Robert Corrington and the Philosophy for Children Program: Communities of Interpretation and Communities of Inquiry

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Preface

The current trend of philosophy in America, insofar as we are concerned with that philosophical tradition which is the most commonly studied within universities across the country, is by no means that which we might call "American Philosophy." Philosophy in America today can be described as still living in the Analytic epoch. Yes, there are, of course, American philosophers who have gained great prominence in the Analytic tradition, namely Richard Rorty and W.V.O. Quine, while still upholding some of the naturalist traits that we so often associate with American philosophy. The fact of the matter, however, is that the American philosophical tradition is still alive and well, despite not enjoying the popularity in the United States as it did in the days of William James and John Dewey. In the field of metaphysics, which analytic philosophers have more or less eliminated, consider the descriptive naturalism of Justus Buchler. Buchler has essentially invented an entirely new metaphysical vocabulary, not to mention the creation of a unique systematic framework the broad and general features of which satisfy the demands for a coherent metaphysic. Buchler's important work in metaphysics has ignited some fresh and much needed discourse in contemporary American philosophy over the last thirty years.

While the American philosophical tradition does not encompass that region which we have come to call the 'philosophy of language', for the sole reason that this particular region of philosophy has only accepted the contributions made by the Analytic tradition, it has made significant efforts in the development of hermeneutic theory. We need look no further than the writings of C.S. Peirce and Josiah Royce. Peirce's offering of the "Theory of Signs"—i.e. his 'semiotics'—established a theoretical ground and inner logic for not only his hermeneutics, but also his epistemology, phenomenology, and metaphysics. It is no wonder then that Royce was so inspired and influenced by his contemporary. Not only did Royce take Peirce's semiotics and rework it into his own hermeneutic theory, but he also made clear the necessary relationship

between the human act of interpretation and the communal process. For Royce, in fact, reality in its wholeness is communal and the real world is but a world of interpretation.

Despite these groundbreaking works in hermeneutics, contemporary interpretation theory has shied away from the American tradition and has focused mainly on the continental hermeneutics of such philosophers as Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and Jacques Derrida. Rather than adopting the optimism shared by Peirce and Royce in an interpretive community, contemporary American hermeneutics has been held hostage by the skepticism and subjectivism of the continental thinkers.

Although apparently unpopular, American philosophy is still quite active. One of the primary goals of this paper is to help sustain, and hopefully enhance, some of the discourse that is currently occurring in the American tradition. I will try to achieve this goal by writing about two very important modern day forces in American philosophy: 1) Robert Corrington and 2) the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children (IAPC), established by Matthew Lipman.

Since this paper is written for the IAPC, I will not spend too much time writing about the very basic assumptions of the program as I would do for the lay reader. The major focus in this paper will be Corrington's thought and its relationship to the Philosophy for Children program (P4C). As I see it, Corrington's philosophy, which places great emphasis on the descriptive naturalism of Buchler and the semiotics of Peirce and Royce, is crucial for a greater understanding of P4C, especially the workings of a "community of inquiry" (CI). Corrington's delineation of Royce's 'community of interpreters' adds great insight to this most fundamental aspect of P4C.

In order to do this I shall divide the paper into three parts. The first part will deal with the lineage of Corrington's thought. In this part I will briefly discuss the philosophy of three legends in the American tradition: Peirce, Royce, and Buchler. I might add here that these three philosophers also play a crucial role in Lipman's thought. In this regard, P4C and Corrington might be

considered distant cousins and I will consider it my obligation here to, in a manner of speaking, introduce Corrington to P4C at the family reunion. I will limit the first section of this paper to a discussion of the influence that Peirce, Royce, and Buchler have had on Corrington. A strong understanding of the thought of these three will lead to a strong understanding of Corringtton's philosophy. In the second part of the paper I will relate Corrington's thought to P4C. Corrington offers us a highly theoretical account of communal life in his discussion of the community of interpreters. This will become relevant to any analysis of the communal life of CI.

The third part of the paper will further elaborate Corrington's ideas of the self and how it operates in community, especially a community of interpreters. This will become important in understanding how the self functions in CI. Corrington's book *Nature's Self* (1996) works hard to probe into the personal and unconscious aspects of the self. This work, however, does not speak of the communal dimensions of the self; rather it is designed to augment the communal focus in his other works, namely, *The Community of Interpreters* (1987) and *Nature and Spirit* (1992). I shall also draw from these latter texts for a discussion of the self throughout.

Part One: The Lineage of Corrington's Thought

Charles Sanders Peirce

Perhaps the most notable aspect of Peirce's philosophy that Corrington draws from is his theory of signs. This doctrine, also referred to as Peirce's 'semiotics', is, according to Peirce, the whole of the study of logic. In this sense, logic is semiotic. It is the study of, and manipulation of, signs. For Peirce, signs, along with what signs represent, are all that there is in the world and they rely exclusively on an interpreter who addresses these signs. In general terms, Peirce defines signs as "something which stands to somebody in some respect or capacity."[1] Therefore, anything whatsoever which can be identified by a finite interpreter is a sign. Anything which can possibly be

[1] C.S. Peirce, "Logic as Semiotic: The Theory of Signs," in *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*, Justus Buchler (ed.) (New York: Dover, 1955) p. 99.

interpreted is a sign. Hence, Peirce views the study of logic as semiotic precisely because it pertains to the inquiry into how signs function and how they affect human interpreters.

Peirce divides signs into three categories and this triad is necessary for a greater understanding of how signs work. Such a categorical triad is fundamental in all of Peirce's philosophy and it stands as the first principle, not only of his logic, but also his epistemology and metaphysics. In fact, Peirce saw that all of reality can be divided into these three irreducible categories. Before embarking upon a more detailed discussion of Peirce's semiotic and how it becomes an essential tool in Corrington's thought, I would first like to survey Peirce's phenomenological principles. It is here that Peirce establishes his three modes of being; the categorical triad of firstness, secondness, and thirdness, in an attempt to achieve the description of "the collective total of all that is in any way or in any sense present to the mind."[2]

Peirce admittedly borrows from Immanuel Kant in forming his categories. This is no surprise due to the fact that Peirce, reminiscing on his philosophical development, says, "I devoted two hours a day to the study of Kant's *Critic of Pure Reason* for more than three years, until I almost knew the whole book by heart, and had critically examined every section of it."[3] This is not to say, of course, that Peirce's categories are repetitious of Kant's categorical system. Rather, it is to point out the similarities between the two systems.

Peirce defines the category of firstness as "the mode of being which consists in its subject's being positively such as it is regardless aught else. That can only be a possibility. For as long as things do not act upon one another there is no sense or meaning in saying that they have any being, unless it be that they are such in themselves that they may perhaps come into relation with others."[4] An obvious example of the category of firstness, are such qualities as color and feeling. Such

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[2] C.S. Peirce, "The Principles of Phenomenology," in *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*, p. 74.
[3] C.S. Peirce, "Concerning the Author," in *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*, p. 2.
[4] Peirce, "The Principles of Phenomenology," p. 76.

qualities are not dependent upon anybody to experience them rather they are qualities that present the possibility for experience. Corrington describes firstness as the category of "bare immediacy."[5] It is what is immediately present to an observer, prior to any cognition, awareness, or experience. It is the immediate beginning of every cognitive experience.

Those qualities that belong to the category of firstness are mere possibilities that could become organized, reflected upon, or cognized. For the most part, Peirce sees the facts of thought and experience as sufficient conditions for this mode of being. Although thoroughly indescribable, firstness can be said to be a necessary condition for all phenomena.

If firstness can be characterized as the immediate or beginning of any phenomenon, then the category of secondness can be thought of as its end. Firstness comprises the qualities of phenomena and, by contrast, secondness comprises the actual fact of phenomena. We experience secondness as other: "a shock to habitual patterns of awareness."[6] Peirce explains this notion of 'other' by writing, "[in] the idea of reality, secondness is predominant, for the real is that which insists upon forcing its way to recognition as something other than the mind's creation."[7] We might consider such phenomena as cause and effect, where there exists a relation occurring between pairs. Causation, then, belongs in the category of secondness.

While firstness deals with the qualities of phenomena, secondness deals with the phenomena of change. Therefore, what we experience through time belongs to the category of secondness. For example, I may hear a note from a violin. The immediate sensation of the note belongs to the category of firstness which is permanent, in the sense that it is 'stuck' in the present. However, throughout the duration of time the sound of the note changes as it may fade or bend. The

[5] Robert Corrington, *The Community of Interpreters* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1987) p. 4.
[6] *Ibid.*
[7] Peirce, "The Principles of Phenomenology," p. 79.

immediate is a possibility while the whole sound of the note, throughout its duration, is what is the actual. Hence, firstness is possibility and secondness is fact.

If we can categorize the category of firstness as beginning, and the category of secondness as end, then we must refer to the category of thirdness as duration, or the between. Peirce writes, "By the third, I mean the medium or connecting bond between the absolute first and last…The end is second, the means third. The thread of life is a third; the gate that snips it, its second."[8] Belonging to this category are such things as laws and ideas of generality. Of all the categories, thirdness is the most complicated because it is conceptual rather than perceptual. Even Buchler saw that the category of thirdness, as a metaphysical concept, suffered from great obscurity.[9]

Cause and effect is a second since it is a relational phenomenon occurring between pairs. But if we were to speak of a "law of causation" then we would categorize such a law as a third. Another example of thirdness would be the idea of growth. A person, considered from birth to death, experiences or goes through a process of growth. The immediate point of birth functions as a first, as does the immediate point of death. The two points together; i.e., the actual fact of a person's life, functions as a second. The continuity which lies between the two pints functions as a third. Growth, as the mediation between the first and the second, belongs to the category of thirdness.

Peirce's triad serves his semiotics in the same respect as his phenomenology. The only difference is that his principles of phenomenology are divided into one triad while his semiotic is categorized with three triads—i.e., a triad of triads. However, we need not, for the purposes of this paper, delve into all three triads. Therefore, I shall only discuss the essential triadic relationship which all three semiotic triads share.

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[8] *Ibid*., p. 80.
[9] Justus Buchler, "Introduction," in *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*, p. xvi.

When interpreted, signs create in the mind of the interpreter an equivalent sign. For example, I may interpret a painting and that painting is a sign because it stands for something, namely the "object" which it represents. Even a painting of something as basic as a human face, for example, will not represent a human face in all of its possible dynamic manifestations. Nevertheless the painting, or sign, of the human face refers to the "idea" of the object. Here, Peirce in using the term "idea," is referring to the Platonic notion of the eternal, universal idea. The eternal idea of the painting Peirce calls the "ground" of the sign.

Since the immediate sign of the painting—what Peirce calls the "representamen"—stands before an interpreter who embodies it, the painting creates in the mind of the interpreter an equivalent sign. Peirce calls this sign an "intepretant." All thought, according to Peirce, functions by way of signs. Therefore, the subject matter of logic is signs. Every sign (representamen) is connected to three elements": the representamen's object, its ground, and its intepretant. However, this is not the essential triadic system of all signs since an object and its ground are corollary. The representamen is a first because it is what is immediate to an interpreter. The object and its ground are a second because they stand before the interpreter as other. The intepretant is what determined by the first (sign-representamen) and the second (object-ground). The intepretant is, in turn, also a sign-representamen and, as a third, it becomes a first when it stands in a new triadic relationship with a second and a new third. Therefore, the process of sign interpretation is, theoretically, endless.

For this semiotic triad to occur there must be an interpreter. Peirce's sign theory therefore becomes crucial to Corrington's communal hermeneutics and ultimately serves as its inner logic. In individual interpreter is finite, however. Not only is the individual finite in the course of their biological life but also in the course of their interpretive life. In other words, an individual interpreter can only perform this semiotic triad up to a certain point when interpretants (thirds) cease to become new signs (firsts). Individual interpreters can only perform finite hermeneutics

because the individual is limited in their ability to create new sign translations. Peirce saw this and argued for a "community of science" whose members would act democratically in order to surpass their own ideological bents which cease the process of sign translation. Ideologies, by definition, have already arrived at the truth of their interpretations. Ideologies are, in this sense, a product of finite hermeneutics and are to be contrasted with Corrington's notion of "horizontal hermeneutics." Horizonal hermeneutics is limitless in its probing of signs. Corrington's form of hermeneutics therefore demands community because the individual interpreter can only do so much. A community of interpreters, performing horizontal hermeneutics, can probe more successfully into semiotic material because an innumerable amount of signs and interpretations can emerge. I will discuss horizontal hermeneutics more thoroughly in the third part of this paper.

Peirce, however, only went so far in his account of the community of science and how it performs hermeneutics. Josiah Royce, working from Peirce's semiotics, laid the theoretical foundations for the "community of interpreters." It is Royce that Corrington delineates from in using the "community of interpreters" and it becomes central to Corrington's thought, especially for his theory of horizontal hermeneutics. I shall now briefly expose Royce's though and its particular influence on Corrington.

Josiah Royce

Josiah Royce took Peirce's logic and used it as the foundation for his entire metaphysical system. First and foremost, Royce was a Christian and wrote extensively to supply the metaphysics for a Christian ideology. Royce's theology is not the subject-matter here, however it is important to discuss his ideas on community. Community is primary to Royce's thought and this becomes clearly evident when we consider the two fundamental theses of his most celebrated work, *The Problem of Christianity*. These two theses are, in Royce's words, 1) "The Christian doctrine of life is dominated

by the ideal of the Universal Community," and 2) "The real world is, in its wholeness, a community."[10]

Royce's greatest contribution to Corrington's philosophy is his notion of the "community of interpretation." This community is necessary for horizonal hermeneutics to function. In Corrington's words, the community of interpretation "forms the interpretive horizon within which any sign must receive its determination and validation."[11] If all knowledge of reality can only come about by the method of sign interpretation then, Royce holds, true knowledge can only be grasped by a community performing this method. Royce saw the community as necessary for the act of interpretation of signs to occur at all. He writes, "For its very being as a sign-post consists in its nature as a guide, needing interpretation, and pointing the way. To know the real sign-post, you must then learn to interpret it to a possible hearer to whom you address your interpretation. This being to whom you address your interpretation must be a self distinct from your individual self."[12] Here we get the notion that the community is the only place in which interpretations can be tested and validated for further use. This may sound familiar for those knowledgeable of P4C and CI. In CI the group's goal is to arrive at a shared judgment about the subject-matter under investigation. This requires communal dialogue and the building of ideas and arguments. Ideas and arguments are considered and tested and some are eventually validated. We have to consider the dialogue and its products of language as semiotic material which are being interpreted. There is no doubt that CI is equivalent to the interpretive community which Royce refers to if only for the fact that the inquiry of open-ended philosophical themes is, at the same time, interpretation of rich semiotic material.

The community of interpretation is ultimately striving for truth, or, knowledge of reality. The question is, of course, whether or not such success is possible. Peirce was a firm believer in

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[10] Josiah Royce, "The Problem of Christianity," in *The Philosophy of Josiah Royce*, J.K. Roth (ed.) (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1982), p. 388.
[11] Corrington, *The Community of Interpreters*, p. 28.
[12] Royce, "The Problem of Christianity," p. 391.

fallibilism, as well as evolution, and therefore saw the community of science as most likely never arriving at absolute truth but always progressing closer to it. Nevertheless, he was well aware of the fact that the individual could never arrive at the truth alone. Peirce writes, "The real, then, is that which, sooner or later, information and reasoning would finally result in, and which is therefore independent of the vagaries of me and you. Thus, the very origin of the conception of reality shows that this conception essentially involves the notion of a COMMUNITY, without definite limits, and capable of a definite increase of knowledge."[13] Here Peirce is attempting to point to the idea that any distinction of the real and unreal can only come about by conflicting opinions between people. This fact essentially draws us to the conclusion that community is needed, not only to acquire truth, but to realize the problem of reality in the first place.

If interpretation is an endless process and calls for infinite interpretation, as Peirce makes clear, then it follows that the interpretive community can never culminate in truth. Royce ultimately agrees with this conclusion but disagrees with Peirce as to what moves and goads the community on toward truth. Peirce concluded that this was an evolutionary process ignited by love. Royce, however, saw the Spirit-Interpreter as pushing the community of interpretation along. This ideal interpreter lures the finite community of interpreters closer to the ideal community, which Royce calls the "Beloved Community." Signs for the Spirit-Interpreter are transparent and their meanings are validated and thus this ideal interpreter stands outside of the interpretive community, securing our hermeneutic acts so that we move closer to the ideal community. Corrington stresses the importance of the Spirit-Interpreter in his own writings as that which guides interpretive communities towards hermeneutic convergence. As I will show in the second part of this paper, communities of interpretation, as well as communities of inquiry, can become sensitive to the spirit by becoming animated by powers of hope and expectation.

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[13] C.S. Peirce, "Some Consequences of Four Incapacities," in *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*, p. 247.

Justus Buchler

The third and final thinker who has done the most in influencing Corrington's philosophy is Justus Buchler, Corrington's friend and teacher. Buchler's *Metaphysics of Natural Complexes* (1966) initiated the philosophical world to the descriptive system known as 'ordinal metaphysics.' Ordinal metaphysics views nature as the "locus of reality," as that which makes all things available. Supernatural and transcendental notions are thrown out the window, for when we speak of anything at all we must speak of it as "in nature." Corrington speaks of nature in the same manner when he describes two ontologically different manifestations of nature. For Corrington, nature is both "nature natured," the sum total of all things that nature itself has produced; and "nature naturing," that which makes all things available and sustains them.

"Things," for Buchler, are replaced by the concept of "natural complex," or, simply, "complex" to avoid redundancy. He famously opens *Metaphysics of Natural Complexes* with the line, "Whatever is, in whatever way, is a natural complex."[14] Buchler places great emphasis on the fact that whatever is must also be, in some way or another, capable of discrimination. A discriminated complex is, "Anything identified or discovered or imagined or discerned or inferred or sensed or posited or encountered or apprehended or made or acted upon—no matter whether deliberately or not."[15] From this definition of discriminated complexes, we can immediately recognize the similarity with Peirce's definition of interpreted signs as that which 'stands before the mind.'

Buchler also understood the endless process that is involved in the interpretation of signs, and this follows for complexes as well: "A complex…is analyzable and interpretable without end."[16] The endless process of interpretation is a fact of life for a community of interpreters performing horizonal hermeneutics. There is no limit to interpretation, no end result where further

[14] Justus Buchler, *Metaphysics of Natural Complexes*, 2nd ed. (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1990), p. 1.
[15] *Ibid.*
[16] *Ibid.*, p. 6.

hermeneutics becomes impossible. However, the hope for the interpretive community is to possibly arrive at a shared meaning or a shared interpretation. The fact that the interpretive community may arrive at a shared interpretation, or in Peirce's terminology, a shared interpretant, does not mean that it has arrived at truth. It only entails that the community has moved closer towards truth, i.e., it has expanded the scope of meaning of the subject-matter under interpretation.

The endless process of interpretation is also a fact for CI. The hope of the inquiring community is to arrive at a shared judgment. However, this judgment which the community has arrived at is also a shared interpretant, fully capable of further interpretation. In Buchler's terminology, a shared judgment which the CI arrives at still maintains its status as a complex which is analyzable without end. The reason for the possibility of endless analysis of a given complex is that complexes, in Buchler's system, cannot be reduced to an absolute, irreducible simple. By contrast, complexes have as their constituents other complexes which can be said to be their "traits." Traits are also regarded as "sub-altern complexes." As traits they function as an order of traits (sub-altern complexes) for any given complex. Buchler writes, "Every complex (complex of traits) is thus a constituent of some other complex and includes other complexes as constituents of it."[17]

As an example, the CI may have as its complex under analysis, the concept of 'justice.' As inquiry proceeds certain traits of justice will become illuminated, for example, such concepts as 'law', 'reciprocity', 'goodness', etc. All of these traits function in the 'order' of complexes that is 'justice'. Therefore, a particular complex is always an order of complexes. The complexes in the order serve as traits. The complexes in the above case—'law', 'reciprocity', and 'goodness', etc.—are located within the order of 'justice' and are considered sub-altern complexes of the complex 'justice.' Therefore, each complex is related to each other and, to a certain extent, belongs to each other.

[17] *Ibid.*, p. 13.

Therefore, in the process of CI it becomes necessary to illuminate related complexes in an analysis of any of them.

Each and every complex that is discriminated has "integrity" insofar as it consists of sub-altern complexes within its order. Every complex has a unique order of sub-altern complexes insofar as the ordinal locations of these sub-altern complexes have certain limits and relations to their complex and to other traits. The complex 'goodness' maintains certain integrity within the order of the complex 'justice.' This means that 'goodness', as an example, has a certain ordinal location within the order of the complex 'justice.' 'Justice', as a sub-altern complex, also has integrity within the order of the complex 'goodness.' The many sub-altern complexes of a complex will also have integrity insofar as they are interrelated according to their respective ordinal locations. The many instances of integrity that function within an order of any given complex together form that complex's "contour." Buchler writes, "A complex has an integrity for each of its ordinal locations. The continuity and totality of its locations, the interrelations of its integrities, is the contour of the complex."[18]

It is important to remember that all complexes are in the world and that there is no end to the exploration of them. Complexes which are relevant to both the interpretive and inquiring communities are what Buchler calls "human products." Human products are crucial to Corrington's work and I shall discuss them in the next part of this paper. As Buchler describes, "The products of men are made possible by natural complexes that lend themselves to identification. Each product is a complex that has its own integrity, even if it is of momentary duration and small importance."[19] In the community of interpreters, as well as CI, human products are of great importance. Not only do they take the form of words in communal dialogue, but products can also be gestures and bodily movements. Such human products are also natural complexes and are equivalent to Peirce's signs.

[18] *Ibid.*, p. 22.
[19] *Ibid.*, p. 23.

All human products no matter how hidden demand interpretation and analysis in both the interpretive and inquiring communities.[20]

Part Two: Communities of Interpretation and Communities of Inquiry

Introduction

In his second major work, *Nature and Spirit*, Robert Corrington develops a philosophical method which he calls "ecstatic naturalism." Ecstatic naturalism is a kind of theistic naturalism which attempts to unify nature and spirit through a description of the "divine natures" as ontologically in nature as opposed to supernatural and transcendental notions of the divine, which would separate the two orders. More importantly, ecstatic naturalism is a hermeneutical system that fully incorporates the notion of horizonal hermeneutics, which is developed in Corrington's first major work, *The Community of Interpreters*. This hermeneutical system, which, as Corrington describes, "frees itself from a narrow concern with human linguistic artifacts" and enters into the "features of communal and personal life."[21] All systems of interpretation interpret specific orders and the objects of Corrington's hermeneutics are the "innumerable signs" that arise from communal dialogue. The purpose of the community of interpreters is to clear the way for the emergence of shared meanings within the community. Corrington's community of interpreters is analogous to the P4C program's CI in the sense that the latter's purpose, among other things, is for the combined making of good judgments within the community.[22]

Corrington defines philosophy as "the quest for the most pervasive features of the world."[23] He argues that philosophical methods, such as ecstatic naturalism, and their animating perspectives, are employed to make such pervasive features emerge. Ecstatic naturalism when unfolded as a

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[20] For an excellent discussion of the ways in which human products shape and structure the interpretive process in a CI, see, David Kennedy, "The Five Communities," *Analytic Teaching* 15, no. 1 (1994): pp. 3-16.
[21] Robert Corrington, *Nature and Spirit* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1992), p. 1.
[22] See, for example, Ann Sharp, "The Community of Inquiry: Education for Democracy," in *Thinking Children and Education*, M. Lipman (Ed.) (Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt, 1993), pp. 337-45.
[23] Corrington, *Nature and Spirit*, p. 1.

method, Corrington claims, "can only function within a communal context."[24] The P4C program holds that inquiry, in itself, is also a philosophical method that can only function in such a communal context.[25] Corrington's concept of the community of interpreters encompasses that of CI only because a group must interpret signs and orders prior to proceeding with a systematic pattern of inquiry.[26] Along with Peirce's 'community of science', Corrington argues that the CI is but one instance of the more pervasive community of interpreters.[27] Therefore, CI is necessarily a community of interpreters but a community of interpreters is not necessarily CI.

In his delineation of Royce's community of interpretation, Corrington provides us with a thorough analysis of communal life. It is the purposes of the second part of this paper to expose some of the major features of Corrington's notion of the community of interpreters in the hopes that it may provide some helpful insight into any analysis of CI as it is brought forth by the IAPC and P4C. In order to do this I shall compare the underlying assumptions of the two communities as well as offer a strategy for incorporating Corrington's idea of the "power of expectation" to further our understanding of how a community of inquiry proceeds.

Self and the Human Process

Corrington and P4C advocates both agree that membership in community is an essential aspect of the human process. In fact, both would go further and say that any participation in communal life is what it means to be a person. What constitutes participation is, in a sense, that which shapes personhood. For Corrington, participation in the community is, ultimately, the "horizon" for the human process. A horizon, as Corrington describes "stands between subject and object and is constituted by signs and interpretations that represent the truths of the community."[28]

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[24] *Ibid.*, p. 9.
[25] See, for example, Ann Sharp, "What is a Community of Inquiry?" *Journal of Moral Education* 16, no. 1 (1987): pp. 37-45.
[26] Here I am referring to Dewey's "pattern of inquiry" as he describes it in, John Dewey, *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1938), pp. 101-19.
[27] Corrington, *Nature and Spirit*, p. 51.
[28] Corrington, *The Community of Interpreters*, p. 64.

All people occupy these horizons which are, in the Buchlerian sense, 'orders', and people need not be consciously aware of them. These orders have "traits of awareness, expandability, and…self-conscious transformation."[29] As a person becomes more involved in communal life, especially a community of interpreters, these horizons become more expansive and transparent. Not only can the semiotic material of the subject-matter under interpretation become validated in a community of interpreters, but horizons, which are the mysterious truths of the human process, become clearer. Horizons, according to Peirce's semiotic and phenomenological categories act as thirds in the sense that they are the general laws of human life.

Participation in a community can be measured by the human products that an individual generates. Corrington writes, "The creation of an external product, whether it be a physical artifact, an idea, a moral stance, or an aesthetic rendering, extends the scope and reach of the self."[30] The P4C program agrees with this notion and, as a model for education, seeks to cultivate the human process by encouraging students in CI to create these same products of which Corrington speaks. Stan Anih tells us that members of CI are "more able to make better distinctions, more able to recognize underlying assumption, more able to distinguish better from worse reasons, more able to think consistently and comprehensively, more able to criticize [one's] own goals and others, more able to criticize [one's] own thinking as well as the thinking of others."[31] Certainly all of these enhanced abilities can be considered to be the creation and domain of human products. In fact, Corrington's notion of product encompasses such a wide range of things that one might be hard pressed to explain why CI cultivates the human process as opposed to, say, an automobile factory.

CI is the greater cultivator of the human process because the products which are generated are of an introspective nature, thereby showing traits of novel shaping, as opposed to the mechanical

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[29] *Ibid.*
[30] Corrington, *Nature and Spirit*, p. 41.
[31] Stan Anih, "Nigerian College Adopts 'Community of Inquiry' Approach," in *Thinking Children and Education*, p. 336.

nature of automobile production. In order for members to create the kinds of products belonging to Anih's list, they have to apply some form of higher order thinking. CI is a forum for self-reflection in the sense that inquirers reflect (which is interpretive) on their own products as well as the products of others in the community. Participation in inquiring and interpretive communities calls for reflection upon the products generated from communal dialogue, ideas, and judgments, which are all requirements for communal inquiry and interpretation. Hence, participation in such communities means not only that one is being developed as a person, but that one is actually reflecting upon and interpreting the signs of personhood. Corrington writes, "No account of self-identity can be compelling that fails to acknowledge the innumerable products of the self."[32] Participants in CI are constantly struggling for self-identification because they are constantly accessing their own introspective products. These products function as signs of the self and struggle for illumination and validation by interpretive acts.

Again, Corrington tells us how we can, by being observant of our own products and through a dedicated study of signs, come closer to identifying and defining ourselves. Although the self is more than the sum of its products, and forever beyond our finite, hermeneutic grasp, the "scope" of the self—i.e. the space for unhampered thought and action, and the "effect" of the self are defined by the products of the self.[33] Furthermore, an understanding of the self, in fact, an understanding of the entire human process, is only possible by an investigation of the self's signs and products. Corrington writes, "The human process can thus be approached either through a description of its interior semiotic life or through a description of its products."[34] The question becomes: Does participation in CI serve members in their quest for self-understanding? If we are to understand what is meant by "semiotic life" as the functioning of signs, i.e. products and orders, especially in

[32] Corrington, *Nature and Spirit*, p. 41.
[33] *Ibid.*, p. 46.
[34] *Ibid.*, p. 47.

language, and how they affect human beings, it is certainly possible that Corrington would answer "yes." CI, with its emphasis on dialogue and critical thinking as products of the self, certainly cultivates the quest for self-understanding and of the human process.

Ann Sharp, in her writings on CI, points to the fact that inquiry into this semiotic life is crucial to self-understanding and becoming a person—hence, the dialogical nature of participation in CI. As activities which are products of the self, it is Sharp's view that language and thinking are "overlapping activities."[35] She tells us, when writing about the classroom CI, "It is through speaking to other persons that one becomes a person oneself…To speak one's ideas to one's peers in the classroom is to create and express one's own thinking and in a sense to create oneself."[36] Each idea that is uttered is subsequently a product of the self and becomes a sign or a series of signs for the rest of the community to interpret, inquire about, and apprehend meaning from. It is a product precisely because it is thought about and communicated. CI, with its emphasis on dialogue and the combined thinking about the dialogue occurring within the community is, under Corrington's conception of community, a fruitful enterprise for one's quest towards self-understanding and personhood.

Corrington's Three Conditions for Community

After a further investigation of the conditions for a community of interpreters that Corrington has established, we will be more able to see how Corrington's conception agrees with the P4C program. The first condition that Corrington sets is for the constitution of a community of interpreters is for members who are self-reflexive. Corrington explains, "An individual becomes self-reflexive whenever he or she examines and tests signs of so-called internal life." He continues, "The community of interpreters can only emerge…when each of its members enters into the inner

[35] See, Sharp, "What is a Community of Inquiry?"
[36] *Ibid.*, p. 40.

dialogue that makes self-understanding possible."[37] As I have explained earlier, the "inner dialogue" which Corrington speaks of is the describing of the products of the self. It is the inner semiotic life, i.e. the signs and orders which affect the human organism. Furthermore, in our discussion of CI, we saw how participation in the community cultivates the quest for self-understanding. Participants do become more self-reflexive, more able to think for one self. In describing the self-reflexive person, Sharp and Laurance Splitter write, "A person who thinks for herself is, in an important sense, free. She is able to reflect upon her situation in the world. She is prepared to reappraise her deepest values and commitments, and hence her own identity."[38]

Corrington's second condition for a community of interpreters involves the unique for of temporality in which the community is embedded. The antithesis of a community of interpreters, or as Corrington calls it, a "natural community," remains embedded in clock-time, or "chronos."[39] The community of interpreters, however, "is one that expresses the continual tension between 'chronos' and 'kairos'."[40] "Kairos," for Corrington, is the idea of fulfilled time, or the opposite of chronos, that is, clock-time or time extended in space. This means that the community of interpreters is less rigid and more free-floating than the natural community. Corrington considers the community which lives in chronos to be nostalgic, i.e. living in the past. If a community remains nostalgic it will remain closed-minded to the new, strange, foreign, open, and so on. As I shall explain later, the natural community, which is embedded in clock-time, lives under the influences of fear and anxiety. I will also show how CI attempts to transform such dangerous and, as Corrington calls them, "demonic" influences as fear and anxiety.

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[37] Corrington, *Nature and Spirit*, p. 100.
[38] Laurance Splitter, Ann Sharp, *Teaching for Better Thinking* (Melbourne: Australian Council for Educational Research, 1995), p. 16.
[39] Corrington, Nature and Spirit, p. 100.
[40] *Ibid.*

The third condition for a community of interpreters, as established by Corrington, is for the emergence of "genuine inter-subjective communication." He explains, "Communication entails reciprocity between a 'sender' and a 'receiver' who work together to ensure that meanings conveyed correspond to meanings had…In genuine inter-subjective communication, the media of sign production become thematically articulated and understood."[41] In other words, there is a distinctive care for meaning in dialogue. Nothing is spoken which, as the old saying goes, goes in one ear and out the other. The same demand for articulation exists in CI. In such a community, dialogue builds inquiry in the sense that what is said—or, the meanings which are conveyed—are the stepping stones toward shared judgments. Inquiry cannot proceed in the absence of this reciprocity between 'sender' and 'receiver', which allows for meanings to be shared and, ultimately, for shared judgments to emerge.

The third condition for a community of interpreters is the condition which essentially demands community in the sense that it demands inter-subjectivity. The community of interpretation demands the existence of more than one subject participating in genuine communication. Corrington says that "a community of interpretation 'contains' more than the sum of its interpreters. An individual only becomes a genuine interpreter within a community of interpretation."[42] The same holds true in the case of a genuine inquirer. A person can only become a genuine inquirer in CI, participating in genuine inter-subjective communication, which is, for the most part, essential to inquiry.

Glenn Tinder tells us that inquiry is the unification of consciousness and consciousness can only be unified through "harmonious inter-subjectivity, through sharing and cooperatively questioning all interpretations of the contents of consciousness."[43] He concludes, "Inquiry, then,

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[41] *Ibid.*, p. 101.
[42] *Ibid.*
[43] Glenn Tinder, "Community as Inquiry," in *Thinking Children and Education*, p. 361.

takes place through communication and in that way alone. In this sense, inquiry is community."[44] It is, hence, impossible to be a genuine inquirer if one is not participating in a "genuine" CI, where inter-subjective communication is well underway—as the combined interpretation of signs and articulation of meanings.

Democratic Communities

Corrington argues that the community of interpreters is, and must be, a democratic community through and through.[45] Essentially this means that signs and orders, i.e. all which can be interpreted, must be free from constraint and remain open to all sorts of interpretation and meaning apprehension. This does not mean that interpretations can be validated despite the fact that they are not relevant to a given order, nor does it mean that valid interpretations are of a limited possibility. Here, the critical common sense of a community is weighed heavily. Ideologies are "demonic" in the sense that they stifle the interpretive powers of the community. Open-ended inquiry sustains the life of the fragile community of interpreters. Each individual interpreter in the community is obligated to become free from his or her personal constraints—they must detach themselves from their prior interpretations and meanings which they may have already thought of as carved in stone. Not only must signs and orders remain open to the interpreter, but the interpreter must remain open to signs and symbols.

We can acquire a greater understanding of democratic communities, like the interpretive and inquiring communities, by contrasting them with what Corrington calls "natural" communities. As Corrington argues, "Natural communities are inherently conservative and jealous of their particular semiotic claims."[46] This means that the interpretations of signs and orders remain embedded in their condition of origin and are thus not adapted to suit the particular semiotic purposes of a community

[44] *Ibid.*, p. 362.
[45] Corrington, *Nature and Spirit*, p. 103.
[46] *Ibid.*, p. 97.

of interpreters. In natural communities, signs are not tested or examined—the meaning which is originally conveyed remains operative. Corrington sees such natural communities as being guided by "powers of origin," which keep meanings closed and constrained and also, at the same time, all too clear and uncontestable, i.e. they remain tied to their original meanings. Corrington writes, "One key difference between a natural and an interpretive community is the ability of the latter to live within ambiguous and highly ramified sign systems."[47] The interpretive community is free-floating in its interpretations and able to remain open to all sorts of possible meanings.

CI is also free-floating in this sense. The fact that CI can remain open to all possible meaning and interpretation is an important element to making the inquiry itself meaningful. As Ann Sharp describes, the classroom CI is designed "to form a bridge between the old and the new, to bring to consciousness the fundamental ideas of the culture in the child's own words, and to help the students through inquiry not only to make the tradition their own, but to imaginatively re-enact it and reconstruct it into a more coherent and meaningful version—a version that makes sense to them. It points to new ways of looking at the world, new ways of understanding and perceiving."[48] The communal forming of "the bridge between the old and the new," as Sharp describes, is a metaphor for the endless process of interpretation. We build this bridge through the transformation of the 'old' interpretant into the new 'representamen'. The community takes this new representamen, which was previously the old interpretant, and re-interprets it and acquires a new interpretant. In this way CI is not, using Corrington's terminology, contrasted by the powers of origin, rather CI remains open to the possibility of new meanings and new ways in which to look at the world and its innumerable signs and orders. Opposition to a collapse into the powers of origin

[47] *Ibid.*
[48] Sharp, "What is a Community of Inquiry?", p. 43.

is essential to the survival of a democratic community. Furthermore, as Corrington says, "Individual selves come more clearly to self-understanding within democratic communities."[49]

Members of a democratic community also sacrifice their own interests for the sake of the community. If the CI is to remain democratic—meaning that if it is to remain a CI—then it cannot allow room for individuals to prosper at the expense of another individual and, more importantly, at the expense of the group. The CI is in pursuit of a common good, most notably, the movement toward "an impartial and shared view of the world that has been subjected to public inquiry."[50] Therefore, the elimination of purely personal goods, but only insofar as they are in conflict with the aims of the community, is a necessity for CI's survival. Corrington writes, "Personal goods, by definition, find themselves in conflict with social goods, and can only assert themselves through a denial of extra-personal realities. A purely personal good can only prevail if it challenges the ontological status of alternative personal goods."[51] Corrington here is painting the picture of the ongoing battle between participants only interested in their private sphere and the pursuit of their larger self-interests.

Ann Sharp tells us that the classroom CI is education for democracy because, "In a working community of inquiry, participants move from considering themselves and their accomplishments as all important to focusing on the group and its accomplishments."[52] If, however, such conflict exists in a community then it must be the opposite of any community that is characterized as being democratically structured. Furthermore, if such conflict exists in a so-called community of interpreters or a so-called CI, then as a matter of fact, according to Corrington, these communities are merely natural communities which are not free from heteronymous and alien constraints.

Being Guided By the Power of Expectation

[49] Corrington, *Nature and Spirit*, p. 105.
[50] Sharp, "What is a Community of Inquiry?", pp. 39-40.
[51] Corrington, *Nature and Spirit*, p. 105.
[52] Sharp, "The Community of Inquiry," p. 339.

Perhaps the greatest struggle for aspiring interpretive and inquiring communities is the struggle against powers of origin. Often, private interests and an unwillingness of members to remain free-floating in their inquiry, stunts the growth of the community. The community finds itself remaining in the state of being a natural community. In my own experience with CI the one thing that usually stands in the way of inquiry done in 'kairos', i.e. free from the powers of origin, is anxiety. Although it is hardly ever admitted, most members live in fear of each other and this fear, or anxiety, blocks inquiry and genuine inter-subjective communication. Most of the time, this fear remains hidden in the subconscious of an individual but is marked by a dialogical style which can be abusive to other members and, in turn, to the individual himself. Unfortunately, the most common destructive element of CI is the demonic forces of origin which thwart free-floating interpretation, inquiry, and communal dialogue. As Corrington writes, "The primary threat to the community of interpretation is the basic mood of anxiety, crystallized and finitized in specific fears."[53]

Corrington also tells us that these demonic forces "can be transcended only when we are transformed by a spiritual presence that comes from a source outside human history and creativity."[54] How are we to welcome this spiritual presence and allow it to empower the communities of interpretation and inquiry? First and foremost, Corrington tells us, is that we must become sensitive to the Spirit, for this is the only way the community can overcome the heteronymous and imperial tendencies of those members who are self-interested.[55] These seem to be ambiguous, or at least, open-ended instructions that Corrington gives us, however they should not be interpreted as the demanding of communities to be obedient to a particular Godhead or for communities to follow the established rituals of a distinct religion. Rather, Corrington is asking communities to become guided by the Spirit in overcoming the powers of origin, anxiety, and fear.

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[53] Corrington, *The Community of Interpreters*, p. 105.
[54] *Ibid.*, p. 88.
[55] *Ibid.*, p. 95.

Communities can become sensitive to the Spirit by becoming animated by the power of hope, which is the only way that the processes of inquiry and interpretation can free themselves from "demonic traits."[56] Hope, in this sense, keeps the interpretive and inquiring communities from remaining embedded in the priorities of history, institutional life, and 'chronos.' For Corrington, "Heteronomy and the life of interpretation cannot live long together."[57] The same holds true in the case of inquiry. Members of a CI cannot be subject to something else outside of the community, whether it is an institution, or a "cherished belief system." The CI can only be governed by hope, or what Corrington calls, "the power of expectation." Hope is the gift of the Spirit, luring communities toward convergence. The community that is guided by the power of expectation and the hope that the ideal awaits them—i.e. genuine inter-subjective communication, freedom from self-interests and external constraints, living within a democratic structure, etc.—will ultimately survive and become a convergent community. That is, an ideal community which is governed by Spirit.

Part Three: Self, Horizonal Hermeneutics, and the Community of Interpreters

Introduction

It is in the tradition of American pragmatism that Robert Corrington develops his method of interpretation, horizonal hermeneutics. Performing this method is the 'community of interpreters' which is a reconstruction of Josiah Royce's 'community of interpretation' that was developed in Royce's magnum opus, *The Problem of Christianity*. As I see it, CI is but one species of the genus of the more encompassing community of interpreters. Although communal inquiry is an "interpretive process, converging on a common body of signs,"[58] a community of interpreters need not be a CI. For example, a jazz quartet, performing musical improvisation is an interpretive community in that

[56] *Ibid.*, p. 103.
[57] *Ibid.*, p. 105.
[58] Kennedy, "The Five Communities," p. 3.

members are 'interpreting' the central theme of a given composition. However, we shall be hard pressed to call this type of performance "inquiry" into the central theme of a composition.

Nevertheless, as I shall attempt to make clear, the community of interpreters performing horizonal hermeneutics is synonymous with the philosophical CI. The open-ended subject-matter which stands before the CI is semiotic, meaning that it is a sign system which demands interpretation. Furthermore, the subject-matter before the philosophical CI can be considered, in Buchler's terminology, as an 'order', and the purpose of the community is to identify and describe its traits, or, orders of relevance. Signs are orders and orders are signs, and nature stands as both the producer of them (nature natured) and that which sustains them and makes them prevail (nature naturing).

Corrington's delineation of the community of interpreters and his development of horizonal hermeneutics provides us with a structural framework for communal life. Elemental to this framework is the demand for personal openness and communal democracy that allows for more encompassing interpretations and meanings. In this respect, personal ideologies are considered to be destructive to the community of interpreters because, by definition, they have already arrived at the truth of the matter and seek only to validate predisposed interpretations.

The notion of philosophical inquiry as a communal practice has come out of the American pragmatic tradition. Corrington and P4C inherit this communal emphasis from Peirce, Royce, and Dewey. Within the contemporary context of American philosophy there is a continuing debate concerning whether communal inquiry is a fruitful philosophical enterprise.[59] Can a community of interpreters and inquirers arrive at truth? Can they somehow solve, finally, the great questions of the universe? Even if it is assumed that such communities in the long run will not have absolute success, it does not entail that communal inquiry is fruitless altogether. In the proceeding pages, I

[59] For a discussion of this debate, see Todd Driskill, "Beyond the Text: Ecstatic Naturalism and American Pragmatism," *American Journal of Theology and Philosophy* 15, no. 3 (1994): 305-323.

shall argue that communities of inquiry and interpretation cultivate self-identity and self-understanding even if the concept of 'self' is ultimately indefinable.

The Hermeneutics of Nature

Corrington outlines his theory of horizonal hermeneutics in his first book, *The Community of Interpreters*, and one of his major concerns is to rid the notion that hermeneutical theory ought to be confined to an analysis of linguistic artifacts. Building upon the semiotic theory of Peirce, Corrington wishes to move toward the interpretation of nature rather than mere texts. Nature is thus the enabling condition for all meanings. And, drawing from Emerson, Corrington depicts nature as driving toward expression and meaning.

Emerson considers nature as the ultimate text, or the text of all texts.[60] However, this view of nature is beyond metaphor. Emerson saw language as intimately relating to nature and not merely as an aspect of human convention. For example, he views words as signs of natural facts. Corrington explains that "the word 'spirit' derives from our experience with the wind. The word 'right' derives from any movement across a terrain that is straight and does not involve deviation."[61] Corrington recognizes the value of Emerson's conceptualization of nature as a hermeneutic move that opens nature toward linguistic analysis. However, he does not wish to carry Emerson's version to its ultimate conclusion which is that nature is intrinsically limited to the textual. This ecstatic quality means that nature is infinite in its semiotic possibilities. Nature is not complete in its creation of signs (nature natured) but remains active as the ground from which new signs continually emerge (nature naturing).

Horizonal Hermeneutics and the Community of Interpreters

The term 'horizon' means, simply, perspective. A horizon is a window to the world. Horizons are between subject and object as what is looked through. "A horizon is not merely a

[60] Corrington, *The Community of Interpreters*, p. 87.
[61] *Ibid.*, p. 93.

subjective projection but somehow stands between person and world as a third actuality, keeping each open to the other."[62] More importantly, for Corrington, is that horizons are where our meanings reside. Thus horizons are "constituted by signs and interpretations that represent the truths of the community."[63]

Since horizons are the access structures to nature for the interpretive community, the community must realize that all horizons are not obtainable at once. We shall never stand before the outermost reaches of nature: "Horizonal hermeneutics has as its object the innumerable signs and interpretations that emerge from communication and the creation of shared meanings."[64] Communities of interpretation and inquiry must locate themselves within the innumerable orders of nature and identify those orders that are directly beyond their communal horizons. Horizonal hermeneutics, Corrington writes, "drives toward the encompassing perspective in which all signs are located vis-à-vis each other and in terms of the human communities that sustain and articulate them."[65]

In order for this encompassing perspective to continually lure the communities of interpretation and inquiry there must be certain normative dimensions to communal life. The two main structural aspects of the community of interpreters are personal openness and communal democracy. These two aspects are intertwined and rely heavily upon each other for their fulfillment.

Communal democracy begins when each member is recognized to be of equal importance and value to the whole of the group. Interpreters must be free, in the democratic sense, to offer their interpretations. Corrington writes, "A hermeneutical community…can emerge only when interpreters have the necessary freedom to give novel and enriched meanings to the common body

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[62] *Ibid.*, p. 64.
[63] *Ibid.*
[64] Corrington, *Nature and Spirit*, p. 1.
[65] Corrington, *The Community of Interpreters*, p. 47.

of signs."[66] This does not mean that, in the end, every interpretation that is generated by an individual will be secured. The community must remain guided by the critical common sense that eventually validates interpretations and celebrates their relevance. Nevertheless, the community must remain open to all interpreters and interpretations and must work hard to ensure their relevance. In order for this to occur each individual is obligated to suspend prior ideologies and belief systems. Democracy is not an ideology and is not fixed. Rather, it moves and adapts to changes in meaning. Nor is any sign-interpretation "better" or "worse" than any other in itself, but it is only more or less relevant to that sign which is under interpretation. The sacrifice of ideology will fulfill the communal demand for personal openness.

When inter-subjective dialogue is underway within an interpretive or inquiring community, signs are given to each member. Signs are open-ended rather than finite and it is important that they remain so. Corrington writes, "The wealth of a community is best measured by its ability to sustain semiotic expansion."[67] This means that we must expand our horizons rather than contracting them. This is not for the sake of horizonal expansion but rather it is a defense mechanism against the powerful constraints of finitude. It is here that members must shed their ideologies which, by definition, sustain defined signs. As an example, communists perform no further interpretations of history for they see it as the actual representation of class struggle. "Furthermore, political and social distortions blunt the drive toward semiotic transparency and reduce the hermeneutic process to the mere validation of prior ideological structures."[68]

The Cultivation of Self in Community

Beyond the structural dimensions of the community of interpreters exists those dimensions of human existence that the success of communal interpretation and inquiry depend upon. Any and

[66] *Ibid.*, p. 57.
[67] *Ibid.*, p. 57.
[68] *Ibid.*, p. 47.

every community is constituted by a collection of two or more minds that have in common a sign or sign-system. As an example, the community of attorneys in the United States has as its common body of signs the Constitution or local penal code. Two or more people converging upon common semiotic elements are the minimum condition for community.

There are, of course, the structural demands of "personal openness" and "communal democracy" that are necessary for a community to become a genuine one of interpretation and inquiry. Yet, there are certain traits that minds must possess for communal interpretation and inquiry to be underway. Corrington indicates three traits which minds must have in order for them to become genuine interpreters. These are self-reflection, temporality, and inter-subjectivity. For our purposes here, self-reflection is most important because it is out of continual self-reflection that the interpreter or inquirer can reach a greater degree of self-identity and self-understanding. This is not to say that the traits of inter-subjectivity and temporality are unimportant. These two traits are integral in self-reflection and some discussion on them is very relevant here.

Corrington writes, "To interpret is to gauge the meaning of a sign across time and space."[69] Interpretation is inherently temporal in that sign articulation can only come about by a study of its antecedent and consequent meanings. No sign can become completely articulated and transparent because they must be infinitely re-interpreted throughout time. Consequent meanings soon become antecedent meanings whenever they become interpreted. The fact that a "sign interpreted is a sign changed" reveals the temporal trait of the interpretive mind. "The ultimate tendency of a given sign series can be determined only by a community of inquiry. The series must be ramified and studied through time. Reality—that which is determined by sign series—can be discovered by a community as it works across large stretched of time."[70] The point here is not that reality will be reached but

[69] *Ibid.*, p. 52.
[70] *Ibid.*, p. 13.

that it stands before the community in the distant and ideal future. Knowledge of reality is what is communally hoped for and it continually lures and goads the community toward sign illumination.

Interpretation entails communication as much as it does temporality. Inter-subjective communication occurs when there is a reciprocal relationship between subjects who "work hard to ensure that meanings conveyed correspond to meanings had."[71] When communication is inter-subjective the process of sign interpretation becomes consciously explored. Dialogue, just one media used in the communal transmission of signs, is taken seriously. Within CI we see inter-subjective communication secured when members ask each other for clarification of meanings and clarity of expression. According to Corrington, inter-subjective communication enriches the scope and semiotic reach of the interpretive and inquiring communities.

Self-reflection is intra-subjective insofar as the self is both interpreter and that which is interpreted. Self reflection is, more or less, internal interpretation insofar as the signs of the self do not refer to any objects outside of the self. The self is "constituted by innumerable signs series that serve to generate some form of self-identity through time."[72] Thus the self is a sign series and self-reflection makes the self become conscious of the self as a sign series. In this sense, the self emerges before the self and each sign that is available to the self awaits interpretation and articulation in order for self-identity and self-understanding to occur. However, a complete interpretation of the self is never possible. Corrington writes, "The sign series that forms my 'self' thus has no natural terminus other than death, a feature common to all sign series…No object can ever fully be interpreted in that the signs depicting it must be subject to reinterpretation."[73]

Within the interpretive and inquiring communities, products of the self—i.e. ideas, interpretations, opinions, gestures, etc.—become open for communal interpretation. Each time that

[71] Corrington, *Nature and Spirit*, p. 101.
[72] Corrington, *The Community of Interpreters*, p. 51.
[73] *Ibid.*, p. 12.

a member transmits a sign to the community, a semiotic transaction occurs between subjects. For example, when the CI analyzes the concept of 'freedom', I, as a member, will render a product that is received and interpreted by other members. At this point, a recipient of my prior sign will send a subsequent sign to me that I interpret. As a result of this semiotic transaction, I reinterpret my own product through self-reflection. In other words, I turn over in my head the antecedent thoughts that I had on the subject of 'freedom'.

In this sense, self-reflection is intrinsically communal. Within the community members constantly perform self-reflection and, in turn, become aware of the signs that constitute the self. Self-reflection can only go so far when the self remains outside of the community. Therefore, self-identity and self-understanding are cultivated by participation within communities of interpretation and inquiry.

We must take for granted that the self, and reality for that matter, can never become fully articulated. However, when philosophy and hermeneutics become the practice of a community understanding of the self and reality may gain greater transparency. The individual philosopher-interpreter is limited outside the community. Inter-subjective communication guarantees the expansion of the scope of the self and the subject-matter under inquiry.