The Cultivation of Caring Thinking in Education for the Re-Creation of the Democratic Human Being

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In a world growing ever more cruel and violent as nihilism becomes generalized, a world in which the disintegration of the human assumes dimensions that threaten its very cohesion, the demand for the humanization of the Western individual asserts itself as an urgent historical task. Among the institutions implicated in this process, education assumes a central role, as it is within it that wonder and critical thinking are gradually eliminated, together with the demand for shared deliberation, coherent meaning, and the tragic dimension of human existence, while an education of cruelty comes to permeate it from end to end. In order to prevent the full entrenchment of evil in the social world, from which only destruction can be expected, a decisive role could be played by caring thinking that would be coordinated with corresponding action and would come to deeply characterize the educational institution. Such a form of thinking was proposed in the second half of the twentieth century and took flesh and bones within the framework of the *Philosophy for Children* movement. Its contemporary application within educational practice could reactivate *phronesis* (practical wisdom) and contribute to enabling the Western human being to re-create themselves as a democratic human being—one who desires the creation of a world of freedom, equality, and justice, and who acts accordingly to bring it about: the creation of a compassionate and prudent world, the preservation of which would be the responsibility of all.

Keywords: Western world, education, cruelty, violence, caring thinking, democratic human being

Introduction

There is little doubt that the spread of cruelty in the contemporary world no longer surprises us, nor does it elicit the concern one might expect for limiting it, let alone eliminating it. It appears to have become increasingly commonplace, as it enters the language of institutions, is incorporated into policy decisions, and aligns with a logic of efficiency that contemporary capitalism readily employs (Crépon, 2024).

This cruelty is a direct outcome of authoritarianism in its various forms (Deppe, 2013). Its consolidation within Western societies, in particular, reflects the establishment of a nihilistic ethos at the centre of social life, a process that has taken place primarily since the 1970s. This violence is not confined to extreme phenomena such as war or crime, but extends to the everyday, often invisible dimensions of life. The violence that characterizes Western societies manifests as physical assault, verbal aggression, social exclusion, institutional indifference, psychological pressure, relations of domination, institutional discourse, and even as a mode of thought. The pressure exerted by the accelerated pace of time, insecurity, economic inequalities, and the

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weakening of social relations contributes to conditions in which tolerance is reduced and aggressiveness increases.[1] It has already been discussed that mass media and digital networks also contribute to this condition: while they promise an expansion of communicative possibilities, they often intensify division, polarization, ethical degradation and ultimately lead to processes of dehumanization (for a general discussion of the issue, see Blaya, 2019). Growing familiarity with cruelty, however, renders it increasingly indistinct, with the result that it no longer shocks, as it is transformed into an everyday spectacle.

This increasing cruelty, together with the violence that accompanies it, constitutes not only a social phenomenon but also an ethical and political symptom of a declining democracy. It reveals, in the most forceful manner, a profound crisis of social meaning understood as cohesive meaning, and, more specifically, as political meaning (see Castoriadis, 1990). It likewise points to the distancing of the Western individual from the need for empathy and for care for the other.

To a large extent, the formation of this condition was also shaped by modernity's attempt to rationalize the world, drawing primarily on a technical mode of thinking detached from being-in-the-world, a mode that leads human beings into profound misconceptions. Arendt demonstrated with exceptional clarity that the intellect detached from the world, which prevails in the modern Western world, constitutes a form of egoism that distances us from other human beings and, ultimately, from the world itself (Arendt, 1998). The world is thus transformed into an object for consumption, while human beings are gradually reduced to a mass that uncritically follows dominant trends and engages in self-admiration when it is able to consume commodities with ease. It is indeed the case that technology and the economy constrain us to adopt a mode of thinking that compels us to position ourselves toward things from a particular perspective—one that, as a rule, does not question things but accepts them uncritically as they are. For this reason, as Arendt wrote, the greatest cruelty in the world is displayed not by those who choose to be evil, but by those who are unable to think (Arendt, 2006).

Relatedly, the formation of this world was also shaped, to a large extent, by the elimination of wonder and critical thought, of uncertainty, vulnerability, and the tragic dimension of human existence—the only dimension capable of humanizing the human being by rendering them a prudent being. Yet the tragic cannot be abolished without cost (Theodoridis, 2009; 2025). When human life is treated as a problem to be managed rather than as an experience to be understood, the cruelty and violence that accompany it return disguised as technocratic coldness, as dehumanized discourse, and as systematic indifference toward the other. It is worth noting, moreover, that in the contemporary Western world, the other no longer appears to be experienced as a person, but rather as an obstacle, a threat, or a means. This shift undoubtedly expresses a profound form of violence, insofar as it denies the uniqueness and vulnerability of the human being. It also, unmistakably, signals the absence of the democratic human being.[2]

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[1] See on this matter, indicatively, the insightful analysis of Judith Shklar in her works (1985), *Ordinary Vices* and (2026), *The liberalism of fear*. Shklar offers a realistic, anti-utopian, and deeply human-centered version of liberalism. Her thought, which places cruelty at the center of ethical and political reflection, is exceptionally timely, as it reminds us that political activity must take as its point of departure the protection of human beings from cruelty and fear.

[2] Certainly, part of contemporary thought has subjected this reality to critique and has brought its problems to light. See indicatively, among others, Castoriadis, 1986. La polis grecque et la création de la démocratie. In *Domaines de l' homme. Les carrefours du labirynthe, II* (pp. 261-306). Papaioannou, 2003. *Mass and history. A general theory of the revolutionary mass*. Lipovetsky, 1983. *L' ère du vide. Essais sur l' individualisme contemporain*. It is true that when shared narratives capable of giving meaning to pain, loss, and conflict are absent, violence becomes perhaps the only way through which the tragic asserts its presence. In this sense, the contemporary world is not merely a more violent world, but a world that struggles to think its own violence. The task of thinking under such conditions is, moreover, to understand cruelty and violence both as elements of the human condition and as symptoms of the problematic limits of modern self-confidence.

Cruelty in Education

It is impossible for this cruelty and the violence that have taken root at the centre of social life not to be expressed within the education of the contemporary Western world, often, moreover, in indirect yet deeply formative ways. Insofar as it does not concern only isolated incidents, it assumes the form of an education in cruelty that permeates both the school environment and the academic sphere.[3]

To begin with, cruelty in education in the contemporary West appears in the form of competition and pressure for performance. Its fixation on measurable outcomes, examinations, assessments, and rankings transforms learning into a mechanism of survival. The student often experiences school not as a space of meaning and relationship, but as a field of anxiety, comparison, and exclusion, as a form of symbolic violence that is pedagogically legitimized. Moreover, violence manifests itself as a crisis in the teacher–student relationship. Bureaucracy, the inflation of curricular content, and instrumental logic restrict the time available for dialogue, for listening, and for the development of a shared process of thinking between teachers and students, and remove from pedagogical practice the element of care, with the result that the school reproduces the violence of indifference (Freire, 1975). The violence of cruelty, however, today also appears within the school environment through digital culture and its harmful features, which permeate everyday educational life, often without adequate pedagogical mediation. The absence, moreover, of an education in tragic awareness—that is, an education in democracy, freedom, equality, justice, and self-limitation—renders students existentially, politically, and ethically unanchored. Within such a condition, violence becomes amorphous and unprocessed, and in this very way spreads across all domains of the human, fragmenting them (Castoriadis, 1990).

As we now ask whether and how this condition might be transformed, the role of a form of thinking capable of traversing the educational institution in its entirety and bearing a human character appears, among other things, to be irreplaceable. This is a form of thinking that does not turn education into a mechanism of rational adaptation that detaches knowledge from human experience and strips it of its existential and ethico-political depth, but rather a form of thinking able to connect with emotion, with the need for understanding, and with care; a form of thinking that also does not reinforce pedagogical hubris—that is, the illusion that the human being can be educated without confronting limits or loss. In other words, the kind of thinking that education requires in the present reality is a form of thinking that does not deny the human as an ethico-political condition—one that establishes the value of thinking, judging, engaging in dialogue, and self-limitation. It is a form of thinking that dissolves the principle of *monos phronein* (thinking for oneself).[4]

Caring Thinking in the *Philosophy for Children* Movement

Such a form of thinking, whose exercise presupposes a caring disposition—that is, a benevolent attitude toward examining what is said, heard, and discussed within a reflective community of people, bringing together rationality with the affective function of the soul—was developed in the second half of the twentieth century in the United States within the framework of the *Philosophy for Children* movement, a movement that consistently recognized the importance of cultivating philosophy within the educational environment. Its initiator was

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[3] The establishment of crisis at the heart of education in the Western world was analyzed with exceptional clarity by H. Arendt in the early decades of the second half of the twentieth century. See Arendt, 1961.

[4] See the embodiment of the spirit of *monos phronein* (thinking for oneself) in the figure of King Creon in *Antigone* by Sophocles. See, Sophocles, 1994. Cf. Castoriadis, 2001. See also, Theodoridis, 2010.

Matthew Lipman[5]. In order to understand its significance, we must first consider the socio-historical context in which its demand emerged, as well as the aims that shaped the manner of its practice. We may then reflect on whether this form of thinking could take flesh and bones in our own time and function as a restraint on the cruelty that transforms the human sphere into a space of brutality, domination, imposition, coldness, disregard, lack of judgment, and irresponsibility.

During the 1960s and 1970s, an extensive pedagogical debate took place in the United States, reflecting a desire to reform the educational institution, insofar as its operation was shaped by a set of pedagogical conceptions which, despite their individual differences, converged toward a knowledge-centered, hierarchical, and instrumental understanding of learning. Within such an institutional framework, the classroom was organized primarily around the transmission of knowledge and the regulation of students' behavior and social adaptation, while at the same time, the development of thinking, critical capacity, and democratic participation in educational life remained secondary concerns. This was the period during which behaviorism exerted a significant influence on schooling (particularly from the 1930s through the 1950s), leading to practices of standardized instruction and to an instrumental conception of knowledge. During this time, the student was treated more as an object of management than as a subject of thought. This mechanistic approach to learning was, as is well known, subjected to strong criticism, as it underestimated both the cognitive and the ethico-political dimensions of learning[6].

Although from the early twentieth century, educational theory in the United States had already been influenced by the thought of Dewey, which made explicit the socio-historical dimension of learning and linked its experiential character to the demands of democracy, this line of thought was, until the middle of the century, applied either fragmentarily or had lost its philosophical depth. In practice, so-called progressive education was largely confined to activity-centered methods of learning, without a substantive cultivation of thinking. The emphasis on experience was not accompanied by the systematic development of logical thinking, dialogue, and ethical judgment, as required by Dewey's pedagogy (Egan, 2002). This distorted, applied version of Dewey's pedagogy became the object of sharp criticism by Lipman, who maintained that the philosopher's genuine pedagogy had never been fully implemented. In fact, following the Second World War, the orientations and objectives of American education were subsumed under an instrumental logic that emphasized the natural sciences, efficiency, and the production of human capital capable of serving the corresponding needs of the economy and national security. From this perspective, emphasis was not placed on philosophy, dialogue, or civic education, as these activities were regarded as secondary or unproductive. Instrumental logic thus rendered the school a mechanism for the production of skills and for the attainment of measurable objectives, distancing it from the task of cultivating critical thinking (Egan, 2002).

From the 1960s onward, however, the dominance of instrumental thinking came under intense criticism. It was thus argued that it should be replaced by a form of critical thinking, whose exercise would function as a fundamental prerequisite for a necessary educational reform, both in order to endow the school experience with meaning and to reinforce student discipline on the basis of democratic demands. This was the period during which the legacy of Dewey re-emerged in American education, calling for the recognition of the school as a microcosm of democracy and of thinking as a form of action. It should also be noted that, at this time, the

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[5] For a general introduction to the topic, see Lipman, 1988.
[6] For an overview of the issue, see, for example, Cremin, 1961 and Tyack & Cuban, 1997.

development of social and political movements played a significant role in this educational reform, rendering the political role of education more consciously perceived—a development that further stimulated interest in discussions concerning the kinds of thinking students ought to develop, moving away from the demand for the memorization of knowledge (Ravirch, 2001). Within the field of educational theory, intense criticism was directed at cognitive behaviorism, which was seen to weaken the student's intellectual life, while at the same time the importance of the critical spirit was brought to the fore—one that was considered capable of taking flesh and bones only through participatory and reflective learning processes.[7] The discussions of this period influenced the educational process to a certain extent, insofar as a student-centered approach to knowledge was gradually consolidated, efforts were made to strengthen the democratic functioning of the classroom, and the ethical and political dimensions of learning were further brought to the fore.

Soon, however, it became evident that these principles of the educational spirit were not sufficiently robust, insofar as they did not meaningfully activate students' critical and creative thinking, nor were they adequately connected to a form of activity capable of strengthening the democratic demand within the educational environment (Ravirch, 2001). Within this deficient framework, Lipman, as noted earlier, intervenes. As a professor of Philosophy at Columbia University, and fully aware of the magnitude of the problem, he came to believe that its resolution could be achieved through the introduction of philosophy into basic education. It was precisely this idea that he sought to place at the centre of the Philosophy for Children movement, whose aim was the cultivation of critical thinking even among children of preschool age (Lipman, 2017).[8]

Inspired by and deeply influenced by the pragmatism of Dewey, Lipman proposed, as the principal pedagogical method entrusted with the responsibility of developing children's reflective capacity in the classroom, the creation of reflective communities, which he termed communities of inquiry. He held the conviction that the spirit of inquiry and reflection embodies critical thinking, which students must come to know in order to become capable of engaging in dialogue, understanding, and judging. Relatedly, he also maintained that these capacities contribute to the establishment and development of democracy (Lipman, Sharp, & Oscanyan, 1980; Lipman, 2003; Lipman, 2004).[9] All of this discussion, then, which it introduced into educational practice, revolves around the question of what kind of human being education aims to form, rather than which skills ought to be acquired. This was precisely the generative spirit of the Philosophy for Children movement, within which dominant authority is questioned, passive learning is rejected, and the child is required to become capable of questioning, thinking, and judging—that is, to possess, as noted earlier, a form of thinking oriented by values and by an ethico-political horizon.[10]

Matthew Lipman is a thinker who creatively integrates within his work different theoretical currents, as represented by Dewey, Peirce, Piaget, Vygotsky, and Mead. Although his thought was influenced primarily by

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[7] At this stage of the reforms, educational theory was also strongly influenced by the work of P. Jackson. See, indicatively, Jackson, P. W. (1968).

[8] A key collaborator of Lipman—without whom the *Philosophy for Children* movement would not have taken the form we know today—was Ann Margaret Sharp. The two of them jointly shaped the theoretical and pedagogical framework of the movement. Tibaldeo, R. F. (2022). Its dissemination and further theoretical development were also advanced by Ronald Reed, Gareth Matthews and David Kennedy.

[9] Saeed, N. (2003). Interview with Matthew Lipman—Part 1: The IAPC program. It should be noted here that the concept of the community of inquiry is fundamental to the philosophy of Pragmatism. See indicatively, Peirce, 1958. Dewey extended Peirce's problematic and applied the scientific logic of inquiry he proposed to a broader social context. His ideas on communities were developed primarily in his works on education and democracy. See indicatively, Dewey, 1997 and Dewey, 2008.

[10] Particular emphasis on the democratic community of inquiry was also placed by Sharp. See indicatively, Sharp, 1987; Splitter & Sharp, 1995.

that of Dewey, it cannot be regarded merely as a continuation of Dewey's pragmatist pedagogy. Lipman draws from Dewey, in particular, with regard to the conception of the experiential character of learning. For Lipman, as for Dewey, thinking is not understood as an abstract intellectual function, but as an act of inquiry into problems that emerge within a concrete socio-historical context. The school, therefore, does not constitute for him a space for the transmission of knowledge, but rather a community of learning in which children learn to think collectively. The concept of the community of inquiry thus functions as a central structural element that, one might say, situates Dewey's democratic pedagogy within a more explicitly philosophical framework.

The influence he receives from Peirce directs his thought toward a more positivist logical orientation. From Peirce, he draws the idea that truth is not an individual achievement but the product of an open, ongoing, and collective process of inquiry. Logic, therefore, for Lipman should not be confined to formal rules, but must be situated within a practical activity of argumentation, questioning, and revision. This approach enables him to recognize children's thinking not as a preparatory stage of reflection, but as an authentic form of reflection in its own right (Biesta & Burbules, 2003).

Particularly significant was the influence he received from the social psychology of Mead and the sociocultural theory of Vygotsky, which, in his judgment, reinforce the social and dialogical character of thinking. Lipman adopts the view that cognition is activated through communication and dialogue, and that the development of thinking takes place primarily within a shared field of meaning. Philosophical discussion in the classroom thus functions as a space of co-creation of meaning, in which students learn to think with others and through others (Lipman, 2017).

In dialogue with the developmental psychology of Piaget, Lipman advances a critical reinterpretation of cognitive development. While he acknowledges the significance of Piagetian stage theory in understanding child development, he rejects the idea that children lack the capacity for philosophical thinking. On the contrary, he argues that philosophical inquiry can function as a catalyst for cognitive and ethical maturation when it is situated within an appropriate pedagogical framework in the school setting (Lipman, 1988).

Lipman also receives an indirect influence from the later Wittgenstein (primarily through the ideas developed in *Philosophical Investigations*) with regard to the understanding of philosophy as a practical inquiry into meaning and to the emphasis placed on the use of language and on dialogue. According to his view, students learn to examine concepts such as truth, justice, freedom, or friendship through dialogical activity. Although Lipman does not explicitly refer to "language games", his pedagogical practice nevertheless exhibits a clear analogy with this notion. Philosophical discussion in the classroom may thus be understood as a set of rules governing dialogue, argumentation, and the alternation of roles, through which children learn to participate in specific forms of discourse. Moreover, like Wittgenstein, Lipman rejects the search for essences behind concepts and does not seek to lead children toward the formulation of philosophically exhaustive definitions, but rather toward an activity of open inquiry, within which meaning remains under negotiation (Lipman, 1988, pp. 33-38, 64-68; Lipman, 2003, pp. 89-96).

There is, however, no doubt that the *Philosophy for Children* movement was influenced primarily, deeply, and systematically by Socratic philosophy, which functions here not as a model to be imitated but as a living practice of philosophical education. The Socratic influence on the thought of Lipman was methodological, pedagogical, and political. The Socratic conception of philosophy as a dialogical practice aimed not at the transmission of knowledge but at the cultivation of judgment, self-knowledge, and ethical responsibility provides the fundamental orientation of *Philosophy for Children*. Within this framework, the educator, by applying a

pedagogy of doubt, does not function as an unassailable authority but as a facilitator of dialogue within the community of inquiry. By adopting Socratic maieutics, the educator does not "implant" ideas in children, but rather helps them to articulate ideas, to work through them, to think, and to re-examine the outcomes of their own thinking (Lipman, 2003, pp. 78-85, 90-94; Lipman, 1988, pp. 3-7; Lipman, Sharp, & Oscanyan, 1980, pp. 19-25, 40-45; Haynes, 2001).

In dialogue with Dewey and the Socratic tradition, Lipman thus formulated the communities of inquiry, which constitute the philosophical and pedagogical core of the *Philosophy for Children* movement. In Dewey's thought, inquiry assumes the character of an open, experimental, and non-linear process, activated when individuals are confronted with problems whose resolution requires judgment. Within communities of inquiry, students are invited to formulate questions that arise from shared stimuli, to justify their positions, to examine arguments and counterarguments, and to reflect not only on their conclusions but also on the very processes of thinking they employ. Here, the educator, as noted earlier, cares for the dialogical process, ensuring equality of participation, clarity of speech and thought, the coherence of the philosophical dialogue, as well as respect for all participants (Lipman, 2003, pp. 78-85; Lipman, Sharp, & Oscanyan, 1980, pp. 40-45).

Of particular importance within communities of inquiry, however, is the cultivation not only of critical and creative thinking but also of a form of thinking that Lipman terms caring, insofar as it is considered necessary for linking cognition with human experience and the ethical dimension of life. In *Philosophy for Children*, as noted earlier, thinking is not treated as a technical skill or as a tool for problem-solving, but as a responsible act that embodies values, emotional sensitivity, and care for the other and for the community. Caring thinking, which is connected to the Aristotelian tradition of *phronesis*, thus radically distinguishes Lipman from knowledge-centered and technical approaches to critical thinking (Lipman, 2003; Lipman, 1995a; 2003; Lipman, Sharp, & Oscanyan, 1980; Tozzi, 2011). Thinking here is evaluated not only as logically correct or critically adequate, but also as responsible and oriented toward the other and toward collective life. Through its activation, education appears to acquire a deeper human and political character. The environment for the development of this form of thinking is precisely the communities of inquiry, within which an ethical and political act also takes place—one that does not merely prepare children for democracy, but constitutes the very practice of democracy itself. This is so because communities of inquiry are grounded in participation, listening, dialogue, disagreement without exclusion, and thus in the collective formation of meaning. In this sense, philosophy in the school ceases to be an academic subject and is transformed into a fundamental pedagogical practice aimed at the formation of autonomous, reflective, and responsible individuals (Sharp, 1987).

What, then, led Lipman to expand the boundaries of thinking in education beyond its critical and creative dimensions? He takes this step when he recognizes that thinking risks being reduced to a technical skill devoid of ethical orientation once it is detached from values, human relationships, and meaning. It is indeed the case that critical thinking, although indispensable for the analysis, evaluation, and examination of arguments, may devolve into sterile skepticism or come to serve an instrumental rationality if it is not accompanied by concern for the other, as well as by responsibility for the consequences that its exercise may entail. Similarly, creative thinking, when severed from ethical responsibility, may simply serve innovation as an end in itself, without reference to meaning or to the common good.

Conceiving thinking as a form of action that is always situated within specific social and ethico-political contexts, Lipman recognizes caring thinking as a necessary complement and unifying element of critical and

creative thinking. It should be noted from the outset that caring thinking does not concern emotion alone, but rather a conscious concern for the value of persons, ideas, and relationships within the community of inquiry. Its ethico-political orientation lies in the fact that it connects cognition with empathy and care with responsibility (Lipman, 1995a; 1995b). Through caring thinking, Lipman seeks to restore the lost bond between thinking and life, reacting against technocratic and knowledge-centered models of education. Philosophical inquiry within such a framework does not aim solely, as noted earlier, at the correctness of arguments or the originality of ideas, but also at the formation of persons capable of thinking with sensitivity toward the other and together with the other, and with an awareness of the consequences of their actions.

According to Lipman, caring thinking is expressed through distinct forms of thinking, which function complementarily within the framework of philosophical inquiry.

The first such form of thinking is appreciative thinking. This is the form of caring thinking oriented toward the discernment and evaluation of what has value. Appreciative thinking is grounded in the individual's relation to the object under appraisal, the idea under consideration, or the situation that is worthy of appreciation. In other words, thinking here is exercised as sensitivity to the quality of things, ideas, and relationships. Appreciative thinking is connected to the individual's ethical principles, which mediate their capacity to engage in evaluative judgments (Uluçinar & Ari, 2019).

The second form of caring thinking is affective thinking, which does not sever emotion from judgment but, on the contrary, works through their interrelation. Thinking here is not isolated as an individual process, but is shaped within relation. It takes the form of a reflectively articulated empathy that enables understanding without negating the critical dimension of thought. Nussbaum has clarified with particular precision that emotions are a form of thought and are often connected to an individual's beliefs (Nussbaum, 2004). The formation of thinking, therefore, should not exclude emotions, since they are always present.[11]

The third form of thinking is active thinking, which links reflection with action. Judgment here is accompanied by an awareness of its consequences and is committed to the other and to the community (Sharp, 2010). Thinking moves from the affective caring about to the active demonstrating concern in practice. This involves a volitional activity that seeks criteria for the expression of concern. Lipman notes that the action inherent in this form of thinking is "curatorial", insofar as it is concerned with the preservation of what is significant, while at the same time activating the very framework of values on the basis of which an action is judged to be significant. The caring quality thus becomes manifest in the manner in which actions are carried out (Sharp, 2004).

The fourth form is normative thinking, which is expressed when the individual examines what is just, right, or good within a specific context. In this form, caring thinking functions as *phronesis*, that is, as the capacity to weigh values and assume responsibility, avoiding both ethical relativism and the formalism of Kantian ethics. Lipman emphasizes that, in this form, the actual enters into dialogue with the normative, thereby provoking reflective engagement. Thinking thus expands in order to seek the best possible course of action—even in matters of universal scope—and to delineate possible responses to difficulties on the basis of the question of how things ought to be (Sharp, 2004; Kennedy, 2010).

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[11] Mlodinow has shown that, insofar as emotion always intervenes in the processing of information in the mind, thinking must be carried out with emotional alertness and guided so as to recognize the emotional context within which it is articulated. Mlodinow, 2022.

The fifth form of caring thinking is empathic thinking, which concerns the capacity to relate actively to the experiences, emotions, and perspectives of others, insofar as the individual is displaced from their own field of lived experience into the framework of the other, approaching matters from the other's point of view. By drawing on emotion in order to grasp how the other experiences a given situation, the individual strengthens their capacity for understanding (Dombayci, 2014; Kennedy, 1999). It is noteworthy that Johnson links empathetic thinking with ethical imagination, through which the positions of others become intelligible, insofar as imagination makes accessible the emotions that shape their beliefs, attitudes, and behavior. Nevertheless, although caring thinking necessarily takes into account the emotions, beliefs, and values of others, ethical imagination does not necessarily lead to their acceptance or adoption by the individual (Johnson, 1993).

It should be emphasized here that caring thinking in Lipman does not emerge in a vacuum. It constitutes a contemporary pedagogical synthesis of a long tradition in which thinking is understood as care for the self, the other, and the world. The point of departure of this tradition can, of course, already be located in the Socratic tradition, where thinking is recognized as a care of the self. For both Socrates and Plato, philosophical inquiry does not aim primarily at the accumulation of knowledge, but at the care of the soul and the transformation of one's way of life. Thinking is exercise, vigilance, and responsibility toward the self, and for this very reason it possesses a fundamentally pedagogical character. This tradition continues with the Stoics and the Epicureans, for whom thinking is conceived as a therapeutic practice, as a way of managing judgments and passions, and as a form of care for the quality of life.[12]

In modern thought, the concept of care acquires ontological weight in the work of Heidegger. In Being and Time, care does not, of course, constitute a moral stance or a pedagogical value, but rather the fundamental structure of human being-in-the-world. Human beings think because they care about their being and about the world into which they are thrown. Although Heideggerian care does not possess a normative or pedagogical character, it nonetheless opened the way for understanding thinking as a form of existential involvement in the world (Heidegger, 1996).

In the work of Arendt, thinking is also closely linked to responsibility and judgment. As we have noted, Arendt emphasizes that the absence of thinking is equivalent to the absence of care for the common world, and that evil does not always arise from malicious intent but often from the human inability or refusal to think (Arendt, 2006). Thinking, she maintains, functions as an inner dialogue that renders the individual responsible toward others and toward the world they share with them. In this sense, a genuinely reflective act, one that brings together the logical, social, and ethical dimensions of life, is deeply connected with the world, with the human community, and with the consequences of our actions. With such a form of thinking, the world ceases to be transformed into an object of consumption, and the human being is no longer depersonalized.[13]

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[12] A common element in this tradition, which extends to the contemporary era, is that thinking is inextricably linked with education. It is a form of exercise that cultivates character, regulates one's way of life, and constitutes the human being as a responsible ethical agent. Thinking, understood in this way, is not merely a means of acquiring knowledge, but an act of formation and care, with clear pedagogical significance. Hadot, 1995.

[13] In analyzing the reality of Western societies in the second half of the twentieth century, Arendt observes that "men have become entirely private, that is, they have been deprived of seeing and hearing others, of being seen and being heard by them. They are all imprisoned in the subjectivity of their own singular experience, which does not cease to be singular if the same experience is multiplied innumerable times. The end of the common world has come when it is seen only under one aspect and is permitted to present itself in only one perspective". See, Arendt, 1998, p. 58. A central concern of her work, however, was also the understanding of the possibilities that human beings can activate in order, by caring for the world and safeguarding it, to avoid this nightmarish condition of worldlessness. The opportunity for such a realization, moreover, can be undertaken only by pedagogical activity. See Arendt, 1961.

Care for the world also occupies a central place in the ethical thought of Levinas, where the educator's ethical worth does not derive from power or tradition, but from their ethical relation to the Other. For Levinas, the educator acquires authority not because they are the possessor of knowledge, but because they recognize and accept their responsibility and care toward the Other—the child—within a relationship of asymmetry. From this perspective, authority is the result of a deontological stance, of a profound responsibility toward the Other (Levinas, 1982; see also Theodoropoulou, 2018). In contrast to Arendt, who links the authority of the educator to the relation between generations and to the assumption of responsibility for the common world—whose continuation requires human care—Levinas locates authority in the ethical root of the relationship itself, independently of institutions or historicity. Thus, the educator does not "introduce" the child into the world in the sense of cultural transmission, but rather responds to a call—the gaze of the Other that looks at them and calls them to assume responsibility. This conception of responsibility has radical implications for pedagogy. According to Levinas, the educator cannot regard the child merely as a bearer of knowledge or as a member of a pedagogical program. The child is a "person" a bearer of alterity, for whom the teacher bears unlimited responsibility, without guarantees of reciprocity. Within such a framework, education therefore cannot be dominative or instrumental; it is primarily a bond of ethical proximity and care (Levinas, 1982).

Wittgenstein also contributes indirectly to the interpretation of this concept when he speaks explicitly of care, understanding philosophical activity as an attitude of attentiveness toward the use of language and forms of life. Philosophical thinking here presupposes respect, patience, and sensitivity toward meaning—elements that cultivate a deep relation of care with the ways in which we think, speak, and live (Wittgenstein, 2009).

Within the pedagogical framework, Dewey attributes to care an experiential and democratic character. For Dewey, thinking arises from real interests and problems of life and cannot develop without the active involvement of the individual. Learning presupposes concern for meaning and participation in shared practices, a fact that links thinking to care for experience and for the common world. Dewey's influence on Lipman, as noted earlier, was decisive (Dewey, 1997).

Finally, within contemporary care ethics, as articulated by thinkers such as Carol Gilligan and Nel Noddings, care is recognized as a distinctive mode of ethical thinking, one that places emphasis on relationships and on responsibility toward the other.[14]

Advancing further the discussion of the relationship between thinking and emotion, let us reiterate that a basic premise of caring thinking within *Philosophy for Children* is the recognition that emotions are not, in any case, separable from thinking, nor do they constitute a problem for it. On the contrary, they represent an additional element in its formation. This relationship, according to Lipman, allows us—when appropriately engaged—to proceed toward evaluations of a cognitive kind. Moreover, the connection between the cognitive and the emotional dimension leads to the further development of interest, as well as of our capacity to engage in evaluative judgments (Morehouse, 2017). The cognitive processing of concepts and ideas, when experienced in parallel with emotions, strengthens the disposition toward inquiry, even with regard to what ultimately has significance and ought to be examined more closely through dialogue. The identification of an emotion as

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[14] Noddings discusses in her work the significance of genuine relationships, in which care is reciprocal and grounded in empathy and personal commitment. Gilligan emphasizes that traditional ethical theories, focused on justice and rules, overlook the relationships and sensitivities that develop in everyday life. Both recognize that care is not a formal ethical obligation, but an active ethical practice that does not arise from an individualistic morality. Rather, it shapes the space of a collectivity, within which responsibility becomes a central element. Noddings, 2012; Noddings, 1986; Noddings, 1994 and Gilligan, 2016.

emerging within dialogue, the elucidation of the beliefs that arouse it, and the examination of its quality through philosophical inquiry constitute both the means of assessing its validity and a way of educating it. In this manner, emotion becomes beneficial and functional (Topping, Trickey, & Cleghorn, 2019). The clarification, therefore, of the quality of emotion through philosophical reflection constitutes a fundamental characteristic of caring thinking.

This acceptance of emotion, in conjunction with the demand for care, leads the *Philosophy for Children* movement to recognize that one cannot engage in critical and creative thinking while lacking an empathetic understanding of ideas (Thayer-Bacon, 1993). What emerges directly is the presence of a caring ethical mode of conduct among students, taking place within a community of persons whose relationships presuppose equality, a free-minded disposition, justice, as well as reciprocity between the one who, in each instance, expresses caring thinking and the one who receives it (Owens & Ennis, 2005).

The maintenance of a caring ethical stance among the members of a community of students therefore presupposes a relational framework and necessarily takes place within it, where practices develop that are characterized by reciprocity in the recognition and acceptance of difference, in the right to development and empowerment, and in the relation formed between the one who expresses the caring stance and the one who becomes its recipient (Owens & Ennis, 2005). And insofar as caring ethical and political conduct within a learning community is deeply connected to the need for care, it is also necessarily connected to the need for positive attentiveness, the will to act, and the intention to intervene (Lowry, 2009). Such conduct makes free reflection possible for all members of the community, as it is recognized as a highly significant act. In this way, within the classroom environment, a spirit of recognition, reciprocity, openness, and responsiveness to otherness is cultivated—on the basis of care rather than competition.

It is therefore evident that ethico-political education becomes the fundamental demand within a community of inquiry. Every clarification of concepts within this framework inevitably leads to the ethical question of action and activates inquiry into what ought to be done (Kennedy, 2010). It is also crucial to emphasize that, while self-awareness and the intellectual self-confidence of the members of the community of inquiry are being developed, an ethical sensitization is simultaneously cultivated—one that counters every form of nihilism arising from arbitrariness and manipulation, which seeks to persuade us that a rational and just coexistence among human beings, grounded in values of universal validity, is not possible. In this sense, caring thinking activates our ethical and political commitment toward others (Barrow, 2007).

Let us further emphasize what we have repeatedly noted: within the *Philosophy for Children* movement, ethical commitment toward others cannot be understood except also as political commitment—that is, as democratic commitment. In this sense, it is clear that caring thinking should not be understood as an emotional supplement to critical or creative thinking, but as a fundamental mode of political pedagogical thought. Put differently, the logic of caring thinking presupposes, for its flourishing, a school that is organized and governed democratically—not only as an institutional framework, but also as a form of life and coexistence. If, then, caring thinking rests on the recognition of the other as an ethically significant person, and if the care that characterizes it is not understood as an abstract virtue or a universal rule but as a relation—as the outcome, that is, of attentiveness, responsiveness, and responsibility toward the always concrete other—then its flourishing requires a democratic environment in which every individual is recognized as a bearer of voice, experience, and value, rather than an authoritarian educational environment in which, for example, students' voices are a priori

secondary to that of the educator. Democracy, therefore, does not constitute an external condition of caring thinking but its internal ground. It represents precisely what Dewey had already emphasized when he understood democracy not as a procedure but as a way of life—a mode of living grounded in participation, freedom, equality, and justice. Caring thinking in the school embodies exactly this meaning: it presupposes equality, dialogue, freedom of expression, trust, and the possibility for students to co-constitute the meaning of learning. And it is precisely within this framework that care concerns not only interpersonal relations but also attentiveness to justice, inclusion, and the ethical quality of school life. For without dialogue, without participation, and without recognition of the other, care degenerates either into paternalism or into mere sentiment.

I consider that M. Gregory brings to light, in a particularly insightful manner, the caring dimension of thinking as a constellation of virtues, within which the individual, by opening to otherness, does not remain indifferent to the consequences that their conduct may have for others. Within the community of philosophical inquiry, the caring dimension expresses both sensitivity and an awareness of the consequences that the judgments we articulate may have for others. For this reason, within this space ideological constraints are called into question, while the desire to encounter the other leads one to recognize that, in this way, it may be possible to co-constitute a shared reality and to share it together (Gregory, 2000). The individual's empathetic readiness to open themselves to the ethical framework of the other allows for a familiarization with unfamiliar perspectives. This connection of caring thinking with a Habermasian-type communicative ethics—one that is nevertheless marked by a non-competitive disposition, non-logocentrism, and personal humility—leads to the recognition of the importance of a logic of contribution and sharing within a community that is centrally guided also by the wisdom of *phronesis* (Gregory & Laverty, 2009).

The reason, therefore, why caring thinking develops through the advancement of collective reflectivity within a community of philosophical inquiry and contributes to the consolidation of democratic education lies in the fact that it constitutes a social practice imbued with value-laden content. Here, discourse shifts its focus from what is said to how it is said, thereby demonstrating a positive intentionality toward what is articulated and an openness to the plurality of arguments.

At this point, it is important to make two clarifications concerning issues that could easily be misunderstood. Let us note, first of all, that caring thinking cannot be governed by psychologism, nor can it align with an extreme form of relativism. What renders caring thinking prone to falling into psychologism is its restriction to a sensitized experience of intersubjectivity that reduces logic, knowledge, and ethics to psychological processes. When, however, truth and validity depend on psychological processes (perceptions, habits, associations), logical judgment can no longer be articulated with rigor. Psychologism—which is known to have had significant consequences for pedagogical theory and practice from the nineteenth century onward, insofar as it fostered the belief that education should shift from the cultivation of objective criteria of truth and correctness to the management of students' cognitive or emotional states—was subjected to severe criticism by Frege and Husserl, since it leads to epistemological relativism and to the undermining of truth. At the ethical level as well, psychologism can lead to relativism, insofar as, when moral judgments are interpreted primarily as expressions of emotions, empathy, or other psychological dispositions, there arises the risk of blurring ethical principles and

of generalizing the notion that everything is permitted;[15] correlatively, the very idea of universal ethical laws is undermined. When ethics ceases to function as a normative framework and is transformed into a description of emotional reactions, moral education as an ethical end is rendered difficult.

The critique articulated against ethical relativism in education denounced the risk of weakening both the intellectual rigor and the ethical formation of students.[16] The pedagogical reflection activated by *Philosophy for Children* acknowledges the importance of the emotional dimensions of learning, but does not ground in them either the logical demand for the disclosure of truth or ethical conduct (Brenifier, 2008). Caring thinking, therefore, as well as the ethics of care, incorporates emotional sensitivity into pedagogical practice without slipping into psychologism or extreme relativism, insofar as they keep active the significance of critical dialogue and rational argumentation, as well as the normative character of ethics. This clarification elucidates the nature of caring thinking as a practice capable of assessing the value of an idea, motivated by the need for a reflective and conscious determination. In this sense, caring thinking becomes an evaluative, selective, compassionate, and deliberately caring act. Caring thinking never claims that everything is permitted, since it does not abolish criteria but relocates them from abstract rules to relations of responsibility, reason-giving, and responsiveness. Care, moreover, does not mean here that whatever one feels is right, but rather that one is accountable to the other. By transferring the principle of individual and collective autonomy into the school through the community of inquiry, Lipman—whose members become capable of thinking, judging, and giving reasons—demands the safeguarding of equality in speech, active listening, and respect for different positions, while recognizing the importance of an education in which democracy is lived as a condition rather than as a procedure. This means that democracy becomes possible only through the formation of the democratic social individual, as the outcome of their education.

Caring Thinking and the Need for the Re-Creation of the Democratic Human Being

Caring thinking within Philosophy for Children, although it emerged in the 1970s in connection with American education, was not institutionally adopted at the national level. Nevertheless, it found partial implementation in school programs and pilot initiatives. These selected programs demonstrated positive outcomes, primarily in improving students' capacity for critical thinking and in enhancing their understanding of the needs of their classmates (Trickey & Topping, 2004; Biesta, 2010; 2011; Higgins, 2011).

Europe constituted the first significant arena for the international dissemination of caring thinking through

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[15] The phrase "anything goes", associated primarily with Feyerabend, expresses the idea that, insofar as there are no universal criteria of truth, all theories, or all discourses, are equivalent, and consequently every evaluation is arbitrary or culturally relative. Castoriadis' critique of absolute relativism clarified that such a position is logically self-refuting: it abolishes the distinction between truth and error, is linked to heteronomy—that is, to apathy and cynicism—and undermines the democratic demand, insofar as democracy is inseparable from the requirement of *logon didonai* (giving an account). If all interpretations are equivalent, he argues, then none has value; and if none has value, then there is no reason to think at all. For Castoriadis' critique, see indicatively, Castoriadis, 1996 and Castoriadis, 2001.

[16] In the 1980s in the United States, Allan Bloom articulated a strong critique of psychologism at the pedagogical level, among other targets, expressing deep concern about the fate of education as an intellectual and ethical undertaking. Contemporary education, as he describes it, imbues young people with the conviction that all values are equivalent and that no truth can legitimately claim universal validity. This so-called "opening of the mind", which is presented as tolerance, in fact constitutes, according to Bloom, its closure: the student ceases to seek truth not because they have found it, but because they have been persuaded that it does not exist. As a result, education no longer cultivates reflection and judgment, but rather a mild form of cynicism and an incapacity for ethical orientation. Within this framework, Bloom also criticizes the shift of education toward psychological approaches that prioritize self-fulfillment and subjective experience at the expense of knowledge and intellectual discipline. Bloom, 1987. Cf. Biesta, 2011. On this issue see also K. Egan's critique in his work (2005), *Imaginative approach to teaching*.

the *Philosophy for Children* movement. It was adopted primarily in the United Kingdom, Sweden, and Finland, where it was incorporated into school curricula and also formed part of the professional development of educators who sought to introduce philosophical thinking into the classroom (Trickey & Topping, 2004; Biesta, 2010). In Asia—specifically in Japan and South Korea—philosophical education was introduced into school classrooms primarily as a tool for the development of logical reasoning. The implementation of philosophical education also appears to have yielded positive results in Australia, where individual applications demonstrated that it contributed to the development of students' thinking, alongside the cultivation of skills related to empathy, ethical judgment, and democratic practice within the classroom (Biesta, 2011; Higgins, 2011). The reasons that hindered its implementation internationally appear to lie primarily in the lack of institutional integration, insofar as most educational systems gradually came to focus—much as they do today—on students' performance in core academic subjects. Additional factors include limited resources and the insufficient training of teachers in philosophical dialogue, as well as the fact that, in many cases, the demands of its implementation were not compatible with traditional educational cultures.

The need to draw upon caring thinking, however, re-emerges in our time and becomes a condition of vital importance for the survival of democracy. There is little doubt that democracy in Western societies is undergoing a profound crisis that is not merely institutional or political; it is deeply anthropological and pedagogical. The weakening of the public sphere, the retreat of dialogue from all the spaces in which it ought to be cultivated, the rise of individualism, and the transformation of the citizen into a passive consumer of political and cultural products are among the conditions that indicate that the problem does not lie simply in political institutions and their dysfunctions, but in the very institution of the social individual—that is, in the type of human being that society and its educational system shape through education. From this perspective, education in the Western world is once again called upon to assume its quintessentially democratic role: the formation of the democratic human being. In light of everything discussed thus far, it is evident that caring thinking emerges as a fundamental prerequisite for this re-creation.

The Western world must therefore cease to assume that the democratic human being is merely identical with the individual who knows the significance of political institutions or who formally exercises their political rights. The democratic human being, as this figure has appeared in history and as articulated by philosophical and political thought, is a human being of free-minded disposition, capable of critical thinking, of recognizing the other as an equal interlocutor, and of assuming the responsibility that properly belongs to them for the common world. Democracy, in this sense, is not only a procedure but a way of life, as Aristotle already emphasized in the fourth century BCE, and as John Dewey reiterated in the modern era. In our discussion, we have observed that, for this way of life to become possible, it is necessary to cultivate an appropriate social individual who is capable not only of thinking critically and creatively, but also caringly.

We have seen that caring thinking introduces, in a particularly compelling way, the ethical and political dimension of relation into pedagogical practice. It does not approach the other as a means, an adversary, or a mere recipient of arguments, but as a person with needs, experiences, and intrinsic value. Without this dimension, critical thinking risks degenerating into a cold intellectual exercise or into an instrument of domination. Democratic thinking presupposes the capacity to take the other into account, to listen to them, to reflect upon what they say, and, where necessary, to revise one's own positions. Care renders thinking open and dialogical, and thus genuinely democratic.

In the contemporary Western school, democracy is often confined to formal procedures or to specific

curricular subjects, such as civic education. However, democratic education cannot be achieved without a school environment that embodies its values. Caring thinking both requires and at the same time cultivates the existence of a school in which students are recognized as active and responsible persons. Participation in dialogue, the shared inquiry into meaning, and the collective pursuit of the good do not merely constitute instructional techniques, but forms of practice in democracy.

The re-creation of the democratic human being, however, further presupposes the overcoming of the ethical relativism that characterizes a large part of contemporary culture. In many cases, democracy is conflated with the mere coexistence of subjective opinions, without criteria or commitments. Caring thinking offers a different foundation: it does not derive its force from the plurality of opinions or from abstract universal principles, but from our living relation with the other and from the responsibility that this relation entails. In this way, the democratic human being is not merely tolerant, but actively responsible for the common world.

The role of caring thinking is particularly significant with regard to the formation of public judgment. Democracy presupposes citizens who are capable of judging, deciding, and acting collectively. These capacities are not cultivated solely through the transmission of knowledge, but through the experience of shared thinking and mutual recognition. Care makes possible the building of trust, without which no democratic process can function meaningfully.

It is therefore evident that caring thinking does not constitute a supplementary or secondary element of education, but rather the core of its democratic mission. It is also clear that, if we seek the re-creation of the democratic human being, we must recognize that this cannot be achieved through strictly technocratic or competitive educational models. It requires a pedagogy that brings together reason and care, our own individuality with the individuality of others, individual autonomy with social autonomy, and critical reflection with responsibility.

In an era in which democracy is being tested at both the institutional and the cultural level, education is called upon to rethink its role anew. Caring thinking offers the philosophical and pedagogical foundation for the formation of social individuals who are capable not only of participating formally in democracy but also of sustaining it as a living practice. The re-creation of the democratic human being, therefore, must inevitably pass through an education that dares to place care at the very center of thinking.

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