

PRACTISING AUTHENTICITY IN *DIALÉGESTHAI*: DIALOGUE AS THE FIRST REALITY OF PHILOSOPHY

FLORIN LOBONȚ

Abstract: This article argues that authenticity is best understood as a dialogical achievement emerging within *dialégesthai*, conceived as being-in-communication-as-dialogue and the first reality of philosophy. It critiques reductive views of authenticity as mere self-expression and develops a stronger account grounded in interpersonal justification, conceptual clarification, and shared inquiry. The analysis draws primarily on the work of Charles Taylor, Stefano Oliverio, Matthew Lipman, Susan Gardner, and Daniel Anderson as its main theoretical sources. It shows that authenticity requires participation in norm-governed dialogical practices where self-descriptions are tested, revised, and owned. The paper further argues that philosophy with communities provides a privileged setting for cultivating authenticity, while also exposing risks such as pseudo-reasoning, solipsism, and superficial dialogue that can undermine authentic self-formation.

Keywords: authenticity, *dialégesthai*, philosophy with communities, dialogical self-formation, practical reasoning.

INTRODUCTION

If philosophy is reduced to doctrine, commentary, or the private brilliance of a solitary thinker, then something primordial in it is lost. Before philosophy becomes a system, a school, a discipline, or a profession, it is an event of thinking-between. It happens in the interval opened by questioning, answering, objecting, reformulating, and listening. In this deeper sense, philosophy is not first a possession but a relation. It begins not with a finished position but with *dialégesthai*: being-in-communication-as-dialogue. To understand philosophy in this way is to relocate its primary reality from isolated cognition to shared inquiry, from monological certainty to a disciplined exposure of the self before others. The claim of this essay is that authenticity is best understood, exercised, and tested within precisely this dialogical space.

Florin Lobonț ✉
West University of Timișoara

This thesis matters because authenticity is too often misunderstood. In popular culture and in much therapeutic or self-help discourse, authenticity is equated with sincerity, self-expression, spontaneity, or fidelity to whatever one presently feels. That picture is seductive because it promises immediate ownership of the self. Yet it is philosophically thin and ethically risky. It treats the self as if it were transparent to itself, as if identity could be secured by inward declaration alone, and as if justification to others were somehow a betrayal of inner truth. Against this, a more demanding account of authenticity has emerged in philosophical discussions of selfhood, practical reasoning, and education. On that account, authenticity is not the mere release of a pre-given essence but an achievement of dialogical self-formation: a fragile, revisable, norm-governed process in which one becomes oneself through answering for oneself in public space.

This essay develops that stronger account by bringing together four lines of thought. The first is Charles Taylor's argument that modernity's cult of self-fulfillment is not simply narcissistic decadence but a misfired aspiration toward a genuine moral ideal: authenticity¹. The second is Susan T. Gardner's sustained warning that philosophical inquiry can easily degenerate into mere conversation, superficial exchange, or what she calls a pathological misunderstanding of reasoning unless it is rigorously facilitated toward better understanding². The third is Gardner and Daniel J. Anderson's argument that authenticity "should and can be nurtured," but only if autonomy is rescued from both hyper-individualist and weak voluntarist distortions and re-situated in interpersonal justificatory practices³. The fourth is Stefano Oliverio's reconstruction of the community of philosophical inquiry as a contemporary enactment of *sumphilosophheîn* (a concept he borrowed from Alessandro Volpone), where communication itself becomes the chronotype of philosophy and *dialégesthai* names the first reality of thinking together⁴.

My aim is not to rehearse philosophy for children in detail. That movement matters here chiefly as an initial pedagogical source for a broader philosophy with communities. What deserves central attention is not childhood as such but the structure of inquiry that such pedagogies helped to reactivate: communal reasoning, distributed reflection, collaborative conceptual clarification, and the transformation

¹ Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1992/2003.

² Susan T. Gardner, "Inquiry is no mere conversation (or discussion or dialogue): facilitation is hard work", *Creative and Critical Thinking*, vol. 3, no. 2, 1995, pp. 38–49; idem, *Thinking Your Way to Freedom: A Guide to Owning Your Own Practical Reasoning*, Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 2009; idem, "Selling the reason game", *Teaching Ethics*, vol. 15, no. 1, 2015, pp. 129–136.

³ Susan T. Gardner, Daniel J. Anderson, "Authenticity: it should and can be nurtured", *Mind, Culture, and Activity*, vol. 22, no. 4, 2015, pp. 392–401.

⁴ Stefano Oliverio, "Dimensions of the *sumphilosophheîn*: the community of philosophical inquiry as a palimpsest", in *The Routledge International Handbook of Philosophy for Children*, M. Rollins Gregory, J. Haynes, K. Murrin (eds.), London, Routledge, 2017, pp. 93–99; Alessandro Volpone, "Eteronomia degli elementi argomentativi nella dialettica antica, con cenni a qualche sua conseguenza", *Phronesis: Semestrale di filosofia, consulenza e pratiche filosofiche* 13(23–24), 2015, pp. 23–64.

of philosophy from the transmission of doctrines into a practice of co-created understanding. The article therefore treats philosophy for children briefly and mainly as an inspiration for a fuller account of philosophy with communities.

The argument proceeds in six steps. First, I clarify why *dialégesthai* should be treated as the first reality of philosophy. Second, I show why authenticity cannot be reduced to expressive inwardness. Third, I reconstruct Gardner and Anderson's model of dialogical autonomy and self-creation, emphasizing their account of the risks of non-authentic formation. Fourth, I argue that these risks are not peripheral but constitutive: they are built into every weak or distorted form of communal philosophizing. Fifth, I examine the facilitator's role as guardian not of conclusions but of conditions under which authenticity becomes possible. Finally, I suggest that philosophy with communities is one of the most promising contemporary settings for the exercise of authenticity precisely because it makes the self-answerable without making it submissive, and relational without making it dissolved.

***DIALÉGESTHAI* AND THE FIRST REALITY OF PHILOSOPHY**

To describe communication as the first reality of philosophy is not to deny the importance of texts, arguments, traditions, or solitary reflection. It is to make a more basic claim: philosophy becomes fully itself only where thought is exposed to response. The image of the philosopher as the primary site of philosophy – conceiving ideas in isolation and then delivering them to an audience – has been historically powerful, but it is neither exhaustive nor innocent. It encourages an understanding of thinking as possession, of truth as unilateral delivery, and of dialogue as secondary ornament. Against that image, Oliverio's retrieval of *sumphilosophêin* is decisive. In the community of philosophical inquiry, philosophical work is not something completed in one mind and exported outward; rather, it arises between interlocutors, through their interaction, contestation, and collaborative reconstruction of meaning⁵. Philosophy becomes not the product of a sovereign interiority but an enacted relation.

This shift has major consequences for authenticity. If thinking is always already dialogical in its most vital philosophical form, then authenticity cannot mean insulation from others. It cannot mean preserving an inner core from contamination by interpersonal encounter. On the contrary, if meaning itself emerges in shared inquiry, then selfhood is partly constituted through responsible communicative exchange. This does not entail social conformism. The self is not merely the result of external pressures. But neither is it a sealed origin. It is shaped, challenged, clarified, and sometimes rescued through the demands of conversation – demands to define terms, distinguish claims, justify inferences, revise overstatements, acknowledge counterexamples, and listen seriously to rival views.

⁵ S. Oliverio, "Dimensions of the *sumphilosophêin*".

The community of inquiry thus alters not only pedagogy but ontology. It suggests that the self capable of authenticity is not prior to dialogue; it is formed in dialogue. Here the old antithesis between individual and community becomes unhelpful. The issue is not whether the self belongs to itself or to the group. The issue is whether the self can become answerable enough to become genuinely its own. Philosophy with communities offers a setting where one learns that identity is not secured by shouting louder but by articulating oneself under conditions of mutual scrutiny and shared standards. This is why *dialégesthai* matters so deeply. It is not just a technique. It is the very medium in which authenticity is either exercised or lost.

WHY AUTHENTICITY IS NOT MERE SELF-EXPRESSION

Taylor's account remains indispensable because it identifies a paradox at the heart of modern authenticity. Modern culture often appears to glorify self-choice, self-definition, and self-expression. Critics describe this as relativism, narcissism, or the decay of shared moral worlds. Taylor's subtler point is that these deformations are not the ideal of authenticity itself but degraded versions of it. The modern emphasis on being true to oneself contains a genuine moral insight: each person has a task of self-formation that cannot be outsourced to inherited rank, fixed status, or mere conformity. Yet that task becomes unintelligible when severed from what Taylor calls "horizons of significance"⁶. In other words, the self can only define itself meaningfully against backgrounds of value it does not create ex nihilo.

This means that authenticity is not equivalent to choosing whatever identity one prefers. Nor is it licensed by the sheer force of feeling. A self-description is not made authentic simply because it is mine. It must be placed in relation to goods, distinctions, and normative vocabularies that can be discussed with others. Taylor's critique is therefore not anti-modern; it is a rescue operation. He wants to save authenticity from expressive subjectivism by showing that self-creation requires dialogue with meanings that exceed the isolated individual. The self is original, but not self-grounding. It becomes itself through articulation in relation to more-than-private standards.

Gardner and Anderson radicalize this point by linking authenticity directly to practical reasoning and interpersonal justification. Their view is especially useful because it prevents authenticity from collapsing into psychological comfort. A person is not authentic simply by feeling aligned. Authenticity requires a certain kind of ownership of one's evaluative self-descriptions, yet that ownership is never purely private. The self becomes intelligible only through predicates that can be justified interpersonally, not merely asserted inwardly⁷. This is crucial. It means

⁶ Ch. Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*.

⁷ S. Gardner, D. Anderson, "Authenticity: it should and can be nurtured".

that authenticity is not an escape from public reasoning but an achievement within it. The authentic self is not the self that refuses all external challenge; it is the self-capable of surviving challenge without dissolving into imitation or coercion.

Once this is seen, much popular talk of “being yourself” appears philosophically irresponsible. It ignores how often what passes for one’s true voice is only borrowed rhetoric, defensive posture, or socially rewarded impulse. It ignores the extent to which human beings can be mistaken about their own motives, trapped in rehearsed narratives, or dependent on the recognition of others for the stability of their self-understanding. Above all, it ignores the discipline required to separate authenticity from mere intensity. One may feel deeply and still be inauthentic. One may be passionately committed and still be repeating scripts one has never critically owned. Authenticity is therefore not less demanding than rationality; it is inseparable from the disciplined work of rational self-articulation.

FROM PHILOSOPHY FOR CHILDREN TO PHILOSOPHY WITH COMMUNITIES

The relevance of philosophy for children should be stated carefully. Its deepest significance lies not in the age of its participants but in the pedagogical and philosophical architecture it revived. Lipman and Sharp reimagined philosophical activity as communal inquiry rather than elite transmission. Their question was not primarily what children should memorize from philosophy, but how they could be initiated into shared practices of questioning, concept-formation, reason-giving, counterexample-testing, and collaborative reflection⁸. In that sense, philosophy for children opened a path beyond the classroom: it offered a model for philosophy with communities.

This model matters because it places process before doctrinal closure. Participants are not recipients of finished truths but co-inquirers. Their work includes asking good questions, clarifying concepts, constructing and revising arguments, and learning how to think with others without merely surrendering to others. The result is neither free-form conversation nor rigid scholasticism. It is a disciplined public space in which people become more capable of autonomy precisely by learning the norms of shared reasoning. David Spiteri’s work on intercultural sensitivity is relevant here: dialogical reconstruction of knowledge strengthens not only cognitive ability but intersubjective responsiveness⁹. Roger

⁸ Matthew Lipman, *Thinking in Education*, 2nd ed., Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003; Matthew Lipman, Ann Margaret Sharp, Frederick S. Oscanyan, *Philosophy in the Classroom*, 2nd ed., Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1980.

⁹ David Spiteri, “The community of philosophical enquiry and the enhancement of intercultural sensitivity”, *Childhood & Philosophy*, vol. 6, no. 11, 2010, pp. 87–111.

Sutcliffe similarly stresses that the practice reaches beyond “thinking skills” into moral and social dispositions¹⁰.

Still, one should resist romanticizing the model. The mere fact that a group sits in a circle and exchanges views does not make it a philosophical community. Gardner’s enduring insistence is that inquiry is no mere conversation. Without facilitation, rigor, conceptual pressure, and shared standards, dialogue easily drifts into repetition, politeness rituals, ideological posturing, or superficial consensus¹¹. This warning is vital for philosophy with communities. The community of inquiry is not philosophically significant because it is communal; it is significant because it subjects communal exchange to norms that can transform opinion into thought.

This is exactly where authenticity enters. Philosophy with communities provides a structure in which the self can be tested, not humiliated; challenged, not erased; invited to articulate itself, not forced to perform spontaneity. In such settings, authenticity is exercised through a sequence of habits: giving reasons, hearing objections, revising claims, distinguishing impulse from judgment, and recognizing others as co-constitutors of meaningful self-description. Philosophy for children, then, is only the pedagogical doorway. The larger destination is a philosophy with communities in which dialogical life becomes a site of adult self-formation and shared ethical seriousness.

GARDNER AND ANDERSON: AUTHENTICITY AS DIALOGICAL SELF-CREATION

The central achievement of Gardner and Anderson lies in their refusal to treat autonomy as either solitary self-legislation or permissive self-assertion. They argue that autonomy must be stabilized by joining a Kantian concern for ownership of reasoning with a Habermasian concern for public justification¹². That move is more than theoretical elegance. It is a practical necessity. If autonomy is interpreted in an excessively “supra-Kantian” way, it becomes the fantasy of pure solitary reason, as though one could think oneself free independently of communicative life. If it is interpreted in an excessively weak or “sub-Kantian” way, it declines into license, preference, or manipulative will. Neither distortion yields authenticity.

For Gardner and Anderson, self-creation is unavoidable. The real question is not whether we create ourselves, but whether this self-creation approximates authenticity or misses it. And here the crucial claim appears: authenticity requires that self-descriptions be answerable to objective evaluative predicates capable of

¹⁰ Roger Sutcliffe, “Philosophy for children: a gift from the gods?”, *Gifted Education International*, vol. 19, no. 1, 2004, pp. 5–12.

¹¹ S. Gardner, “Inquiry is no mere conversation (or discussion or dialogue): facilitation is hard work”.

¹² S. Gardner, D. Anderson, “Authenticity: it should and can be nurtured”; Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 1, trans. T. McCarthy, Boston, MA, Beacon Press, 1984/1992.

interpersonal justification. One does not become authentic by inventing a flattering narrative and then treating it as sovereign. Nor does one become authentic by confusing confidence with warrant. The self must learn to inhabit descriptions that can withstand scrutiny, comparison, and challenge. In that sense, authenticity is not anti-normative; it is normatively thick. It depends on standards of better and worse reasoning, stronger and weaker justification, more and less adequate interpretation.

This is why their notion of the “language of freedom” is so important. The language we use in dialogue can either intensify responsibility or deepen passivity. It can call people into agency or reinforce their self-understanding as mere victims of circumstance. Gardner and Anderson therefore recommend a disciplined shift from explanations that evacuate agency to justifications that require persons to articulate reasons in their own terms. The point is not to deny social conditioning or structural constraint. It is to refuse descriptions that collapse the person into pure effect. Freedom, on this account, is not magical uncaused spontaneity. It is the capacity to enter justificatory space as someone who can answer for what one says and does.

This argument gives authenticity a robust philosophical profile. It also explains why dialogical pedagogy matters so much. If authenticity depends on learning how to justify oneself without self-absolutization, then educational and communal settings are not peripheral. They are constitutive. One becomes more authentic not by withdrawing from demanding conversation but by inhabiting it more fully. Philosophy with communities is therefore not merely one context among others where authenticity may incidentally arise. It is one of the privileged sites where the very capacities required for authenticity can be cultivated.

THE RISKS OF LOSING AUTHENTICITY: GARDNER AND ANDERSON’S CORE WARNING

The most important contribution of Gardner and Anderson may not be their positive picture of authenticity, valuable as that is, but their diagnosis of how authenticity is lost. They understand that the self is not only underdeveloped by neglect; it is deformed by certain kinds of language, pedagogy, and communal interaction. These risks deserve sustained attention because philosophy with communities can either counteract them or unwittingly reproduce them.

The first risk is solipsism masquerading as self-ownership. Gardner and Anderson explicitly reject the fantasy that self-descriptions are private property. Their warning against self-help ideologies of positive thinking is philosophically devastating. To say “as long as I believe I am worthy, I will have self-esteem” sounds empowering, but it mistakes assertion for formation. It treats evaluative identity as if it could be conjured by inward declaration. Yet just as there is no private language in Wittgenstein’s sense, there can be no purely private authorship of the evaluative self. We become intelligible to ourselves through vocabulary

whose validity is never ours alone. When communities of inquiry fail to make this clear, they risk producing not authentic persons but rhetorically fortified monads.

The second risk is pseudo-reasoning. Gardner repeatedly notes that many people assume they are reasoning whenever they offer any reason after the fact for a conclusion they already prefer. This is a subtle but devastating pathology¹³. It leads individuals to treat themselves as reasonable without genuinely exposing their views to doubt, counterexample, or alternative description. In communal philosophizing, this pathology can become socially contagious. A group may look active, articulate, and participatory while remaining conceptually stagnant. Participants present opinions, decorate them with ad hoc reasons, and leave with the comforting illusion of inquiry. Nothing has really been tested; no self-description has really been risked. In such conditions authenticity is not nurtured but blocked, because the self never learns the humility and courage required for revision.

The third risk is the replacement of justificatory dialogue by victim language. Gardner and Anderson's notion of the "language of freedom" is especially sharp here. Certain descriptions of action or experience, even when psychologically understandable, consolidate passivity by making agency linguistically unavailable. If every event is narrated as something that simply happened to me, if every response is reduced to causation rather than reason, then the person is never invited to inhabit authorship. Again, this does not mean blaming individuals for all circumstances. It means preserving a space in which they can speak as agents without denying complexity. Communities that normalize purely passive or deterministic self-description undercut authenticity because they remove the very grammar through which self-creation becomes possible.

The fourth risk is superficial communitarianism. There is a recurring temptation in dialogical pedagogy to treat participation itself as success. Everyone spoke; therefore, something valuable occurred. Everyone felt heard; therefore, inquiry advanced. Gardner's work is a powerful antidote to this complacency. A community can be warm, inclusive, and still philosophically inert. It can be procedurally democratic and still conceptually circular. Authenticity is not promoted by endless sharing if sharing never reaches the level of disciplined clarification. A person does not become more authentic merely by voicing what they already think. They become more authentic by learning to distinguish what they think from what they can justify, what they inherit from what they own, what they repeat from what they understand.

The fifth risk is the facilitator's abdication. Much turns on this role. If the facilitator confuses non-authoritarianism with passivity, the group may drift toward sentimentality, domination by the confident, or fragmentation into parallel monologues. Gardner insists that facilitation is hard work precisely because it must

¹³ S. Gardner, *Thinking Your Way to Freedom: A Guide to Owning Your Own Practical Reasoning*; idem, "Selling the reason game".

propel inquiry forward without colonizing it¹⁴. This is equally true of authenticity. The facilitator cannot manufacture authentic selves but can either protect or sabotage the conditions under which authenticity becomes thinkable. Asking the second “why,” resisting vague generalities, inviting distinctions, exposing contradictions, and insisting that counterpositions be taken seriously – these are not technical add-ons. They are practices through which participants learn that being oneself is inseparable from answering for oneself.

These warnings are indispensable because they reveal how easily communities of inquiry can fail under the banner of success. A philosophical community may appear emancipatory while actually reinforcing impulsiveness, performative individuality, anti-intellectualism, or covert hierarchy. Gardner and Anderson help us see that the risk of not becoming authentic is built into every dialogical setting. Precisely for that reason, authenticity must be intentionally cultivated rather than romantically presumed.

THE FACILITATOR AS CUSTODIAN OF DIALOGICAL CONDITIONS

The facilitator’s task is often misunderstood. In traditional pedagogy, authority is linked to possession of content. In weakly romantic pedagogy, authority is often treated as inherently oppressive and therefore minimized into near invisibility. The facilitator in a genuine philosophical community occupies neither position. This figure is not a doctrinal master, yet not a passive bystander either. The facilitator is a custodian of the norms under which shared inquiry can become philosophically fruitful and personally formative. That includes protecting the group from domination, but it also includes protecting it from triviality.

From the standpoint of authenticity, the facilitator’s work is doubly demanding. First, the facilitator must sustain an environment in which persons feel recognized as interlocutors rather than objects of correction. Here Daniel Siegel’s emphasis on contingent communication is illuminating. Identity develops not simply because people interact, but because they are responded to as centers of subjectivity worthy of attention¹⁵. A community that does not “see the mind” of its members cannot become a site of authenticity. Recognition is therefore a condition of serious philosophizing, not an emotional luxury. People must feel that what they say can matter.

Second, the facilitator must prevent recognition from becoming indulgence. This is where the discipline of reason enters. To recognize someone as a person is

¹⁴ S. Gardner, “Inquiry is no mere conversation (or discussion or dialogue): facilitation is hard work”.

¹⁵ Daniel J. Siegel, *The Developing Mind: How Relationships and the Brain Interact to Shape Who We Are*, 2nd ed., New York, NY, Guilford Press, 1999/2012.

not to ratify every utterance. It is to take their utterance seriously enough to ask what it means, what follows from it, what supports it, and whether it survives criticism. The facilitator therefore embodies a non-humiliating rigor. Questions are directed not at exposing incompetence but at enabling ownership. One might say that the facilitator practices a form of dialogical respect that refuses both sentimental affirmation and authoritarian correction.

This role becomes even more important when authenticity is at stake. Because participants may be deeply attached to certain self-descriptions, the inquiry can easily become defensive. The facilitator must help distinguish between questioning a claim and negating a person. In the best cases, participants learn that revision is not self-betrayal but self-deepening. They discover that to lose a weak description of oneself is sometimes the necessary condition for becoming more truly oneself. Authenticity, then, is nurtured where the facilitator can hold together three goods often split apart: interpersonal safety, conceptual seriousness, and existential risk.

CARING, COLLABORATION, AND THE MORAL TEXTURE OF AUTHENTIC DIALOGUE

Authenticity in dialogical philosophy is impossible if inquiry is imagined as purely critical in the narrow sense. Sharp's reflections on caring thinking are crucial because they show that philosophical communities depend not only on logic but on a richer ethos of attention, concern, and shared significance¹⁶. Caring thinking should not be confused with niceness. It names the depth dimension of inquiry in which participants discover that what is said matters because people matter, and because the concepts under discussion bear on lives, relations, and forms of coexistence.

This matters for authenticity because the self cannot be formed by criticism alone. If every utterance is treated merely as a proposition to be dismantled, people will either harden themselves defensively or retreat into strategic silence. Authenticity requires the courage to appear before others as someone unfinished. That courage is sustained by a community in which listening is real, disagreement is serious, and people are not reduced to their latest statement. Caring thinking therefore provides the affective and ethical infrastructure within which critical thinking can do its work without becoming spiritually destructive.

Collaboration is equally central. In a philosophical community, one does not merely present one's view; one is altered by the better articulation of the question itself. Others help one see distinctions one had overlooked, assumptions one

¹⁶ Ann Margaret Sharp, "The other dimension of caring thinking", in *In Community of Inquiry with Ann Margaret Sharp: Childhood, Philosophy and Education*, M. Rollins Gregory, M. J. Laverty (eds.), London, Routledge, 2018, pp. 209–214.

had naturalized, and implications one had not yet faced. This does not weaken individuality. Properly understood, it intensifies it. A self that never undergoes such collaborative testing risks remaining schematic, slogan-like, or complacent. A self that learns to think with others may become more differentiated precisely because it becomes more responsive.

The combination of caring and collaboration is therefore not incidental to authenticity but constitutive of it. Authenticity is neither adversarial self-assertion nor consensual fusion. It is the disciplined becoming of a singular voice within a shared space of meaning. The philosophical community at its best allows participants to discover that one can be answerable without being erased, relational without being absorbed, and vulnerable without being manipulated. That discovery is one of the highest ethical achievements of dialogical philosophy.

COMMUNICATION AS CO-PHILOSOPHIZING, AUTHENTICITY AS PRACTICE

Oliverio's account of *sumphilosopheîn* gives philosophical depth to what might otherwise seem a merely pedagogical model. In the community of inquiry, communication is not the vehicle of philosophy but its scene of emergence¹⁷. This is why the phrase "first reality of philosophy" is so apt. Philosophy is not first a content transferred through language; it is an event constituted in and through communicative engagement. Such a view restores something ancient while speaking directly to contemporary needs. It recovers the insight that thought is sharpened in relation, and that dialectic is not decorative dialogue but a serious mode of shared being.

Understood in this light, authenticity becomes a practice rather than a possession. One does not finally "have" authenticity. One exercises it, loses it, repairs it, and tests it during dialogical life. The self is not a finished interior jewel waiting to be displayed. It is a historically and relationally formed project of self-interpretation under conditions of finite knowledge and normative contestation. Philosophy with communities is therefore uniquely suited to authenticity because it makes this project visible. It externalizes the work of self-formation without vulgarizing it. It allows participants to hear themselves speak, to witness their own evasions, to revise inherited scripts, and to inhabit reasons more responsibly.

This also explains why authenticity should remain the dominant concept here, not happiness. Happiness may well follow from authentic dialogical life, and some of the educational literature rightly links authenticity with forms of flourishing. But happiness is too easily psychologized, privatized, or rendered

¹⁷ Stefano Oliverio, "Dimensions of the *sumphilosopheîn*: the community of philosophical inquiry as a palimpsest", in *The Routledge International Handbook of Philosophy for Children*, M. Rollins Gregory, J. Haynes, K. Murrin (eds.), London, Routledge, 2017, pp. 93–99.

episodic. Authenticity better names the moral and philosophical labor at stake. It refers not to a feeling-state but to the quality of one's self-relation as mediated through reasons, relations, and norms. It asks whether one's way of being is genuinely owned, critically answerable, and dialogically formed. In communities of inquiry, this question can be practiced rather than merely admired.

The most promising implication is that philosophy with communities can offer a much-needed counterculture to both atomized individualism and manipulative collectivism. Against atomism, it shows that the self is dialogically constituted. Against collectivism, it insists that each participant must still answer in their own name. The result is neither the sovereign isolated self nor the dissolved communal self, but the authentic interlocutor: one who becomes capable of freedom by learning to speak, listen, justify, and revise in company with others.

CONCLUSION

To practice authenticity in *dialégesthai* is to reject two equally damaging fantasies: that the self can become true by withdrawing into pure inwardness, and that the self can become true simply by participating in a community. Neither isolation nor participation as such is enough. Authenticity requires a more exacting configuration: interpersonal recognition, public reasoning, conceptual rigor, collaborative inquiry, and a communicative ethos capable of calling people into responsible self-articulation.

This is why dialogue should be considered the first reality of philosophy. Not because solitude is useless, but because philosophy becomes most fully itself where selves are rendered answerable in shared inquiry. In that space, communication is not a secondary medium for ready-made ideas. It is the very place where meanings emerge, where self-descriptions are tested, and where the work of becoming oneself takes shape. Oliverio's *sumphilosopheîn*, Taylor's horizon-bound selfhood, Sharp's caring thinking, Lipman's community of inquiry, and above all Gardner and Anderson's account of authenticity converge on this point: the self is not authentic before dialogue and then expressed within it. The self becomes more authentic through dialogical practice.

The urgency of this claim is heightened by the risks Gardner and Anderson identify so forcefully. Communities may drift into superficiality. Participants may mistake assertion for ownership, any reason for good reasoning, or passive explanation for freedom. Facilitators may abdicate under the illusion that non-directiveness guarantees authenticity. In all these cases, philosophy with communities can become counterfeit philosophy: conversationally warm, ethically well-intentioned, and existentially empty. The answer is not a return to authoritarian teaching but a deepened practice of facilitation – one that sustains the language of freedom, insists on justification, and enables persons to risk revision without losing dignity.

Authenticity, then, should be understood not as the final reward of philosophical dialogue but as one of its central ongoing practices. It is exercised whenever a person learns to speak in ways that are genuinely theirs because they have been critically tested, interpersonally recognized, and normatively sustained. It is exercised whenever a community learns that disagreement can deepen relation rather than destroy it. It is exercised whenever philosophy ceases to be the exhibition of finished positions and becomes again what it most fundamentally is: a disciplined being-in-communication-as-dialogue.

