# CREATING INVESTORS, NOT TOURISTS: HOW TO CARE FOR THE LINGUISTIC ECOSYSTEM

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Abstract

The role of the facilitator within Communities of Philosophical Inquiry (CPI's) has often been allocated to structuring group interactions and/or affirming participants' contributions. In this paper, however, it will be argued that facilitators must take a far more active role in dialogue than has hereto been recognized. This is the case because, when left to its own devices, CPI dialogue often devolves into mere opinion tourism, becomes obscure, and/or is drowned by an excess of irrelevant content. It will be argued that these effects, in turn, pose a serious threat to agent investment. That is, by muddying dialogue, these effects can sever the link between agents' motivational sets and the subject matter at hand and, consequently, may cause agents to internally disengage from the discussion underway. Given the danger that unchecked dialogue poses to agent investment, it will be argued that facilitators must be vigilant in attending to the health of the linguistic environment that both they themselves and participants occupy. That is, it will be argued that facilitators have a responsibility to care for participants by intervening in dialogue and pushing for rigour and clarity. This ecocentric model of care, interestingly, often directly contends with the more intuitive, or biocentric position, that a facilitator must directly care for participants affective or emotional welfare by celebrating their contributions for contribution's sake. Instead, it suggests that facilitators can indirectly care for participants by strategically prompting them to make their contributions logically sound, concise and clear. Moreover, this ecocentric perspective also conflicts with the often purported view that a facilitator is a temporary figure that should eventually become obsolete in a CPI. To the contrary, the ecocentric perspective suggests that a facilitator's role is indispensable to a CPI's success, insofar as it helps create and maintain the necessary conditions for agent investment, and helps ensure the continued health of the linguistic ecosystem, upon which everybody's welfare crucially depends.

Keywords:  P4C; CPI; philosophical discussion; facilitator.

## Criando investidores, não turistas: como cuidar do sistema ecolinguístico

Resumo

O papel do facilitador dentro das Comunidades de Investigação Filosófica (CIF) tem sido frequentemente destinado a estruturar as interações do grupo e/ou confirmar as contribuições dos participantes. Neste artigo, entretanto, será sustentado que facilitadores devem assumir um papel muito mais ativo no diálogo do que tem sido reconhecido até aqui. Este é o caso porque, quando deixado a seus próprios dispositivos, o diálogo da CIF frequentemente se transforma em mera opinião, tornando-se obscuro e/ou ficando submerso por um excesso de conteúdos irrelevantes. Será argumentado que esses efeitos, por sua vez, colocam uma séria ameaça ao facilitador. Isso é, por turvar o diálogo, esses efeitos podem romper o elo entre o colocado pelo agente motivacional e o assunto em questão e,

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consequentemente, podem levar os agentes a interiormente se desinteressar pela discussão em curso. Dado o perigo que o diálogo não controlado coloca ao facilitador, será argumentado que o facilitador deve estar atento para prestar assistência à saúde do ambiente linguístico que ambos, agentes e participantes, ocupam. Isto é, será argumentado que os facilitadores tenham responsabilidade de cuidar das intervenções dos participantes, intervindo no diálogo e promovendo rigor e clareza. Interessantemente, esse modelo ecocêntrico de cuidado com frequência colide diretamente com uma posição mais intuitiva ou biocêntrica, segundo a qual o facilitador deve diretamente cuidar para o bem estar afetivo ou emocional dos participantes, comemorando suas contribuições para o bem da discussão. Em vez disso, é sugerido que os facilitadores possam, indiretamente, cuidar dos participantes estrategicamente, incitando-os a fazerem suas contribuições logicamente fundamentadas, concisas e claras. Mais que isso, essa perspectiva ecocêntrica também se confronta com a ótica frequente segundo a qual o facilitador é uma figura temporária que deveria, finalmente, se tornar obsoleta na FpC. Contrariamente, a perspectiva ecocêntrica sugere que o papel do facilitador é indispensável para sucesso da FpC, à medida que ajuda a criar e a manter as condições necessárias para o investimento do agente, e ajuda a assegurar a continuidade do ecossistema linguístico, do qual depende, crucialmente, o bem estar de todos.

Palavras-chave: Filosofia para criança; comunidade de investigação filosófica; discussão filosófica; facilitador

### Creando inversores, no turistas: Cómo cuidar el ecosistema Lingüístico

Resumen
El papel del facilitador dentro de la Comunidad de Indagación a menudo ha sido asignado a la estructuración de las interacciones de grupo y/o a la afirmación de las contribuciones de los participantes. Sin embargo, en este trabajo se argumentará que los facilitadores deberán tomar un rol mucho más activo del que se le ha reconocido hasta el momento. Este es el caso, ya que cuando se deja el diálogo librado a su suerte, este suele convertirse en mera opinión, se vuelve obscuro y/o se diluye en una serie de contenidos irrelevantes. Se argumentará que estos efectos, a su vez, representan una amenaza seria al investimento del agente. Es decir, por enturbiar el diálogo, estos efectos pueden romper el vínculo entre los sistemas de motivación de los agentes en relación con el asunto en cuestión y, en consecuencia, pueden provocar que los agentes se desinteresen en el interior de la discusión en curso. Dado el peligro que el dialogo sin control presenta para el investimento del agente, se argumentará que los facilitadores deben estar atentos a la salud del entorno lingüístico que ellos mismos y el resto de los participantes ocupan. Es decir se argumentará que los facilitadores tienen la responsabilidad de cuidar por las intervenciones de los participantes en el diálogo y presionar por rigor y claridad en las mismas. Este modelo ecocéntrico de atención, interesantemente, a menudo contiende con las posiciones más intuitivas y biocéntricas que un facilitador debe directamente cuidar por el bienestar afectivo y emocional de los participantes celebrando sus contribuciones indiscriminadamente. En cambio se sugiere que el facilitador puede indirectamente cuidar de los participantes incitándolos estratégicamente a realizar sus contribuciones de manera ordenada, concisa y clara. Además esta perspectiva ecocéntrica también discute con la imagen a menudo pretendida del facilitador como una figura temporaria que eventualmente debe llegar a ser obsoleta en el interior de la

Comunidad de Indagación. Por el contrario, la perspectiva ecocéntrica sugiere que el papel del facilitador es indispensable para el éxito de una Comunidad de Indagación, en la medida que ayuda a crear y mantener las condiciones necesarias para el investimento del agente y ayuda a asegurar la continuidad de la salud del ecosistema lingüístico del que depende, de modo decisivo, el bienestar de todos.

Palabras claves: Comunidad de Indagación; Filosofía para niños; Discusión filosófica; Facilitador.

CREATING INVESTORS, NOT TOURISTS: HOW TO CARE FOR THE LINGUISTIC ECOSYSTEM

## I. Introduction.

In David Fincher's film *Fight Club*, the protagonist, Jack, becomes addicted to frequenting a number of different Cancer Support groups. Despite not actually having cancer, Jack finds that the vulnerability, crying, and story-telling at these meetings are cathartic; moreover, they help him combat the chronic insomnia he suffers. Yet, for all intents and purposes, Jack's life otherwise stays the same. That is, he slogs through his 9-5 job, and spends his spare time incessantly buying furniture from IKEA catalogues to furnish his bachelor pad. It's only when Marla Singer begins attending his meetings that things begin to take a change for Jack. Marla Singer, like Jack, doesn't have cancer—the meetings merely provide her with a listening ear, and an abundance of free coffee and doughnuts. Very quickly, Jack begins to resent Marla because her inauthenticity reflects his own, and, once again, he can't sleep. Aptly, Jack refers to Marla as a *tourist*, that is, a person with no real stake or investment in the activities of the meetings she attends.

It might be argued that despite Marla's apathy and Jack's insomnia, something else was also culpable for their "touristic" tendencies. That is, it could be argued that certain kinds of *dialogue* tend to cater to people who care about hearing what others have to say—in the sense they find such contributions interesting—but they remain largely untouched by the contact (tourists). By contrast, it will be argued here that there exist other forms of dialogue that hold the possibility of inducing people to care about truth and therefore to care about dialogue that moves toward truth (investors). Consequently, it will be argued that we ought to identify dialogical strategies that are necessary for dialogical success, where success is measured by the degree to which dialogue motivates agents to invest themselves.

The quintessential difference between the two conceptual personas of the investor and the tourist, is that while investors care deeply about objectively justifying significant decisions, and, hence, take seriously the implications of reason

with regard to their behaviour, tourists are not interested in having reason undermine their inclinations; instead, reason is post-hoc for tourists and merely a handy device to pacify their already made-up mind. While investors are open to their opposition, and the possibility of changing their mind, and thus behaviour, tourists are merely passive observers who cherry-pick from the conversation buffet, taking what they want and discarding the rest.

It will be argued here that in order to produce or sustain investors, one must first create a healthy linguistic environment that is capable of hosting successful dialogue. A healthy linguistic ecosystem, like its environmental counterpart, is one in which any trash or toxins that interfere with its homeostasis and equilibrium are nonexistent or only exist to a minimum degree. However, unlike its environmental equivalent, in order for a linguistic ecosystem to maintain agents' motivation—and thus remain healthy—it requires a high degree of momentum (i.e., analogously, its evolutionary clock must be ticking at a much higher speed). In other words, maintaining the health of the linguistic ecosystem requires that there is a high degree of pressure for rigorous thinking placed on the individuals occupying this environment.

All of the above will have important implications for practitioners who facilitate Philosophical Communities of Inquiry (CPI's). What is particularly interesting about the above is that, to the degree that the above is true, it will clash with the more intuitive, or biocentric view, that a facilitator's or educator's care should focus *directly* on the affective, or emotional welfare of participants. Moreover, this ecocentric point of view also seems to conflict with the notion that the facilitator should get out of the way of the discussion, and even, as some have suggested, eventually become obsolete (Kennedy 753).

## II. Motivation and the Linguistic Environment.

In his paper *Internal and External Reasons*, Bernard Williams argues that something only counts as a *reason* for an agent if is it part of their existing

motivational set "S" or linkable to their motivational set "S" via a sound deliberative route (364). Williams denies the existence of external reasons, and distinguishes between reasons *to* do something, which he calls an internal reason, and reasons *for* doing something, which he labels an external reason. For instance, while there may be a myriad of reasons *for* an agent to brush their teeth (i.e., dental hygiene prolongs life expectancy), Williams argues that agents possesses no reason *to* brush their teeth unless some value such as longevity, bodily hygiene or the like are contained within their motivational set "S" or are soundly linkable to it. Hence, under Williams' conception, reasoning, if it is to have any force, crucially depends upon the content of agents motivational sets and consequently, how this content links or connects to other values.

Williams goes on to argue that through reflective, creative and comparative processes, we are capable of generating and/or undermining reasons for action (365, 366). That is to say, the content of an individual's set "S" isn't static or rigid. On the contrary, one's motivational set is a dynamic structure that is sensitive to the experiences that one undergoes—or, put more simply, what one cares about is capable of changing. Consequently, an underlying implication of Williams' argument is that, in order to motivate an individual to care about something, we must ensure—at the very least—that the subject in question is contained within, or linkable to, an agent's motivational set. The implication with regard to Philosophical Communities of Inquiry, is that facilitators must be sure that the *content*, or *the question* being discussed is important and relevant (i.e., the content of the conversation should have practical bearing in the lives of those discussing it).

While relevant content is necessary for procuring motivation, it is by no means sufficient. This is the case because there exist instances where the *connection* between the agent and the content is impeded, and, as a result, agent investment is disrupted. That is, there are cases where the quality of the dialogue is such that it muddies the water, and, by consequence, an agent is unable to make sense of how varying comments connect to the content, or issue at hand. As a result, no sound deliberative

route can be established between the agent and the content in question.

Therefore, facilitators of CPI's must be sensitive and attend to the manner in which messages are relayed, communicated and received. If agents are submerged in messaging that is confusing, directionless, populated with red herrings or an overabundance of irrelevant material, or the conversation is dull, and tedious, they will have trouble becoming and/or remaining invested. Put differently, we should remember that agents motivational sets are dynamic, and, that without a sound deliberative route between the agent's set "S," and the content, the difficult process of generating adequate content may be a vagabond venture. Ensuring a healthy linguistic ecosystem, in other words, is of the utmost importance since it is necessary for producing and maintaining agent investment.

## III. Ecocentric vs. Biocentric Care.

With regard to the physical environment, Aldo Leopold, in his paper *Ecocentrism: The Land Ethic*, argues that moral agents have an obligation to care for welfare of ecosystems as a whole, and not merely to attend to the welfare of individuals occupying these ecosystems. Part of what makes Leopold's argument so powerful is that he illustrates how the welfare of the individuals within an ecosystem are crucially dependent on the entire ecosystem's health, since, without this ecosystem up and running, these individuals would most certainly perish. Consequently, by caring for an ecosystem, we *indirectly* care for those dependent upon it. Alternatively, the opposing, *biocentric* view emphasizes the welfare of individuals as most ethically relevant.

These two perspectives, while not always incompatible, may nevertheless produce conflicting perspective from time to time. Thus, for instance, a biocentric theorist studying wild deer populations may be appalled at the ecocentric suggestion that the welfare of these deer requires that one *cull* individuals in the deer population in order to prevent over-grazing that would permanently damage their seasonal feeding grounds. The biocentric perspective may also render proponents of this view

blind to the importance of environmental aspects that only *indirectly* benefit of individuals (i.e., the importance of a marsh or swampland).

These conflicting points of view can also emerge in the context of the linguistic or dialogical environment. Thus, for instance, an ecocentric view would appear to require that facilitators' care for dialogical agents must sometimes be indirect. That is, since the quality of messaging can be such that it either hinders or promotes the welfare of individuals, an ecocentric view requires that caring for the linguistic environment take precedence over caring for its messengers (i.e., that is, that we attend to the quality of the messaging, even if this sometimes comes at the risk of compromising the emotional safety of the messengers).

A second and important difference between ecocentric and biocentric care in the context of a linguistic ecosystem, is that the former often requires an abundance of facilitator interaction. That is, under the ecocentric model, facilitators are responsible for ensuring that agents' points are clarified, that understanding is achieved, and that any excess content and/or toxins are neutralized. These objectives require that a facilitator is heavily immersed and engaged in the discussion. Alternatively, the biocentric model would seem to delegate the facilitator's role more to merely affirming agents' participation or to simply organizing a group's speaking order. Some have even suggested that the facilitator is only a temporary figure that eventually becomes an impediment to the community's integrity (Kennedy 753). Analogously, this tracks the tendency of environmental biocentrism, which seems often to suggest a hands-off approach; one that looks down on "interfering" with a species' activities. As with its environmental counterpart, dialogical ecocentrism, at least from an abstract point of view, may seem callous or mean-spirited. For this reason, it is critical to keep in mind that this approach does not curtail the facilitator's care for individual participants, rather, it *transforms* this vital care into an indirect form. By contrast, directly caring for participants emotional states by welcoming all messages, risks severing potential motivational links in agents and, consequently, risks producing tourism—that is, the relativistic position that any belief is as good as

any other, and that "reason" is merely a justificatory device for bolstering one's own beliefs. As well, guarding participants' emotional skin, may be directly harmful to them.

In support of this position, Susan Gardner, in her paper *Questioning to Hesitation Rather than Hesitating to Question,* argues that one ought to be more wary of questioning that is soft and otherwise shallow, than forms of questioning that lead to an agent's uncertainty. What Gardner is suggesting is that a point of emotional upheaval in the agent, which results from pointed questioning, is in fact positive as it assists in overcoming pre-established beliefs in light of new reasons. Similarly, in his book *The Mess Inside*, Peter Goldie argues that radical adjustments to one's motivational set are more likely to take place when agents are exposed to situations that *force* them to see things in another light (145). In the same vein, developmental psychologist Jean Piaget  argues that states of conflict between contradictory beliefs catalyze paradigmatic shifts, and that, without these internal struggles, one's moral development would remain stagnant (xii-xiii).

What all three authors' arguments have in common is the view that oftentimes an internal state of conflict is not something to be avoided. On the contrary, this internal state of conflict often indicates a moment of reconstruction, in the sense that one's motivational set is undergoing adjustment. Likewise, internal conflict often indicates that the issue at hand is deeply important as opposed to a trivial venture. Hence, in the case of Communities of Inquiry, contrary to biocentric notions of ensuring that no feathers are ruffled, ecocentric care requires that facilitators push for messaging chocked-full of conflict both between participants and within the participants themselves. It suggests, indeed, that the facilitator may be morally responsible for ensuring that a state of tension or conflict is maintained throughout an inquiry—which, in turn, may require them being the *devil's advocate* and identifying contentious implications of certain views when participants slip into politically correct jargon or rhetoric. Alternatively, a facilitator may also play the role of devil's advocate by elucidating underlying disagreements between participants'

messages that are not immediately caught or identified by participants themselves.

All of the above, however, requires an important caveat, and that is that, although ecocentrism lends itself to the idea that nobody is completely safe in "investor dialogue" since one's messaging may undergo rigorous scrutiny and revision, nonetheless, it should be stressed that everyone should feel "safe enough." That is, unlike its environmental counterpart, culling in the linguistic ecosystem is always the culling of ideas and/or linguistic moves, and never the culling of messengers. Therefore, facilitators should try their best trying to ensure that messengers feel confident enough to expose their ideas and thoughts to the feedback of others, otherwise participants will barricade themselves, and thus lack the kind of vulnerability necessary for motivational reconstruction.

## IV. Procuring a Healthy Linguistic Ecosystem.

It has already been mentioned above that a healthy linguistic ecosystem requires that facilitators be heavily immersed in the dialogical process. Here I will outline three particular strategies, that, if kept in mind, ought to assist facilitators in maintaining the linguistic health of CPI's. This metric for a healthy linguistic ecosystem is measured by the degree to which all the communication underway is concise and logically sound, and the degree to which a facilitator engages others contingently. I will deal with these three in turn.

### (i) Dialogue Must Be Concise.

We are living in an era in which data is often being generated beyond the speed that it can be meaningfully analyzed or even properly acknowledged. In his book *The Paradox of Choice,* psychologist Barry Schwartz suggests that despite some of the technological advantages of our modern industrial society, its characteristic "overabundance of content" has concerning implications for human welfare. Specifically, Schwartz's research suggests that if individuals are presented with too many options, or too much content, that the apparent complexity produces agent

uncertainty and paralysis. Consequently, individuals are less likely to invest themselves in any of the options presented to them. Put differently, disengagement and apathy are often the function of an individual being overwhelmed by too much data littering or crowding their environment.

Schwartz's findings suggest that, in CPI's, facilitators are responsible for imposing a methodological constraint when it comes to dialogical contributions—namely, that contributions are clear and concise. This is the case for at least two reasons. On the one hand, dialogue may be most powerful and effective when it is easily organized and stored in participants' memories. That is, a connection between an agent's motivational set and the issue at hand is more likely to be achieved if the link is made clear and direct. On the other hand, *concise* contributions are also in the temporal interest of a CPI. If participants ramble or carry-on too long while speaking, they may cut short potential conclusions, and box-out the contributions of others; ironically, they may obscure their own point in the process of contributing too much. Rabbit trails such as these compromise the welfare of all those privy to the conversation, and therefore should be cut short.

A facilitator is thus responsible for ensuring that the information that is introduced to the environment exists for the benefit of all those listening. This entails that facilitators strategically prompt participants to "hone in" on their points quickly and efficiently, thus sending the message that participants should carefully consider what thoughts and ideas are most important to submit to the community. This process of encouraging concise contributions will likely have the effect of prompting a "think-before-you-speak" ethic in the community.

### (ii) Dialogue Must Be Logically Sound.

Ecocentric care for the linguistic environment requires that facilitators are constantly scanning and probing dialogue for detours and pitfalls common within interpersonal dialogue. Fallacious dialogical contributions represent many of these dialogical stumbling blocks, and can compromise the health of the linguistic

ecosystem in a number of different respects. For instance, a red herring can destroy the conversation's momentum by forming a smoke screen that distracts from the discussion at hand. Similarly, a single false dilemma might cause a community to engage in an aimless debate while ignoring neglected alternatives. Most obvious is the carnage created by bully-like behaviour, in the form of ad hominem and ad feminem attacks, which can likewise cause agents to completely disengage, or worse yet, to engage in a purely political manner in a struggle for power. One consequence of such "conversation debris" is that agents often cannot readily perceive the motivational links being established during a COI, or, these links cannot be formed in the first place due to the interfile environment into which they are introduced. Hence, it is important if agents are to invest that fallacies are both identified and targeted by facilitators for the sake of the ecosystem's integrity.

These interventions on the part of the facilitator, as well, create a logical standard for future contributions, and, like the other checks and balances mentioned, help create a proactive awareness of "contribution feasibility" in participants. Put more simply, by seeing fallacy identification in action, agents can get a sense or a vision of what a logical contribution looks like, and then apply these criteria to their own contributions before introducing them to the discussion at hand.

### (iii) The Facilitator Must Engage Contingently.

Facilitators are responsible for ensuring that their own responses are *contingent*. A dialogical contribution is contingent if it is "on the same wavelength" or responsive to what the other has said (Laing 6). Importantly, a contingent response to another's contribution needn't be affirmative or in solidarity with what has been previously said, rather, what is crucial is that responses are tailored or geared to the contribution of the other speakers—that is, these responses should enable or allow the previous speakers to know that someone has accurately understood, or perceived what *they* meant.

Contingent communication catalyzes agent investment by reducing an agent's

sense of alienation from others and the conversation underway. Echoing Laing, neuroscientist Daniel Seigel argues that "confirmatory responses"—by which he means responses that are geared to what has been said by the other—are necessary in order for an agent to feel or experience that their mind or subjectivity has been perceived. Seigel refers to this phenomenon as "mind-sight" (34). Thus, in the same vein as Marx, who argued that a worker's divorce from their *material product* was an alienating experience, one might likewise argue that a facilitator failing to acknowledge or misinterpreting  participants' contributions divorces them from the *dialogical product* they have produced, and thereby alienates them from the discussion. More simply put, it seems incoherent why anyone would invest themselves in a conversation of which they don't feel a part, or acknowledged.

Contingent communication likewise helps to ensure that dialogue is both *accurate* and *coherent*. This point is crucial, because a sound, deliberative route between one's motivational set and the subject in question requires, at the very least, that one can identify the proposition(s) the other is committed to in their dialogical contributions. Unfortunately, much of what is said in a CPI may be misunderstood both by speakers themselves and those privy to their contribution. That is, there may be a disconnect or breakdown between (A) the *intended* meaning of a dialogical contribution, (B) the *propositional* or *semantic* meaning, and/or (C) the *understood* or *perceived* meaning. Therefore, it is a facilitator's duty to ensure that the intended meaning is accurately relayed to all if it is the least bit unclear. In addition, it is the facilitator's responsibility to ensure that the logical implications of this meaning are elucidated for all those present. This oftentimes requires hearing the *hidden premise* contained within contributions, and then presenting the contribution again—with this premise included—to the community. This will serve the dual purpose of both giving the speaker a chance to reformulate their own contribution if it has been misunderstood or, by identifying the implications of their view, alter it. It will also encourage more precise contributions and better listening from participants.

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*V. Conclusion.*

It has been argued here that there exists a linguistic environment that, importantly, can either be cultivated or polluted via the messaging we introduce and exercise within it. The criteria above have been identified as rough guidelines for nurturing this ecosystem, because they are necessary conditions for ensuring that agents are capable of perceiving the link between their motivational sets and the subject in question. This perceptibility, in turn, opens up the possibility of agents investing themselves. This conclusion may worry some practitioners because this ecocentric style of facilitation might, in practice, give the impression that one doesn't *care* for participants. However, for the reasons already mentioned, this style of facilitation suggests, to the contrary, that one cares deeply for others, if only in an indirect way. Indeed, with regard to facilitating a Community of Philosophical Community, a biocentric position that ensures no feathers are ruffled may be positively harmful, insofar as it compromises the quality of the messaging entering the linguistic ecosystem. That is, by passively watching individuals pollute a collectively shared environment, a facilitator is, in fact, *neglecting* to care for participants, because their welfare crucially depends on the health of said ecosystem. Vigilance with regard to ensuring the health of the linguistic ecosystem within the confines of a CPI would thus seem to be a necessary condition for making the claim that the flourishing of participants is thereby enhanced. Consequently, in order to both cut short the production of tourists, and create the necessary conditions for agent investment, facilitators must be prepared to take a far more active role in dialogue than has hereto been recognized.

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