Philosophical Dialogue and Empowerment

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Introduction

This research aims to investigate how philosophical dialogue could support minority groups, that is, empower people of minority, by comparing this dialogue with Tojisha-kenkyu. In this paper, I will compare these two practices and demonstrate how philosophical dialogue can help participants learn a new language to express themselves and help them transform. Insofar as people of minority are seen as those who are observed, valued, or diagnosed by the majority of people in the dominant language of the society, such self-transformation through the acquisition of a new language could empower people of minority.

First, I will show how Tojisya-kenkyu participants transform the medical and punitive language used by experts to explain their life conditions into a new language they can use to express themselves. Second, I will point out that a similar idea of empowerment can be found in the conception of philosophy for children (P4C) in Ann Margaret Sharp's writings on self-transformation in the community of inquiry and feminism. Differences exist between Tojisya-kenkyu and P4C, such as the difference in purpose: the former aims at patient recovery, and the latter at philosophical inquiry among children. However, I believe the idea of empowerment presented in this paper can provide some practical lessons for philosophical dialogues. Finally, this study argues that having a moment of silence in the dialogue process - or, to borrow Wittgenstein's phrase: "Don't think, but look!" - is beneficial for empowering philosophical dialogue.

1. Tojisha-kenkyu and Empowerment

What is Tojisya-kenkyu? Kenkyu means research or inquiry. Tojisya refers to people with disabilities or other life challenges; it also means subjectivity or autonomous agents. Tojisya-kenkyu is essentially a collective inquiry conducted by people with disabilities or other difficulties in life. The inquiry is reached by discussing their own experiences with peers and writing on the results of those discussions. For Mukaiyachi (2012), one of the founders of Bethel's house (a self-support center for those who have schizophrenia) where Tojisya-kenkyu originated, Tojisya-kenkyu is "an empowerment approach."

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Through Tojisya-kenkyu, one can see life situation that had not been known in the days in which, when encountering bad conditions or troubling situations, one would rush to the hospital to consult with doctors and social workers, as if delegating all decision-making regarding one's own problems to experts. In Urakawa's words, seeing one's own life situation differently is an experience of "becoming the protagonist of his or her own difficult life story." It can be described as a process of building a foothold for one's own life and regaining one's subjectivity in a situation where one was subject to and at the mercy of various unpleasant symptoms, such as hallucinations and delusions (Mukaiyachi 2005, 4).

In Tojisya-kenkyu, participants with schizophrenia are not observed or studied by medical experts, which is the usual way their conditions are expressed in words. Through collective inquiry into their life circumstances, they see their own situations differently than before, become persons who express their experiences, and reclaim the subjectivity of their experiences. Language plays a significant role for these changes. According to Shinichiro Kumagaya:

Like buildings that are not equipped with elevators, language is not made accessible to some people, and the everyday language used by the majority is often an unusable tool for minorities to interpret their experiences and share them with others. […] While there may be a variety of objectives for Tojisya-kenkyu, but I believe there is a motivation to do what I would call language barrier-freeing, that is, to change the language to one that is more usable for those who are currently considered minorities (Kokubun and Kumagaya, 2017, 13).

Buildings without elevators are designed for nondisabled people and are impossible to access for people in wheelchairs; they must be "barrier freed." The language is also suitable for interpreting the majority's experiences and must be changed so that minority people can better express their lives and share their experiences with others. The term minority here refers to people who lack words in everyday language to understand their own lives. In the case of disability, the language used to explain the conditions of people with disabilities is occupied by medical and social experts. Given this view of the minority, acquiring a new and alternative language is of special importance for empowering the minority.

In Tojisya-kenkyu, it is believed that learning a new language is impossible, as if one could simply abandon the language that has defined one's own life from the outside and *invent* a completely new one. As Kumagaya once stated, "The only language that concerns the body of cerebral palsy is in medicine, so we have to start there" (Ikeda 2013, 128). One could *transform* the language into one that feels its own and is usable through a collective inquiry into experiences.

One method for transforming the language can be found in Tojisya-kenkyu at Bethel's house:

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each participant gives an original name to her or his illness.:

> In Urakawa, the self-diagnosis [自己病名] is meant to be an important symbol that is linked to the history of each participant's life up to now and the way she or he will live in the future. "Self-diagnosis" is not just a medical fact diagnosed by a doctor or a mere memory of an abhorrent experience, but traces of one's life as a human being. Giving original name to his or her illness is a way to convey the experience of the mental illness to others and share the experience with them. （Mukaiyachi 2002, 108）

Self-diagnosis is considered a symbol of the participant's own life in both the past and the future. The following are examples of self-diagnosis given by participants in Tojisya-kenkyu at Bethel's house: human allergy syndrome, Schizophrenia type of "what's in my mind is exposed to others," or Schizophrenia type of "constant moving because of neighbors' noise." These names are made up of medical diagnostic names and the expression of what the participants go through in their daily lives. Kohji Ishihara describes such "hybrid self-diagnosis" as follows:

> Self-diagnosis is a challenge to the authority of medical experts and an important task to take back own experiences from them. However, if this were the case, it would be enough to ignore medical diagnostic names, but at Bethel's house, the self-diagnosis "schizophrenia _ type" is used, which is an imitation of a subtype of schizophrenia. I would call this parodic use of psychiatric diagnoses "semi-psychiatry." This is said in contrast to the "anti-psychiatry" movement that developed in the 1960s. (Ishihara 2013, 37)

Unlike the idea of anti-psychiatry, presenting a self-diagnosis is not simply to ignore the medical diagnosis, but this is conducted through the *parodic use* of those diagnoses. In my opinion, this parodic use of the dominant language is the key to what Kumagaya calls language barrier-freeing, or language transformation by which people with disabilities become "the protagonist of his or her own difficult life story." When installing an elevator in a building without an elevator to make it barrier-free, we can only begin by understanding what the building is like for people with disabilities, rather than ignoring how the building currently appears to a person with disabilities. Similarly, to make a language barrier-free, one can only begin by recognizing how the language prevents understanding of that person's condition and then try altering that language. The parodic use of psychiatric diagnoses can be seen as a method of such an alteration of language.

2. Sharp's Works on Empowerment: Self-Transformation and Feminism

We have seen that Tojisya-kenkyu empowers people with disabilities through language transformation. Although both philosophical dialogue and Tojisya-kenkyu are collective inquiries that use dialogical methods, does philosophical dialogue empower people in the similar way that Tojisya-kenkyu does? In the following, I shall focus on some writings of A. M. Sharp, who founded and directed The Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children with M. Lipman (Laverty and Gregory 2017, 10-11). I will show that the concept of empowerment is contained in P4C, and that this concept overlaps with the idea of empowerment in Tojisya-kenkyu, which can further be developed.

Sharp started the 1996 paper "Self-transformation in the community of inquiry" with the recognition that in the educational literature much has been said about building self-esteem, but neither what esteem is nor what self is has been adequately analyzed. According to Sharp (2017a, 49), self-esteem cannot simply be about "feeling good about oneself," because "to esteem is to value something—to think it is worthwhile." One must have criteria, standards, or ideals to value a certain movie or wine. Moreover, criteria must be subjected to public scrutiny because one's judgment can be skewed otherwise. Also, in the case of esteeming oneself, one must have criteria, which must be subjected to public scrutiny. Sharp argues that providing students with an opportunity that allows classroom community of philosophical inquiry is vital for education:

> Why? Because it is in such a classroom community that they are exposed to
> the *normative* disciplines of logic, ethics, and aesthetics. Inquiry within these
> branches of philosophy are necessary tools in helping students not only to
> understand what is worthy of their esteem but also to come to understand the
> self as a process in relationship to all of nature, a process of endless
> transformation and self-correction (Sharp 2017a, 50).

Students could esteem themselves askew both in positive and negative ways. However, when building self-esteem is set as an objective of education, the presupposition is that students commonly developed low self-esteem during growth and socialization. A classroom community of philosophical inquiry allows students to examine what is worthy of their esteem by questioning the ethical and aesthetic values and ideals they have learned in family, school, the media, and other social circumstances. Sharp emphasizes the possibility that students will understand that the self is not fixed and unchangeable, but a process of constant self-correction and transformation. For example, if a student is trapped in a negative self-image due to the media's portrayal of beautiful women, philosophical inquiry is expected to help correct that self-image and help that person transform. If a student with a disability is stuck in a negative image of disability by being exposed

to the punitive language about disability, philosophical inquiry could help challenge that self-image.

Although Sharp thinks that building self-esteem through participation in the community of philosophical inquiry is vital for education in general, she also believes that self-transformation is especially important in the education of minority students, as evidenced by her writings on feminist philosophy of education.

> To be truly liberated, women must participate in the development of new conceptions of justice, freedom, education, and other aspects of personhood, by engaging in a philosophical reckoning with experience. As bell hooks (1994) has observed, there are aspects of our lived experience that are real and felt, but that remain inarticulate unless we can invent language sufficient to make them into objects of inquiry (Sharp 2017b, 145).

We all have lived experiences that are real and felt, but those experiences are not articulated. For instance, just because my lived experiences are mine, this does not mean that I understand what these experiences mean, that I have an ideal view of my experiences, or that I cannot look at my experiences from different perspectives. In Sharp's (2008a, 55) view, the assumption of *fallibilism* makes a dialogue authentic:

> Each person's views and insights are to be heard, respected, and valued as a potential source of insight. Such communities come to generate *alternative* meanings, diverse perspectives, and communal help and support to its members. Expression of differences is not only a right of each participant but is itself important as a means of enriching the evolving self (Sharp 2017a, 55).

To understand one's lived experiences and express them in words, a community of inquiry is needed to "generate alternative meanings" and "diverse perspectives." Because one understands the meaning of one's experiences in a habitual way, these experiences require alternative meanings to be expressed from different perspectives; bringing a new way of speaking about lived experiences is critical for self-transformation and, according to Sharp, for women's liberation, because, as a quote from hooks suggests, the dominant language in our society is not the language which could sufficiently make aspects of women's experiences into objects of inquiry.

3. Moments of seeing and silence: Don't think, but look!
Tojisya-kenkyu and the philosophical dialogue have in common the view that the dominant

language is not suitable for articulating and expressing the experiences of people who are minority because of disability and gender. Moreover, in both communal inquiries, acquiring a new language is the key to the empowerment of participants. The first obstacle to such empowerment is the difficulty of changing one's own habits. Although dominant language can undermine self-esteem and bias self-understanding, it is already part of one's being in the world; that language is something that one has learned and acquired over time to understand itself and thus cannot be discarded like throwing a garbage.

In Tojisya-kenkyu, the intention is not to *invent* a new language, as is said in Sharp's quote from hooks, but to *transform* medical language into a new one that allows participants to express their own experiences, in which the "parodic use of psychiatric diagnoses" plays a great role. In Sharp's community of inquiry, the novel she created (sometimes alone, sometimes with others, including Lipmann) is a tool to challenge the habituated self. However, her or their novels are long and difficult to use in different cultural contexts. Therefore, we must consider ways to enable empowerment in philosophical dialogue. One method we can learn from Tojisya-kenkyu is the parodic use of words, but I would like to suggest another method we can learn from past philosophical dialogue practice.

Finn Hansen, a researcher and practitioner of several kinds of philosophical practice in Denmark, proposes a method to incorporate the *moments of seeing and silence* into philosophical dialogue. In my view, those moments allow the participants to distance themselves from how their life and situation are described in the usual language and to motivate them to explore a new language. The following are the four steps in his art performance project called Tom Rum (Empty Spaces) (Hansen 2022, 111-2).

The first way of seeing	The second way of seeing	The third way of seeing	The fourth way of seeing
Look at something	See with the field	See from within	Being seen by it or seeing by virtue of it
	"Don't tell it, Show it!"	"Do not even try to show it, see it!	"Be seen by it!"

Four steps in Hansen's art performance project called Tom Rum (Empty Spaces)

Although these four steps are listed as the process of art performance, they are thought to be incorporated into the process of philosophical dialogue. Let us imagine a dialogue we would have

here in a conference room. First, participants are asked to look at the situation and try to describe it. I would say, "I am attending a symposium on philosophical dialogue and Tojisya-kenkyu. The venue is KOMCEE west 402. There are around 20 people in the room, etc.[1]" Other participants would also say similar things. Then, we are asked to "Don't tell it, show it." We would be puzzled and try to show what the situation is like awkwardly, and then repeat "Don't even try to show it, see it!" We would not see the situation as it was described before. The information given about this session (the name of venue or the number of the audience) would appear superficial to express the situation in which we are actually in. Such information is the same regardless of who says it and does not need to be said by a specific person; however, while I see the situation, I can only see it from my perspective. It is impossible to view it from the perspective of another person, let alone the general perspective. We cannot have a "view from nowhere." Thus, I now need to speak about the situation or what I see. Moreover, the language must be changed because the words I used to describe the situation objectively are useless to express how I see the situation from my perspective. Finally, we are asked to "be seen by it." Here I would try to be actively passive as if I were an object seen by the situation. Then, people in the room would not appear to be something, the number of which is at issue in the first place; rather, they would appear diverse faces. As for the room, for example, the location information would be completely useless to express my lived experience here and now. Rather, certain aspects of the room, such as shape, brightness, color, or even smell, would become salient. To become actively passive as if I were a seen object is, in fact, to become sensitive to the situation and responsive to certain aspects it. To say what I see in such a sensitive perception is difficult to express and requires a language that can express what Sharp calls "alternative meanings" of experience. Such philosophical dialogue, including moments of silence and seeing, can also apply to the social situation we are in.

To think about the possible application of such philosophical dialogue, I would like to draw attention to Wittgenstein's phrase "Don't think, look!" in Section 66 of *Philosophical Investigations*:

> Consider, for example, the activities that we call "games". I mean board-games, card-games, ball-games, athletic games, and so on. What is common to them all? - Don't say: "There *must* be something in common, or they would not be called "games'" - but *look and see* whether there is anything common to them *all.* - For if you look at them, you won't see something that is common to all, but similarities, affinities, and a whole series of them at that. To repeat: don't think, but, look! (Wittgenstein 2009, 36)

If we do not think about the essence of game and instead look at a whole series of similarities and

affinities of game, any hegemonic meaning of game loses its place. The same is true for words like disability and gender: there is no essential meaning of disability and gender, and if there appears to be one, it is only because it is hegemonic in society. Suppose we stop thinking about what disability or gender is, and carefully look at the similarities and affinities between experiences about being able or disabled, and about being of a certain gender. In that case, we will need language to express the complicity of people's lives, and we must see those lives with others or collectively. Meanwhile, each participant must say what is seen from his or her own perspective (i.e., own experience). In my opinion, what Sharp refers to as the transformation of the self - that is, the habituated self is challenged by the innovative self - occurs in such a way that participants feel compelled to speak about themselves on the limit of language. The self will then be disclosed so that the stereotyping description becomes meaningless and will be rejected.

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NOTES

1 The KOMCEE west 402 is a room on the Komaba Campus of University of Tokyo, where this paper was read at the Wrap-up Symposium on Philosophy Dialogue and Empowerment of Minority held on September 24, 2023. The symposium was organized by the JSPS Research Project: A Project on Fusing Philosophical Practices and Self-Directed Studies (Tojisha-kenkyu): an Investigation of Dialogue and Support for Minority Groups.