

## Reconciling Socrates and Levinas for the Community of Inquiry:

### A response to Sharp and Lavery (2018)

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*... but inasmuch as it is welcomed this conversation is a teaching [enseignement]. Teaching is not reducible to maieutics; it comes from the exterior and brings me more than I contain. (Levinas 1969, p. 51)*

#### Abstract

In the publication *In Community of Inquiry with Ann Margaret Sharp* (2018) the editors, Maughn Rollins Gregory and Megan Jane Lavery present a series of significant essays that honour Anne Margaret Sharp and her significant contribution to the Philosophy for Children (P4C) program. One of the essays, *Looking at others' faces* (Sharp & Lavery 2018), is a revised version of Sharp's earlier essay (see Sharp & Lavery 2018, p. 128, note 2) and further develops her original themes and interests in post-structuralist research and its implications for the P4C program. Sharp and Lavery argue for recognising alterity as informed by Emmanuel Levinas and his notion of the 'Other' (*L'Autre*) in the Community of Inquiry (CoI) alongside the well-established model of Socratic maieutics. But can Socrates and Levinas be reconciled as Sharp and Lavery invite us? In this essay I examine an interpretation of maieutics from Levinas that makes it both incompatible and yet, ultimately, reconciled with alterity in his notion of teaching. Finally, I explore ambiguities and implications that emerge from accepting this approach and suggest further questions that remain to be explored in relation to the pedagogy of the CoI.<sup>1</sup>

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**Key words**

alterity, Community of Inquiry, maieutics, Levinas, pedagogy

**Introduction**

In the essay *Looking at others' faces* (Sharp & Lavery 2018) there is a case made for the integration of maieutic pedagogy with an existential commitment to alterity in the teaching of philosophy. Ultimately, they express a plea to reconcile the Socratic model of teaching philosophy with the philosophy of alterity.

There must be a way to frame the CoI to honor its Socratic roots while acknowledging ... the relational and existential dimensions of philosophical inquiry that ... preserves alterity. (Sharp & Lavery 2018, p. 187)

Is this plea justified? I will argue that it is and can be met. But what is the Community of Inquiry and what is the classroom context of teaching philosophy for Lavery and Sharp that can reconcile both Socrates and a modern metaphysic? They suggest 'a student's ethical education' (Sharp & Lavery 2018, p. 127) is fostered in the pedagogical practice of the Community of Inquiry (CoI) that equally attends to both the epistemic dimension of 'inquiry' and should in equal measure incorporate the humanistic or 'community' dimension of the interpersonal exchange. The CoI is a practice for inducting students in philosophy in classrooms across the world (see UNESCO 2007). One of the motivations for its inception by Mathew Lipman in the 1970s is for the development of critical thinking in young children. Philosophy was envisioned by Lipman (1988, p. 12) to develop the cognitive abilities of children by doing philosophy rather than merely learn about philosophy. This distinction was important for re-visioning philosophy to be taught in schools and enables a meaningful engagement with the rich legacy of philosophy in the lives of the young.<sup>2</sup> The CoI is the central pedagogical practice in the teaching and doing of philosophy in the classroom and was collaboratively developed by Matthew Lipman and Ann Sharp to create a curriculum and pedagogy for the teaching of philosophy in the primary and secondary classroom. It was inspired by the Socratic dialogues of Plato where Socrates, the teacher, engages his pupils as interlocutors in maieutic elenchus

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<sup>2</sup> The distinction between teaching philosophy and doing philosophy is important to recognise and the emphasis in my paper is on presenting philosophy as a relational activity between teacher and student, where the teaching of philosophy is an invitation to do philosophy.

(Lipman, Sharp & Oscayan 1980). Along with the logical and critical objectives is the Deweyan aim for inculcating dispositions for democratic citizenship (Lipman 2004). Referring to the seminal works of Lipman, Philip Cam (2014) notes, 'Lipman (1988) was to elaborate on this idea of schools as a model of a participatory democracy and his classroom community of inquiry provided close analogies with the democratic school, a microcosm of the wider society' (p. 1205). But it is far from being delivered uniformly. It is a methodology that has many and varied conflicting interpretations, which are symptomatic of a pluralism of commitments (Vansieleghem & Kennedy 2011).

Sharp and Laverty put forward a case for Socratic maieutics on the one hand and the existential commitment to alterity as espoused by Levinas, to inform a pedagogical scaffold of the CoI that combines its Socratic roots and the 'relational and existential dimensions of philosophical inquiry that preserves alterity' (Sharp & Laverty 2018, p. 127). Importantly, the reconciliation is presented as an imperative when they say that there '*must* be a way' (my emphasis). My purpose here is to respond to their plea with a case for such a reconciliation.

Inherent in their plea is an assumption of a contradiction between Socrates and Levinas that has to be overcome if they are to achieve their pedagogical goal for the CoI. In this essay I initially examine how this contradiction can be understood and then present a case to overcome the putative irreconcilable dichotomy between Socrates and Levinas. In the second part, I explain how Sharp and Laverty's appeal to reconcile maieutics and alterity is possible from Levinas' interpretation of Socratic dialogue and how it can inform our notion of teaching. In the third part, I examine the relational implications of teaching that unfold if we follow Levinas in accomplishing a pedagogy beyond Socratic maieutics. In the fourth section, I examine the ambiguities inherent in the Levinasian solution to reconciliation. In the final section, I suggest consequences and implications these ambiguities have for the teaching of philosophy in the classroom and I conclude with questions and further lines of inquiry.

### **Part One: Introduction to Levinas and maieutics**

In this essay I support a reading of Emmanuel Levinas as a contemporary philosopher of alterity who has both an interpretation of Plato where Socratic maieutics is, on one reading, opposed to alterity but, more importantly, also opens a way to understanding Socratic dialogical inquiry that preserves alterity. Levinas is able to bridge the gap

between the maieutic strategies of questioning while at the same time accommodate the absolute alterity of one's interlocutors because they welcome each other and are ready for dialogue, or in his terms, dialogue is possible because one 'welcomes the stranger'. In this first section of the paper I introduce the ethical thinking of Levinas and examine his critique of Socratic maieutics.

The complex and many-faceted philosophy of Levinas emerges from the mid twentieth century from his engagement with Talmudic scripture, his interpretation of the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl (Zahavi 2017), his response to Martin Heidegger (Levinas 1995), and his survival and witness to his family's tragic losses caused by the destructive violence of the Shoah, that all coalesce to inform his philosophical purpose (Fagenblat 2010, p. xiii). My argument in this essay depends on the recurring reference Levinas makes to Plato throughout his philosophy (Peperzak 1996, p. xii) that I think will help us to understand how a teacher can learn from both Socrates and Levinas to inform their pedagogy for a CoI. But how is such a commensurate relation possible? Levinas himself dismisses maieutics as a model for teaching, 'Teaching is not reducible to maieutics ...' (Levinas 1969, p. 51). Let us examine why Levinas does not accept maieutics as a model for teaching.

In his critique of Western philosophy, Levinas describes how, under the influence of Plato, that which can be encountered by a subject is relative to the way in which the subject can already thematise and think of the world and therefore not encounter it as it is. On this view here is a kind of 'levelling' (Lingis 1994, p. 79) between interlocutors who are not Other for each other but reduced to an equality; an equality whose currency came from the ancient Greek value of rational thought, a legacy bequeathed to us in the West, where each interlocutor is a variant of the same universal form (see Lingis 1994).<sup>3</sup>

Levinas argues that this assumption of immanence is at the heart of the maieutic pedagogy and describes this assumption as a reduction to the *Same* (*Le même*). The *Same* is a term coined by Levinas to describe subjective acts of intentionality that signify meaning in relation to what is already understood by the subject. The implications, therefore, are that in an encounter with the Other, such as in communal dialogue, the alterity of the other is reduced to what is already understood and grasped by the subject. The Other in this case is necessarily deprived of their alterity. 'The possibility of possessing, that is, of suspending the very alterity of what is only

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<sup>3</sup> I acknowledge and thank my friend Alan Pose for the subtle and important distinctions in Husserl and Levinas on the concept of the 'Same'.

at first other, and other relative to me, is the way of the same' (Levinas 1969, p. 38) The contents of the ego in this case become the measure of the world. Anna Strhan (2007) summarises Levinas' argument with Western philosophy and its tendency to reduce what is other to its totalising thematic constructions by stating: 'Levinas describes the history of Western philosophy—and, that is to say, in Western thought—as following Ulysses: it is characterised by its failure to recognise the Other, always to return to the same' (p. 421).

Levinas argues that Socratic maieutics represents a propensity in philosophy to reduce what it encounters as other to the level of the same. In the Socratic model, the CoI becomes a pedagogical device to engage and scaffold students in philosophical dialogue where they make concrete, in the living experience of that dialogical exchange, common, central and contestable ideas (Lipman 2003). This version of the Socratic elenchus whose prime maieutic principle is articulated in the *Meno*, requires Plato's theory of recollection (*anamnesis*)<sup>4</sup>. The theory of anamnesis entails we accept learners are born with an innate knowledge of the forms in their souls, and the role of teachers is to ask germane questions in order to facilitate the expression of this knowledge from their interlocutors. Anamnesis implies, amongst other things, a universal innate capacity to learn and know the forms of knowledge. Hence, the pedagogy of maieutics entails a metaphysics of immanence. However, Levinas has an irrevocable commitment to the heteronomy of reality where it manifests in existence and existents that can have a meaning which is beyond what can be thought by an intentional consciousness (Strhan 2009). This commitment is evident in his thesis against the reduction of the Other to the 'Same' (*le même*). Gert Biesta (2013), a philosopher of education who draws out implications from Levinas in his analysis of teaching, confirms the immanent nature of maieutic pedagogy when he says at one point, 'The idea that teaching is immanent to learning goes back to the Socratic idea of teaching as a maieutic process, that is, as bringing out what is already there' (Biesta 2013, p. 449) Socratic maieutics therefore represents, for Levinas, a pedagogy that perpetuates a totalising immanence.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, a maieutic pedagogy suggests that the possibility for forming a community is undermined by any totalising pedagogy if, by community, one imagines a plurality of subjects identifying as a collective. Levinas' argument against Western metaphysics is an argument against Socratic maieutics,

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<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Peperzak, Critchley and Bernasconi (eds) (1996) who describe the influence in Levinas of the Cartesian idea of the infinite that is interpreted by Levinas to contrast with the totalising immanence in philosophy '... Levinas finds in Descartes's account of a thought greater than I can contain a model of how transcendence breaks open the unity immanence, and presence of the subject as ordinarily conceived by philosophy' (p. 129).

‘This primacy of the same was Socrates’s teaching: to receive nothing of the Other but what is in me ...’ (Levinas 1969, p. 43).

In spite of this tradition, Levinas advocates for an understanding of teaching as a transcendence brought about by our encounter with the Other who remains a radical exteriority, who is not someone I can totally reduce to any of my prior existing knowledge. ‘Teaching is not reducible to maieutics; it comes from the exterior and brings me more than I contain’ (Levinas 1969, p. 51).

With the above considerations of maieutics from the perspective of Levinas’ critique of Plato, how do we square Socratic maieutics with Levinas’ commitment to alterity? It seems as if the imperative for a reconciliation from Sharp and Lavery is not possible. At first blush, Sharp and Lavery’s plea for a pedagogy to inform the CoI that can accommodate both immanence and transcendence seems destined to fail. Sharon Todd (2016) would agree. Todd is an interpreter of Levinas in her philosophy of education who sees fruitful possibilities in understanding Levinas from the challenges and questions he can be subjected to from out of the everyday and lived educational concerns.

What I do ... by way of method, is to start from ... the assertion that there is indeed something ‘new’ to be explored in Levinas’s philosophy—both in terms of ideas to be found within his work, and also in terms of the demands educational ideas and practices place on his work from without. (Todd 2016, p. 406, original emphasis)

And if we question Levinas, as Todd suggests, we find that his advocacy for transcendent alterity in the Other to be ‘bringing me more than I contain’ is opposed to Socrates and is completely at odds with maieutics:

... the view of teaching as bringing more than I contain ‘is antithetical to the Socratic method that so predominates dialogical approaches to educational practice, where teaching is viewed as ‘bringing out of the I that which it already contains’. (Biesta 2014, p. 48, quoting Todd 2003b, p. 30)

In this section we discussed how Socratic maieutics can be interpreted as a totalising pedagogy and therefore opposed to the philosophy of Levinas. However, if we follow the methodology of challenging Levinas as Todd suggests, we can find a way out of the impasse. I propose that we get our first clue in the conjunction in the title of his signature text *Totality and Infinity* which reflects how Levinas avoids simplistic

reductions and reaches for meaning beyond the obvious dichotomies dependent on established Western philosophical paradigms. In the next section I examine Levinas' alternative reading of Plato and interpretation of maieutics as a device for overcoming rhetorical artifice, but also as a stage toward an ethical pedagogical disposition that is beyond the solipsistic trap of absolute immanence in Western metaphysics (Drabinski & Nelson 2014). To illustrate this analysis, I examine Levinas' interpretation of the *Apology*.

## Part Two: Levinas and Socratic Apology

Early in *Totality and Infinity* (1969) Levinas sees the significance of the *απολογία* from Socrates in Plato's *Apology* as an example of discourse where interlocutors are part of a dialogical event where the Other is addressed. In his frequent, sometimes oblique and idiosyncratic references to Plato (Schroeder & Benso 2008; Staehler 2010, pp. 2-3), Levinas (1969) says at one point, 'Apology, in which the I at the same time asserts itself and inclines before the transcendent, belongs to the essence of conversation' (p. 40). Here we see an example of how dialogue is essentially, for Levinas, an instance that is both an assertion of a singular egoic subject and at the same time acknowledges and is responsive to the alterity of the Other. In the literary and philosophical reference to Plato's *Apology* Levinas suggests Socrates to be, in this instance, an exemplar of teaching who is predisposed and 'inclines' towards others as Other or transcendent and not another version one's self (Staehler 2010, p. 77).

In the *Apology* Socrates is accused of not respecting the gods and leading astray the young men of Athens who participate in his philosophical dialogues. Socrates puts forward an apology and argues his case against the charges. The act of apology should not be understood in the modern sense of an expression of regret and redress for wrongs done but instead according to the ancient Greek sense of an argument that is a defence in response to a judgement. Socrates argues that he is far from corrupting the youth of Athens, instead he teaches the 'care for the best possible state of the soul' (30g) and encourages his interlocutors to question because the 'unexamined life is not worth living' (38a 5-6). Philosophical teaching in this sense is not sophistry because he does not arrive at a resolution or answer to resolve the questions aimed at him. He does not summon up arguments in the form of a debate to score a tally of points or for his own self-interest. Instead, Socrates offers a model of teaching that Sharp and Laverty are advocating for in the pedagogy of the CoI because Socrates does not merely model procedural and logical critical thinking but exemplifies ethical relations.

The Socratic elenchus features inference, comparisons, contradictions and uncovers assumptions, all essential elements of critical thinking teachers ought to model to their students and foster their capacity to identify, practice and evaluate.

However, the enrichment of doing philosophy in the classroom lies in the pre-conditions to welcome inquiry and be questioned in the first place and, as Socrates discovered, this is not always valued. The pre-condition for undertaking philosophy is ethical and that commitment cannot be taken for granted. As Lipman and Sharp (1978) have argued when discussing the role of philosophical inquiry in schools, 'Philosophy presupposes a commitment to open inquiry, and such inquiry might or might not be welcome in certain areas' (p. 90). This commitment to openness Levinas attributes to the ethical pre-conditions that make dialogue possible in the first place. Socratic dialogue for Levinas 'presupposes beings who have decided for discourse, who consequently have accepted its rules' (1969, p. 180). The apology from Socrates therefore has pedagogical significance because it is motivated by his relationship to the Other and directed toward the Other as his response to their judgement. If Socrates were a Robinson Crusoe, there would be no need to apologise but it is because the encounter with the Other is recognised as an encounter with alterity it brings with it a demand for my response and my responsibility toward them. Staehler (2010) concludes, 'Yet it has turned out that Socratic teaching and Levinasian philosophy are closer than one might first assume. For both Plato and Levinas, teaching involves the Other, and it involves the Other in a much more fundamental fashion than teaching understood as the conveying of content' (p. 77). The *Apology* represents a pedagogy of maieutics more than the immanent philosophy represented by the midwife analogy. Socratic teaching represents a teaching motivated by an ethical desire to fulfil a responsibility toward those we are in dialogue with.<sup>6</sup>

If Socratic maieutics is interpreted as an ethical pedagogy it is because we have accepted it can be responsive to the Other, and therefore we can accept the proposition that maieutics can be reconciled with alterity. But how do we understand Levinas' insistence of the responsiveness to the other? And if we accept the argument so far about the importance of the Other for philosophical dialogue, don't we risk lurching toward the other extreme and losing the immanent self by being overwhelmed by the Other? In the next section I examine the implications of the Levinasian reading of

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<sup>6</sup> There is a comprehensive discussion to be had on whether the response to the Other is toward an individual or to a collective, but that is not my purpose here. For more on this important issue, see Garrison (2011).



Socratic maieutics beyond dichotomies whose reconciliation is found in ethical responsibility.

### Part Three: Beyond maieutics

For Levinas, we transition beyond a simple interpretation of maieutics by overcoming the dichotomy between immanence and transcendence in our encounter with the face (*la visage*). According to his phenomenological analysis, one's encounter with a face is understood as an experiential event of alterity that is radically other and yet, at the same time, maintaining one's egoic subjectivity. In the following long quote we see Levinas introduce his idea of the 'face' that, amongst other ideas, conveys meaning by holding on to both intentional poles of alterity and sameness:

The notion of the face, to which we will refer throughout this work, opens other perspectives: it brings us to a notion of meaning prior to my *Sinnggebung* and thus independent of my initiative and my power. It signifies the philosophical priority of the existent over Being, an exteriority that does not call for power or possession, an exteriority that is not reducible, as with Plato, to the interiority of memory, and yet maintains the I who welcomes it. (Levinas 1969, p. 51)

The experience of a face is a meaning prior to and beyond an intentionality that can adequately capture its entire meaning. However, what is also important in this quote is the way in which we see an instance of Levinas not totally dismissing Plato's immanent thesis of anamnesis. He could have, for example, concluded that anamnesis and therefore maieutics is opposed to exteriority. But that is not how he ends it. Instead he adds 'and yet' as a way of indicating 'nevertheless' or 'however' which alludes to a conjunction of ideas.<sup>7</sup> I interpret Levinas here to indicate that one's encounter with the face of the Other does not totally eliminate the subjectivity of an intentional ego. What he suggests here is that the experience of alterity can accommodate both the exteriority of the Other and the immanent sphere of the ego who is in relationship with the Other. It is the subjective ego who can then express her or his hospitable 'welcome' toward the Other. The ethical significance of this 'welcome' cannot be underestimated and we will return to it below when I discuss the consequences of the ethical dimension for teaching philosophy. But here we have an instance of Levinas saying that, in

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<sup>7</sup> Adriaan Peperzak (1993, p. 120) refers to the significance of the conjunction in *Totality and Infinity* (1969) to lie in alluding to the relationship between the 'Same' and the 'Other'. The conjunction 'and' operates to indicate both a separation and the inescapable relationship of the key terms of the book.

opposing maieutics with alterity, we do not need to let go of the subject and let it be subsumed by our encounter with alterity. As such, discourse for Levinas can be interpreted as an event where the subject and the Other can be regarded as both discrete and separate from each other and yet be responsive to the Other. The subject remains an ego in dialogue with a transcendent Other.

Levinas offers a way of interpreting Socratic maieutics which can accommodate the totalising ego of the subject while, at the same time, allowing it to be open to maintaining the alterity of the Other. How is Levinas able to encompass a relationship between two opposite poles? There are two ethically motivated reasons for this according to Levinas. Firstly, Socratic maieutics can be used as a foil against the violence of rhetorical devices intended to coerce, manipulate or indoctrinate vulnerable others. The ethical motivation of Socrates to be in dialogue with the Other overcomes the sophistry and rhetorical devices of so-called 'teachers' or sophists who Socrates railed against.

Socratic maieutics prevailed over a pedagogy that introduced ideas into a mind by violating or seducing (which amounts to the same thing) that mind. (Levinas 1969, p. 171)

According to Levinas in *Totality and Infinity*, maieutics has a legitimate role to play because it has a performative function in teaching. Such an interpretation of Plato highlights how maieutics can overcome the cynical ploys of rhetoric to help frame dialogue and how communal thinking implies an intersubjective relationship that acknowledges alterity.

To renounce the psychagogy, demagogy, pedagogy rhetoric involves is to face the Other, in a veritable conversation ... Thought, for Plato, is not reducible to an impersonal concatenation of true relations, but implies persons and interpersonal relations. (Levinas 1969, pp. 70-71)<sup>8</sup>

Levinas shares with Plato the need to maintain an argument against rhetorical artifice and opinion but he also disagrees with any suggestion Socratic maieutics is the end of pedagogy. Maieutics is merely a corrective to the rhetorical artifice and the 'violence' of sophistry. This argument against sophistry is essentially a plea for non-violence in the relational dialogue between interlocutors. Exactly what this sense of non-violence is for a CoI is a dense subject in itself. However, there are clear references from the contributions from Lipman, Sharp and Oscayan (1980), Murriss (2013), Sharp (2014)

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<sup>8</sup> Levinas references Theaetetus, 151a. and Phaedrus, 273e

and Kizel (2016) that point to the violence of marginalisation and the hegemony of epistemic authorities and politics. Similarly, this argument against sophistry is also an argument for going beyond maieutics by demonstrating the ethical motivations for dialogue. Levinas sees the possibility of teaching in the welcoming relationship between teacher and student who are ready to meet in dialogue; 'language presupposes interlocutors, a plurality' (Levinas 1969, p. 73). This face to face encounter is the transformative condition for the possibility of dialogue and ultimately for teaching. It is through this transformative sense of an encounter that Levinas is able to demonstrate how teaching can be a manifestation of transcendence. In other words, encountering alterity is an opportunity to go beyond maieutic pedagogy where the I and the Other are both contained in an existential relationship with each other. The implications for the CoI is that members of the dialogue remain Other to each other while at the same time do not lose their individual identity. Such an interpretation of Plato by Levinas supports Sharp and Laverty's plea to reconcile Socratic maieutics while preserving alterity. Levinas shows we can go beyond maieutics while at the same time recognise and accept it as an enduring stage or pole of experience and still be in relationship with alterity.<sup>9</sup> But what kind of co-existence is this between the two disparate and opposing poles, the Same and the Other? In the next part I discuss how the reconciliation of maieutics with alterity exhibits an inherent ambiguity between the immanence of the Same and the transcendence of the Other that Levinas does not shy away from.

#### **Part Four: Ambiguity in the relationship between maieutics and alterity**

So far we have seen how, on the one hand, Levinas is clearly against maieutics when it stands in the way of accepting the alterity of the other, and yet he sees a way to interpret Plato whereby we can maintain maieutic pedagogy while being open to the Other. This re-interpretation of Plato is an example of an ambiguous relationship Levinas has with Plato. The ground for the ambiguity lies in the fact that Levinas is treading a line between extremes without an explicit synthesis in the reconciliation, and his view remains unsettled as it were. Todd (2003a) defines ambiguity in Levinas as an essential feature of his ethical expositions when she says of Levinas at one point; 'And this is particularly the case since he views communicative ambiguity as itself

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<sup>9</sup> A question that emerges out of this discussion is how can the egoic subject who is prone to reduce the world around them to the same, enter into a relationship with the Other without directly divesting them of their alterity? I suggest an answer here but a complete answer Levinas offers to this question would take us too far afield from the focus of this response to Sharp and Laverty.

central to an ethics of responsibility' (p. 32). Francisco J Gonzalez (2008) explains that the ambiguity in Levinas' argument against maieutics is both against it while at the same time accepting of it because Plato's argument is, firstly, in opposition to the cognitive violence of rhetoric and, secondly, because he demonstrates through the figure of Socrates a disposition of openness to a plurality of views:

The debt to Socratic maieutics is to be found in this determination to preserve the autonomy of the Same in the face of the Other. Levinas can therefore be seen, not so much as rejecting Socrates' maieutics in favor of its opposite, but rather as trying to find a reconciliation between the two extremes: a reconciliation one could name ... plurality. (Gonzalez 2008, p. 53)

Gonzalez sees the ambiguity Levinas has toward Plato in his attempt to maintain a plurality without synthesising or resolving that plurality into a unified thematic system or philosophical approach. This version of plurality is what Biesta (2004) calls the 'community of those who have nothing in common', a phrase he borrowed from Alphonso Lingis (1994). In relation to speaking for oneself as we discussed above in our analysis of the *Apology*, Biesta similarly argues for the welcoming of the stranger and acknowledging that it matters who is speaking and that it is they who are speaking for themselves, whereby each maintains their alterity toward each other and yet remain in communion.

... when I speak to the stranger, when I expose myself to the stranger, when I want to speak in the community of those who have nothing in common, then I have to find my own voice, then it is me who has to speak—and no one else can do this for me. It is, to put it differently, this very way of speaking which constitutes me as a unique individual—as me, and no one else. (Biesta 2004, p. 317)

What is alluded to here is that to be in communal dialogue demands individuals speak for themselves and, like Socrates, expressing themselves without recourse to an idealised version of themselves or a theorised essence of humanity to define them as an individual. Alfonso Lingis writes eloquently of the ethical pre-condition for dialogue that encompasses the two poles of otherness and self:

The other turns to me and speaks; he or she asks something of me. Her words, which I understand because they are the words of my own tongue, ask for information and indications. They ask for a response that

will be responsible, will give reasons for its reasons and will be a commitment to answer for what it answers. But they first greet me with an appeal for responsiveness. (Lingis 1994, pp. 130-131)

The theme that is prevalent in any reconciliation between a plurality of subjects is that an ethical disposition is a pre-condition for dialogue. Fundamental in the writings of Ann Margaret Sharp (2014) is the idea of 'caring thinking'. Care is intended to identify what students and teachers can strive to demonstrate in a CoI that illustrates and confirms her commitment to the relational and existential commitments we make when we are in dialogue:

Caring thinking suggests a certain view of personhood and a pedagogical process. It also suggests a particular environment for the cultivation of such thinking. I am referring to the process of communal inquiry and the democratic environment of the classroom community of inquiry. It is as if you can't have one without the other, if you are interested in cultivating caring thinking among children on a large scale. (Sharp 2014, p. 16)

It seems, ultimately, that an ethical commitment toward the Other is the pre-condition to reconcile maieutics and alterity. However, if that is the case, then we are also committed to an essential ambiguity in defining a pedagogy that is borne from an ethical responsibility toward an indefinable *face* of the Other. So have we undone the possibility of a pedagogy for the CoI in trying to reconcile maieutics with alterity. In the final section I suggest the implications of ambiguity that I see emerge for a pedagogy of communal dialogical inquiry.

### **Part Five: Implications and questions for the CoI**

The first implication I suggest is that we are attuned to not commit a violence toward others. In the preface to *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas defines violence as something more than its physical manifestations but it also has to do with the way in which rhetoric and sophistry can undermine the capacity of interlocutors to express themselves, and which is pertinent to the classroom and the relationship between the teacher and student:

But violence does not consist so much in injuring and annihilating persons as in interrupting their continuity, making them play roles in which they no longer recognize themselves ... (Levinas 1969, p. 21)

Maieutics is a functional model for inducting students into philosophy. But as Levinas argues here, in maintaining a utilitarian purpose for it, there is the possibility for subterfuge and ruse in the rhetorical techniques a facilitator may bring to the dialogue which can become a kind of violence because the Other is reduced to the purposes of the ideal rather than respected for who they are. Kizel (2016, p. 20) argues that if schools impose a hegemonic meta-narrative of inquiry a version of violence because it 'silences' and disempowers the 'otherness of the other', what should communities of philosophical inquiry do in order to confront 'normalising education'? First of all, they can provide a space that allows a discourse I call 'enabling identity' —in other words, expression of the otherness of the other. Sharp and Lavery (2018) also allude to the unethical relations that can occur in philosophical dialogue modelled on maieutics where the interlocutors 'must divest themselves of personality' (p. 127). Splitter (2018) observes how Sharp and Lavery prioritise the moral implications of Levinas for teaching when he says, 'The point ... according to Sharp and Lavery's reading of Levinas, is that being face-to-face with another implies a degree of moral responsibility' (p. 105).

The second implication of accepting alterity in the classroom is a continual openness to what is strange and unsettled. What is clear from my interpretation of Levinas is that nothing is completely settled but always open to further questioning. But can this questioning in education be a source of strength and not a sign of insouciance? (see, for example, Strhan 2012; Todd 2003a). Sharp argues that this openness to fallibility is something vital and inseparable from what it means to care.

As children commit themselves to the process of communal inquiry and all that it involves (including the principle of fallibilism) something much more important than what is said on any particular day is happening. Children are committing themselves to a practice that, although rooted in fallibilism, has intrinsic meaning and calls forth their care: their care for the tools of inquiry, their care for the problems they deem worthy to be inquired into, their care for the form of the dialogue, and their care for each other as they proceed in the inquiry itself. (Sharp 2014, p. 20)

A third and related implication for accepting a reconciliation between maieutics and alterity is a re-examination of subjectivity and its capacity for transformative change. In the example of the Platonic dialogues, interlocutors maintain their identity throughout. Anna Strhan (2012) and Guoping Zhao (2015) have recently written about the consequences for subjectivity of accepting a post-humanist pedagogical approach as represented by Levinas. Zhao (2015) argues that the implications for accepting alterity lie in the way in which it allows for growth and transformation, ideals found in the educative purpose of fostering philosophical dialogue:

Drawing on the French philosophy of difference, particularly Levinas' ideas of alterity and subjectivity, I propose a post-humanist subject that is singular and unique, inexhaustible and uncontainable, and responsible and open to the world ... In education, we cannot give up the search for who we are, but such a search should not close us off in a total manifestation. It should allow for growth, change, and transformation. (p. 960)

The relationship with alterity is seen as an opportunity in education to recognise an openness in the other allowing them to grow and develop.

All three ethical implications of alterity signify a certain limitation to teaching and suggest a questioning of the purpose of education itself. In reference to Gert Biesta's discussion of a multi-dimensional purpose to education that includes socialisation, qualification and subjectification, he argues for an ethical approach to questions of education:

All this also shows—and this is perhaps the most important point—that in the design, enactment and justification of education we have to engage with normative questions. This is why I have emphasised that it is of crucial importance that we engage with the question of *good* education and do not make the mistake of thinking that it suffices to talk about *effective* education. (Biesta 2015b, p. 80, emphasis in original)

If we accept Biesta's argument, then our welcoming of the Other is an opportunity for the CoI to be a manifestation of the teacher who does not merely settle for instrumental outcomes of the curriculum and society but strives for a moral end to education. Allowing both Socrates and Levinas into dialogue with each other shows up their compatibility to the CoI, as Sharp and Laverty argue. But their reconciliation also raises deep questions about the possibility of how their ambiguous relationship is

informative of pedagogical practices in the philosophical classroom. Socrates may act as a model in the writings of Plato, and Levinas can express himself, but how do they translate into the daily actions of teacher in the classroom? Could it be as Alistair Miller (2016) says of Levinasian scholarship that, 'Instead of contributing toward the transformation of education and society envisaged by many philosophers of education, the "ethics of the Other" merely generates an esoteric discourse' (p. 1). I am not so dismissive of what Levinas has to offer as Miller suggests.

As a final note, but one that I think deserves more investigation, is the question of whether or not there is ever a way in which a phenomenological analysis, such as the one described by Levinas, could be informative for how a teacher can facilitate a CoI? I have made suggestions as to ethical consequences but, I have to admit, the fundamental issue with any analysis informed by phenomenology is that it is not a pedagogy. Adding to this question is the clear position from Levinas (1969, p. 75) that his conception of ethics is disruptive of any system and a pedagogy is, by definition, a systematic way of organising how a teacher is to teach. 'The face has turned to me — and this is its very nudity. It is by itself and not by reference to a system'. If Levinas is as radical in his descriptive phenomenological analysis of our encounter with the face as I think he is, then any consequences that can be reduced to a pedagogy cannot be consistent with his philosophy. Perhaps a phenomenological analysis has nothing to contribute toward a pedagogy and I think there continue to be a series of assumptions that need to be untangled and clarified. So what do I think Levinas has to offer the teaching of philosophy in schools?

For teachers who are wrestling with often competing demands on their professional practice from their historical, political and social context, this lack of a practical pedagogical framework can make teaching a formidable task. But perhaps in accepting this challenge to find a meaning in teaching we, as teachers, have signalled our responsibility for good education and perhaps that is as good as it gets when we acknowledge our commitment to the Other. The Other is excessive of any representation and cannot be recuperated in my immanent representations. And if one takes this insight into practical issues such as pedagogy, we may fall into the assumption that we need a model whereby the alterity of the Other is respected. But Levinas' philosophy is not prescriptive, he is doing phenomenology and not philosophy. Instead of settling for a thematised and theoretical pedagogy, the call from Levinas to teaching is only as fundamental as the *welcome* to conversation that tries to reconcile alterity with maieutics and attempts to make meaning of a Community of Inquiry in an anarchic way each and every lesson.



There are questions here and an area of research that is in need of further investigation and discussion. I can accept the sense of incompleteness and a lack of finality can be disheartening (Strhan 2012; Van Manen 1991; Wolf 2013). Ultimately however, I propose that such radically anarchic conclusions from Levinas' reflexive ambiguities are hopeful because they are borne out of a sense of responsibility to respond to the questioning of teaching from its encounter with the face of the Other (see Crowell 2012, p. 564).<sup>10</sup> What more can we require as teachers of philosophy and philosophical practice than to wrestle with unanswerable questions others readily leave to us? 'Reason is never so versatile as when it puts itself in question. In the contemporary end of philosophy, philosophy has found a new lease on life' (Levinas & Kearney, 1986, p. 33).

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<sup>10</sup> Crowell explains how *ethics is an optics* describes Levinas' radical responsibility from the encounter with a face.

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