience nor the outcome of experimentation.
- Guarded faith is essentially different from belief in empirical facts: Belief in empirical facts is open to falsification and verification through experience, broadly construed. Guarded faith does not subject itself to these procedures.

In a field already not lacking in neologisms, it falls upon me to justify coining yet another term. The straightforward reason has to do with my dissatisfaction with existing descriptors such as dogmatism and fideism, for example, or schools of thought such as noncognitivism and non-evidentialism, to fully capture the nature of a phenomenon that has proved to pose a unique challenge in running P4C/CPI sessions from my experience as a facilitator. As such, I will procedurally justify the introduction of this new term by setting forth how it overlaps with and diverges from two concepts in the philosophy of religion: dogmatism and noncognitivism.

The reader may wonder what it is exactly that separates guarded faith from dogmatic thinking, given the list of positive and negative characteristics just outlined. It may be true that, in the picture sketched above, dogmatism and guarded faith both stand for a belief in the possession of unquestionably true principles which act, among other things, as the source of moral authority. As

such, it would be fair to say that guarded faith and dogmatism are aligned metaethically. However, to my mind, the dogmatist, insofar as he holds his beliefs dogmatically, will not necessarily have a problem entering into discussions and debates regarding those beliefs. The dogmatic believer may be perfectly at ease with laying out his beliefs on the table to be scrutinized by others. There is nothing in the notion of dogmatism itself that precludes religious belief from being the subject of inquiry. The contrast with the guarded believer should now be clear, as the latter would not be open to presenting her beliefs as topics of discussion at all, whether to be promoted or defended. There is something about the guarded believer's perception of the nature of religious belief itself that circumvents such efforts epistemically, as well as something about the bond that ties the believer to their faith which stymies such efforts affectively. To cast this distinction in terms of the three positive characteristics of guarded faith outlined above, I argue that while guarded faith and dogmatism are metaethically aligned, they diverge epistemically and affectively. These epistemic and affective aspects of guarded faith are what make it uniquely problematic in the context of the community of philosophical inquiry, as I will show below, in a way that forthright dogmatism is arguably not.

So much for the distinction between dogmatism and guarded faith. It may also be illuminating to examine the notion of guarded faith in view of some recent debates on the nature of religious belief. Some philosophers of religion have identified two orientations in relation to understanding the nature of faith (Crane, 2023; Scott, 2023). Cognitivist accounts argue that religious belief is or should be based on rational justification. Noncognitivist approaches, on the other hand, perceive the attempt to base one's understanding of religious belief strictly on rationally compelling evidence as misguided at its core, arguing that the validity of faith by its very nature does not lend itself to discursive inquiry and justification, and is better understood on the lines of "a felt attraction" (Kvanvig, 2016, p. 13). Although guarded faith exhibits some of the basic epistemic and metaethical characteristics of the noncognitivist conception of faith, the two are not synonymous.

For example, a reader who is informed about the cognitivist/noncognitivist debate on faith will notice that the lists above consist mainly of corollaries of the

noncognitivist standpoint.³ One commonly accepted view among noncognitivists is that religious belief is different in some significant sense from belief in the standard epistemic sense, that is, belief understood as an attitude toward some propositional content. Likewise, though it may elude a satisfactory positive definition, we can unequivocally say that guarded faith is different in kind from belief in the standard epistemic sense. And although guarded faith may in fact exhibit some features of standard doxastic attitudes, it cannot be reduced to or treated in terms of assent to a propositional content. To consider an example, for the guarded believer (naturally, I do not wish to extend this statement to all varieties of religious belief), the belief that God exists is of a fundamentally different sort from belief, say, that this table is solid.⁴ As far as this goes, the guarded believer is a noncognitivist about faith.

But there is one crucial difference between the noncognitivist and the guarded believer. Along the lines of the difference delineated above between guarded faith and dogmatism, my conclusion is that while noncognitivism does not preclude inquiring into and disputing matters of faith, guarded faith is distinguished by the resistance to touch upon such matters in any way in the course of discussion. There might be epistemic, affective, or metaethical reasons for this, but a decisive point is that even these reasons are unlikely to be accepted as topics of discussion by the guarded believer, given that they touch upon the subject-matter of their guarded faith.

So why worry about the guarded believer at all, if she will not accede to subjecting *all* of her beliefs, including those religious beliefs that she holds most dear, to open philosophical inquiry? It is because I find the guarded believer sitting there among the participants in the P4C/CPI session. This leads me to assume at the very least that she is curious about philosophy or, perhaps, that she is comfortable subjecting some beliefs of hers (though not all) to philosophical inquiry. I think it is safe to assume that someone who rejects philosophical inquiry in all shapes and forms would not be present in a P4C/CPI session. And while it might be worthwhile to think of how CPI should relate to the presence within the community of inquirers of someone who does not see the value of philosophical

³ The noncognitivist stance on faith is itself far from settled; compare, for example, Kvanvig (2016) and McKaughan and Howard-Snyder (2022).

⁴ For a critical engagement with the noncognitivist position I am outlining here, see Scott (2023).

inquiry in any way, this is not my concern here. To some extent, people who participate in philosophical inquiry are on some level a self-selecting group, brought together by a modicum of shared interest or a sense of curiosity about philosophy, if nothing else. Especially within cultures that are perceived, rightly or wrongly, as hostile to philosophy, I advocate taking this common footing, however shaky, nebulous, and embryonic it may be, as an opportunity for promoting the overarching values and virtues of philosophical thinking.

There are two programmatic clarifications that remain to be made. First, I would like to note that I have focused solely on the general characteristics that make the guarded believer a challenging inquirer to deal with and guarded faith a problematic object of inquiry in the context of CPI. These features are arguably overstated, so that whatever suggestions may be applicable to them may be translated to less extreme cases as they present themselves in the course of inquiry. On the other hand, perhaps an inquirer will exhibit one or more of the aspects attributed to the guarded believer. For example, inquirers may be guarded believers affectively, such that they are not comfortable with making a topic of inquiry of their faith, while they see that there are rational grounds for their religious principles, meaning that they are not guarded believers epistemically. The concerned facilitator may apply whatever they deem suitable out of the following reflections.

Second, and simply to confine the scope of this paper, I will not consider the effect of guarded faith against the multiplicity of models and approaches related to the community of philosophical inquiry. Instead, I will focus only on how guarded faith challenges the “visiting” model of inquiry proposed by Ann Sharp, which is probably familiar to many P4C facilitators, and which will be explored in due course. I pick the “visiting” model deliberately, as it represents Sharp’s thoughts on dealing with the challenges of conflicting values when practicing CPI/P4C in a multicultural (and, I would assume, potentially multifaith) context.

caring-critical thinking

CPI pedagogy sets itself the goals of improving critical and caring thinking. Our hypothetical inquirer, the guarded believer, presents the following challenges to these goals:

- In terms of critical thinking: *Should some questions be off-limits to inquiry? How can we decide that without alienating the guarded believer?*
- In terms of caring thinking: *Should certain persons be excluded from the community of inquirers? How can we include guarded faith without sacrificing the rigor of critical thinking?*

These two sets of questions are reciprocally related. The challenges of guarded faith to critical thinking lead us to consider the challenges it poses with regard to caring thinking, and vice versa. These challenges present an opportunity for deepening our understanding of the intersection of critical and caring thinking. Lipman (2003, pp. 200–203) and Sharp (1987, 2004/2018, 1996/2018) saw critical, creative, and caring thinking as interdependent and mutually reinforcing. Reflecting on CPI facilitation in the presence of guarded faith provides an opportunity for an intervention that can flesh out what *caring-critical thinking*, the singular fusion of these two thinking skills, might look like.

What is at stake in exploring the connection between critical and caring thinking? Consider this scenario. An inquirer might point out that justifying one's religious beliefs by appealing to private intuition, tradition, or scriptural authority consists of a fallacy. This is a clear example of the application of critical thinking in inquiry. Yet while we may agree with Lipman (2003) that "questioning is the leading edge of inquiry" (p. 99), surely there are ways of questioning which run the risk of turning the other off from engaging in inquiry altogether, probably for good. Shouldn't we attend to the demands of *caring-critical thinking* just as seriously as we care for the demands of critical thinking? I do not see *caring-critical thinking* as an alternative to or extension of critical thinking. I am proposing, rather, that *caring-critical thinking*, as the fusion of two elementary dimensions of CPI, be treated as an "emergent" thinking skill that comes with its own unique set of injunctions and challenges. Without the right sensitivity to what others hold dear, we risk alienating them forever from the wonders and rewards of philosophical inquiry. *Caring-critical thinking* thus enjoins critical thinking to strive to be non-alienating, declaring that inquiry cannot take place at the expense of community. As a central feature of CPI pedagogy, the facilitator is encouraged to model and instill this orientation in inquirers.

But caring-critical thinking makes a demand on caring thinking, as well. The ends of community cannot be made to suppress the vitality of inquiry. Lipman (2003) hints that the play of the community of inquiry consists of a subtle balancing act between the ends of community and the ends of inquiry (pp. 83–87). The ends of caring and critical thinking must likewise be brought into “reflective equilibrium” (p. 103). I see the same concern in the effort to bring reasonableness to bear over abstract rationality (p. 97). It is a tough balancing act. What does it mean to ask critical questions while preserving the sense of community? Conversely, what does it mean to care for the other without sacrificing critical rigor? This is a central theme tackled by Ann Sharp (2007) in her article, “Let’s Go Visiting.”

visiting

Influentially, Sharp conceptualized the improvement of judgment and moral imagination (stand-ins for critical and caring thinking) on the model of “visiting” (Glaser, 2018, p. 221). Considering child inquirers in the context of P4C, she explains visiting as follows:

The metaphor, *going visiting*, aims to encapsulate the imaginative intellectual work that children actively engage in when they meet together to dialogue about matters of importance and then, in turn, integrate the dialogue into a story telling process that they perform for themselves before they make the ultimate judgment. This imaginative work of visiting and storytelling is a combination of critical, creative and caring thinking. It involves bridging among perspectives, understanding the feelings of those who hold the perspectives and the world views from which they originate, caring for these people and their growth, while at the same time, remaining oneself and using one’s critical faculties to arrive at a judgment... And it is all of this that is essential in the making of better judgments. (Sharp, 2007, p. 305)

Procedurally, Sharp draws on Lisa Disch’s analysis of Hannah Arendt’s thought to describe visiting as a two-step process:

First, the child tries to distance herself from the familiar and expose himself [*sic*] to views and perspectives that are different, unfamiliar, maybe even shocking. ... Secondly, when one *goes visiting* into the different perspectives, one fosters a practical equality of concern by multiplying the stories in which one imagines oneself to be an actor, always interested in bridging the different stories into a complex and rich tale that doesn’t lose the uniqueness of each of the individual parts. (Sharp, 2007, p. 310)

The reader can now plainly see why visiting in this way would not be entertained by guarded faith. The articles of guarded faith do not permit their exposure to another’s consideration. These articles of faith posit themselves

outside the realm of discourse absolutely. They are unfamiliar on the order of the “wholly other,” to channel Rudolf Otto’s (1950) description of the holy (pp. 25-30). It is important to remember that visiting “does not mean that when we listen to others we imagine we *are* that person,” as Jen Glaser put it, since “we cannot capture another’s perspective as they do, and indeed to try to do so would be to negate or trivialize the real differences between us” (Glaser, 1998, p. 18). But even conceiving of visiting on the plane of “standing alongside,” as Glaser suggests, would be too intrusive for the guarded believer: approaching their faith is considered alarming in itself, undermining the reverence with which it is upheld.

Sharp insists that when taking the imagination on a visit, the other’s “worldview ... must be understood *from the inside*” (Sharp, 2007, p. 305). Such an effort involves “the courage to try to bridge the abyss of remoteness” that separates inquirers’ worldviews from one another (p. 306). Sharp elaborates further: “When one goes visiting one ventures into the foreign world sensitively, caringly, attempting to understand the world from the inside and subsequently trying to weave the plurality of perspectives one has gained access to into a story” (307).

So far as it goes, this is a fine guideline for inquirers and facilitators alike. The problem is that guarded faith, as sketched above, places itself beyond the reach of lay discussion, not to mention philosophical inquiry. Guarded faith does not permit inquirers to simply “try it on” on the model of visiting. It does not permit its “implications, assumptions and consequences” to be “explored” by others, as Sharp (2007, p. 307) urges. Guarded faith draws an impenetrable veil before itself. It sets itself forth as inaccessible, exalted above public exchange. For the guarded believer, exposing faith to the interplay of discourse, even in friendly conversation, amounts to a profanation that diminishes its sacredness. Part and parcel of guarded faith is its sequestration in “the abyss of remoteness,” to use Sharp’s (2007) powerful expression, which visiting seeks to bridge. So if “storytelling ... is an essential step in learning how to make better judgments” (p. 307), it falls upon the facilitator to figure out how to teach for better judgment in the presence of guarded faith, about which no stories may be told.

Effective as communal inquiry may be on the model of visiting, the foregoing reflections raise the following question: What happens when an inquirer

objects to making some of his or her beliefs a topic of discussion? Does guarded faith obstruct the possibility of thinking as a collective in CPI? Does it exclude the participant from the community, insofar as in the community of inquiry, “[i]t is by virtue of *thinking together* that we consider one another as members” (Glaser, 1998, p. 17)?

sitting out

Declaring that an inquirer has the option of withdrawing from the discussion is one way in which the facilitator may choose to account for the guarded believer’s faith: *If we touch upon something that makes you feel uncomfortable, you are exempt from the inquiry*, or something to that effect. But I think this kind of special treatment unduly singles out the guarded believer. To be clear, I am not against explicitly establishing ground rules for inquiry. The problem with the foregoing ground rule in particular is that it seems to declare that the community of inquiry is not made for a believer of this sort, that it does not provide a safe space for them to participate as the persons that they are. This sort of ground rule makes the guarded believer feel like their acceptance into the community is conditional upon their assent to distance themselves from their most precious commitments. The conflict between critical thinking, which demands maintaining a critical distance between oneself and one’s beliefs, and caring thinking is stark on this point. More importantly, such a ground rule precludes the possibility of the believer changing their mind about certain issues through exposure to others’ ideas in the process of inquiry. Even if the inquiry is not directly related to their faith, there is something about the delights of engaging in philosophizing as such that may – and does, as I am sure many facilitators, myself included, are ready to admit – draw participants toward further inquiry.

Beyond that, a ground rule of the sort mentioned above also signals that discomfort is a sufficient reason to justify distancing oneself from the rough-and-tumble of inquiry. Philosophical inquiry at its best is often challenging and unsettling. On the other hand, too much discomfort has the potential to push the inquirer outside the zone of proximal development that is most suitable for their journey as philosophical thinkers, to reference Vygotsky’s (1978) famous paradigm. Is there a way to make the guarded believer feel safe without

attempting to explicitly shield them from discomfort pure and simple, which would amount to little more than providing them with false comfort? Is there a way the facilitator can gently direct the flow of inquiry without gatekeeping and without sacrificing the goal of improving caring and critical (and caring-critical) thinking to the fullest possible extent?

making room

Perhaps visiting is not always the best model to go about improving judgment in CPI sessions, but clearly “sitting out” is tantamount to giving up on the life changing potential of philosophical inquiry. In the presence of guarded faith, I think the aims of CPI would be better served by replacing the model of visiting with the model of *making room*.

Guarded faith exhibits several basic noncognitivist features of faith, as mentioned earlier. I take such a characterization to properly reflect those epistemic aspects of guarded faith which make it particularly challenging for CPI facilitation. Drawing on Wittgenstein’s remarks about religious belief, noncognitivist philosopher of religion D. Z. Phillips argues (1970, 1976, 2005) that faith is best understood as a self-contained form of life, a configuration of meanings with its own grammatical rules which do not rely for their meaningfulness on external justification.⁵

I think that approaching guarded faith from this angle dispels the desire to subject it to purely logical critiques, which operate under the assumption that such critiques amount to critical thinking pure and simple. It is easy to assume that guarded faith is a self-sealing belief and treat it as such, that is, as guilty of committing an informal logical fallacy. I do not think that this approach is conducive to the ends of philosophical inquiry, if we view those ends in terms of striking the right balance that is capable of mutually growing critical and caring thinking. The kind of thinking that should be employed, if we aim to approximate that kind of growth, must always prioritize the demands of caring-critical thinking. Perhaps we separate critical and caring thinking only for the sake of analysis, where when they are functioning well in practice, they are always functioning in tandem.

⁵ It is by no means a settled issue whether Wittgenstein himself was a noncognitivist about religious belief: see Pichler and Sunday Grève (2025).

We cannot, following Sharp's directive, visit guarded faith in order to understand the standpoint from which the believer sets forth in inquiry. But this in no way furnishes us with sufficient grounds for concluding that the believer is somehow unfit for philosophical inquiry. Nor does it mean that the possibilities of improving their judgment-making, including the improvement of strictly critical thinking skills, are foreclosed. An inquirer may resist putting their religious beliefs on the table, but this does not mean that the beliefs themselves are necessarily invalid.

It is the attitude of the guarded believer toward their religious belief that is at issue here. But I would argue that it is exactly one's attitude toward their beliefs that is philosophical inquiry's first concern, not the content of their beliefs per se. On one reading, of historical significance to the development of P4C, such is the aim of Socratic dialogue itself: method and the learning of method takes precedence over content and the learning of content (Nelson, 1949). Translated into pedagogical parlance, this means lending at least as much importance to the development of skills as to the accumulation of knowledge (Sutcliffe, 2022, p. 24). Such an approach to philosophical inquiry upholds the value of reflective thinking. This does not mean that questioning the content of beliefs is without value. It is simply to say that the value of such beliefs is so fundamentally tied to the adequacy of their grounds that growing the capacity to formulate adequate grounds takes precedence over any possible revision of belief-content. If the inquirer is not equipped with the right understanding of what constitutes adequate grounds, the value of any revision of judgments becomes trivial. This is one conclusion that became highlighted to the author in wrestling with the challenge of facilitating in the presence of guarded faith. It is a lesson that goes to the heart of just what the ultimate ends and values of practicing philosophical inquiry should be. I have come to see guarded faith not simply as an obstacle to the facilitator, but an opportunity to turn inward and reflect on such far-reaching questions.

By and by, the latter point is where *making room* stakes out its position in relation to the principle that self-correction is the crowning achievement of philosophical inquiry. Self-correction cannot be taken to mean the replacement of one set of beliefs with another. It cannot be taken to mean replacing one's belief in,

say, the Biblical afterlife with a belief in Vedic reincarnation, or their belief in the tenets of *Shari'a* with a belief in political liberalism. The value of self-correction is not in the act of replacing one belief with another. Self-correction is valuable to the extent that the revision of one's beliefs is based on adequate grounds. The latter, at least according to Lipman's (2003) approach, are expressed in the reflective equilibrium achieved by the community of inquiry, an equilibrium which itself emerges in the process of thinking together: critically, creatively, and caringly (p. 103).

if you don't want to lose it, don't use it

I have said plenty about the importance of caring in the caring-critical thinking dyad. It is worth adding a word on how the facilitator may avoid placating guarded faith at the expense of rigorous critique. I suggest a simple guideline: *If you don't want to lose it, don't use it*. That is, if you advance an article of faith in the course of giving reasons, then you have automatically opened it up to challenge and critique.

To my mind, this is a better ground rule than declaring some topics off-limits from the start or allowing some inquirers to withdraw from the dialogue entirely. While declaring a topic off-limits creates an exemption for the content of religious beliefs, this rule focuses on what advancing a belief in the process of justification entails. In other words, the rule turns the inquirers' attention to the metacognitive level. As such, far from obstructing the flow of inquiry, establishing this rule may work toward a better appreciation of the virtue of reflective thinking and to the kind of "think before you speak" procedures that caring thinkers are adjured to observe.

Furthermore, the rule leaves it open to the inquirers themselves to decide what they want to include or exclude from inquiry. If discussions of faith require a level of trust, safety, and comfort with the community of inquiry, who is to say that the inquirers will not reach such a level of intimacy as time goes on?

know thyself, love thy neighbor

In "Let's Go Visiting," Sharp (2007) draws on Lisa Disch's work to consider two types of inquirer whom she argues should be replaced by the preferred Visitor

type: the Assimilator and the Tourist (p. 308).⁶ I would like to add and recommend a fourth to these three: the Neighbor. To know oneself was and remains an ultimate good of philosophical inquiry. However, doing philosophy in community with other inquirers of diverse religious beliefs and modalities of faith necessitates supplementing the quest toward self-knowledge with an attitude toward those beliefs that seeks neither to immediately negate nor placate them. I argued above that visiting is not the best model for approaching guarded faith and showed why a model of *making room* would better serve the interests of inquiry and community. This entails that the attitude of the Visitor is not always the most suitable for CPI. In making room, the inquirers are rather urged to model the behavior of good neighbors.

Imagine a situation where someone moves into your community. Whenever you cross paths in the town square or linger around and converse, occasionally about issues of importance, they are willing and convivial enough. But when you decide to take a trip down to their home one day, you see a sign that unmistakably reads: NO VISITORS ALLOWED. I conceive of the relationship between inquirers and guarded faith along these lines. The believer herself might be willing to engage in inquiry about any topic except one or more tenets of her faith. To figure out how the facilitator may best deal with such a situation, it is useful to ask first: What are the interpersonal traits that make for a good neighbor?

Neighborly love is a familiar concept in several religious and wisdom traditions. Islamic, Christian, and Jewish traditions, for instance, arguably share the view that love is what sets the terms of the relationship between oneself and the others who cohabit the same community, however widely or narrowly we choose to draw the boundaries of that community (Attridge et al., 2007). Aligning with the Christian formulation of “love thy neighbor as thyself,” Islamic sources urge believers to love for the other what they love for themselves (Attridge et al., 2007). Many other religious traditions echo the sentiment.

Kierkegaard was one philosopher who attempted to delineate what such an ideal of love would look like in the context of philosophical inquiry. In identifying God as understood in theology with the Good as understood in philosophy

⁶ In a recent article, Daniel Contage (2017) argues for understanding the inquirer as “traveler” as an alternative to the “tourist” model.

(Evans, 2004, p. 183), Kierkegaard argued that the love that ties oneself to the other must be an expression of one's deeper love of God/the Good. He thus comes close to expressing the embodiment of neighborly love that would ideally be at work in the community of philosophical inquiry: "To love God is to love oneself truly; to help another person to love God is to love another person; to be helped by another person to love God is to be loved" (as cited in Evans, 2004, p. 182).

In relation to CPI, adopting such an approach would entail that both the facilitator and the inquirers understand that the realization of what David Kennedy has called "the community of love" (Kennedy, 1994) requires all participants to attend to helping, inviting, and encouraging one another to turn toward the Good (to limit ourselves to the philosophical lexicon) as an overarching value. Like any objective of CPI, the process of inquiry itself is the testing ground. No single inroad can be prescribed to achieve it. Embodying this value is the joint responsibility of all involved, whether through modeling, establishing ground rules, explicit instruction, metacognition, or the inevitable "chaos" (Kennedy & Kennedy, 2010) and "disequilibriums" (Murriss, 2008) erupting in the course of collective philosophical inquiry.

Following Kierkegaard's lead, the basic idea of neighborly love at work in CPI turns on, first, understanding what constitutes the good for oneself and the other and, second, helping the other as one would help oneself toward realizing that good in their own lives. This does not mean that one adopts a moralizing attitude toward fellow inquirers. Seneca's would be an attitude that is better aligned with the ends of CPI:

I'm talking to you as if I were lying in the same hospital ward, about the illness we're both suffering from, and passing on some remedies. So listen to me as if I were speaking to myself. (Seneca, 1969, pp. 72-73)

Nor does orienting oneself toward this good in the course of inquiry entail adopting a dogmatic attitude, as if one is invited to come into the inquiry with their heels dug in about what constitutes good and bad or right and wrong. It is part and parcel of CPI practice that the ideas we share are subject to change as the inquiry goes on. One's ideas about the good are no exception.

However, I think that there is an idea of the good that is not only a goal but also an enabling condition for realizing the pedagogical goals of CPI. It must be operative at all times if CPI practice is to achieve its full potential. This good, I

believe, is the above-mentioned equilibrium which Lipman spoke of between the ends of inquiry and the ends of community. Prioritizing the attainment and maintenance of this equilibrium is equivalent to prioritizing the attainment of the good in the relationship of inquirers to one another and that of the facilitator to the inquiring community. In short, it is equivalent to the ideal of love of neighbor in this context.

The reader may wonder what is at stake in maintaining this balance. It should go without saying that balancing the ends of inquiry and community is not intended to result in a stultifying homeostasis. The basic objectives of the community of inquiry are typically stated in terms of a forward-movement, such as improvement, cultivation, development, flourishing, and growth (Lipman, 2003, p. 14, 148, 188, 197). Yet it is key to stress that this desired growth cannot be achieved where an adequate nurturing environment is found lacking. Here the good, conceived as the right balance between inquiry and community, can be imagined on “ecological” terms, to use Lipman’s (2003) analogy, insofar as “thinking needs a habitat to facilitate its development” (p. 157). My comments, observations, and suggestions in this paper about guarded faith, making room, and neighborly love, seek no more than to elucidate the conditions that may be capable of furnishing such a habitat for all stripes of inquirers, including those of guarded faith, without upending the required balance between inquiry and community or the forward-movement of the community of inquiry as a whole. Maslow’s (1999) remarks on the dialectic of safety and growth, with attention to how “safety needs are prepotent over growth needs,” are instructive here:

Apparently growth forward customarily takes place in little steps, and each step forward is made possible by the feeling of being safe, of operating out into the unknown from a safe home port, of daring because retreat is possible. ... Assured safety permits higher needs and impulses to emerge and to grow towards mastery. To endanger safety, means regression backward to the more basic foundation. What this means is that in the choice between giving up safety or giving up growth, safety will ordinarily win out. Safety needs are prepotent over growth needs. (pp. 57–58)

It is thus by no means the upshot of my inquiry in this paper to suggest that the goal of the facilitator must be to retain those of guarded faith as members of the community of inquiry by any means necessary, including taking pains to prevent any challenge to their beliefs. Nor am I trying to suggest that CPI should in principle refrain from investigating faith claims or related beliefs, such as the

inferiority of certain social groups or the attitudes towards non-believers that allow for injury towards them, simply because a believer in such views is present within the circle of inquirers.⁷ But I do claim that if—assuming the worst—we suspect that the guarded believer is a person whose beliefs entail treating people of other faiths or worldviews as unworthy of protection, dignity, or respect, the best way to get them to open their doors to examine these beliefs is to induce them to do it from the inside, rather than by banging on their doors and windows or, worse, breaking into their quarters in police-raid fashion. Let me reiterate that I am speaking of the guarded believer here, who refuses to present his articles of faith to discussion altogether, and not about a belligerent zealot who brings such harmful beliefs to the table, perhaps even backing them up with the authority of their religious tradition. In the latter case, it should be clear that the rule of “if you don’t want to lose it, don’t use it” will apply, and that he has accordingly opened-up his underlying faith commitments to investigation by the group.

conclusion

I have argued for the need to formulate a conception of faith that captures the attitude of certain religious inquirers in P4C/CPI sessions, an attitude which presents the facilitator with unique challenges, as well as an opportunity to reflect on the broader ends and overarching values sustaining the community of philosophical inquiry as a global practice. In articulating the most significant features of “guarded faith,” I have attempted to draw some vital distinctions between it and dogmatism, on the one hand, and between it and the spectrum of noncognitivist positions on faith, on the other. My purpose in drawing these distinctions was to shed light on the combination of epistemic, affective, and metaethical features that make guarded faith what it is. To be sure, similar distinctions may be drawn between guarded faith and puritanism, fideism, non-evidentialist positions on faith, and so on, which clearly cannot be adequately done within the scope of one paper.

I have isolated the epistemic, affective, and meta-ethical features of guarded faith the better to situate the challenges that the guarded believer presents to the improvement of critical and caring thinking, which are fundamental goals of CPI.

⁷ I thank one of my anonymous reviewers for raising this point.

This led me, first, to suggest the synthesis of caring-critical thinking as something worthy of attention by the facilitator and, from there, to examine how well Ann Sharp's influential model of inquiry as "visiting" can attend to the kind of caring-critical thinking called upon by guarded faith. I finally proposed an alternative model of "making room" that is arguably more suitable for welcoming the guarded believer into the community of philosophical inquiry, together with a reimagining of the inquirer as "neighbor," rather than "visitor."

In closing, let us see what making room and loving one's neighbor would look like in practice. The classical approach of CPI, as advocated by Lipman and Sharp, relies on inquirers' democratic decision-making to decide the subject-matter of inquiry. What about situations where the majority of inquirers wish to discuss a topic that includes aspects of an inquirer's guarded faith? This is a situation that risks alienating the guarded believer not only from the particular session, but from philosophical inquiry altogether. On the other hand, we do not want to alienate the inquirers who believe that no topic should be off-limits to critical thinking, either.

In such a case, I suggest that the facilitator keep in mind that the goal is creating a community of philosophical inquiry that is at once also a community of good neighbors. There is no cure-all approach to a challenge of this sort. However, the facilitator may find it helpful to keep in view the twin goals of (1) promoting philosophical inquiry as such and (2) encouraging those of guarded faith in particular to participate in communal philosophical inquiry. The facilitator would do well to model the following "caring-critical" questions, sharing them with the group beforehand or as the inquiry unfolds (each line of questioning is followed by a brief comment on its significance within the framework of CPI):

- *To the best of my knowledge, does my contribution risk alienating another participant from the inquiry? If so, will alienating them help me develop my thinking and interpersonal skills in a way that alternative contributions cannot? Will it help the other develop their thinking skills or is it more likely that they will shut down and withdraw? Am I approaching them with an attitude of curiosity or antagonism?*
- This line of questioning centers the pedagogical aim of developing thinking skills in the minds of inquirers. Inquirers are made to understand that they play an active role and bear part of the responsibility for attaining the pedagogical aims of CPI.

- *Will my contribution help this community be a safer place for people of all walks and ways of life? Is it more likely to strengthen or weaken the bonds between us?*
- Paralleling the previous line of questioning, this one centers the pedagogical aim of creating a *community* of inquiry in the minds of inquirers.
- *How would a good neighbor phrase this contribution? If it can't be better phrased, does it make sense to postpone it to a later time when the ties between us inquirers have grown stronger?*
- Asking questions such as these have the added benefit of depicting philosophical inquiry as an open-horizon and the community as a work in progress, a project spread out over a period of time, during which not only our thoughts but our relationships with one another are subject to change and grow.
- *Am I being a good neighbor if I make this contribution? Do I risk making a fellow inquirer so uncomfortable that they will view philosophy itself in a negative light?*
- CPI does not only promote the virtues of community and inquiry. It also promotes philosophy itself. Communities of philosophical inquiry are like little incubators showing what philosophy can achieve if transformed into a practice of community-building.

The facilitator (and, one hopes, the collective) should model and gently direct the inquiry toward thinking about their contributions along these lines. It is much better, of course, if the inquirers themselves end up taking ownership of these considerations. Getting inquirers to ask such questions of themselves and others may have the additional benefit of cultivating these caring-critical reflections in their own interpersonal conduct, inside and outside of the CPI circle.

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