

# The Role of the Community of Inquiry in the Process of Knowing

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The notion of Community is a fashionable one. It has been studied (and it is still being studied) from many different areas of thinking: philosophers, sociologists, lawyers, psychologists, pedagogues, and scientists, among others, have offered different points of view from which new terms have been proposed, to shape and limit the more general concept of Community: concepts like «Linguistic Community», «Community of Speech», «Community of Inquiry», «Educational Community», «Scientific Community», and so on.

Let's draw our attention now to the concept of *Community of Inquiry*. The purpose of this article is not to analyse the notion of Community of Inquiry from all these different points of view, but to point out that the idea that the Community of Inquiry is an essential condition of knowing, and not only a pedagogical instrument, a mere method to learn or to teach.

We do not intend to demonstrate the convenience of establishing communities of inquiry in the classroom, nor the effectiveness and utility of the community of inquiry as a pedagogical method, nor the democratic role of the community in its interaction with the society. On the contrary, we want to demonstrate that the community of inquiry goes beyond all these roles: the community of inquiry is not only a didactic methodology or a democratic strategy, the community of inquiry is an essential condition to the fact of knowing; that is to say, it is a basis of knowledge. Obviously, it is not the only one, but it is a necessary condition for the fact of knowing. Without a community there is no knowledge, and without knowledge, according to the pragmatist approach, our possibilities to face problematic situations in an effective way decrease drastically.

In fact, neither knowledge nor experience can be understood without this social factor. If human experience has to be relevant and meaningful it has to be displayed and contrasted with other people's experiences in a social context - displayed by language and contrasted by dialogue - becoming itself an object of reflection and analysis. As C.S. Peirce said (1995), «one man's experience is nothing, if it stands alone. (...) It is not «my» experience, but «our» experience that has to be thought of; and this «us» has indefinite possibilities» (p. 259).

These indefinite possibilities have to develop in a context where plurality of alternatives is conceived as positive and enriching; a context where there is no exigency of total convergence among the individual experiences but where both the diversity of experiences and the possibility of contrasting them it could be guaranteed.

This is the context that a community of inquiry offers. This concept of community of inquiry integrates all the different points of view from which the notion of Community of Inquiry has been analyzed; in that sense, we suggest that all these perspectives converge, in a way, in the notion of Community of Inquiry.

### WHAT IS A COMMUNITY OF INQUIRY?

Features of a philosophical community of inquiry in the classroom - that is to say, characteristics of a community of inquiry in its didactic and pedagogical dimensions - have been broadly commented<sup>1</sup> but we are more interested in those aspects which transcend the classroom, in those features of the community of inquiry that any community of inquiry has to have - obviously, then, also a community of inquiry in the classroom.

So, to analyze the meaning of the notion of Community of Inquiry does not mean to ask for the didactic features of a community of inquiry but to discover its epistemological utility.

The analysis of the concept implies necessarily the analysis of both the terms of «Community» and «Inquiry». Both of them are equally important in order to establish the limits and epistemological features of a community of inquiry.

#### a) Community

One of the precursors in the study of the notion of Community was Ferdinand Tonnies, a German sociologist who emphasized the distinction between community (*Gemeinschaft*) and association (*Gesellschaft*). According to Tonnies, the opposition between the community and the association is the opposition between what is naturally originated and what is contractual, and between what is organic and what is mechanical. Tonnies identified what is organic and natural with community, and what is mechanical and contractual with association.

We suggest it should be necessary to smooth Tonnies' sharp distinction in the sense that we could not identify natural with organic, on the one hand, and contractual with mechanical, on the other hand; in the same way, we could not establish a radical border between natural/organic and contractual/mechanical either. Moreover it is doubtful that every community was a natural group and every association was founded on the ground of a contract.<sup>2</sup>

Lipman also distinguishes between *community* and *association*, but not in the same sense as Tonnies did. Lipman's criterion of opposition is not the binomial natural/contractual, but the binomial self-profit/cooperation:

*In a community - like for example in a friendship, or in a family, or in a classroom where everyone cooperates and inquires together - the other person's welfare means as much to you as your own does. In an association, on the other hand, your own welfare generally comes first. In an association, you cooperate with others because it is to your advantage to do so. In a community, the question of whose advantage it is, never even comes up because you always take other people's points of view into account. (Lipman, 1980, p.33)*

Nevertheless we can not establish a radical border between communities and associations. In some circumstances a community can become an association «to the extent you bargain with somebody about what you'll do for him if he'll do something in return for you» (Lipman, 1980, p. 33). In other cases, associations can become communities: «At first the people come together for individualistic reasons, but slowly a *sense of community* is formed. The members come to appreciate shared experiences, and they cooperate simply because they enjoy cooperating» (Lipman & Sharp, 1980, p. 173).

Moreover, in the same way as, according to Tonnies, the community differs from the society, the community also differs from a mere group of people, because members of the community share and accept the fact of being part of a unity with common goals and all the members join together to reach these goals. On the contrary, being part of a mere group of people does not imply any reciprocal commitment.

The notion of community is equidistant from both the natural group and the association. In that sense, a community implies some kind of commitment to the objectives and interests of the community, and to the effort to reach them. This commitment is not the result of a forced contract but the mutual need of every member of the community. A community becomes the field where the relationships among individuals can be hold; even the more intimate and private experiences need a net of relationships and meanings, which only can be possible with a previous connection with the community. It is not true that the meaning of our experiences can be acquired without the others; it is absolutely necessary that there is a common and active intercourse among individuals to broaden and enrich the meaning of our experiences.

The community sets the frame within which relationships between individuals are established, the frame within which dialogue is established. That is why, the presence of interlocutors and the interchange of opinions, beliefs, experiences, that guide to new and more reasonable opinions, and beliefs, and, therefore, to richer and more fructiferous experiences in the future, is essential.

Human experience, then, is expressed through language and dialogue within the limits of a determined linguistic community, in a context of a concrete community of speech (neither universal nor ideal).<sup>3</sup>

Moreover, regarding the nature of knowing, it is broadly accepted that knowing has an inevitable social component: «conceptual frameworks are largely social, rather than individual phenomena, because meaning cannot be had in isolation» (Rollins, 1995, p. 33).

### *b) Inquiry*

The notion of Inquiry implies a commitment to «action» of all the members of the community; that is to say that the relationship among these members can not be a mere interchange of opinions - like in a mere conversation -; in a community the group feels the need to «work» together (from the starting point of the different opinions held by the members - in order to find the most effective ways to reach the goals of the community. These goals and the ways to reach them are involved in the process of inquiry, which involves all the members of the community.

However, these methods and these objectives depend on the epistemological assumptions of the community; that is to say, on the idea of what knowledge, reality and truth are. These assumptions determine the outcomes of the process of inquiry of the community, and the direction of that inquiry.

Maughn Rollins distinguished three epistemological positions that connect the notions of reality, knowledge and truth: realism, first-order non-realism, and second-order non-realism. Each of them have different opinions on reality, on the possibility of knowing it, and on the certainty and verification of that knowledge. It seems clear that each position will have different ideas about the goals of the community and about the way to reach them.<sup>4</sup>

To realists, there are two essential assumptions: a) there is an external and unchanging reality, and b) it is possible to apprehend this reality in its totality. In that context, knowledge is conceived as a mental copy of reality, and Truth as a correspondence between knowledge and reality. The process of inquiry, points to the obtaining of this copy, which can be verified in comparing it with «what it is».

According to Rollins, the main distinction between realists and non-realists has to do with the second feature more than with the first one: non-realists are not convinced of the possibility of a global and infallible knowledge of reality.

First-order non-realists do not question the existence of an external reality, but they believe that the whole apprehension of reality is almost impossible: human knowledge can be pictured as if it was a group of windows to the world<sup>5</sup>, but the whole vision is out of our eyes. However, it is assumed that all (or at least the majority) of the different conceptual frameworks are commensurable, compatible; that is to say, they reveal the same and sole reality: «our conceptual frameworks only limit but do not distort the human understandings of reality» (Rollins, 1995, p. 33).

Our knowledge about reality is, then, partial and also fallible and revisable; we must be always ready to broaden our points of view. In that case, the goal of the process of inquiry is «to expand one's repertory of conceptual frameworks, since the more points of view one can appreciate, the richer one's experience will be» (Rollins, 1995, p. 33).

Second-order non-realists coincide with first-order non-realists in the state that no knowledge or point of view is final because it is always subject to revision. But they differ on the consideration of the commensurability of conceptual frameworks. Second-order non-realists believe that they are incommensurable: «Second-order non-realists see human understanding as spectacles through which we view the world, but these spectacles are of different materials that filter and alter our experience of the world in various ways» (Rollins, 1995, p. 36).

Anyway second-order non-realists are more interested in the individual point of view, and in the need of finding meaning to the personal experience than in the knowledge of an external reality. The incommensurability of conceptual frameworks implies - among other things - that «people possessed of radically different conceptual frameworks will be unable to communicate to each other at least part of their vision or feeling» (Rollins, 1995, p. 36). But the problem is not only incommunicability; according to the second-order non-realists we can not translate a personal experience into terms which are familiar to the group without a loss of meaning.

In that context, second-order non-realists face up to the accusations of subjectivism and relativism: which is the criterion of verification that guarantees some degree of convergence in people's judgements about reality? The direction of inquiry in second-order non-realism can not be unique; there is not a sole and common goal to which the process of inquiry points. Moreover, it is doubtful that we could find common bases to begin the process of inquiry starting from incommensurable frameworks. So the only thing we could say is that in second-order non-realism there are different directions of inquiry.

With regard to the question of the direction of the process of inquiry, then, it is appropriate Rollins' distinction between realism, first-order non-realism and second-order non-realism. Depending on our position, the process of inquiry will take one or other direction: it will point to a concrete target, that is reality (in the cases of realism and first-order non-realism) or, in the contrary, it will give a panoramic view of all (or of the majority) of the current alternatives and points of view, without taking into consideration the possibility of integrating them (this is the case of second-order non-realism).

From Rollins' analysis we can infer that, in spite of the differences among them, realists and non-realists converge in the statement that knowledge is some kind of *apprehension* of reality.

The differences among them would be in the *kind* of that apprehension: complete or incomplete, personal or social, untransferable or communicable apprehension.

There is, however, another way to consider the problem of inquiry.

According to pragmatists, the problem is not the existence or inexistence of reality, nor the (possible) ways to access to it. This would be only another way to emphasize the dualisms reality/ thought and nature/ experience. However, it is urgent to overcome these dualisms.

According to Dewey, reality is not an inert or fixed set of things; knowledge is not an apprehension of this reality by the subject, either; thought is not the human capacity to connect reality and subject either.

Dewey refuses also the traditional notion of truth as a correspondence or adequacy between reality and knowledge. This outlook makes impossible to conceive inquiry, as a process of acquisition of that apprehension of reality (named knowledge).

The direction of the process of inquiry in the pragmatist context implies a turn, a revolution with regard to the traditional conception: inquiry does not point to a true knowledge of reality but to the establishment of effective ways of action. According to Dewey, inquiry begins in a problematic situation which has to be solved. The observation of specific features of the problematic situation leads to the establishment of ideas from which a concrete proposal of action has to be created. This action must guarantee the (provisional) solution of the problem. In that scheme, knowledge works as a tool.

According to pragmatists, there is no dichotomy between ends and means nor between thought and action; both of them are parts of a sole process: the endless process of inquiry. So, inquiry is never a process with a specific and ultimate end nor a process to a true knowledge of reality. Pragmatist philosophy does not accept the traditional point of view, that there are ends-in-themselves to which inquiry points. According to Dewey, the process of inquiry is an endless process of beginnings and endings. For that reason, it is also a process under permanent revision.

In that context, Truth - from the pragmatist perspective - is built in the process of inquiry itself. In Dewey's thought, truth is inseparable from the complex of actions and operations which are the outcomes of judgement; we can only speak of true judgements or, in Dewey's words, of warranted assertions. The truth or guarantee of a judgement consists in the efficacy of its consequences and in its capacity to solve problematic situations: «When the pragmatists speak of truth, they mean exclusively something about the ideas, namely their *workableness*, whereas when anti-pragmatists speak of truth they seem most often to mean something about the objects» (James, 1975, p. 6).

Truth, then, is not the adequacy of thought to reality because, according to Dewey, there is no neutral access to reality. Insofar as human beings are active agents in the process of knowledge, they are not only in a permanent process of thinking about nature but also in a permanent intercourse with it. Doing so, nature becomes a new world in every generation. Human beings are inside the nature but they are also capable of modifying it and giving it a new meaning every time. In some sense, human beings create worlds and, at the same time, they discover worlds. That is why the process of inquiry can not look for a definitive and final result.

However, this building of reality from inside the reality itself can not be done by the individual self. Dewey states that social dialogue is essential to make ideas really workable. Workableness of ideas is never decided by the individual alone: assertions would be warranted only by a collective inquiry.

In fact the commitment to an open inquiry can only occur when individuals have the opportunity to participate in communities that are also involved in the principles of self-correction and dialogue:



*Inquiry is seldom a solitary matter. It is generally pursued by groups of individuals with similar objectives, individuals who share information with one another, respect each other's views and opinions, offer reasons for their views, willingly consider alternatives and attempt to construct together a reasonable understanding of the ways in which human beings could be said to live well. If/then such a group reflects in a self-corrective manner upon ethical issues, it can be called a community of inquiry.* (Lipman & Sharp, 1985, p. 1)

### **c) Community of Inquiry**

The notion of «community of inquiry» springs from a large pragmatist tradition in the United States. Authors such as Peirce, Mead, Royce, Buehler and Dewey contributed to its development. Under the influence of C.S. Peirce, the notion was originally and restrictively applied to the scientists who were supposed to be a community devoted to reach the same ends in the field of science. However, the notion has broadened its range and now it includes any kind of inquiry, whether scientific or not. In that sense: «the term Community of Inquiry is usually associated to the pragmatists, most notably Peirce<sup>6</sup> and Dewey, but (...) the idea goes back much further. Lipman suggests that it can be found in ancient Athens exemplified in the teachings of Socrates» (Johnson, 1995, p. 128).

Lipman's suggestion implies an enrichment of the concept of Community of Inquiry. If we agree to consider the Socratic conversation as an example of a community of inquiry, the notion of Community of Inquiry can not be seen as a restricted scientific community - as Peirce would uphold - any more; on the contrary, it can be enlarged to other kinds of community - and, in a certain sense, it can be identified with them.

In an ideal situation the community of inquiry could be extended to the linguistic community<sup>7</sup>. Obviously, in that case, such a wide community of inquiry should contain other smaller communities of inquiry (community of scientists, community of philosophers, community of educators). However, that should not affect the commitment to inquiry of the members of the linguistic community as a whole, but it would imply the existence of processes of inquiry at different levels, because what actually distinguishes every community (big or small) is the direction and the goal of inquiry, but not the fact of being or not being a community of inquiry. In this sense - as we said at the beginning of this article -, all the different perspectives on the community converge in some way in the notion of Community of Inquiry.

The extension of the range of the community - in the sense that Lipman proposes when he suggests the Socratic community as an example of community of inquiry - implies extending the range of inquiry. If the community is not only a community of scientists, then inquiry can not be restricted to scientific investigation but, on the contrary, it points to more general aims which can be shared by a larger number of people.

The basic assumption in the use of a community of inquiry is the generalized acceptance of its indispensable role in the construction of knowledge and in the organization of experience. The differences will appear in the way knowledge is built or in the consideration of its possibilities and of its limits, or in the way experience is organized. It is in that sense that we could say that the community of inquiry

can not be limited to the scientific community, insofar as knowledge and experience are not exclusive of scientists.

It is important - as Rollins points out - to know what a theory of knowledge is behind our daily practice of a community of inquiry in order to know what we can expect from the community of inquiry.

From a realist point of view, the role of the community of inquiry would be to contribute to the true access to the sole and unchanging reality. The community must be the context where the individuals «will liberate from the superstitions (beliefs contrary to truth) they may have accidentally acquired» (Rollins, 1995, p. 32).

In that point, Rollins makes a distinction between «dogmatic realists» and «reasoned realists». The first group do not see any advantage to a community of inquiry in a broad sense, since they believe that truth about reality can be told and not at all discovered. On the contrary, reasoned realists admit that the truth has not to be imposed but apprehended as an outcome of an open process of inquiry. The problem, then, is that open inquiry - if it is really open - can lead to different results from *their* truth. According to reasoned realists, community of inquiry is «the only means by which the reasonableness of *their* truth can be fully appreciated» (Rollins, 1995, p. 32).

In the case of first-order non-realists, on the other hand, the role of the community of inquiry would consist in facilitating the intercourse and the integration of different conceptual frameworks in order to increase our knowledge about the world: «the goal of inquiry is to make one's understanding more and more comprehensive by learning to understand different points of view» (Rollins, 1995, p. 33). But insofar as the whole comprehension of reality is impossible for us, inquiry is an endless process. In that case, the role of the community of inquiry is reduced to a mere «laboratory» where the members of the community look for the sole and true evidence of the fact. In that context, it has no sense talking about alternatives because we do not want to expose possible actions or ideas but to confirm what we thought.

From a second-order non-realist point of view, it has also no sense to talk about a community of inquiry because there is not a sole direction of inquiry, neither in relation to the notion of community itself nor to the effort of cooperation among its members. The possibility of incommensurability can entail that «two people from the same culture, who speak the same language, cannot, even so, communicate to each other part of what is real and important to each of them» (Rollins, 1995, p. 37).

None of these points of view about the community of inquiry fits Dewey's notion. Dewey does not care about the correspondence between reality and knowledge but about the adjusting of our actions to our goals. In that sense, according to Dewey, neither a community of inquiry that intends to reach the truth nor a community of inquiry which intends to draw a map of commensurable conceptual systems forcing all those which resist, have any sense.



## WHICH IS THE ROLE OF A COMMUNITY OF INQUIRY ACCORDING TO PRAGMATIST CRITERIA?

Although Dewey does not use the term «community of inquiry» itself, it looks as though the features of Lipman's community of inquiry globally fit Dewey's implicit notion of community. The notion of Community of Inquiry, as defined by Lipman, also fits Dewey's notions of democracy and inquiry.

Lipman presents the community of inquiry as a way of life<sup>8</sup>; it is a necessary condition (but not a sufficient condition) in the process of development of thought and in the process of acquisition of knowledge. According to Lipman, the community of inquiry is the context in which all the members of the community can *inquiry together*.

Lipman agrees with Dewey against the traditional notion of an objective, transcendent, independent Truth: the only thing we can propose is a whole series of warranted assertions always subject to revision.

It does not mean that communities of inquiry are condemned to relativism or that the personal point of view is condemned to an individual and incommunicable world. On the contrary, participating in a community of inquiry allows its members to perceive other points of view and using them to build one's own vision of the world. The fact that the process of inquiry takes place in a community-frame guarantees some degree of objectivity in the inquiry and in knowledge. In this context, the notion of objectivity refers to an inter subjective truth to which human beings will arrive through inquiry, experimentation, consideration of evidence and dialogue. Warranted assertions that will help us to find the meaning of our world are true statements which had been asserted after dialogue, not before it. This inter subjective truth is, however, always subject to self-correction. Errors and counterexamples have to be considered by the group in the reformulation of the question in discussion.

Philosophical discussion represents a shared intellectual experience by which a group of isolated individuals becomes a community of inquiry. Conversations are guided through the spirit of inquiry and by logical and philosophical considerations. In the community of inquiry the interlocutor is not only one, but many. To consider the other person as an interlocutor implies a commitment to his points of view, in the sense that we assume them to be as worthy and liable to analysis and revision as our own points of view. In this sense, the community of inquiry represents an enrichment and an extension of dialogue and guarantees the contribution of different and varied points of view.<sup>9</sup>

In that context, dialogue can not be seen as a mere methodology but it is an essential part of the community of inquiry and, therefore, essential part of the construction of knowledge. Philosophical dialogue is much more than a simple instrument to reach a goal; it is the exercise of philosophy itself.<sup>10</sup> Dialogue is, in Lledos words, «the form in which thinking comes out» (Lledo, 1984, p. 39).

In the same way, the community of inquiry is not a mere instrument either, through which language and dialogue are expressed, but it is the necessary frame where that philosophical dialogue can

take place. The community of inquiry, then, is not merely the context where information is given and interchanged but it must be the place where information is analyzed, contrasted and evaluated.

Moreover, the community must become a community of *inquiry* if we want to «piece together a more comprehensive understanding of the world than can be based solely on one individual's personal experience» (Lipman, 1984, p. 442).<sup>11</sup>

The community of inquiry should help people to give up intellectual fears and to overcome blind and coward confidence in old ideas (often displayed as «facts»). They should share imaginative and innovative ideas, look for hidden assumptions, consider consequences, and create means to put them into practice if, after discussion, it looks desirable to do it. Thinking skills can only develop in a context of dialogue and inquiry where the open, critical, creative, and caring self is in contact with other open «selves» with which it will be possible to build a critical, creative, and caring community of inquiry from philosophical dialogue in order to reach appropriate and effective hypothesis of action (ideas, in Dewey's terms).

Nevertheless, the most important thing in a community of inquiry is not the possible outcome but the process of inquiry itself. But it does not mean that the community has no goal: «The community of inquiry is a process that aims at producing a product - at some kind of settlement or judgement, however partial and tentative this may be» (Lipman, 1991, p. 229). There is no predetermined end-in-itself, but the process points to an effective (and also provisional) answer to a concrete problematic situation. Inquiry must be seen as a series of «flights and perchings» and the stimulus to «fly» (to inquire) is always something amazing or puzzling. Perchings are provisional outcomes which could be a new stimulus to fly again.

In a word, the process of inquiry is the only one that will help people to become autonomous, creative, and reasonable beings. It is the only process that inquires about the means to reach the goals we consider meaningful and useful.

According to all what we have said, dialogue and inquiry are not mere elements of an educational methodology but axes of the community. And this will affect the notion of knowledge, the notion of community of inquiry, and also the relationship between them. All the features of the community of inquiry are precisely the same elements that collaborate in the construction of knowledge and also in the enrichment of experience in order to face future situations.

If, according to pragmatists, knowledge is not more a mere copy of reality but a tool, then the goal of the community of inquiry is not the acquisition of that copy but a creation of ideas.

The main feature of this new relationship between community and knowledge is inquiry: a process of inquiry guided by the goals of the community and deeply rooted in individual and collective experience. So knowledge is not something to transmit, but something to build. There can not be an effective knowledge without a context in which people could analyse and evaluate the outcomes of the process of inquiry. For that reason, we said that community of inquiry is a basis that makes knowledge

possible. Knowledge can not be reached only by oneself, but it can neither be reached by a group of people which does not have the traits of a *community* and of a group of *inquiry*.

The democratic community includes all these elements and makes them into its own starting powers. Democratic community is - has to be - a permanent practice of inquiry through dialogue; that is to say, a community of inquiry where people arrive at effective judgements in action. In that sense, philosophical dialogue falls into social practice.

So then, philosophy and education are intimately connected. The community of inquiry becomes an educational community since it helps to develop and enrich personal and collective experiences.

In summary, then, the community of inquiry is not a tool to learn (philosophy, among other things), but it is a philosophical activity which allows critical and creative thinking, which guarantees that all the things and habits we acquire within a community of inquiry will lead us effectively to reasonableness, to good judgment, to morally responsible discernment.

## NOTES

1. See, for instance, Lipman (1991); Sharp (1987), or Sharp-Splitter (1995).
2. In the last case, we must say that Tönnies' distinction is made on the base of ideal forms of organization. Tönnies insists that none of them exists in a pure form.
3. We stated that it is not possible an ideal community of speech, just because it is ideal. We can postulate it as a model but not as an actual fact. We do not consider an universal community of speech either, because any community presents specific features. Concrete linguistic communities, concrete communities of speech are the place where opinions are expressed.
4. He tried to explain that the features of the community of inquiry depend on our epistemological commitments. It meant to analyse the outcomes that the community of inquiry could generate from the point of view of the three most important epistemological theories. Rollins states that each epistemological doctrine gives a different meaning to the notion of Community of Inquiry and each of them extracts different «utilities» from it.
5. See Rollins, 33.
6. Although Peirce did not use explicitly the term «Community of Inquiry», he insisted in the importance of the community and of the inquiry. With regard to the community, Peirce talked about a scientific community, but he also mentioned other kinds of community, such as, for example, the community of philosophers. However, judging from Peirce's explanation of what is a community of philosophers, we could think that a community of philosophers is, in fact, a scientific community (See Peirce, n.d.).
7. It does not mean that a linguistic community is, necessarily, a community of inquiry, but every community of inquiry is necessarily a linguistic community.
8. This notion of a community of inquiry as a «way of life» brings to mind some features of the Socratic community and dialogue and also some features of Dewey's «moral democracy».

9. Plato's dialogues want to guarantee this convergence of different points of view. The problem in this case is that there are big differences in the treatment of these points of view: Socrates' point of view is always the one which prevails in front of the others.

10. In that sense, we can say that the Socratic method goes beyond a simple method to learn or to teach philosophy: it is doing philosophy (and not only because of the discussed issues but because of the form in which these items are discussed). In spite of this, we have some difficulties in considering Socratic conversations as true communities of inquiry, for it seems that Socrates' interlocutor is only an stimulus (or an excuse) for a unidirectional inquiry: Socrates is who lays down the guideline of inquiry.

11. This is one of the main principles which define what Rollins calls first-order non-realism (See Rollins, 32-36).

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