

Literary Applications of Alphonso Lingis' *The Community of Those Who Have Nothing in
Common* to Education, Phenomenology, and Science

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Alphonso Lingis, a contemporary American philosopher, identifies the connecting fibers that weave all of humanity into one community in his book *The Community of Those Who Have Nothing In Common*.¹ Lingis opens by comparing the common goal of philosophy and science “as the will to give reason.”² Across all cultures and subgroups of races, religions, and otherwise demographically divided people, Lingis argues that the one commonality is the innate desire to answer the question, ‘why?’ He gives the example of rational science: an observation is formed, then a general formulation to give reason to the observation is created, followed by a reason behind the reason, or a theory, followed by yet another overarching theory. Lingis argues that all institutions, monuments, and other beacons of community answer the fundamental question of why a community is what it is by demonstrating the underlying principles that guide that community. As Lingis puts it, “We enter into that community by constructing the reasons that motivated its constructions.”³ The only impediment to the community of those with nothing in common is “the intruder” or the “other community.”⁴ The intruder is characterized by a varied conceptual scheme that prohibits an understanding across differences.

The idea of community conceptualized by Lingis bonds all rational beings together by a mutual understanding that, despite ideological differences, we all comprise one humanity. Lingis’ concept of universality and an all inclusive community is applied primarily in the fields of education and phenomenology, but extends to the natural and human sciences. The publications that tend to cite Lingis’ work usually pertain to teacher-student interaction or individual-community interaction.

¹ Lingis, *The Community of Those Who Have Nothing in Common*. Indiana University Press, 1994. www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt16gzc06.10.

² Lingis, *Community*, 2.

³ Lingis, *Community*, 6.

⁴ Lingis, *Community*, 6.

Lingis is engaged with education by Clarence Joldersma, a philosopher with a focus on education, when he asserts education's role in cultivating spirituality and in turn a desire for justice.⁵ He argues that spirituality is dual faceted in the sense that it's derived from both the individual and the community. The individual has a particular "uniqueness" in the eyes of the community and the community has an "intrinsic worth" as a collective of individuals in the eyes of the individual.⁶ Spirituality, in this way, "oscillates" between the community and the individual. Joldersma uses Lingis' idea of the common community between all humans to highlight a similarity that "transcends any particular defining identity that happen to be associated with a select group of people."⁷ Essentially, Joldersma crafts an adapted version of Lingis' community, deconstructing the barriers that would otherwise exist in the classroom. Joldersma concludes that his dual faceted definition of spirituality explains how the education system can be reformed so that spirituality is taught in a way that leads to the ultimate realization of the significance of seeking justice, a goal that he claims should be one of the utmost responsibilities of education.

Lingis' idealized community appears again in the educational field, this time as the community relates to belonging in the classroom and how Hybrid Education can be used to better inform students on a remodeled idea of digital citizenship. In Pedersen et. al.,⁸ Lingis is introduced in a section with the subheader of "Belonging,"⁹ a fitting title for the context of his

⁵ Clarence W. Joldersma, "A Spirituality of the Desert for Education: The Call of Justice Beyond the Individual or Community," *Studies in Philosophy and Education; Dordrecht* 28, no. 3 (May 2009): 193–208, <http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.lib.davidson.edu/10.1007/s11217-007-9078-7>.

⁶ Joldersma, "Spirituality," 203.

⁷ Joldersma, "Spirituality," 203.

⁸ Alex Young Pedersen, Rikke Toft Nørgaard, and Christian Köppe, "Patterns of Inclusion: Fostering Digital Citizenship through Hybrid Education," *Journal of Educational Technology & Society; Palmerston North* 21, no. 1 (2018): 225–36.

⁹ Pedersen et. al, "Digital Citizenship," 227.

work. Pedersen et. al uses Lingis to describe a virtual workshop in which representatives of varying demographic communities are asked questions about digital citizenship. To ensure inclusion and impartial consideration of ideas, Lingis' concept of the rational community and the community of those with nothing in common is implemented. Foundationally, the concept of Hybrid Education is dependent on Lingis' idea of community. As Pedersen et. al states, Hybrid Education is contingent on "the acknowledgement of otherness and difference as something productive," an acknowledgment pointed to by Lingis in his "Rational Community."¹⁰ Both Joldersma and Pedersen et. al utilize Lingis' ideas in the creation of community in education to ensure that the classroom is all inclusive and universally applicable.

Joris Vlieghe et. al takes an intriguing turn in their interpretation of the importance of Lingis' communities.¹¹ As opposed to Joldersma and Pedersen et. al advocating for directly creating an environment that induces Lingis' community, Vlieghe et. al argue that the community can more efficiently be created through the facilitation and promotion of group laughter. In Vlieghe et. al's terms, group laughter in the classroom creates ubiquitous vulnerability that results in the end goal of bonding over differences, the essential criterion for the *Community of Those Who Have Nothing in Common*. The only commonality extending to every member of a group in laughter is "that they are mercilessly given over to irrepressible reactions that force them to give up any position or identity."¹² As Vlieghe points out, the stripping of all other identifying characteristics serves to the community building of the group as a whole. In application to the classroom, the bonding that stems from a complete loss of control

¹⁰ Pedersen, "Digital Citizenship," 229.

¹¹ Joris Vlieghe, Maarten Simons, and Jan Masschelein, "The Educational Meaning of Communal Laughter: On the Experience of Corporeal Democracy," *Educational Theory; Urbana* 60, no. 6 (2010): 719–34.

¹² Vlieghe et. al, "Laughter," 729.

creates the “Corporeal Democracy” mentioned in the title of Vlieghe et. al’s work, attaining a sense of community consistent with Lingis’ *Community of Those Who Have Nothing in Common*.

Continuing in applying Lingis’ notion of community to the emerging virtual connectivity of humans, Kasper Lysemose conducts a phenomenological observation of the shift from the physical elements of interaction and touch to the virtual elements of detachment and unlimited access to information, ultimately arguing that this shift is representative of a more cosmic change in the human experience.¹³ Lysemose uses Lingis’ community of those who have nothing in common to more accurately describe the virtual world in the absence of direct communication.¹⁴ Lysemose concludes that accepting the shift to technological interaction as “the sense of existence.”¹⁵ Similar to the writing of Pedersen et. al, Lysemose’s writing is concerned with the implementation of Lingis into the digital world. Arūnas Sverdiolas and Tomas Kačerauskas reaffirm Lingis’ contributions to the field of phenomenology.¹⁶ Although Lingis doesn’t write in Lithuanian, Sverdiolas et. al asserts that he “admits his Lithuanian roots and frequently visits Lithuania, contributing to the development of phenomenological thought.”¹⁷ Sverdiolas further argues that Lingis’ concept of community was largely influenced by the post-war existentialism movement which is central to Lithuanian phenomenology’s identity.¹⁸

¹³ Kasper Lysemose, “Responsiveness and Technology: On Touch and the Ecotechnie-From Aristotle to Jean-Luc Nancy,” *Philosophy Today; Charlottesville* 58, no. 3 (Summer 2014): 345–65.

¹⁴ Lysemose, “Technology,” 349.

¹⁵ Lysemose, “Technology,” 361.

¹⁶ Arunas Sverdiolas and Tomas Kacerauskas, “Phenomenology in Lithuania,” *Studies in East European Thought; Dordrecht* 61, no. 1 (February 2009): 31–41, <http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.lib.davidson.edu/10.1007/s11212-008-9071-x>.

¹⁷ Sverdiolas et. al, “Lithuania,” 35.

¹⁸ Sverdiolas et. al, “Lithuania,” 35.

Finally, parting from the usual philosophical and phenomenological utilization of Lingis' concept of community while maintaining a focus on digital relations, Lucas Introna and Martin Brigham, researchers at Lancaster University, make observations on how the transition to a virtual world affects our interaction.¹⁹ Their scientific observation of the transition to virtuality breaks down the differences between "thin" and "thick" communities. Thin communities are defined as communities that's concerns "are mostly peripheral to the participants' identity," whereas thick communities are based upon the "sharing of core concerns."²⁰ Introna et. al claim that virtual communities aren't inherently thin, but are problematic when, in line with Lingis' ideas, the community is "confronted by the other, the intruder."²¹ The danger in this confrontation in the virtual world as opposed to an in person interaction is the detachment from the subject. Introna et. al point out that this detachment challenges the rational community that would otherwise exist more commonly in physical interaction as it is harder to recognize "the Other's" humanity and equality.²²

¹⁹ Lucas D. Introna and Martin Brigham, "Reconsidering Community and the Stranger in the Age of Virtuality," *Society and Business Review; Bradford* 2, no. 2 (2007): 166–78, <http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.lib.davidson.edu/10.1108/17465680710757385>.

²⁰ Introna et. al, "Virtuality," 171.

²¹ Introna et. al, "Virtuality," 168.

²² Introna et. al, "Virtuality," 175.

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