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On Rorty's Literary Culture, Democratic Ethos and Political Education

Stefano Oliverio

To Bruno Coppola, *in memoriam*

1. Engaging with Rorty via Pedagogy?

- 1 In the *incipit* of a paper of 1944 focusing on the “Challenge to Liberal Thought,” Dewey rehearsed one of the principles to which he had most faithfully clung all his life: there is no better way to assess what is living in a philosophical controversy than to investigate what the educational implications of different philosophical positions are, viz. what educational aims and ideals the latter further and what educational undertakings they promote (LW 15: 261).¹
- 2 In the present paper, by taking inspiration from this Deweyan tenet, I will explore a relatively simple question: in order to sustain and further the democratic *ethos* should we shift from a philosophical to a literary culture, as Rorty has repeatedly recommended? To specify the question in keeping with the aforementioned principle: should education pivoting on the reading of novels (and, more generally, of narratives) replace – *as the chief axis of democratic education* – education for inquiry and, more distinctively, philosophical inquiry?²
- 3 Some assumptions are involved in the latter formulation that need to be made explicit in order to better outline the argumentative trajectory that will be here unfolded. First, it is patent that the present reflection will tend to “verify” – in a bland and loose acceptance of the word – the significance of Rorty’s position by investigating its educational and pedagogical consequences. Whilst typically Deweyan, it is up for discussion whether this way of proceeding is genuinely Rortyan. Indeed, on the one hand, the latter’s contributions to educational reflection *stricto sensu* understood were fairly meager, sporadic, if not reluctant, in comparison not only with Dewey but also with Sidney Hook, just to mention his philosophical hero and his most direct usherer

into pragmatism. Moreover, by analogy with one of his most recognizable stances,³ Rorty (1990) resonantly warned against the dangers of “over-philosophication” when educational matters are addressed.⁴

- 4 On the other hand, though, the question of education peeps out in relevant points of his production and specifically in the constructive parts – as one may even venture to say – when, after showing the reasons for abandoning some vocabularies, or after endeavoring to make them appear unattractive, he delineates his ‘positive’ views: I am thinking, only to mention a couple of instances, of the notion of “edification,” which has a clear educational lineage, to the extent that it is proposed in order to avoid that which is the most educationally loaded concept of modernity, viz. *Bildung* (PMN: 360 ff); and, moreover, the centrality of his views about “sentimental education” (CIS: *passim*; TP: 172; 176 ff; 199 ff; Rorty 2000: 17 ff). It can be plausibly argued that the very idea of “cultural politics,” the culmination of Rorty’s life-long project, is a recontextualization of Dewey’s idea of philosophy as a general theory of education (MW 7: 303; MW 9: 338) and of the latter’s purpose to “drop teaching philosophy directly, and teach it via *pedagogy*” (letter to his wife on November 1st, 1894, quoted in Westbrook 1991: 95).
- 5 On account of this ambivalent attitude to education, suspended between the lack of a focused thematization and the recurrence of the topic in his works, the endeavor here pursued to engage with a key theme of Rorty’s thought via pedagogy may be not completely at variance with a deep thrust of his reflection and, indeed, it may grant some specific vantage points from where to view his project as a whole. It is appropriate to specify once again the purpose of the present paper: I am not interested in outlining a Rortyan pedagogy or theory of education,⁵ but rather I aim at exploring the significance of his invitation to shift from a philosophical to a literary culture from an educational-pedagogical perspective, viz. through investigating what this shift would imply in terms of the educational undertakings and ideals and, thereby, detecting the implications of this move for the flourishing of a *democratic ethos*. In other words, to adopt a slippery distinction, education is less the *content* of the argument than the *lens* through which to look at the issue here investigated.
- 6 In the aforementioned formulation of the main question of this paper, there is a second assumption: I have spoken of the substitution of education with novels for education through philosophical inquiry, thus setting up a distinction that, while making sense within a Rortyan framework, may be misaligned with Dewey’s conceptual device. If the first assumption risks overdosing on the Deweyan element (with the “methodological” choice of tackling a philosophical issue via educational theory), here the reverse may be the case with the focus on a distinction – philosophy vs literature – that is certainly not in the spotlight of Dewey’s interests. Indeed, the latter, in his paper from which I have taken my cue, establishes a different opposition when countering Robert Hutchins’s (1936/2009) pedagogical project, pivoting on the Great Books as the pillar of a liberal education adequate for the cultivation of intelligence in a democratic society. He appeals to the need to turn to scientific inquiry as the chief axis of education on account of “the intrinsic kinship of democracy with the methods of directing change that have revolutionized science” (LW 15: 274). In this horizon, in order to further liberal thought, Dewey does not invoke a transition from a philosophical to a literary culture but, primarily, a shift from a dogmatically philosophical⁶ to a scientific culture and, relatedly, from a language-obsessed, dialectical (MW 1: 157 ff; LW 11: 50-1) and

bookish education (whether philosophical or literary) to an inquiry-driven pedagogy based on occupations.

- 7 Against this backdrop, my main question as to whether education pivoting on the reading of novels and, more generally, of narrative texts should replace – as the chief axis of democratic education – education for philosophical inquiry risks being partially un-Deweyan, as the latter seems not to foreground philosophical but scientific inquiry in education. Accordingly, rather than shuttling between only two poles (Dewey and Rorty), the present reflection needs to involve a third voice, that of Matthew Lipman, who together with Ann Margaret Sharp launched in the 1970s the *Philosophy for Children* (henceforth P4C according to the international acronym) approach, an educational program that, while rooted in the Deweyan tradition, puts at the very center philosophical inquiry.
- 8 By harping on a motif of Harold Bloom, the Brazilian philosopher of education Heraldo Aparecido Silva (2010) has nicely intimated that we may construe Rorty and Lipman as two “poets” who undertake an *agon* with their strong predecessor (Dewey) and end up representing two different *clinamen* (in Bloom’s phrase) in relation with the latter’s vocabulary. By appropriating in an idiosyncratic way Silva’s suggestion, I will make Rorty the representative of education for/through literary culture and Lipman the exponent of education for/through philosophical inquiry and by dint of their comparison I will investigate – on the educational terrain – what the shift from philosophy to literature means and what it implies for democratic education.
- 9 It is to note that there is one more reason why this comparison and this dialogue of three voices may not be extrinsic:⁷ when insisting on the priority of philosophical inquiry for democratic education, Lipman explicitly contrasts the “‘core of common culture’ approach” construed as “the adaptation to the elementary school of the Hutchins-Adler view[s]” (Lipman 1988: 39), that is, the views countered by Dewey in the aforementioned paper. A complex constellation of motifs and biographical trajectories may be limned starting from this simple statement: on the one hand, the Hutchins-Adler approach is something with which Rorty was deeply conversant, as he attended the “Hutchins College” (see PSH: 7-8; Rorty 2010: 5)⁸ and, while coming to nurture the same misgivings as Dewey regarding the passion for the absolutes which animated that educational program, he always remained “very grateful for the education” received in that institution. And, although Rorty spells out this gratitude essentially in terms of an acknowledgement of “the best possible preparation for what turned out to be [his] professional career” (Rorty 2010: 5), that approach seems to have left a permanent mark on his (educational) views, if we think that, in his only specifically educational paper (PSH: 114-26)⁹, he recommends Hirsch’s (1987; 1996) “cultural literacy” for the primary and secondary school, which is precisely the educational approach that Lipman indicates as an adaptation of the Hutchins-Adler stance to the first levels of education (see below § 3).
- 10 While I find unfortunate Rorty’s uncritical endorsement of Hirsch’s cultural literacy (see Oliverio 2018; 2019), Rorty’s appropriation of Hirsch has some good points and Lipman (and, with him, the Deweyan pedagogy) may be a little too dismissive towards the cultural literacy approach – accordingly, Rorty’s attitude may represent a helpful counterbalancing attitude from within the pragmatist camp.
- 11 In this horizon, I would like to suggest that, rather than a neat alternative (either literary culture or philosophical inquiry; either Rorty/Hirsch or Lipman and Sharp) in

reference to how to sustain the democratic ethos, we have to do with a more “entangled” regime of relationships, in which a “Rortyan” moment is at work in the very idea of philosophical inquiry as Lipman and Sharp develop it and a “Lipmanian” moment is not alien to Rorty’s stress upon novels. The former qualification (about the “Rortyan” moment in Lipman) can be more easily claimed, the latter will require, instead, a kind of recontextualization and perhaps even the description of a hypothetical Rorty and of “what [he] might have said, and in my view should have said” (TP: 292) but was unable to say with sufficient decision on account of his ““God that failed syndrome”” towards the philosophical tradition, as Richard Bernstein (2010: 214; see also Bernstein 1991: 251) has enthrallingly named it.¹⁰

- 12 Against the backdrop sketched in broad strokes thus far, I will address, first, Rorty’s understanding of a need for an end (instead of a “Deweyan” recovery) of philosophy starting from his dialogue with Castoriadis and by reconstructing his appeal to a poeticized culture (§ 2); in § 3, I will present Lipman’s case for education for philosophical inquiry in order to cultivate a democratic *ethos* in primary and secondary schools. I will contrast it with Rorty’s education as socialization and, contextually, I will illustrate their different stances towards Hirsch’s cultural literacy. Finally, in § 4, after problematizing one dimension of Rorty’s understanding of the use of literature for a democratic culture, I will indicate the need to combine the Rortyan and Lipmanian thrusts and I will claim that part of the novel-driven education advocated by (my hypothetical) Rorty maintains a constitutive Socratic-inquiring dimension.
- 13 When coming to the educational terrain as the “testing” ground, in a Deweyan spirit, we may thus discover that what Rorty, according to “the either/or’s that structure his thinking,” loves to present in “fateful [...] dichotomies” (Bernstein 1991: 242) is better understood as an original prosecution of Dewey’s project of a recovery of philosophy as the vehicle to deal with the problems of wo/men and, thereby, “enlarge human freedom” (CP: 69; see Voparil 2013).

2. The End(s) of Philosophical Inquiry and the Democratic Project

- 14 Richard Bernstein has forcefully epitomized the trajectory of Rorty’s engagement with the fate of philosophy as well as the differences between himself and his lifelong friend, despite their common recognition of Dewey as their philosophical hero:
- From the early days of his disillusionment with “Platonism,” he was haunted by the question, What is philosophy good for? [...] I never experienced the type of disillusionment that Rorty experienced. [...] The task, as Dewey had indicated, was to reconstruct philosophy. I did not see Plato as the “Platonist” that Rorty caricatures, but rather as the great defender of the ongoing, unending dialogue that Rorty came to advocate. (Bernstein 2010: 213-4)
- 15 Rorty’s invitation to take leave of philosophy was spelled out in different ways over the years, not without some changes of accent (Wain 2001). In this paper, I will tackle this theme through his response to a vigorous vindication of the significance of philosophy penned by Cornelius Castoriadis. The Greek-French philosopher and psychoanalyst insisted on the fact that “[p]hilosophy is a central element of the Greek-Western project of individual and social autonomy; the end of philosophy would mean no more and no less than the end of freedom” (Castoriadis 1989: 3).

16 Philosophy and democracy share, in Castoriadis's view, the same self-reflective tension, that is, they are both constantly engaged in inquiring into the very reasons for their positions and results. Castoriadis takes to task Heidegger's view of philosophy insofar as, for all the latter's fervor for Greek thought, he fails to capture the real gist of it. Indeed, Heidegger seems to ignore "systematically the fact that philosophy was born in and through the *polis* and is a part of the same movement which brought about the first democracies [...]" (Castoriadis 1989: 4). It may be not completely accurate to state that Heidegger ignored the *polis*; the real problem is rather that, when recognizing that it was the very center of Greek life, he interpreted it in the light of his thought about *aletheia* by completely uncoupling it from the democratic project: "The *πολις* is the abode, gathered into itself, of the unconcealedness of beings" (Heidegger 1982: 133). I would suggest that Castoriadis's main move consists in substituting *the vocabulary of disclosing* (overarching the themes of philosophy and democracy) for *the Heideggerian vocabulary of un-concealment* (encompassing the themes of *aletheia* and *polis*):

Democracy is the project of breaking the closure at the collective level. Philosophy, creating self-reflective subjectivity, is the project of breaking the closure at the level of thought. But of course, any breaking of the closure, unless it remains a gaping "?" which does not break anything at all, posits something, reaches some results, and, thereby, risks erecting again a closure [...] Thus, the birth of philosophy is not just coincident, but equi-significant with the birth of democracy. Both are expressions, and central embodiments, of the project of autonomy. (Castoriadis 1989: 11)

17 A last element of Castoriadis's argument is worth mentioning in this context: for him the most vital era of Greek philosophy and the adventure of the Athenian democracy terminate almost synchronically, the former with "the death sentence against Socrates" (Castoriadis 1989: 13), the latter with "the defeat of the Athenians in the Peloponnesian war" (Castoriadis 1989: 12). In this understanding, in an admittedly paradoxical way, the greatest of all philosophers, Plato, does not belong to the very flourishing of the democratic-philosophic ethos *qua* the ethos of autonomy and self-reflective dis-closure. Plato caused a "torsion" to this ethos that would overshadow "the Western emancipatory movement" (Castoriadis 1989: 13) and, in reference to the Bernstein remark from which I have taken my cue in this section, it is possible to say that it is precisely the focus on this torsion, viz. on "Platonism," – by sidelining, instead, the intimate Socratic bond of philosophy and democracy as twin participants in the project of autonomy – that leads Rorty to his tendential ban on philosophy as a resource for democracy.

18 In commenting upon Castoriadis's paper, Rorty marshals different but converging strategies, only some of which will be relevant for the present argumentation. First of all, he specifies that the end of philosophy would be calamitous for the very Greek-Western project of individual and social autonomy *only to the extent* that we construe "philosophy" as "the use of imagination" or even "culture" in the Castoriadisian acceptance of the word:

In this sense, it is of course true that the end of philosophy would mean the end of the conscious refashioning of what Castoriadis calls "imaginary significations." [...] To cease revising these significations would indeed be the end of freedom. For what Dewey called "the crust of convention" would then become unbreakable. (Rorty 1989b: 24)

19 Enthralled by the Emersonian dictum that "[t]here is no outside, no enclosing wall, no circumference to us. [...] Men walk as prophecies of the next age" (quoted in PCP: 109),

Rorty would redescribe what I have called the movement of dis-closure in terms of the work of imagination, of which philosophy may have been a stage, however one that has been so contaminated by the debris of a long history that it is better to shift to other cultural forms. In this horizon, while he could be ready to accept Dewey's intimation of the significance of philosophy as "an intellectualized wish," the "effort at action" and the "prophecy of the future" (MW 11: 43), he would object that it might be only a belated and possibly trite habit to refer to it as "philosophy" instead of frankly endorsing a literary culture.

- 20 Indeed, Rorty insists that there are at least two meanings of philosophy that make its end possible – without undermining the democratic, autonomy-driven project – and even welcome: first, philosophy as the Kantian undertaking to reconcile "the facts of science with our moral intuitions and our social hopes" (Rorty 1989b: 25) and, secondly, philosophy as what Heidegger calls metaphysics (Rorty 1989b: 28-9). In this context and in reference to the main line of argument of the present paper – viz. philosophical and/or literary culture for the cultivation of the democratic ethos? – I will dwell only upon the former. By rehearsing a typical motif of his production, Rorty hopes for a culture that substitutes narrative for theory, thus operating in the wake of what he takes to be the Hegelian "turn from theorizing to story-telling" (Rorty 1989b: 26). Accomplishing this turn, however, and thus deploying genuinely post-philosophical narratives, requires the thorough abandonment of "the idea that human beings have a nature – one which has been repressed by the practices and institutions of the past" (Rorty 1989b: 26).
- 21 In Rorty's view, this further move entails taking "the novel rather than the treatise as the genre in which the European intellects comes to fruition" (Rorty 1989b: 27) and embracing Milan Kundera's view about the wisdom of the novel (Rorty 1989b: 27; see also EHO: 66-82). In this perspective, Plato can still represent a dialogue partner not because he is "the greatest of philosophers" – albeit appearing paradoxically after the full thriving of the philosophic-democratic ethos had come to fruition – as Castoriadis puts it, but rather because he is the author of an extraordinary narrative pivoting on a fascinating character named Socrates. In Rorty's late production, this attack on the philosophical undertaking is spelled out in terms of the description of philosophy as a *transitional genre*. Indeed, Rorty sets out the thesis that:
- [...] the intellectuals of the West have, since the Renaissance, progressed through three stages: they have hoped for redemption first from God, then from philosophy and now from literature. [...] From within a literary culture, religion and philosophy appear as literary genres. [...] The difference between the literary intellectuals' readings of *all* these books and other readings of them is that the inhabitants of a literary culture treat books as human attempts to meet human needs [...]. (PCP: 91)
- 22 The evolution from religion *through* philosophy to literature and a literary culture is construed as the transition from a culture finding:
- redemption [...] in a non-cognitive relation to a non-human person [through] a cognitive relation to propositions [to] non-cognitive relations to other human beings, relations mediated by human artifacts such as books and buildings, paintings and songs. This sort of culture drops a presupposition common to religion and philosophy – that redemption must come from one's relation to something that is not just one more human creation. (PCP: 93)
- 23 This kind of literary culture redescribes Socrates's motto in *Apology* by stating that "a life that is not lived close to the present limits of human imagination is not worth

living. For the Socratic idea of self-examination and self-knowledge, the literary intellectual substitutes the idea of enlarging the self by becoming acquainted with still more ways of being human” (PCP: 94).

- 24 It is in this sense that we should take Rorty’s invitation to accept the Castoriadisian vindication of the self-reflective mission of philosophy as an endeavor towards autonomy *only to the extent that we understand* “philosophy” as “the use of imagination” and, therefore, the constant movement of breaking the Deweyan “crust of convention.” But does not something crucial in the Castoriadis narrative get lost in this redescription, moreover something that may ally Castoriadis with a Deweyan understanding of philosophy?¹¹ Rorty seems to be deaf to the possible permanent value of philosophical inquiry – in the “Socratic” sense – and this not only on account of his focus on the narrow meaning of philosophy as the Kantian undertaking but also when the very rise of Greek-Western philosophy is put in the spotlight. Indeed, instead of seeing – with Castoriadis and, arguably, Dewey and Bernstein – this rise as contextual and co-implicated with the rise of the Athenian democracy, he refers to:

Parmenides [who] jump-started the Western philosophical tradition by dreaming up the notion of Reality with a capital R. He took the trees, the stars, the human beings, and the gods and rolled them all together into a well-rounded blob called “Being” or “the One.” He then stood back from this blob and proclaimed it the only thing worth knowing about, but forever unknowable by mortals. (PCP: 105)

- 25 One could agree on the fact that this Parmenidean thrust could have contributed to hi-jack philosophy *qua* the driving force of the project of autonomy towards Platonism – in the derogatory meaning that Rorty gives to this name – and that, accordingly, Romanticism (in an acceptance which is shared by Rorty and Isaiah Berlin (1990; 1996)) may work as a welcome corrective (PCP: 105 ff; see also Schulenberg 2015, esp. chs. 2, 8 and 11). A pragmatism as romanticism without any passion for profundity (PCP: 80 ff) is a promising alternative, but should we exclude the possibility of a “Socratic” pragmatism?
- 26 In the following section, I will endeavor to show what this Socratic pragmatism might look like, by moving to the educational terrain and referring to Matthew Lipman and Ann Sharp’s P4C approach, which combines an attentiveness to the better argument without ceding to “the jigsaw-puzzle view of inquiry” (PCP: 83). And, moreover, I will indicate in what sense Lipman and Sharp recommend this kind of philosophical culture for the cultivation of a democratic ethos.

3. Philosophical Inquiry, Cultural Literacy and Education as Socialization

- 27 The Socratic ideal of self-knowledge, which Rorty wants to replace with the enlarging of the self through literary imagination, emerged as an articulation of some practices typical of Athenian democracy. By elaborating (also) on the Castoriadis essay (cf. Euben 1997: 104-5), to which Rorty responded, Peter Euben has drawn our attention to “the degree to which Athenians institutionalized self-reflection and self-critique” (Euben 1997: 92) and has emphasized that the Socratic self-examination is an extension and radicalization of the “democratic tradition of self-scrutiny” (Euben 1997: 48).
- 28 It is important to highlight that this train of reflection has a clear educational trajectory and it contributes to making the argument for “the Socratic challenge that

ordinary men can rule themselves wisely, and that it is possible and perhaps necessary to have ‘*philosophical*’ citizens” (Euben 1997: 93; italics added). In this horizon, Euben establishes a helpful distinction between the *political education* of a citizenry and a *politicized education*. I will quote an illustrative passage in some length:

A politicized education regards the “objects” of instruction as passive receptacles of knowledge which molds them according to some blueprint of the good society. Here what can be taught, who can teach it, and where it can be taught is tightly regulated, and education is close to what we mean by training, socialization, or “indoctrination” in the original unapologetic meaning of the term. Of course every culture, including a democratic one, educates its young to embody certain ideals of action and character and much of that education is a matter of habit and imitation, of social, psychological, and cultural processes that constitute us as the kinds of people we become. *But a politicized education [...] treats the new as if it already existed [...] A political as distinct from a politicized education would be deeply respectful of those traditions which empowered democratic citizens but skeptical of those which claimed the exclusive privilege of doing so. It would encourage student citizens to challenge those with power while reminding them of the critical traditions within the dominant culture that makes such critique possible and intelligible.* (Euben 1997: 50; italics added)

- 29 As we will see later in this paper, a ‘mild’ version of the so understood “politicized education” may be represented by Rorty’s views about sentimental education (and, via Hirsch, about civic education in the first levels of schooling) and even – in a more radicalized form – by some ideas of O’Brien in Orwell’s 1984, the alarming closeness to which Bernstein imputes to Rorty as an upshot of his stance on socialization.
- 30 The project of the political education of democratic citizenry, instead, is linked – in a Castoriadisian mode – with Socrates’ “philosophical culture.” When developing his argument for a Socratic political education, Euben asks the rhetorical question “why Socrates for us now rather than, say Jefferson or Dewey” (Euben 1997: 53). To put it a bit humorously, Lipman and Sharp’s P4C aspires to having it both ways (Socrates and Dewey) through their educational program. Socrates presides over P4C as the model of *doing philosophy* as opposed to *applying philosophy*: “The paradigm of doing philosophy is the towering, solitary figure of Socrates, for whom philosophy was neither an acquisition nor a profession but a way of life. What Socrates models for us is not philosophy known or philosophy applied but philosophy *practiced*. He challenges us to acknowledge that philosophy as deed, as form of life, is something that any of us can emulate” (Lipman 1988: 12). More specifically, Socrates gives us a model of dialogical inquiry, that is, of how *philosophy as doing* should be performed; this model is dovetailed, by Lipman and Sharp, with the stance of activist-Deweyan pedagogy that invokes the priority of students’ interests (Lipman, Sharp & Oscanyan 1980: xv).
- 31 At the same time, they explicitly engage also with the democratic-educational side of this project. Indeed, from the very beginning P4C has laid a strong emphasis on moral and civic education through philosophical inquiry. As Lipman and Sharp put it:
- Acquainting children with the conduct that society expects of them is only part, although a very important part, of a responsible moral education. It is also necessary that children be equipped to think for themselves, so that they can creatively renew the society in which they live when the situation demands it, as well as for the sake of their own creative growth. (Lipman, Sharp & Oscanyan 1980: 158)
- 32 In this way, differently from Rorty who, in a fairly Hirschian manner (see below in this section), seems to confine children’s education to mere socialization and to postpone until post-secondary (or, in any event, no earlier than in the last classes of secondary)

education a more critical and creative engagement with the culture of one's group, Lipman and Sharp want to involve children in the conversation of society not only in a socializing but also in an "individualizing-critical" mode and they deem philosophical inquiry to be a privileged vehicle to achieve this aim. Their attempt, therefore, is to devise a pedagogical strategy and to invent adequate materials (a curriculum composed of philosophical novels and manuals) to pursue in the classroom the same endeavor that Socrates performed on the Athenian agora, viz. the education of "philosophical citizens."

- 33 They vigorously insist on the fact that "moral education cannot be divorced from philosophical education" (Lipman, Sharp & Oscanyan 1980: 172). Here I will dwell, in particular, on what Lipman (1988) calls "education for civic values." Pivotal in the latter endeavor is the stress upon the centrality of the concept of valuation. For Lipman:

[s]tudents engaged in a value inquiry will discuss and study many things, such as the nature and use of criteria, the relationship of means to ends and of ends to further ends, the role of the analogical reasoning in consideration of values, and the influence of context on moral reflection. *A most important area of study would be valuation itself - that is, the ways in which people in different walks of life do in fact decide value matters [...].* (Lipman 1988: 65; italics added)

- 34 The significance of valuation is wide-ranging but, in particular, it touches upon the question of democratic participation:

[W]ith the acquisition of the mechanisms and methodology of valuation, students will find themselves capable of appraising the institutions of their society in terms of the manner in which these institutions actually implement and make possible the realization of the ideals of the society. Each ideal then becomes a criterion of evaluation rather than a symbol to be invoked rhetorically and subsequently ignored. In this sense good citizens are reflective citizens, vigorously insistent that ideals not merely be professed but that they be operationalized and implemented. [...] [S]chools must prepare students for citizenship by affording them every possible exposure to and participation in the sorts of rational procedures that characterize adult society [...] Rational institutions are our best assurance that individual citizens will be reasonable. (Lipman 1988: 60)

- 35 There are three axes in the educational undertaking directed to the formation of habits of valuation: the cultivation of reasoning skills about value issues, the development of character and "the craftsmanship that enables the individual to integrate habits and reasonings, character and reflection in such a way as to lead to sound value judgments as well as to commendable actions" (Lipman 1988: 71). Even if Lipman recognizes that this undertaking should be implemented across the curriculum, education for complex thinking (Lipman 2003) through philosophical inquiry plays an absolutely special role:

When it comes to ethical reasoning, philosophy is an indispensable method, the subdiscipline of logic is an indispensable apparatus, and within logic there are countless tools [...] that one learns very early to make use of. After all, ethical reasoning need not be thought of as a mere toying with bloodless abstractions, for what is called moral conduct is the practice of such reasoning. (Lipman 1988: 76)

- 36 I would intimate reading this approach in the light of Euben's ideas on political education introduced earlier and, therefore, in a "Socratic" key, operationalized through a pragmatist pedagogy hinging on a specific educational setting, the community of philosophical inquiry (Oliverio 2017). Lipman is adamant in opposing this stance to Hirsch's "cultural literacy," which, in Lipman's eyes, insists on the very

fact that “the educated individual is familiar with the essential findings in the major disciplines” (Lipman 1988: 39).

- 37 I cannot expatiate here on a detailed examination of Hirsch’s tenets, pivoting on the essential role played by background knowledge (knowledge of contents, of facts) in order to be competent readers and literate people:

Cultural literacy lies *above* the everyday levels of knowledge that everyone possesses and *below* the expert level known only to specialists. It is the middle ground of cultural knowledge possessed by the “common reader.” It includes information that we have traditionally expected our children to receive in school, but which they no longer do. (Hirsch 1987: 19)

- 38 His approach is clearly understood as a counter-attack against educational proposals furthering the cultivation of skills (whether reading skills or thinking skills etc.) and against the Romantic pedagogies that have taken leave of “the [...] conception of education [...] [which] assumed that a child is a still-to-be-formed creature whose instinctual impulses need less to be encouraged than to be molded to the ways of the society in which it is growing up” (Hirsch 1996: 72). Progressive education (but not necessarily Dewey [cf. LW 13: 1-62]) performs, in a sense, a synthesis of these two tendencies and thus represents the very target of Hirsch’s polemics.

- 39 The cultural literacy approach has had since its inception a strong political component, for instance denouncing the shift to multicultural education:

But however laudable it is, it should not be the primary focus of national education. It should not be allowed to supplant or interfere with our schools’ responsibility to ensure our children’s mastery of American literate culture. The acculturative responsibility of the schools is primary and fundamental. To teach the ways of one’s own community has always been and still remains the essence of the education of our children, who enter neither a narrow tribal culture nor a transcendent world culture but a national literate culture. (Hirsch 1987: 18)

- 40 This thrust has resulted in an appeal to the Jeffersonian and Lincolnian idea “that the center of children’s upbringing and schooling in the United States should be instruction in a *religious* devotion to democracy” (Hirsch 2009: 67). This educational stance gets embodied in “the general principle of the core curriculum” according to which “we deal with different nationalities as we deal with different religions: we leave them alone but expect them to accommodate themselves to the public sphere. Schools are the institution that will enable everybody to make that accommodation” (Hirsch 2009: 80). By mobilizing the distinction between the public and the private sphere – in reference also to “my friend and colleague Richard Rorty” (Hirsch 2009: 74) – Hirsch specifies the logic of his view of the civic core:

The concentric circles beyond the systems of communication that we all share, and the core American creed that protects our bodies and our beliefs, our purses and our legs – the circle beyond that core – can be as rich and fulfilling as we are able to make them. Those who press us to create a more substantial American identity need to keep in mind why our core structure was invented in the first place. It was not to build a hearth and a home but to allow us the freedom to build them as we wish, by providing protection from oppression and persecution and bloody wars between rival traditions, tribalisms, and systems of belief. (Hirsch 2009: 83)

- 41 The cultural literacy view sounds fairly remote from Dewey’s invocation of a new civic education on account of the new challenges in modern democratic society and from his understanding of school as social center (MW 2: 80 ff). And Hirsch himself finally came to endorse Hofstadter’s (1963: ch. 14) critique of Dewey’s educational theories, after

preferring in his first works to cross swords with the latter's heirs in progressive education (cf. Hirsch 2009: 227-8, 41n). In contrast, when sponsoring cultural literacy, Rorty joins together his two educational heroes and speaks bluntly of "*Hirsch's Deweyan hopes* for a better educated democratic electorate" (PSH: 117; italics added), rather than splitting hairs in pinpointing their differences in a scholarly manner. Indeed, for Rorty "Hirsch is largely right about the high schools" as the initial task of education is "the shaping of an animal into a human being by a process of socialization" and in this respect "Hirsch is dead right in saying that we Americans no longer give our children a secondary education that enables them to function as citizens of a democracy" (PSH: 117-8). In this advocacy of cultural literacy Rorty does not see any transgression of his Deweyan allegiances:

I take myself, in holding these opinions, to be a fairly faithful follower of John Dewey. Dewey's great contribution to the theory of education was to help us get rid of the idea that education is a matter of either inducing or educating truth. Primary and secondary education will always be a matter of familiarizing the young with what their elders take to be true, whether it is true or not. It is not, and never will be, the function of lower-level education to challenge the prevailing consensus about what is true. (PSH: 118)

- 42 Whether or not this alignment of Hirsch with the Deweyan legacy can be performed so smoothly, one thing is certain: the kind of recontextualization of Dewey's ideas thereby operated by Rorty is clearly different from that of Lipman. Indeed, by inventing the child as a *philosophical* inquirer – a figure arguably ignored by Dewey (cf. Oliverio 2012; 2020) – Lipman endorses a view of childhood and its epistemic agency that seems alien to Rorty and Hirsch. For all his kindness to babies (PMN: 192; cf. also Saarinen 2013), Rorty tends to lump together babies, animals and brutes in that they are all non-users of language: "To attribute beliefs and desires to non-users of language (such as dogs, *infants* and thermostats) is, for us pragmatists, to speak metaphorically" (PSH: xxiv; italics added). His adherence to the linguistic turn (Del Castillo 2015) leads him to object to Dewey's insistence on "cognitive development as continuous with animal and *infantile* feeling" (TP: 300, 30n; italics added) and to totally abandon that very notion of experience on which the whole educational project of Dewey hinges:

Dewey should have dropped the term "experience," not redefined it. He should have looked elsewhere for continuity between us and the brutes. He should have agreed with Peirce that a great gulf divides sensation and cognition, decided that cognition was possible only for language users, and then said that the only relevant break in continuity was between non-language users (amoebas, squirrels and *babies*) and language users. (TP: 297; italics added)

- 43 In this stance, it is almost inevitable that the very first steps of any educational undertaking should consist, for Rorty, not in any forms of cultivation of the inquiring attitudes of children but rather in the aforementioned "shaping of an animal into a human being" by virtue of the "gathering of raw material" (Rorty & Ghiraldelli Jr. 2008: 189) and the "piling up" of a lot of information (viz. the Hirschian list of words one needs to know: cf. for instance Hirsch 1987: 152 ff) "into the children's heads" (PSH: 122) so that they develop those sentential attitudes that alone enable them to be fully fledged members of the community.
- 44 One could argue that this is a fairly uncharitable (and even distorted) reading of Rorty and, moreover, one that cannot be deployed to contrast him with Lipman: when inventing the child as a philosophical inquirer, the latter had to refer to language-users, while tendentially (apart from one occasional association of children and

psychotics as non-fully fledged members of community: cf. PSH: 37) the aforementioned tenets of Rorty concern *babies* (viz. *infants* in the etymological acceptation of the word) and, for all his openness to children's philosophical talents, it is moot whether Lipman would have ever subscribed to a theory like that of "the philosophical baby" (Gopnik 2009), as his child becomes a philosophical inquirer only insofar as she is introduced into a cultural tradition.

- 45 Despite these caveats and qualifications, I would insinuate that a *chasm* obtains between Rorty's and Lipman's understandings of childhood and that this is one of the reasons for their different attitudes towards Hirsch's cultural literacy and, additionally, that this has much (if not everything) to do with the fact that Lipman remains committed to the Deweyan centrality of experience. More specifically, it may be argued that, via the Deweyan (LW 5: 243-62) notion of "qualitative thought" (something that Rorty would suggest abandoning), Lipman discovers the 'childhood layer' of *any* (philosophical) inquiry.¹²
- 46 However, due to the main thrust of the argumentation in this paper, we should focus on another site where the disagreement and perhaps the main bone of contention between the two authors lies. As aforementioned, by embracing the Socratic-Eubelian idea of educating "philosophical citizens" and extending this project also to children and, therefore, to primary and secondary education, Lipman identifies in the cultivation of the abilities of the valuation of society one of the chief aims of a democratic education. In a sense, he does not exclude children from forms of "political education" (as predicated upon a culture of self-scrutiny) understood in the Euben acceptation of the phrase. In contrast, Rorty is skeptical about the reasonableness of this project: on the one hand, he agrees that it is an appropriate attitude that of the one who "worries that the process of socialization which turned her into a human being by giving her a language may have given her the wrong language, and so turned her into the wrong kind of human being" (CIS: 75); but, this being a typically ironic stance, it is highly unlikely that it may be cultivated from the very early levels of education as it is difficult to "imagine a culture which socialize[s] its youth in such a way as to make them continually dubious about their own process of socialization" (CIS: 87).
- 47 In this perspective, the contrast between a philosophy-oriented and literature-oriented education is entwined with the opposition between a stance which aspires to cultivate habits of critique from childhood – while socializing children in their own culture, or better, as a constitutive part of this socialization process insofar as it pertains to the introduction into the democratic tradition of self-reflective scrutiny – and one which, instead, draws a marked fault-line of discontinuity between socialization and individualization. Lipman could object to Rorty that he displays an ultimately patronizing attitude towards children on account of his inclination to deem them to be not fully fledged members of their community and, thus, not real fellow partners in the cultural conversation (by accordingly considering them as people needing first to swallow the cultural raw material); as a consequence, he postpones until their post-secondary education both the recognition of their full right to nurture worries about their own socialization and the possibility of their assessing the social institutions in which they have grown-up (whatever is the vehicle of this assessment, whether the philosophical argument or the invention of new vocabularies).
- 48 One can argue that Rorty has never set himself free from Hutchins's spell; as he found the Hutchins approach beneficial in his youth, he continues to recommend it also to

contemporary schools. The more the latter will draw upon the Hirschian cultural literacy, the less colleges will be involved in “the remedial work that society currently forces [them] to undertake – the kind of work that Great Books curricula are typically invented in order to carry out” (PSH: 124). Paradoxically Lipman and Rorty are at one in considering Hirsch as the heir of Hutchins, but while the former deems any “core of common culture” approach to be detrimental for a democratic society, the latter sees it as an indispensable resource, provided that it is confined to the initial levels of education and that, at the university level, students are free to pursue trajectories of self-creation, acquiring the cultural tools “to make themselves into people who can stand to their own past as Emerson and Anthony, Debs and Baldwin, stood to *their* pasts” (PSH: 124).¹³

- 49 In a sense, Rorty wants *all* contemporary youth to receive the ‘same’ kind of education as that which he had the privilege to receive when fifteen – as a precocious college student enrolled on a program of excellence.¹⁴ And we should recognize that Rorty (with Hirsch) makes a good point with his stress on the need for a development of literacy that requires the acquisition of a large amount of background knowledge. If Lipman is right in his qualms about an approach that risks perpetuating a school of the mere acquiring (instead of furthering a school of inquiring, to stick to a notable Dewey [MW 3: 236 ff.] distinction), he may have been too overhasty in discarding it as a sensible pedagogical option. Not only because Rorty could have had it right:

[...] I doubt that it ever occurred to Dewey that a day would come when students could graduate from an American high school not knowing who came first, Plato or Shakespeare [...] Dewey too hastily assumed that nothing would ever stop the schools from piling on the information and that the only problem was to get them to do other things as well. (PSH: 120-1)

- 50 But for another reason directly connected with the very project of P4C: Lipman always took pains to distinguish his approach from the typical programs for training isolated thinking skills according to “a ‘skill and drill’ mentality” (Lipman 1988: 25) and he reclaimed the specificity of P4C (Lipman 1988: 40 ff). In particular, he insisted, first, on the significance of the recourse to philosophy as “representative of the heritage of human thought. Philosophy does not cannibalize its past but holds the thought of any philosopher ever available for re-inspection and re-interpretation” (Lipman 1988: 40); and, secondly, on the fact, that P4C is “[a] language-based approach” (Lipman 1988: 41). I suggest reading these features in terms of the presence of a cultural literacy dimension to P4C, which obviously ought not to be inflected in the Hirschian way of a fixed repertoire of words to know but should maintain a Rortyan focus on the need for a mastery of language that invokes, also, a form of acculturation (possibly promoted through narrative texts: see below § 4).
- 51 In this perspective, Rorty’s noble aspiration to extend to all young people the kind of school preparation he had had the luck to take advantage of makes sense also in a P4C-oriented educational conception. And, though, if this Rortyan thrust is disconnected from the cultivation of a critical attitude via philosophical inquiry from the early levels of schooling, one cannot resist the suspicion that Rorty’s view risks smacking of elitism: are only those who make it to the college enabled to fully participate in the democratic tradition of self-critique?
- 52 The appropriation of the Hirschian thrust (construed in terms of a stark separation of socialization and individualization), combined with the specific inflection which Rorty gives to the understanding of literary culture at the socialization level, may give rise to

further misgivings. I have already hinted at how Rorty enlists Hirsch's cultural literacy for his idea that socialization aims at shaping an animal (viz. an infant) into a human being. But actually this is only a stepping stone to the real goal of education as socialization, namely the familiarization with inspiring narratives about one's own country:

Updating Dewey a bit, we can think of him as wanting the children to come to think of themselves as proud and loyal citizens that, slowly and painfully, threw off a foreign yoke, freed its slaves, enfranchised its women, restrained its robber barons and licensed its trade unions, liberalized its religious practices, broadened its religious and moral tolerance, and built colleges in which 50 per cent of its population could enter. [...] As Hirsch quite rightly says, that narrative will not be intelligible unless a lot of information gets piled up in the children's heads. (PSH: 121-2)¹⁵

- 53 Thus understood, education as socialization risks excluding the early cultivation of any attitude of self-scrutiny and self-reflectivity, which Castoriadis and Euben (and Dewey and Lipman for that matter) would consider intrinsic to the democratic tradition (and therefore, arguably, to the educational initiation into that tradition). Also at this educational level Rorty would cede to what Bernstein had nicely called his "historical myth of the given": "He speaks of 'our' practices, 'our' tradition, the 'consensus' of a particular community as if this were simply a historical given. [...] If we are serious or playful about politics and liberal democracy, then it is [the] ongoing *argument* [about the ends to pursue] that should be the focus of our attention" (Bernstein 1991: 244). Accordingly, the ability of valuation should be at the very forefront of our educational interest, as Lipman would put it, and philosophical inquiry represents a major vehicle in this respect.
- 54 Rorty's distinction of socialization and individualization is the pedagogical counterpart of the "banal point that education [...] needs to begin with acculturation and conformity [...] abnormal and 'existential' discourse is always parasitic upon normal discourse, [...] the possibility of hermeneutics is always parasitic upon the possibility (and perhaps upon the actuality) of epistemology [...]" (PMN: 365-6). Dovetailing his Kuhnian mindset with the Hirschian view, Rorty makes of the first levels of schooling the terrain where to establish the common ground and the space of agreement against the backdrop of which – *later* – plans for "abnormal discourse" and "self-creation" may (and, indeed, ought to) be pursued. Once again, does not democracy "as the regime of (political) self-reflexivity" (Castoriadis 1989: 11) require, instead, a kind of acculturation to its specific ethos, to its movement of dis-closure in every level of schooling, differentiated as the modalities in which this endeavor is undertaken may have to be? Are we really doomed to oscillate between the insane project (Rorty may be right on this point) of an education instilling doubts into the youth about the very society that educates them and the resigned acceptance of an initial conformity? Is it not precisely in order to escape from *this* alternative that philosophy qua the Socratic movement emerged, working its way through the sirens of Homer and those of sophistry, prior to capitulating to Platonism (which does not, however, need to be the destiny of philosophical inquiry)? Should we not aspire to pursue that admittedly precarious balance which Socrates wanted to strike between the faithfulness to one's one country and the readiness to scrutiny its customs (this work of scrutinizing being, indeed, part of the very work of socialization in a community animated by a democratic tradition)?

4. Interweaving Philosophical Inquiry and Literature in Education

- 55 The argumentation presented in the previous section seems to have culminated in a clear answer to the question from which this paper has taken its cue: not only is philosophical inquiry pivotal for a democratic culture but it should be cultivated from the very early levels of schooling. In this perspective, the merit of the Lipmanian misreading of Dewey is that of affording an educational approach that enables us to bring to fruition the Socratic project of educating “philosophical citizens.” The case (philosophy vs literature) seems to be that of philosophical inquiry against the Rortyan poeticized culture.
- 56 Things are more complicated, though. While reclaiming the significance of philosophical inquiry for democratic education, I do not want to insinuate that literature should have a subordinate role in education. If the Lipmanian cultivation of valuation skills (understood as the contemporary counterpart of the democratic culture of self-scrutiny and accountability) is crucial, we should not forget that in Athens “[f]or a culture of accountability to be something more than a mode of policing there needed to be some generative tension between it and a Dionysian politics of disruption. That was, in part, supplied by comedy and tragedy” (Euben 1997: 108). On the terrain of public-political education philosophy – qua the Socratic radicalization of the democratic movement of self-scrutiny – and “literature”¹⁶ were (and still need to be) allied, competitive as philosophy qua the Platonic undertaking and art may have been since the Greek inception (Edmundson 1995).
- 57 But what does this alliance of philosophy and literature look like? In what sense can we regain Rorty’s emphasis on literary culture for the democratic project as the tension toward self-scrutiny? Is Rorty’s understanding of the role of literature in fostering a democratic ethos adequate?
- 58 Richard Bernstein (1991) has remarked that invoking moral and political education through novels rests on “little, if any, concrete empirical evidence” (Bernstein 1991: 285). More devastatingly, by referring to Rorty’s innovative reading of Orwell’s *1984* (CIS: 169-88) and in particular of the character of O’Brien, who declares “But we create human nature. Men are infinitely malleable” (Orwell 1949/1989: 282), Bernstein has suggested that “[t]here is no important difference between Rorty and O’Brien concerning the infinite malleability of human beings and the possibility of socialization ‘all the way down.’ O’Brien is the true ‘disciple’ of Rorty who has diabolically mastered the lesson of the contingency of all vocabularies” (Bernstein 1991: 290). By possibly twisting a little Bernstein’s misgivings, we could rephrase them as follows: in *The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism*, the book co-authored by O’Brien in the fiction of *1984*, we read that the endeavor to perpetuate a hierarchical society essentially amounts to “an educational [issue]. It is a problem of continuously moulding the consciousness both of the directing group and of the large executive group that lies immediately below it. The consciousness of the masses needs only to be influenced in a negative way” (Orwell 1949/1989: 216). Replacing an education inspired by the ideal of a self-examined life, animated by a rational discussion drawing upon arguments and the method of inquiry, with a literary education could leave us disarmed in the face of all the O’Briens lurking within the folds of democratic societies. Insisting on exposing,

during primary and secondary education, the youth to narratives that increase the sense of belonging and evoke a pride for the history of their country risks being a form of “politicized education” rather than a kind of genuinely “political education” (to draw upon the aforementioned antithesis described by Euben).

- 59 These misgivings may be reconnected to reservations about (some aspects of) Rorty’s project aired in some of the best scholarship on his work.¹⁷ I am thinking, for instance, of how, at the end of a sustained and detailed engagement with the significance of Rorty’s thought for education, Ramón del Castillo (2014) has nicely highlighted that, when choosing novels depicting cruelty from the inside, Rorty ends up privileging those offering “an ultimately tranquilizing image” (Del Castillo 2014: 99). And he raises a crucial question:

[...] are we sure that, if we settle for Rorty’s illusions and his literary recommendations, would not teaching and society remain merely satisfied with a pale reformism of custom and a melancholic therapy of the I? Albeit its Nietzschean touches, education à la Rorty turns out to be a little flat: is not the hope that animates it only a symptom of a malaise instead of being the key to its cure? (Del Castillo 2014: 100)

- 60 By distinguishing “moral inculcation” and “ethical reflection” (the latter largely overlapping with what Lipman would call “ethical inquiry”), Chris Voparil (2006), in his turn, has noted that:

[u]ltimately, Rorty’s commitment to what we have called ethical reflection does not hold up. Despite a certain amount of lip service to ethical *phronesis*, Rorty appeals to literature and stories for the inculcation of moral norms. These are of course not transcendental moral norms. But his historicized conception of morality as a matter of “we-intentions” still implies a kind of universality inasmuch as it rests on collectively agreed upon and shared terms. To preserve this commonality, Rorty must insulate it from the idiosyncratic attempt to define one’s character. (Voparil 2006: 74)

- 61 Thus, Rorty separates those dimensions which Lipman’s understanding of ethical education within (and for) a democratic society keeps integrated with each other (see above § 3). Indeed, through an accurate and sophisticated examination of Rorty’s claims about sentimental education, Voparil emphasizes that at the end of the day:

Rorty must subordinate the ethical aim to the moral norm, rather than the other way around. He enlists the ethical force that literature works upon individuals in principle, but in practice its transformative power can only be allowed to function in the direction of producing better *liberal* citizens. Hence he must distinguish between works which meet this criterion and those which do not – namely, between books for public and for private purposes. (Voparil 2006: 75)

- 62 And, yet,

[a]s attractive as this bifurcated picture may appear, [we should] resist it. Citizens of democracy surely do read different kinds of novels, and these different novels serve different purposes for different people, some critical and questioning, others didactic and moral. Novels, like art in general, can be put to many uses, both radical and reactionary. As long as both types exist, one is tempted to argue, democracies will be capable of generating change from within. However, to the extent that the actions we take in the public realm to collectively alter our world are severed from our efforts to transform ourselves, the power of the *demos* may end up yielding little more than a defense of the status quo. (Voparil 2006: 80)

- 63 In the vocabulary marshaled in this paper, we could rephrase these misgivings in the following way: not only does Rorty’s understanding of the “political-educational”

mission of literature disarticulate the “tripod” of Lipman’s (1988: 70-1) education for civic values – composed of the inquiry into values, the cultivation of the character and the craftsmanship of integrating character and reflection – but it risks serving the purposes of a politicized education rather than those of a genuinely democratic political education.

- 64 And, yet, there are important lessons that can be drawn from Rorty’s stance also for those who, like the present author, consider the P4C approach one of the most valuable and advanced for the education of citizens in a democratic society. Accordingly, I will, in conclusion, indicate, first, how significantly a “Rortyan” (literature-oriented) moment is present in P4C and how this should be not only preserved but further enhanced; and, secondly, to what extent a “Socratic” moment is at work in parts of Rorty’s thought about literature and how this should be cultivated also against some of the aforementioned deep tendencies in Rorty’s way of framing the relationship between literature and ethics and politics.
- 65 Concerning the first aspect, it is to note that, when enumerating the main reasons “why moral education cannot be divorced from philosophical education” (Lipman, Sharp & Oscanyan 1980: 172 ff), the P4C creators insist that “a sufficient moral education program would have to develop in the child an awareness of the feelings of the other”; moreover, they indicate that “philosophy for children introduces the novel as the vehicle of moral education” (Lipman, Sharp & Oscanyan 1980: 173, 174). These are two “Rortyan” elements that have been present in the P4C project since its very beginning and this enables us to think of an alliance between Lipman/Sharp and Rorty. On the one hand, by integrating these elements in a broader framework in which philosophical inquiry as a Socratic endeavor is central, Lipman and Sharp can prevent these elements from capitulating to the drift culminating in moral inculcation and the mere manipulation of sentiments (to which Rorty often seems to yield), by strengthening, instead, those “intentions [of Rorty] closer to the broader notion of ethical reflection [...]: the idea that we tell stories in order to change – to refashion our identities and remake ourselves by deepening or enriching our existence” (Voparil 2006: 77). In other words, what in Rorty risks being engulfed by a politicized sentimental education could be re-activated and brought to fruition.
- 66 On the other hand, it may be debatable whether the P4C approach has granted sufficient attention to the aforementioned elements over the decades. Despite the work of many of the practitioners who have valorized them, one should not conceal the fact that a relevant part of the philosophical-educational debate has objected to the P4C approach in the Lipman-Sharp tradition intimating that it winds up being – its best intentions notwithstanding – only one more program in critical thinking and remaining anchored to an analytical-logical view of philosophy. Without tackling this debate, one can suggest that an encounter with the Rortyan positions could help P4C to shun these most unwelcome outcomes and to revisit and redescribe its educational device in forms that ward off an over-intellectualistic slant that may undermine the very project of an education of democratically wise citizens. Indeed, by deploying Rorty’s distinction between normal and abnormal discourse,¹⁸ Voparil has correctly emphasized that:

[u]nder [...] conditions of abnormal discourse, where we lack shared criteria to which to appeal to settle disputes because it is precisely these criteria themselves that are up for grabs, the kind of argument that proceeds inferentially from shared premises within a fixed logical space simply has no purchase. (Voparil 2013: 114)

- 67 To rephrase this in the P4C vocabulary: in these situations, we need less critical than creative and caring thinking (Lipman 2003) and the dialogue with Rorty may be crucial to put in sharper focus – also within the educational practice in the classroom – this dimension.
- 68 After stressing the “Rortyan” elements in the P4C “Socratic” education, I would like to briefly hint at the “Socratic” element in Rorty’s views themselves. In particular, I want to emphasize the implication of his endorsement of Milan Kundera’s wisdom of the novel (EHO: 75 ff). His reference to the Czech writer is illuminating. Indeed, the latter (Kundera 1986: 15 ff) situates his argument in favor of the novel within the context of a re-reflection on (*i.e.* a different inflection of) Husserl’s conferences on the crisis of European sciences. And he implicitly opposes a modernity electing Cervantes as its hero to the modernity springing from Descartes, whose inaugurating gesture Husserl radicalizes. However, the contrast between Descartes and Cervantes – and their 20th century heirs – does not need to be construed in terms of an updated version of the Platonic fight against poetry. Rather, the novel continues to be, in many respects, at least within a Kunderian horizon, a (self-)reflective and even “philosophical” genre. Kundera is quite explicit in vindicating “the appeal of thought” (Kundera 1986: 32-33) as one of the main resources for the novel to continue its adventure as a vehicle for the experimental exploration of the possibilities of existence. And in a later work, after referring to the Nietzsche demise of any systematic philosophy, he turns not to literature alone but to a closeness between literature and philosophy, of which the novel is a major embodiment (Kundera 2000: 153 ff and 178 ff).
- 69 Accordingly, in my admittedly idiosyncratic reading, by aligning himself with Kundera’s advocacy of the novel, (my hypothetical) Rorty is not encouraging us to take leave of a reflective and “philosophical” culture but only to broaden the panoply of its intellectual tools.¹⁹ Philosophy is not simply dismissed but is re-situated within a different constellation, as an important element of life. This is something more than saying that in a literary culture philosophy is experienced as a genre (moreover, a transitional one). Rather it implies that, among the literary genres privileged within education for a democratic society, those that have an “inquiring,” “examining” (we could venture to say, Socratic) dimension maintain a priority. And this stance, I would like to suggest in conclusion, should not be confined to secondary and post-secondary education (where the novels that Kundera has in mind can be read) but it can find hospitality also in the primary school where, instead of “Kunderian” novels, that kind of children’s literature may be marshaled, whose “philosophical whimsy” (in the compelling phrase of Gareth Matthews (1976: 9)) can help trigger and sustain that movement of self-reflectivity and dis-closure which resides at the very kernel of the democratic project and whose cultivation only an alliance of philosophy and literature can implement in our educational settings.

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NOTES

1. Citations of the works of Dewey are to the critical edition published by Southern Illinois University Press. Volume and page numbers follow the initials of the series. Abbreviations for the volumes used are: EW *The Early Works (1882-1898)*; MW *The Middle Works (1899-1924)*; LW *The Later Works (1925-1953)*.

2. Speaking of “replacing” philosophy with literature can be misleading, if understood as a complete abandonment instead of as a substantial redistribution of emphases. Indeed, Rorty continued to recognize a role for philosophy in the common discourse, for instance in terms of a work of “weaving the old and the new together”: one of the reasons why philosophers will “probably always be around is that there will always be something exciting happening [in culture] that needs to be tamed and modified, woven together with the past” (Rorty *in* Mendieta 2006: 47). He also invited us not to reduce any thinking imaginatively to literature (*ibid.*: 121). I would like to acknowledge an anonymous reviewer for having drawn my attention to how far the word replacement risks misrepresenting Rorty’s position in the light of statements like those aforementioned.
3. The major example of this stance may be his paper on “The Priority of Democracy to Philosophy” (ORT: 175-96).
4. Cf. also Arcilla (1990); Nicholson (1989).
5. For a neopragmatist theory of education cf. Ghiraldelli Jr. (2008).
6. An implicit but unnamed target of Dewey’s paper was also the neo-scholastic philosopher Jacques Maritain.
7. It is appropriate to specify that here I am not interested in exploring and commenting upon the way in which, within the scholarship about Philosophy for Children, the possible contribution of Rorty tenets to the practice and theory of this educational approach has been interpreted.
8. On this stage of his intellectual development cf. also Gross (2008: pos. 605).
9. As Ramón del Castillo (2014: 67-8) has aptly highlighted, many theses present in this paper echo some ideas discussed in a previous text, *Hermeneutics, General Studies, and Teaching* (Rorty 1982b).
10. For different (but converging) descriptions of this Rortyan “bereaved” attitude towards philosophy made by some leading philosophers and scholars cf. Mendieta (2006: 15-7).
11. For a Deweyan narrative comparable with that of Castoriadis cf. MW 6: 17 ff.
12. I have elaborated on this idea in Oliverio (2020).
13. This – post-secondary – level of education is what Rorty calls “individualization.”
14. Upon the testimony of Rorty himself (cf. Mendieta 2006: 18 and 55), it may be stated that his enthusiasm concerned principally the vigorous introduction into the history of philosophy that he had received. Indeed, the lack of any historical interest was one of his main indictments against analytical philosophy. However, in an admittedly more speculative way, I am here taking his attachment as directed also toward the very method of basing education on the reading of “great books” (while completely abandoning the reference to a *philosophia perennis* that this phrase had had in Hutchins and Adler). I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for suggesting the need to better specify Rorty’s fondness for the education received in Chicago, in reference to the aforementioned testimony.
15. This is clearly the stance underlying Rorty’s reflection in AOC, many pages of which have a distinct educational tone.
16. Literature is a concept which does not belong to Greek culture but I will use it much in the sense in which Edmundson (1995), an important dialogue partner for Rorty, deploys it when interpreting contemporary literary criticism against the backdrop of “an ancient quarrel” dating back to Plato.
17. It is right to acknowledge that, in the following, I am going to extrapolate del Castillo’s and Voparil’s ideas from the broader context of their argumentation, which is richer and more respectful also of the strengths of Rorty’s positions.
18. On some occasions, Rorty has captured the same distinction between philosophy and literature in terms of a vocabulary inspired by literary criticism, through the difference between the beautiful and the sublime (cf. Mendieta 2006: 69).

19. As appropriately pointed out by Voparil (2006: 70), we should not pass over in silence the fact that there is a “lack of fit between Kundera’s ethereal ideas and Rorty’s prosaic liberalism.” In addressing the theme of irony in Kundera and Rorty, Voparil vindicates its political (public) role in a democratic society. While not completely overlapping, I would tend to suggest that this vindication and my insistence on the inescapability of an education for philosophical-Socratic inquiry as a driving force of a healthy democratic discourse point in the same direction.

ABSTRACTS

In this paper, I will explore Rorty’s recommendation to shift from a philosophical to a literary culture by addressing this theme through a philosophical-educational lens and in reference to the question of what kind of education we need in order to foster democratic ethos. In this perspective, I will establish a comparison/contrast between Rorty’s idea of sentimental education and Matthew Lipman’s *Philosophy for Children* understood as two (alternative?) ways of recontextualizing Dewey’s heritage. After discussing Rorty’s understanding of a need for an end (instead of a “Deweyan” recovery) of philosophy starting from his dialogue with Castoriadis and by reconstructing his appeal to a poeticized culture, I will present Lipman’s case for education for philosophical inquiry in order to cultivate a democratic ethos in primary and secondary schools. I will contrast it with Rorty’s education as socialization and, contextually, I will illustrate their different stances towards Hirsch’s cultural literacy and his core curriculum approach to civic education. Finally, after problematizing Rorty’s views on the use of literature for a democratic culture, I will indicate the need to combine the Rortyan and Lipmanian thrusts and will claim that an aspect of the novel-driven education advocated by Rorty maintains a constitutive Socratic-inquiring dimension.

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