Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.montclair.edu/thinking_journal_philosophy_children

Part of the Social and Philosophical Foundations of Education Commons

MSU Digital Commons Citation
https://digitalcommons.montclair.edu/thinking_journal_philosophy_children/50

This Journal is brought to you for free and open access by the IAPC Scholarship at Montclair State University Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Thinking: The Journal of Philosophy for Children by an authorized administrator of Montclair State University Digital Commons. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@montclair.edu.
Table of Contents

Special Issue on Philosophy, Education and the Care of the Self
Guest Editors: Maughn Gregory and Megan Laverty

In Memoriam
In memory of Pierre Hadot (1922-2010) .................................................................1

Thinking in Stories

Peter Shea, review of E.L. Konigsburg, The View from Saturday .........................2

Introduction to Special Issue

Maughn Gregory and Megan Laverty, Introduction: Philosophy, Education and the Care of the Self .................................................................3

Reflections

Darryl DeMarzio, Dialogue, the Care of the Self, and the Beginning of Philosophy .................................................................10

Walter Kohan and Jason Wozniak, Philosophy as Spiritual and Political Exercise in an Adult Literacy Course .................................................................17

Jason Howard, Emotions of Self-Assessment and Self-Care: Cultivating and Ethical Conscience .................................................................24

Laurence Splitter, Caring for the “Self as One Among Others” ................................33

Olivier Michaud, Monastic Meditations on Philosophy and Education ..................40

Review

Michael Pritchard, Review: Values Education in Schools: A Resource Book for Student Inquiry .................................................................43

Wendy Turgeon, Review: Transforming Thinking: Philosophical Inquiry in the Primary and Secondary Classroom .................................................................46
In Memory of Pierre Hadot (1922-2010)

“Throughout antiquity, wisdom was considered a mode of being: a state in which a person is, in a way which is radically different from that of other people—a state in which he is a kind of superman. If philosophy is that activity by means of which philosophers train themselves for wisdom, such an exercise must necessarily consist not merely in speaking and discoursing in a certain way, but also in being, acting, and seeing the world in a specific way. If then, philosophy is not merely discourse but a choice of life, an existential option, and a lived exercise, this is because it is the desire for wisdom.” (What is Ancient Philosophy? Trans. Michael Chase; Harvard University Press, 2002, p. 230.)

L. Konigsburg uses every word and detail in her book, *The View from Saturday* to provoke the reader into thinking. She is a monstrous optimist: she just expects that the reader, like her characters, enjoys thinking, is always looking for a puzzle or a problem, a thing to think about, in every corner of the world. It’s a surprisingly successful strategy; one finds oneself trying to live up to the book’s high expectations and outrageous demands, and to the intellectual rigor that shines through on every page.

The title is the name of the book’s first and biggest puzzle. The story begins on a triumphant Saturday, and our job – we are immediately given a job, by this author – is to understand how this unexpected triumph – the victory of the 6th grade team in the regional quiz bowl – came about. Later, we understand that we have another job as well. It turns out that the quiz bowl victory is just one small dimension of the day’s triumph, and we are expected to see the full range of goodness in this very good day, to appreciate the many ways in which it completes the work and satisfies the deepest yearnings of the children and adults involved in the story: four children, their teacher, and some of the children’s family.

I suppose one might be suspicious of a book about a triumph. Lots of lives don’t have triumphs; good work doesn’t always lead to splendid results. Perhaps young adults should be prepared for that.

There are plenty of books that prepare people for sadness, for a good enough life, for getting by. It is very rare that a book – for any age person – pictures what smart people might really want, as their absolute best outcome. I can’t see how it hurts to ask what backs them. Can a currency of knowledge lose its value? Does anything lose its meaning? Konigsburg raises this question adroitly, not backing, floating free of any connection to lived experience. This dimension of the book raises daily questions about the work and satisfies the deepest yearnings of the children and adults involved in the story: four children, their teacher, and some of the children’s family.

There are plenty of books that prepare people for sadness, for a good enough life, for getting by. It is very rare that a book – for any age person – pictures what smart people might really want, as their absolute best outcome. I can’t see how it hurts to ask what backs them. Can a currency of knowledge lose its value? Does anything lose its meaning? In its portrayal of an ideal of community and support, this book is both a challenge and a roadmap for teachers: here’s what has to happen, if kids are going to be encouraged to persist in being smart and interested in their world, and in developing all the parts of their minds and hearts.

One strand of Konigsburg’s narrative prefigures, perhaps the model for, the central idea in the movie *Slumdog Millionaire*: in the context of a quiz bowl competition, for which generally students prepare by memorizing stray facts, the underdog sixth graders happen to get questions that call to mind rich experiences in their lives. In the strongest possible sense, they know the answers to the questions, and they know why the answers matter. As the questions are asked, Konigsburg tells the story of each contestant’s encounter with the relevant fact, showing us how that particular, normally dead, fact is alive for this child. A question about the Sargasso sea prompts Nadia to recall her efforts to rescue sea turtles. A question about calligraphy brings back a summer Noah spent helping with arrangements for the wedding of some elderly friends. A question about the word “posh” calls forth memories of Julian’s travels with his father, a chef on a cruise ship.

This dimension of the book raises daily questions about education that will be equally alive for teachers and for alert students: what is it to know a fact? Or rather, what relationship to facts is worth having? What kind of involvement in the world makes the details and connections come alive? Noah, who answers the question about calligraphy, understands far more than the definition: he understands the mental and spiritual discipline required for fine writing, the festive occasions that require special, personal touches rather than computerized efficiencies, the dialogue of giving and receiving courtesy that makes civilized life work.

As these multiple meanings surface during the contestants’ responses to simple-minded quiz questions, any alert reader will wonder what comparable riches surround the other facts that are passed back and forth in classrooms, as the currency of education. With facts, as with any currency, it is plausible to ask what backs them. Can a currency of knowledge lose its backing, floating free of any connection to lived experience or meaning? Konigsburg raises this question adroitly, not in a negative or even a critical spirit, but as a standing test for teachers and students concerned that their education be for real.

Emerson wrote in *Nature*: “Go out of the house to see the moon and it is mere tinsel. It will not please as when its light shines upon your necessary journeys.” *The View from Saturday* is a commentary on the necessary journeys of four children and their teacher. What they encounter on those journeys pleases them greatly and makes them strong in many ways. Konigsburg challenges students and teachers to find the projects that will bring their own learning to life in this way.
Introduction: Philosophy, Education and the Care of the Self

Megan Laverty & Maughn Gregory

We are inquiring, you know, in what way we shall become wise, presuming that each of us has this power in some sort or other ... (Plato 1964, 429)

The papers collected in this special issue of *Thinking* were presented at the Group Meeting of the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children at the 2009 Annual Meeting of the American Philosophy Association, Eastern Division, in December 2009 in Manhattan. The theme of that session, to which these authors responded, was “Philosophy, Education and the Care of the Self.” Our aim in constructing this theme was to bring together two areas of scholarship, to which, we believe, Philosophy for Children has much to contribute, and from which it has much to learn.

The first area of scholarship we might refer to as ‘Philosophy as the Care of the Self,’ or ‘Philosophy as a Way of Life.’ Scholars working in this field practice and promote philosophy as a category of disciplines for ethical, aesthetic and psychological or spiritual self-transformation. This tradition begins with philosophers of Greek, Roman, Indian and Chinese antiquity, for whom the wisdom or *sophia* that philosophy pursues is not knowledge but a well-lived life. Richard Shusterman, for example, recommends “the idea of philosophy as a deliberative life-practice that brings lives of beauty and happiness to its practitioners,” and observes that “philosophy’s solutions to life’s riddles are not propositional knowledge but transformational practice” (1997, 25). Certain kinds of knowledge and understanding are, of course, necessary for this pursuit, but are not sufficient, because to truly live well — e.g., with purpose, integrity, equanimity and compassion — requires self-transformation through physical, intellectual and psychological exercise. As Martha Nussbaum explains, many of the ancients employed a medical analogy, describing philosophy as a set of therapeutic or curative exercises for various diseases or afflictions of the soul. In this tradition, a *philosopher* is anyone who is engaged in self-confrontation and self-work, and need not be a scholar.

Early accounts of philosophy as a way of life describe whole ways of life that included habits of diet and exercise, the discipline of desire, and the cultivation of worthy passions, meaningful friendships, helpful attitudes toward death, and many other aspects of caring for the self, the community, the stranger and the natural world. Scholarship in the form of theoretical discourse may help to explain and justify such ways of life, and certain forms of scholarly discipline — those that de-center the ego for the sake of reasonableness, fairness to others and truth — are themselves self-transformational practices. But as Socrates so tirelessly cautioned, discourse — even highly-disciplined, scholarly discourse — can also be a distraction from self-work, and even detrimental to it, e.g. when it becomes a means to self-aggrandizement. Jacob Needleman has observed that in both of Western culture’s originary traditions — Judaism and “Hellenic spiritual philosophy” — the ideal of reason was understood not merely as instrumentalist rationality freed from the passions, but as intellectual activity that combined such thinking with perceptive, intuitive and valuing capacities oriented to the real and the good (2002, 48). For this reason, philosophers in this tradition have, for centuries, disparaged philosophers whose work is merely academic — who, as Seneca put it, “turn love of wisdom (*philosophia*) into love of words (*philologia*)” (quoted in Hadot 2002, 174). In addition, they have advocated practical, somatic and contemplative exercises to accompany the cognitive practices of argumentation and conceptual analysis, as central to philosophy’s purpose.

One of the most important characteristics of philosophy practiced as the care of the self is that this practice can only begin from a genuine sense of self-discontentedness. This sense may derive from a more general sense of dissatisfaction, world weariness or suffering, but must, at some point, develop into an existential recognition of one’s own moral disorientation, spiritual *aporia*, or, at the very least, of one’s philosophical ignorance. So Socrates admonishes Alcibiades in this exchange:

**ALC.** ... Do you think I could not know about what is just and unjust in any other way [than being taught by a master]?

**SOC.** Yes, you might, supposing you discovered it.

**ALC.** But do you not think I might discover it?

**SOC.** Yes, quite so, if you inquired.

**ALC.** And do you not think I might inquire?

**SOC.** I do, if you thought you did not know. (Plato 1964, 121)
Without confronting our own lack of moral understanding and know-how, and without intimations of freer, happier, more meaningful ways of life, there is no way to begin the radical shift in orientation that signals philosophy (see Gregory 2009). Moreover, without particular knowledge of our own im/moral proclivities, we are at a loss as to how we might practice to ameliorate them. In Socrates’ words, “if we have that knowledge, we are like to know what pains to take over ourselves; but if we have it not, we never can” (Plato 1964, 195). This imperative to appreciate one’s precarious moral standing explains the abundance of practices for individual and communal self-questioning and self-reckoning within this tradition.

Another important characteristic of Philosophy as the care of the self is its development and employment of inquiry dialogue – dialogue as a rigorous, collaborative search for truth and meaning – as not only the most important method of philosophical inquiry, but the defining framework for all other wisdom practices. Discursive rationality requires, in addition to continual consultation of one’s inner conscience, participation in mutual exchange, questioning, critique and assistance – all voluntary and conducted within a framework of cooperative inquiry toward a *logos* of uncoerced agreement. Needleman describes it in terms of paradox:

[R]eason as a spiritualizing force within ourselves … can only arise in us through the struggle to listen to our neighbor. Consider the paradox: reason … is at the same time the most individualistic and most communalistic of human capacities. Reason is the light from within myself and reason enters us only as we open to our neighbor. (2002, 61)

This practice requires a particular communicative ethics, characterized by humility, respect for others and a yearning for truth, in sharp contrast to the competitive, self-serving and often histrionic discourse that has typified political, courtroom, and even classroom discourse since ancient times. A third important characteristic of wisdom-oriented philosophy is therefore the establishment of the philosophical community, which makes possible not only pedagogical and inquiry dialogue, but also collaborative research, mutual concern, example and correction, and the cultivation of intimate philosophical friendship, “the spiritual exercise *par excellence*” (Hadot 1995, 89). As Socrates demonstrated, this kind of relationship is also necessary for pedagogy that aims at wisdom:

SOC... but we must put our heads together, you know, as to the way in which we can improve ourselves to the utmost. For observe that when I speak of the need of being educated I am not referring only to you, apart from myself … [W]e need to take pains—all men rather badly, but we two very badly indeed.

ALC. As to me, you are not wrong.

SOC. Nor, I fear, as to myself either. (Plato 1964, 175)

The second area of scholarship referenced in the theme for this special issue might be referred to as “Education and the Care of the Self.” Scholars working in this field examine the ways that schooling both contributes to, and undermines personal development and self-transformation toward wellbeing (see Gregory and Laverty 2009). Philosophy was the first discipline to take up this concern, as the education of the young bears directly on their aptitude and orientation for self-care. Ancient philosophers critiqued educators and educational programs that focused on materialistic and banal objectives to the detriment of students’ intellectual, aesthetic, civic and moral development and self-awareness. Hadot notes, for instance, that in ancient Athens,

Sophists had claimed to train young people for political life, but Plato wanted to accomplish this by providing them with a knowledge … inseparable from the love of the good and from the inner transformation of the person. Plato wanted to train not only skillful statesmen, but also human beings (2002, 59).

Since that time philosophers have inquired into education’s aims and methods, the nature of learning and thinking, the nature and status of knowledge, the educational responsibilities of students, parents, teachers and governments, and relationships between education and theories of epistemology, ethics and social justice. Though divergent on many points, philosophers who have considered education – e.g., Plato, Aristotle, Montaigne, Rousseau, Dewey, Whitehead, and Freire – have largely maintained consensus around the Socratic imperative for wisdom-oriented education. This imperative is being urged today by contemporary philosophers of education like Maxine Green (2000; 2001), Nel Noddings (2005), Parker Palmer (1993; 2007), bell hooks (1994; 2003), Matthew Lipman (1988; 1996; 2003) and Mike Rose (1996; 2005; 2009).

In spite of this work, education in many parts of the world has tended to focus more on student’s economic viability and the reinforcement of conventional values, than on their hunger for meaning and their capacities for reflection and self-directed growth, and has lately been reconstituted to a significant extent as short- and long-term test preparation. In Rose’s estimation, “We’ve narrowed the purpose of schooling to economic competitiveness, our kids becoming economic indicators. We’ve reduced our definition of human development and achievement—that miraculous growth of intelligence, sensibility, and the discovery of the world—to a test score. (Rose 2009, x) Underlying this status quo is a largely unarticulated view that the primary purpose of education is to prepare students to be successful at pursuing relatively unexamined desires in a free-market economy. Indeed, as Robert J. Sternberg has observed, this view is sometimes promoted deliberately by educational stakeholders.
Sternberg is among contemporary psychologists who have considered what it would mean to make wisdom a primary objective for education. He recommends that education “not ... force-feed a set of values but ... encourage students to reflectively develop their own,” (1999, 80) and that it place particular emphasis “on the development of dialectical thinking [which] involves thinkers understanding significant problems from multiple points of view and understanding how others legitimately could conceive of things in a way that is quite different from one’s own.” (1999, 79-80). Education as the care of the self, in other words, must engage young people in the practice of philosophy (see Laverty 2008). In support of this notion Sternberg has cited Philosophy for Children as one of three educational programs he found “particularly related to the goals of ... teaching for wisdom” (Sternberg 2003, 163). Likewise, Harvard psychologist and originator of multiple intelligence theory Howard Gardner has identified seven approaches or “entry points” to teaching school subjects that map onto multiple intelligences, one being the “foundational (or existential) entry point [which] examines the philosophical and terminological facets” of a subject and provides the opportunity for students “to pose fundamental questions of the ‘why’ sort associated with young children and philosophers ....” Not surprisingly, Gardner recommends Philosophy for Children for this approach (2006).

In many times and places education has been aimed at growth or self-improvement that is oriented to truth, beauty and goodness in some objective sense, and that is intended for communities as well as for individuals. Indeed, the wisdom literature makes the searches for personal and collective wellbeing interdependent. Needleman observes, e.g., that,

… the unspoken undercurrent of early American idealism holds out the goal of the striving to work on one’s own moral defects—through self-struggle and education—in order to approach the capacity to will what is good for the whole of humanity. Carried too far without the concomitant inner struggle for individual self-improvement, ... the spirit of part[isanship] ... inevitably destroys the moral foundations of the community. (2002, 94.)

Wisdom-oriented education therefore gives special attention to citizenship education, not merely as knowledge of government and history, much less the cultivation of nationalistic patriotism, but as the cultivation of the disposition to inquire after, and to will the common good. This necessarily involves practice in the kind of discursive rationality described above. It also involves what Lipman described as “harness[ing] and put[ting] to work the social impulses of the child—in contrast to the imperial, divide-and-rule strategy that some teachers ... employ” (1996, xv), and the creation of “civic space” in schools, described by Rose in terms of “the power of bringing students together around common problems and projects—the intellectual and social energy that results, generating vital public space” (2009, 151).

Rose is also among educational theorists who pay attention to the daily, lived experience of schooling undergone by students, teachers, administrators and parents— an important aspect of education that prioritizes the care of the self. Dewey argued that ethical, political, aesthetic and spiritual values were grounded in the felt qualities of experience (1934; 1934; 1962; 1939; 1972), and Rose identifies a number of experiences typical of a day at school, that are rich in Dewey’s sense of the qualitative: “the experience of opportunity ... [as] feel[ing] a sense of possibility, of hope” (2009, 14), “the emerging desire to improve and to be more competent— both for my satisfaction and to gain [a respected teacher’s] approval” (15), the “desire to do work” (90), “knowledge [as] a source of pleasure and competence” (66), “the deep emotional satisfaction of using my mind” (16), “the sense of stability that steady work can bring” (19), and also the tedium of “classrooms as ... places of flat disconnection” (33).

Learning to be mindful of the qualitative nature of our experiences is a necessary component of self-regulation, and hence of self-care (see Gregory 2006). For this reason, a number of scholars and practitioners of Asian philosophical, religious mystical and Hellenistic wisdom schools have introduced contemplative practices to schools, for the benefit of teachers and administrators, as well as students (see Adarkar and Keiser 2007; Zajone 2008; Greenland 2010). Such practices as dialogue, storytelling, journaling, calligraphy, contemplative movement, and mindful breathing are meant to mitigate the mental distraction and emotional reactivity so often experienced in schools, with mindful engagement in the experiences of teaching and learning and with deliberate, self-
aware responses to the myriad problems and opportunities that arise there. These practices also help young people cultivate a sense of self-agency, both in the immediate circumstances that call for action and choice, and also in the broader sense of “self-definition” (Rose 2009, 92) and an “emerging sense of who [they] can become” (Rose 2009, 4). In this latter sense, Rose writes of how his own experiences of schooling, … helped me develop a sense of myself as knowledgeable and capable of using what I know. This is a lovely and powerful quality—cognitive, emotional, and existential all in one. It has to do with identity and agency, with how we define ourselves, not only in matters academic but also in the way we interact with others and with institutions…. Education gave me the competence and confidence to independently seek out information and make decisions, to advocate for myself and … those I taught, to probe political issues, to resist simple answers to messy social problems, to assume that I could figure things out and act on what I learned (2009, 37-8).

Rose’s educational autobiography is an informative account of education as a means of self-care. His work, like that of hooks, Palmer, Zajonc and others, also demonstrates that the concern for wisdom in education that was once the purview of philosophy is today more often addressed in sociology, critical theory and spirituality studies. If philosophy is to continue to be relevant to this work, it must recover its love of wisdom, extend its practices beyond the theoretical, and make itself accessible to those outside the academy, including children.

* * *

It was my hunch that children were primarily intent on obtaining meaning—this is why they so often condemned school as meaningless—and wanted meanings they could verbalize…. I saw philosophy as the discipline par excellence for making sense of things and for preparing students to think in the more specific disciplines.” (Lipman 1996, xv.)

Although Philosophy for Children is sometimes adopted by schools as primarily a thinking skills program, practitioners have always appreciated its power to evoke profound personal growth. The program’s value orientation derives from the way it construes philosophy itself: as a yearning or wondering toward truth or meaningfulness, with implications for students’ everyday lives (Gregory 2002; 2008). The program materials focus on questions having to do with ethics, aesthetics, epistemology, politics and other topics relevant to the care of the self, as issues with direct bearing on children’s experience. Moreover, the program’s principal mode of practice – the community of philosophical inquiry (CPI) – is, ideally, an instantiation of the wisdom practices of discursive rationality, mindful speech, philosophical friendship and ethical community. In this issue of Thinking we have brought together a number of scholars working in Philosophy for Children who take the program’s value orientation seriously, and who see many of the program’s objectives, materials and methods as relevant to, if not instances of, the care of the self.

The scholars in this issue express a range of views about what it means to know, and care for, the self; yet, each view involves the CPI, both as an epistemological method that moves in the direction of unified, true belief, and as a “spiritual exercise” that moves in a contrary direction to reveal our ignorance and our reliance on others, even for self-knowledge. Darryl De Marzio, Walter Kohan and Jason Wozniak do not consider the self to be a substance or entity with a predetermined identity, but something conferred by, and thus revealed in, its practices and relationships. For these authors, communal philosophical inquiry is constitutive of subjectivity because it circumscribes a self that is always in question and open to the possibility of self-transformation. Jason Howard and Laurance Splitter favor a more traditional view of the self, drawing upon continental and analytic sources, respectively. Howard draws from the writings of Paul Ricoeur to develop a conception of conscience as dialectical, self-interpretative narrative, while Splitter draws on the work of Donald Davidson to develop a triangular conception of consciousness in which self, others and world are interconnected. These authors conceive of the self as having a psycho-social identity that is in constant formation – we are always becoming – and relational – we exist in language and society. Even private introspection implies the existence of a community because it consists in internalized dialogical interaction with others. Therefore, to know the self is to recognize and understand something about our identity, i.e. the kind of person one has become; and to care for the self is to consciously engage in the betterment or amelioration of that identity. Howard and Splitter endorse communal philosophical inquiry on the grounds that it is a practice that instantiates relationality. For Splitter, the CPI helps us know ourselves as it educates us to live well with others, while for Howard, it reinforces our sense of inherent plurality, making us more willing to accept moral ambiguity. That Splitter and Howard are able to connect these diverse traditions with the care of the self, shows that the wisdom tradition has relevance beyond its origins in ancient and renaissance philosophy.

Irrespective of differences in emphasis, the scholars in this issue value the community of philosophical inquiry as much for its destabilizing propensities as for its methodological strengths. The CPI operationalizes our epistemological aims of seeking truth and goodness, but reveals that these aims are only ever imperfectly fulfilled, and that they cannot be fulfilled to any extent without our also fulfilling educative and ethical aims. It is by allowing ourselves to undergo education that we come to experience the world more truthfully, reconstruct our relationships with others and encounter multiple and divergent possibilities of the self. This multiplicity is one of the CPI’s profoundly destabilizing effects. If the self is revealed in its
Caring for the self as by our interactions with others around values and beliefs. In inquiry as a practice of self-care that is necessarily mediated simultaneously de-centers the self and encourages individuals to relate the conscience to more transcendent, impersonal ethical standards but also to a variety of external moral commitments and sources, necessitating an unending struggle to integrate them. For Howard, then, the cultivation of ethical conscience involves a perpetual process of dialectical self-interpretation, which he recommends initiating by engaging children in fair and exploratory discussion and assessment of norms with others, as typified in Philosophy for Children. Howard argues that the pedagogy and curriculum of Philosophy for Children is informed by the recognition that our commitments and identities are shaped by our interactions with others. Engagement in communal philosophical inquiry blurs boundaries between the known and the unknown and between self and other, demonstrating that we are not self-sufficient. This practice reveals that children lack moral certitude, not because they are pre- or provisional adults, but because they share in the human condition. Philosophy for Children presumes that all individuals will come undone in the course of the discussion, to then be reintegrated in the spirit of reciprocity and growth. In the language of Howard, reflecting on what matters with others simultaneously de-centers the self and encourages individuals to care more fully for the self.

Splitter is also interested in communal philosophical inquiry as a practice of self-care that is necessarily mediated by our interactions with others around values and beliefs. In “Caring for the self as one-among-others,” he approaches this practice via philosophy of language, arguing that thinking and speaking are interdependent which, in turn, makes dialogue (as a mode of speaking) and inquiry (as a mode of thinking) interdependent also. Splitter relates the care of the self to three dimensions of care needed for any successful CPI: interpersonal care that generates intellectual and emotional safety, care for the procedures of robust, open-ended inquiry, and care about the philosophical topic under consideration. He refers to the work of Donald Davidson to defend the pedagogical use of the community of inquiry against the claim that inter-subjective dialogue cannot make the thinking of inexperienced participants correspond to disciplinary thinking, let alone to the objective world. Davidson’s “triangulated” view that knowledge of one’s own mind, other minds and the world are epistemologically interdependent, means that subjective thought entails objective commitments, including the recognition of a shared world. Because communication mediates thought and reality – including the thinking of others, and one’s own and others’ non-discursive experience with the world – it is the primary mechanism both for epistemological self-correction and for the kinds of care Splitter advocates.

Splitter highlights a normative plank of Davidson’s epistemology that is operative in Philosophy for Children: his “principle of charity,” which requires us to listen to others under the presumption of truth, i.e. as if what the other is saying were true. This imperative derives from the triangulation of knowledge, which makes it impossible to determine a priori the potential relevance or meaningfulness of what is said. Splitter rightly argues for the application of Davidson’s “principle of charity” to our treatment of children. In so far as they communicate linguistically, children necessarily participate in the triangulation of self, others and the world that makes possible knowledge and relationships of care, both among themselves and with the adults with whom they share the world.

The question of children’s fitness to participate in philosophical dialogue and otherwise to practice self-care is taken up in Darryl De Marzio’s essay, “Dialogue, the Care of the Self, and the Beginning of Philosophy.” De Marzio relates Plato’s apparent ambivalence about the right time for introducing children to philosophy – not before they are old enough to care about truth and therefore take philosophy as more than a sport, but not too late for philosophy’s self-correcting practices to make a difference in their lives – to the proper beginning of philosophy – recognition of one’s ignorance and moral deficiencies – and its proper end – seeking truth. De Marzio makes use of Foucault’s argument that we must prepare for philosophy, as the search for truth, by first becoming subjects of truth ourselves. This entails, in the tradition of Socrates, coming to terms with our own epistemic and moral deficiencies, viz., that we have been concerned with the wrong things: reputation, honor, and physical pleasure. De Marzio draws on the Socratic notion of caring for the soul by engaging in activities that mirror the self to itself, and recommends philosophical dialogue as one such activity. The CPI is a never-ending cycle of self-questioning, inquiry, and quasi-stable self-correction, which inevitably becomes unstable at some time, giving rise to further self-questioning. The practice of self-care does not culminate in finally becoming wise and abandoning that practice. Rather, increased wisdom means increased capacities for self-scrutiny and self-correction. Ironically, on this view, philosophy as the search for truth is both the beginning and the end of philosophy as the care of the self.

The value of the community of philosophical inquiry, as a practice of self-care, transcends, and in our view justifies its other benefits, such as improvements in questioning (Scholl 2005), literacy (Yeazell 1982), argumentation (Lipman 1984), ethical reasoning (Lipman 1987) emotional intelligence (Lipman 1995) citizenship (Lipman 1991; 1997) and violence prevention (Lipman 1995). This value commitment goes against the grain of the educational status quo described above,
the culture of which makes it difficult for teachers to sustain the day-to-day rituals and activities that enhance the dignity and meaningfulness of the educational project and those involved in it. The CPI is one such activity. In many respects, as Kohan and Wozniak observe, it engages teachers and students in a process of unlearning, of “emptying” themselves of presumptions to knowledge, methodology, and authority. In “Philosophy as Spiritual and Political Exercise in an Adult Literacy Course,” they argue that if teachers are to encourage students to practice self-care by way of collaborative philosophical inquiry, they must have experienced this themselves. The experiment Kohan and Wozniak conducted in a suburb of Rio de Janeiro encouraged teachers to refrain from thinking of themselves as providing students with information, skills or dispositions they would otherwise lack, but as creating conditions that enable their students to come to care for things they might not otherwise care for, including their selves. Wozniak and Kohan’s examination of the CPI as a practice of self-care emphasizes its interpretative dimension. In the tradition of Paulo Freire, they argue that interpretive texts – including images, words, and life experiences – volunteered by students reveal something about how they read the world and themselves, while the practice of inquiry calls those readings into question, culminating in altered visions of the world and new possibilities for action, in some cases leading to the empowerment of people to actively resist oppression.

The final contributor to this issue, Olivier Michaud, is a Canadian doctoral student at Montclair State University who attended a ten-day international seminar on Philosophy for Children co-directed by the editors of this issue. The seminar was held at an Episcopal convent in the woods of Mendham, New Jersey, on the theme of “Philosophy as a Way of Life.” Participants lived, ate, studied and played together, and while they engaged in CPI in the mornings and evenings, they were encouraged to spend the afternoons in contemplative activities (running, walking, reading, writing, etc.). Disillusioned with academic philosophy, Michaud initially did not see the connection between the ostensible purpose of the seminar – “to do philosophy” – and his personal, spiritual quest for meaning. But the qualities of the seminar allowed him to rediscover that connection, as he narrates in “Monastic Meditations on Spirituality and Political Exercise in an Adult Literacy Course,” he introduces dimensions of the wisdom tradition not touched on by the other contributors such as the unity of mind and body and the potential for somaesthetic practices of self-care. He calls us to see Philosophy for Children as one element of a much broader educational practice dedicated to self-care, that would include being in nature, diet, and being present. As he narrates his shifting relationship to the workshop, Michaud conveys a sense of philosophy as pilgrimage: a seeking of truths that cannot yet be conceived, a journeying of the self and a retreat from ordinary routines in order to heighten and sensitize reflective awareness.

Michaud also recalls the love or erotic desire that informs both philosophy and education as the care of the self. For one thing, we educate children for wisdom because we love them. We want them to flourish, to have rich and fulfilling lives, which is synonymous with wisdom. For another, we expect that children, like us, will be drawn to wisdom when they encounter it. Most of us can recall being moved by a teacher, a friend, a heroic person, a legend or a work of literature or art that instantiated beauty, or fineness, to use Aristotelian terminology. Ironically, it is sometimes difficult to say what such wisdom consists in, except to say that we find it exemplary and are inspired to realize it ourselves. This is why, as Needleman explains, “reason must free itself from the thrall of the passions, but not from the exquisite and essential subtlety of the feeling/valuing component of the mind, a component which is an absolutely necessary part of authentic human reason” (2002, 48-9).

Philosophy practiced as ‘a way of life’ can be understood as a program for improving our character or otherwise making us better individuals than we currently are. This is one of the meanings of “practice” – as we practice playing tennis or wood carving, in order to improve our performance. But we emphasize this instrumental value of philosophy at the risk of losing sight of its intrinsic value, namely that it is the kind of activity that beings like us should be engaged in. We are meaning-seeking creatures who exist relationally, especially linguistically. For these reasons, we need to reflect communally about the things that matter to us. We need to engage with eternal questions and with our individual and collective moral opacity. In this sense, we – including children – practice philosophy as doctors practice medicine and lawyers practice law: as a manifestation of who we are and the kind of life we have chosen. In this sense, as the contributors here explain, philosophy is not something we practice in order to become the kind of subject who no longer needs that practice. Rather, it is a way of life, and as Dewey argued, the same may be said of education:

We always live at the time we live and not at some other time, and only by extracting at each present time the full meaning of each present experience are we prepared for doing the same thing in the future. This is the only preparation which in the long run amounts to anything. (Dewey 1938; 1967, 49.)

This is also the import of the spiritual / philosophical dimensions of teaching and learning. The teacher’s manner and bearing, her presence and indeed, her very being, can be instantiations of beauty that awaken the children’s desire for wisdom – for study and play and work and friendship that are typified by such beauty. And as most Philosophy for Children practitioners have experienced, this philosophical pedagogy is entirely reciprocal.
REFERENCES


**Introduction: The Question of the Beginning of Philosophy in Plato**

While surveying the dialogues of Plato one is likely to perceive a certain ambivalence concerning the question of whether the young are suitable for philosophy. Perhaps most famous among these writings is the passage from Book VII of the *Republic* in which Socrates says:

> I suppose you aren’t aware that when lads get their first taste of [philosophical arguments], they misuse them as though it were play, always using them to contradict; and imitating those men by whom they are refuted, they themselves refute others; like puppies pulling and tearing with argument at those who happen to be near…And as a result of this, you see, they themselves and the whole activity of philosophy become the objects of slander among the rest of men.¹

The case that Socrates brings forth here is motivated by the concern that the young will misuse the dialectical approach to philosophy—the approach that Socrates has spent much of Book VII articulating and advancing.² Rather than having their mind’s eye fixed solely upon the truth cloaked in the eternal forms, the young are predisposed to employ dialectic for the purpose of refuting and contradicting their counterparts, for the sake of emerging victorious in rhetorical battle. Instead of taking up philosophy for the purpose of apprehending truth and knowledge, the young are prone to distort philosophical discourse into a dreaded display of sophistry, undermining the quest for wisdom, and, ultimately, threatening the welfare and stability of the city. Philosophy, according to the Socrates of the *Republic*, is simply too critical an activity to be entrusted to the young. The inclination of youth toward the thrill of battle is unbecoming of philosophy, which requires the sensibility of a well-ordered soul.

The implication of this critique is that there is, ultimately, a right time in one’s life for the engagement of philosophy. And though it is far from systematically arrived at, the suggestion offered by Socrates in the *Republic* is that the right time for philosophy is fifty years old.³ Unlike the child, Socrates says, “An older man [wouldn’t] be willing to participate in such madness. He will imitate the man who’s willing to discuss and consider the truth rather than the one who plays and contradicts for the sake of the game.”⁴ The pedagogical implication of this suggestion is twofold: first, the education of the young might not actually consist of philosophical dialogue, but instead might consist of the necessary preparations for taking up philosophical dialogue when one is older; and, second, that the proper engagement with philosophy requires that one establish a proper relation to truth. In other words, one must relate to truth in such a way that one only uses dialectic and philosophical argument with an eye fixed upon truth; that one considers the truth always in the context of one’s dialogue with others, rather than with an aim of defeating one’s interlocutors. It is interesting to note that in the *Republic*, Plato never has Socrates suggest that the young are cognitively unable to partake in philosophical dialogue, as if somehow dialectic were beyond the young’s developmental grasp.⁵ Instead, the idea here is that the young are perhaps too spirited and too prone to a type of madness which will prevent them from always keeping in view the proper end of philosophy—which is to say, the truth which the dialogue must always move toward.

The ambivalence in Plato concerning the young’s suitability for philosophy comes to the fore when we compare the above passage from the *Republic* to another passage from Plato’s *Alcibiades I*.⁶ In this text, Socrates and Alcibiades (who at the time is presumably twenty years old)⁷ have been engaged in a dialogue concerning, among other things, the nature of justice. After enduring his second experience of *aporia*, Alcibiades—like so many of Socrates’ interlocutors—is filled with despair due to his inability to answer adequately the questions that Socrates has put forward. Alcibiades says, “But, indeed Socrates, I do not know what I am saying; and I have long been, unconsciously to myself, in a most disgraceful state.”⁸ And with his typical blend of self-satisfaction and optimism, Socrates replies:

> Nevertheless, cheer up; at fifty, if you had discovered your deficiency, you would have been too old, and the time for taking care of yourself would have passed away, but yours is just the age at which the discovery should be made.”⁹

There are a couple of aspects of this passage that need to be considered in light of the passage from the *Republic*. First,
there is the remarkable reversal that occurs regarding the right time for philosophy. Whereas in the Republic fifty years is the age at which the self is most ripe for philosophy, in the Alcibiades fifty is too old. However, upon closer examination there appears to be an almost intended symmetry between the two passages on precisely this point. The question of the right time for philosophy arises in the Republic upon the consideration of that time of life when the self is ready to properly employ philosophical arguments for the purpose of seeking and arriving at truth. But the question of the right time for philosophy as it arises in the Alcibiades concerns the right time of life for discovering a deficiency in oneself, for recognizing that one is actually ignorant of what one had thought one understood completely. This self-recognition is the necessary condition for the beginning of philosophy. So, in the Republic, the issue is about when one is ready to best use philosophy once one has already recognized this deficiency in oneself. In the Alcibiades, however, the issue is about when one is ready for discovering, presumably for the very first time, one’s ignorance. Time is certainly of the essence in both instances, but in the former the essence relates to the end of philosophy, and in the latter the essence relates to the beginning of philosophy.

The second aspect that must be considered, however, concerns the relationship between the self and the truth that are implicated in both passages. Whereas the relevant passages from the Republic have to do with the right time for philosophy insofar as philosophy entails dialogue—not for the battle, but for the truth—the passage from the Alcibiades, on the other hand, has to do with the right time for philosophy insofar as philosophy entails the establishment of a special manner of relating to oneself. And as Socrates suggests in the text, this manner of relating to oneself is referred to as “taking care of yourself.” Here, philosophy becomes necessary for Alcibiades because his newly-discovered lack of knowledge regarding the nature of justice reveals a further truth about the way in which he has related to himself up until his encounter with Socrates. Throughout his young life Alcibiades has concerned himself with all of the wrong things: wealth, reputation, physical pleasure—things that in the end merely belong to him, but do not constitute Alcibiades himself. He has neglected himself for so long that he has failed to realize that not only does he not know what justice is, he does not know himself. Alcibiades must now—while still in his youth—take up the task of caring for himself.

Alcibiades asks Socrates how he might take up the task of caring for himself, now that he has discovered this deficiency of knowledge ‘within’ himself. Socrates responds, “Answer questions, Alcibiades; and that is a process which by the grace of God, if I may put my faith in my oracle, will be very improving to both of us.” The process of answering questions—of immersing oneself in the dialectical give and take of question and answer—is the philosophical work that one must take up in order to care for the self. In this way, dialogue becomes more than just an epistemological method, a process by which one works to construct (or discover) meaning and knowledge of the world; it becomes a form of askesis, a practice by which one cultivates the self in order to attend to the self in a rich and meaningful way.

**Foucault on the Subject and Truth**

Much turns on this distinction between dialogue as a mode of epistemological inquiry and dialogue as a practice of self-care in the later work of Michel Foucault. For Foucault, this distinction ultimately turns on the relationship between the subject and truth. What interested Foucault about this relationship throughout his work was the question of how subjects engaged in practices that relate to truth, and in his earlier work he began to write a history of the practice of truth in this sense. The familiar epistemological problems of correspondence and coherence do not come up here. Instead, what is at stake is how the self comes to be a subject of truth—a subject that has access to, can speak, and can pursue the truth—and the practices that prepare the subject to be a subject of truth.

Since Descartes, Foucault discovers, philosophy has viewed the human subject as being essentially capable of having access to truth simply by virtue of its own subjectivity. That is to say, by virtue of possessing a *cogito*, self-consciousness, or rationality, the subject *qua subject* is capable of knowledge. For the ancients, however, in order for truth to be accessible the subject must undergo a spiritual transformation and conversion. The subject must become ready for truth by turning the self into something other than what it formerly has been. The subject must be formed into a subject of truth. This process of formation is what Foucault calls, in contrast to ‘philosophy’, ‘spirituality’:

> We will call “philosophy” the form of thought that asks what it is that enables the subject to have access to truth and which attempts to determine the conditions and limits of the subject’s access to truth. We will call “spirituality” then the set of researches, practices, and experiences, which may be purifications, ascetic exercises, renunciations, conversions of looking, modifications of existence, etc., which are, not for knowledge but for the subject, for the subject’s very being, the price to be paid for access to truth.

Whereas ‘philosophy’ represents the attempt to articulate through theoretical discourse and demonstration the actual conditions and limits of the subject’s access to truth, ‘spirituality’ represents the subject’s attempt to become a subject capable of truth. The philosophy that Foucault speaks of here is a unique modern phenomenon, beginning with what he dubs the “Cartesian moment” in the history of the relationship between the subject and truth. From Descartes onward philosophy has considered the subject’s access to truth as being “solely through [the] activity of knowing, without anything else being demanded of [the subject] and without [the subject] having to change or alter his being as subject.” Modern philosophy, therefore, posits the subject *qua subject* as essentially capable
of truth. In doing so, modern philosophy removes the subject’s quest for self-transformation as an essential component of philosophical practice, which is reduced to theoretical discourse. In the ancient world, however, “the philosophical question of ‘how to have access to truth’ and the practice of spirituality…were never separate.”

In order to prepare the way for a discussion of how the practice of philosophical dialogue gets mapped on to ancient practices of spirituality in the sense that Foucault describes above, I would like to discuss some of the ramifications of Foucault’s historical analysis, paying closer attention to the idea of the modern subject as a subject of truth. I think the most interesting of all Foucault’s discussions of this topic is perhaps the earliest text that he devotes to it—that is, the essay entitled, “My Body, This Paper, This Fire.” The essay serves two functions. First, it is a response to Jacques Derrida’s criticism of Foucault’s interpretation of Descartes’ *Meditations on First Philosophy* which appears in Foucault’s *History of Madness*. What is more important for our current purposes, however, is the second function which the essay serves: to show how Descartes’ text actually reflects a double schema in which two forms of discourse are at work. On the one hand, there is the “demonstrative schema” which consists of a set of propositions which follow logically and which form a theoretical system which the reader of the *Meditations* must follow in order to arrive at the truth. On the other hand, there is what Foucault calls the “ascetic schema,” a set of exercises which Descartes presumably undertakes—which is to say, the precise *meditations* that Descartes performs—so as to describe to the reader how he or she might modify themselves in order to be capable of receiving the demonstrations. In other words, the *Meditations* are designed to transform and modify the ascetic subject engaged in spiritual exercise into the position of the rational subject, a subject capable of truth without the need of any transformations or modifications. This is why Foucault finds Descartes so compelling a figure in the history of Western thought. The “Cartesian moment” is that moment in this history when the subject relates to truth in such a way that the truth will no longer, in Foucault’s words, “save the subject.”

Truth will now come to represent that which the subject is capable of attaining by virtue of its inherent rationality, rather than the reward for the subject’s *askesis*—the self’s quest for transformation and improvement.

One of the more provocative results of Foucault’s argument is that we modern readers of the *Meditations* are not capable of starting off from the position of the ascetic subject, from which Foucault sees Descartes and his contemporaries as starting the exercises. We moderns must begin from the end, so to speak, from the position of the cogito—the rational subject. But as Edward McGushin points out in a recent and thorough study of Foucault, this may have ultimately a salutory effect:

> [Descartes’ contemporary] would have entered into [the *Meditations*] in order to take the position of the cogito—she would not have started from that position…. However, it is this position from which we [moderns] enter into them. We arrive at the *Meditations* as Cartesian subjects—we see the text as an object to be controlled. And yet, precisely because they are a set of techniques that move the reader from a precogito subject-position into the position of the cogito, the *Meditations* contain with them the starting point. Therefore, approaching the *Meditations* as spiritual exercises produces the opposite effect in a modern, Cartesian reader as it would have produced in a premodern reader. Recovering the ascetic dimension of the *Meditations* serves therefore to destabilize the cogito—without destroying it—by giving it back its foundation: the practices of the self which bring it into being.

Later on, during my discussion of the role of dialogue in philosophical communities of inquiry, I will suggest a point similar to the one made above. I will suggest that rather than positioning the subject in relationship to truth for the purpose of arriving at knowledge, philosophical dialogue might work to destabilize the subject into relationship to self and others for the purpose of self-care. But now I would like to return to the theme of care of the self as it emerges in ancient philosophy, particularly in Plato’s *Alcibiades*, where we see philosophical dialogue serve as a mode, or practice, of self-care.

### The Care of the Self in Plato’s *Alcibiades*

In the *Alcibiades*, Socrates suggests that in order to care for the self Alcibiades must “answer questions”—a task that the young Alcibiades is especially ready for now rather than if he had discovered so at the age of fifty. The remainder of the dialogue primarily deals with two questions: First, what is the self that the self must care for? And, second, what is this practice of care of the self? What does it consist of? If it consists of answering Socrates’ questions, then, what, exactly, does this practice entail?

As for the first question—what is the self?—the answer is reached rather quickly in the text. After a brief series of questions, arguments, and examples, Socrates and Alcibiades arrive at the Platonic notion that the self is the soul. Socrates says, “for surely there is nothing which may be called more properly ourselves than the soul,” and also, “we may truly conceive that you and I are conversing with one another, soul to soul.” Whereas the body might be properly described as merely belonging to the self, the soul, on the other hand, is best understood as the self itself. As Foucault points out in commenting on this dialogue, the soul in this context is not a substance, but a subject—which is to say, the soul is that which the body is *subject to* insofar as it belongs to the self. He writes, “Taking care of oneself will be to take care of the self insofar as it is the ‘subject of’ a certain number of things: the subject of instrumental action, of relationships with other people, of behavior and attitudes in general, and the subject
also of relationship to oneself."21 What we have here, then, is the notion of a relational self rather than a metaphysical self—a self constituted by its mode and manner of relation to itself, rather than by essential qualities. The care of the self, therefore, is the care of a soul-subject rather than a soul-substance.

As for the second question—what does the care of the self consist of?—Socrates points to the famous inscription on the wall of the Temple of Apollo, “Know Thyself!” But in referencing the Delphic inscription, Socrates is not alluding to an act of knowledge in the positive sense. That is, Socrates is not suggesting that Alcibiades seek knowledge of himself in the form of a demonstration or definition of what the self is. Instead, what Socrates is suggesting is that Alcibiades establish a special mode of relation to his own soul—a mode of knowledge, for sure, but a mode of knowledge that does not entail the objectification of the soul, nor the demonstration of the defining features of the soul. Rather, this special mode of relation of the self to the self, of soul to soul, can best be characterized by certain forms of activity: for example, applying oneself to oneself, paying close attention to the self, concerning the self with the self, etc.22

Socrates’ reference to the Delphic inscription as it occurs in the Alcibiades culminates in the presentation of another, more insightful analogy, in which Socrates likens the soul to a mirror. Near the conclusion of the text, Socrates says, “Consider; if someone were to say to the eye, ‘See thyself,’ as you might say to a man, ‘Know thyself,’ what is the nature and meaning of this precept? Would not his meaning be: —That the eye should look at that in which it would see itself?”23 The objects that we see ourselves in are, of course, mirrors. And the remarkable thing about the human eye is that it is, in both form and function, akin to a mirror. Reflecting on this likeness, Socrates says to Alcibiades, “Did you ever observe that the face of the person looking into the eye of another is reflected as in a mirror; and in the visual organ which is over against him, and which is called the pupil, there is a sort of image of the person looking? Then the eye, looking at another eye, and at that in the eye which is most perfect, and which is the instrument of vision, will there see itself?”24

Socrates asks Alcibiades to think of the soul as being akin to the eye. If the soul is to know itself—meaning, of course, if the self is to care for the self—then the soul must see itself, and, in particular, that part of itself which is the instrument of “sight.” Furthermore, as we have already determined from what has come before in the text, this “seeing” is indeed a mode of knowing. We might conclude, therefore, that this part or instrument of the soul is reason but, interestingly, Socrates never labels it as such in the text. He says instead that this instrument is the part of our soul which “resembles the divine,” “that which has to do with wisdom and knowledge,” and that “part of the soul in which […] virtue resides.”25 The upshot of these passages is that again we are compelled to think of this divine aspect of the soul not in terms of substance—as rational ego and source of all thought—but, instead, in terms of relation—as that which the self is attending to, employing, cultivating, and so on. The self of the Delphic imperative is therefore not an isolable entity, a singular member of the class of all things. Instead, it emerges and is constituted through its mode of relation to itself and to others. The divine in us is not that which lurks behind our performances, directing our activity and thought; rather, it comes through in our performances. It is the instrument of the soul precisely through its instrumentation.

The soul-mirror analogy as it appears in the Alcibiades culminates in the notion of the dialogical self. The most striking implication of the analogy is that the care of the self is practiced through dialogue with others. The Delphic inscription commands us, says Socrates, to look at the self—to look at that which is most divine in us. But this form of attending to the self is expressed through our dialogical engagement with others. The radical turning inward which inaugurates the Western philosophical tradition through the figure of Socrates takes place, somewhat paradoxically, when the self turns its gaze outwardly toward the other—and here we can mark yet another point of departure between ancient philosophy and its modern incarnation by way of the Cartesian moment: whereas Descartes’ turning inward brought about the subject’s detachment from others through self-meditation, Socrates’ turning inward thrusts the subject into the world of communal dialogue. This is not to say that the Cartesian model of self-meditation is not a practice of the self,
a mode of self-care, or even that it is a distinctly Cartesian exercise—after all, forms of ascetic detachment were common in ancient philosophical practice.26 It is to suggest, however, that in Cartesian philosophical practice, as opposed to ancient philosophical practice, detached self-meditation is sufficient for the transformation of the subject into a subject of truth and reason. With ancient philosophical practice we see that one must always come back to the world of dialogue after a period of detachment. Foucault writes, “In the [ancient] practice of the self, someone else, the other, is an indispensable condition for the form that defines this practice to effectively attain and be filled by its object, that is to say, by the self. The other is indispensable for the practice of the self to arrive at the self at which it aims.”27

In the context of the Alcibiades we see this indispensability of the other in the soul-mirror analogy, and in Socrates’ remark that Alcibiades must “answer questions” in order to care for the self. Even if we were to imagine that what Socrates had in mind for Alcibiades was for the two to depart and answer questions independently of one another, rather than face-to-face, such a practice would inevitably call up the presence of the other by virtue of its form as language. As David Kennedy describes, “dialogue is implicit in the syntactical structure of language itself. The structure of subjects and predicates implies the proposition, which in turn implies its contradiction, which in turn implies a possible resolution of the two in a third proposition…. Every question implies a response, and every proposition a question to which it is a response.”28 Therefore, every discourse structure, no matter how monological its form, always takes the dialogical form as an “interplay of interlocutors”—a dialogue of self with self, text with text, question with answer.

As I have tried to show thus far, philosophical dialogue becomes significant in a text like the Alcibiades not because it is the means and method for the attainment of an objective truth or an objective knowledge of the self, but because it is first and foremost the principle activity of caring for the self. It is the principal manner of attending to the self, of concerning the self with the self, because the self is—by way of the mediating presence of the other as interlocutor—made available to the self in a genuine and authentic way. Furthermore, philosophical dialogue as the principal activity of self-care emerges when the subject is positioned in a specific manner of relationship to truth and knowledge, and of self to other. In this manner of relationship philosophical dialogue is not for truth—although a fidelity to truthfulness is always present—but for the subject. This entails a certain disposition toward truth, self, and other—a disposition (as we have seen from our reading of the Alcibiades) that is ultimately shaped and cultivated by the very structure of philosophical dialogue itself. The subject disposed in this way views the purpose of philosophy as having to do with the good of the subject—its well-being, its way of life, and its way of relating to itself and to others—rather than with what positions the subject to have access to truth or knowledge.

In the following and concluding section I explore how this question of the proper relationship between the subject and truth remains a dynamic question at the heart of pedagogies rooted in philosophical dialogue, most notably the family of pedagogies associated with Philosophy for Children, or what I will refer to from here on out as CPI, or, ‘communities of philosophical inquiry.’ Though CPI has guiding epistemic aims which can be traced back to its early derivation from American pragmatism, its understanding of knowledge and truth as the always unfinished work of a community of inquirers lends itself to a positioning of the subject in relation to truth and knowledge so as to cultivate the practice of self-care.

Conclusions: Dialogue, Truth, and the Subject in CPI

Our discussion thus far becomes significant for CPI to the extent that we understand CPI as a reconfiguration of the philosophical tradition precisely in regard to this relationship between the subject and truth, specifically in terms of how we understand the role of philosophical discourse in the tradition. As David Kennedy has suggested, CPI has come to represent a radical construction of Western philosophy in that “narrative has replaced exposition in our understanding of philosophical discourse,” and that “CPI represents an embodied narrative context in which the truth comes to represent the best story, in a discursive location in which there are always multiple stories.”29 In this understanding truth stands ahead of the subject, not as that which is to be discovered once and for all, but as that which is to be constructed through the dialogical give and take that occurs within community. Philosophical discourse becomes, then, not the work of disclosing an ultimate reality that is, presumably, always already there, but the continual movement toward a unity of narratives in which the subject stands in relation to truth precisely through its location in relation to others. As Kennedy points out, there are always “multiple stories,” a necessity which is reflective of the duality inherent in the dialogical structure of discourse itself. Philosophical dialogue therefore represents a double movement for the subject in relation to truth: a continual moving closer to truth by way of the convergence of narratives, but also a continual movement away from truth by way of the divergence of multiple narratives. Kennedy adds, “Dialogue offers the possibility of a transition to a condition of unity which in its very structure it yet denies, for it emerges only after a prior transition from unity into difference. It is a double movement, always in motion toward a recovered unity, but never arriving.”30

The image of the subject in continuous double movement in relation to truth reminds us that through philosophical dialogue the subject is not so much taking a position in relation to truth, as being continually repositioned within the discursive space of CPI. As Foucault hoped that our modern reception of the ascetic dimensions of Descartes’ Meditations might have the salutary effect of destabilizing the cogito so as to bring about a renewed commitment to those spiritual practices of the
self that generated the *Meditations* in the first place, so too might philosophical dialogue within the context of CPI works to destabilize the subject from a “boundaried, thematizing subject” of knowledge\(^1\) into a subject of self-care—a subject who is open to self-transformation and the cultivation of a special manner of relationship to itself and others through dialogue.

Again, this is not to suggest that CPI can or ought to be altogether void of epistemic aims. Rather, what I am suggesting is that the dialogical structure of CPI works to create and cultivate the conditions for the practice of self-care insofar as the subject becomes destabilized and repositioned in relation to truth. Furthermore, this destabilization can only occur through the initial positioning of the subject as a subject of truth—as a subject who is motivated by and concerned with access to truth. We witnessed this in the *Alcibiades*. Initially, Alcibiades was concerned primarily with the nature of justice but was soon repositioned by virtue of his dialogue with Socrates into a new and altogether different manner of relationship to himself. At the beginning of the dialogue Alcibiades had epistemological aims, but these became transformed into what we might call educative aims, so that what was at stake in the dialogue became more than just Alcibiades’ knowledge of justice, but how the pursuit of that knowledge could give shape to Alcibiades’ cultivation of self and his manner of being human in the world. In a similar way, the pragmatist conception of truth as formulated by Charles Peirce, et al.—as being that which the community of inquirers will arrive at in the long run\(^3\)—also works, I believe, to destabilize and reposition the subject. On the one hand, this conception of truth gives the subject a singular direction, a pre-determined central point toward which the subject is moving; but on the other hand, because the truth is always somewhat out of the subject’s reach, that movement toward the truth is always unpredictable, partial, and emergent. So the subject of self-care emerges within the context of CPI, not in spite of its epistemic aims, but very much because of those aims being provisional, resistant to final closure, and always not yet.\(^3\)

The status of truth as the always unfinished work of CPI brings us back to the question of the right time for philosophy—that is, the question of philosophy’s beginning. The subject’s experience of double movement, the experience of moving toward the truth only when one has become repositioned and destabilized in relation to that truth, means that philosophy practiced in this way is always at the moment of its beginning. In the context of Socratic dialogue we see this clearly in the experience of *aporia*. On the one hand, the aporeitic moment is what the dialogue has been tending to all along—Socrates’ questions serving to guide his interlocutors toward the recognition that they do not actually know what they once thought they knew, and that they have not concerned themselves with themselves. On the other hand, this recognition does not signal the termination of the dialogue, but its beginning, because the aporetic experience brings forth the recognition that one needs philosophy from here on out. This is what the *Alcibiades* has taught us about philosophy’s beginning: the beginning of philosophy is not, first and foremost, the call to knowledge and truth; nor is it the call to dissect the self in order to know it and bring forth its ‘identity’. Rather, the beginning of philosophy is the beginning of education—it is the beginning of the task of one’s life as the formation of the self.

**Acknowledgements**

I wish to thank Maughn Gregory and Megan Laverty for their encouragement and editorial support throughout the preparation of this paper. I am also grateful to Rodino Anderson and James Stillwagon for our many provocative and critical conversations pertaining to my reading of Plato.

**Endnotes**

2. Ibid., [531d-534e].
3. Ibid., [540a].
4. Ibid., [539c] (emphasis added).
5. This observation is also supported by the fact that Socrates is depicted by Plato in several dialogues to engage in discussions with the young. See, for example, Plato, *Theaetetus*, trans. Seth Bernadete (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986); and, Plato, *Lysis*, trans. Stanley Lombardo, in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1997).
6. It is necessary to note that the *Alcibiades* has been considered by many scholars to be one of the spurious dialogues in the Platonic corpus. This consideration was arguably inaugurated by Friedrich Schleiermacher with his *Introductions to the Dialogues of Plato*, first published in German in 1836. There, Schleiermacher contends that due to significant theoretical and stylistic incongruities which are evident when compared to the other dialogues universally attributed to Plato, the *Alcibiades* cannot reasonably be assumed to have been authored by Plato. See, Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Introductions to the Dialogues of Plato*, trans. William Dobson (New York: Arno Press, 1973) 329-35. For a discussion of how the authenticity of the *Alcibiades* has been perceived by scholars and commentators both before and after Schleiermacher, see Nicholas Denyer, “Introduction,” in Plato, *Alcibiades*, ed. Nicholas Denyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) 14-26.
[127d],
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
13 Ibid., 17.
14 Ibid.
17 Foucault, The Hermeneutics of the Subject, 19.
19 Plato, Alcibiades I [130e].
20 Foucault, The Hermeneutics of the Subject, 56.
21 Ibid., 57.
22 Foucault determines four types, or “families,” of expressions found throughout ancient philosophy which can be said to resemble the Socratic principle of ‘care of the self’ that emerges in the Alcibiades. These are: 1) ‘cognitive activities’, such as analyzing or examining the self; 2) ‘conversion activities’, such as withdrawing into the self, delving into the depths of the self; 3) ‘medical/juridical/political/religious activities’, such as treating oneself, claiming oneself, freeing oneself, and honoring oneself, respectively; and, 4) ‘relation activities’, such as self-mastery, self-contentment, etc. Ibid., 85-87.
23 Plato, Alcibiades I [132d].
24 Ibid., [133a].
25 Ibid., 57.
26 Even Socrates was known to have detached himself in solitary thought, though not, perhaps, in Descartes’ methodical way. Readers of Plato’s Symposium will recall that just prior to entering Agathon’s house for the dinner party, Socrates had “lost himself in thought” and would not enter the house when called to come in. Plato has us believe that this was part and parcel of Socrates’ manner of being, for as it is reported in the text, “It’s one of his habits: every now and then he just goes off like that and stands motionless, wherever he happens to be.” Near the end of the dialogue, this “habit” is confirmed by Alcibiades who tells the story of a Socrates who “started thinking about some problem or other; he just stood outside, trying to figure it out. He couldn’t resolve it, but he wouldn’t give up. He simply stood there, glued to the same spot.” See, Plato, Symposium, trans. Alexander Nehemas and Paul Woodruff (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1989) [174d] [175b] [220c].
27 Foucault, The Hermeneutics of the Subject, 127.
29 Ibid., 339.
30 Ibid., 340.
31 Ibid.
32 Peirce writes, “There is, then, to every question a true answer, a final conclusion, to which the opinion of every man is constantly gravitating. He may for a time recede from it, but give him more experience and time for consideration, and he will finally approach it. The individual may not live to reach the truth; there is a residuum of error in every individual’s opinions. No matter; it remains that there is a definite opinion to which the mind of man is, on the whole and in the long run, tending.” Charles S. Peirce, “Critical Review of Berkeley’s Idealism,” in Selected Writings, ed. Philip P. Wiener (New York: Dover Publications, 1958) 81-82.
Philosophy as Spiritual Exercise in an Adult Literacy Course

Walter Kohan & Jason Wozniak

Introduction

This narrative describes and problematizes one year (2007-2008) of educational and philosophical work with illiterate adults in contexts of urban poverty in the Public School Joaquim da Silva Peçanha, located in the city of Duque de Caxias, a suburb of the State of Rio de Janeiro, Brasil. The project, “Em Caxias a Filosofia En-caixa?!” (“Does Philosophy fit in Caxias?!”), involved a teacher education program in which public school teachers studied and practiced the art of conducting philosophical experiences with their students, and the authors’ experimentation with philosophical experiences in an adult literacy class. This narrative concerns the latter aspect of the project. The thirty students and two teachers involved in the course did not study the history of philosophy, nor did they create philosophical systems or theories. Rather, they participated in a philosophical experience that might have been understood by examining Pierre Hadot’s concept of a philosophical way of living. “As a way of life” – a notion as old as Socrates. Philosophy as a way of living in which one “examines oneself and others” (Apology 29c) and as an adverb (23d; 28e; 29d) that qualifies his manner of living, for which he is being persecuted. Philosophy then, appears to be a kind of practice, a form of living in which one “examines oneself and others” (Apology 28e).

The “philosophical way of living” practiced by adults in a public school literacy class is discussed and examined in this narrative. The narrative also aims to demonstrate that: a) a “philosophical way of living” can be practiced by any adult regardless of literacy ability or number of years of formal education; b) philosophy as a lived experience can be a transformative practice that contributes to what Paulo Freire calls “the reading of the world” and is thus an epistemological and political condition of critical political literacy; c) there is a reciprocal relationship between dialogue and a “philosophical way of living” such that each cultivates the other; and d) in spite of conditions, tensions and challenges, there is indeed space within schools to inspire and nurture a “philosophical way of living.” Put another way, even if there is no formally recognized space for a “philosophical way of living” in schools, assuming this possibility can generate appealing spaces for transformative practices in such institutions.

“Em Caxias a Filosofia en-caixa? A Public School Gambles on Thinking”

The philosophical experiences under investigation in this paper occurred in Duque de Caxias, a sprawling city of 870,000 inhabitants roughly 30 minutes outside the city Rio de Janeiro. Joaquim da Silva Peçanha Public School serves one of the socio-economically depressed zones of the city. The school consists of around 800 students aged 6 to 70 years old, and functions from 7:00 am until 10:00 pm five days a week. In 2007 the school administration and nine teachers from the school decided to begin work with the Center of Philosophical Studies of Childhood (NEFI) at the State University of Rio de Janeiro (UERJ) on a project that aimed to create and nurture philosophical experiences in the school’s classrooms. The project, “Does Philosophy fit in Caxias?! A Public School Gambles on Thinking,” involved six members of NEFI working with individual teachers for one year inside and outside of their classrooms. Several workshops – between 20 and 40 hours each – were offered by members of NEFI during the first year of the project. On a weekly basis seven teachers involved in the project philosophized with children (ages 6 to 15) in their classrooms. Two other teachers, Graça and Monica, coordinated a weekly philosophy class with 30 adult students (ages 17 to 70) enrolled in a nightly literacy course.

The majority of the students enrolled in the adult literacy class worked full-time during the day and studied at night. Many were emigrants from other states in Brazil who had migrated with their families to the state of Rio in search of work. Enrollment in the literacy class did not mean that students had to participate in the weekly, one-hour philosophy class. Attendance was optional, and all students were asked to give their oral consent before the year-long course began. No student had ever taken a philosophy course before. Many, we later discovered, had no idea what the word “philosophy” could mean if they had agreed to participate. Nonetheless, attendance during the course was consistently over 90% and the majority of students enthusiastically requested to continue with the course in the 2009-2010 academic year. In fact, as we write this paper (November 2009) a dozen teachers from three other schools within the same school district have joined the project, with support from their municipal Secretary of...
Education. A new group of adults has entered the project, and has participated in philosophical activities in their school and at the State University as well.

**Philosophy as Spiritual Exercise**

The question “What is philosophy?” like all philosophical questions, is an open and controversial one. Each philosophical enterprise has its own way of answering it. Even though it is endlessly open, an examination of two major works from Pierre Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy?* (2002) and *Philosophy as a Way of Life* (1995) reveals an approach to answering this question that has been very meaningful throughout the history of philosophy, and also for our work: philosophy can be conceived of as a number of spiritual exercises that transform the way we see and live in the world.

In what follows, the nature of philosophical spiritual exercises as presented by Hadot are briefly summarized and examined in the context of the project just described. By re-visiting one year’s worth of philosophical experiences with a group of adult learners we can outline and ruminate on the characteristics of spiritual exercises and how they contribute to a “philosophical way of living” in adult education courses. More broadly, we can consider how the practice of philosophical spiritual exercises can nurture more dialogical relationships with oneself and with others. Finally, we consider how practicing philosophical spiritual exercises has significant political consequences.

There is a classic and significant difference between learning the history of philosophy, or being introduced to philosophies as theoretical discourses and philosophers’ systems, and actually practicing philosophy (Hadot 2002, pp.2-6). The former typically demands that students begin studying the classic philosophical works written by the great thinkers of ancient Greece and work their way chronologically to the influential thoughts and texts of today’s contemporary philosophers. Along this linear and chronological trajectory students are exposed to different sorts of explanations meant to interpret and give account of theoretical discourses. There is of course a strong value in learning this philosophical tradition and, to some extent, any rigorous engagement with philosophy needs to take into consideration that tradition. If philosophy is an “on-going conversation” in a Rortyan sense, there is no way to enter that conversation without being aware of its history. Nevertheless, frequently teaching and learning the philosophical tradition becomes an end in itself, and too often this path of study cuts short philosophy as an existential experience or practice.

In contrast to this academic approach, Hadot has demonstrated that philosophy is above all a way of life, one that demands an askesis, a Greek word meaning “exercise” or “practice,” and is capable of transforming the individual engaged in it. Thought of in this way, philosophy is a spiritual exercise that intends to effect a modification and transformation in the subject that practices it (Hadot 2002, p.6). It is a practice intended to carry out a radical change in our being. It is an exercise in which thinking takes itself as its own subject matter and seeks to modify itself (Hadot 1995, p.82), and thus to provoke a radical change in the individual. Yet, philosophy as a spiritual exercise is not situated merely on the cognitive level (Hadot 1995, p.83). It is a determinate way of living which engages the whole of existence; it is a conversion which turns our entire life upside down, changing the life of the person who goes through it. In sum, the object of spiritual exercise is to bring about the possibility of transformation.

In a course of lectures given in 1981 and 1982 entitled *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, Michel Foucault built upon the concept of philosophy as spiritual exercise to affirm that it is only through what he calls the *moment cartésien* that philosophy in modern times turned out to be understood merely as a cognitive exercise (Foucault 2001, pp.2-39). In spirituality, however, there is no way of building knowledge or reaching truth which does not pass through a transformative practice or askesis of the self. Foucault relates this shift of philosophical practices to the concepts of “self-care” and “self-knowledge.” While in ancient Greece “self-care” was a broader conception of the relation individuals have to themselves, of which “self-knowledge” was only a part or dimension, gradually throughout the centuries there was a movement that made “self-knowledge” the privileged relation to oneself, and one not necessarily tied to a moral or spiritual project of self-care. Each category affirms a different relationship to truth: while in a culture sensitive to “self-care” there is no way to access truth but through a moral discipline of the self, in the modern “self-knowledge” culture, access to truth is merely a cognitive discipline which does not involve any transformation of the subject.

Within the context of a “self-care” culture, some ancient thinkers provided inspiring lists of spiritual exercises. For example, Philo of Alexandria left us with two lists that include the exercises of thorough investigation (skepsis), reading (anagnosis), listening (akroasis), attention (prosoche) and meditation (meletai). These spiritual exercises cultivate a way of seeing and being in the world. They do not entail the transmission of pre-determined knowledge from one person to another, nor do they constitute a methodology which guarantees epistemological certainty and existential security. Rather, the philosophical experience cultivated by spiritual exercise is an individual and shared journey of inquiry, discovery and transformation—one that calls oneself into thought, one’s way of being in the world. It is such a journey that thirty adult students and two teachers in the city of Duque de Caxias decided to partake in.

**Spiritual Exercises in Duque de Caxias**

A short list of the spiritual exercises that were practiced in the adult literacy course in Caxias includes: the practice of asking questions that call oneself into wonder about being and the nature of the world, engaging in dialogue with oneself and
others, cultivating a disposition that accepts uncertainty, doubt and mystery, exercises of “being a child” and “taking flight each day,” and making oneself eternal by surpassing oneself (See Friedman 1970, p.359, cited in Hadot 1995, p.70).

These exercises were not the result of strict adherence to a prescribed teaching methodology. Nevertheless, some clarification is needed. In a sense, problematizing has been the core of our practice and informed the way we worked. During remarks that this was also the core of Aristotle’s philosophical practice: “the most characteristic feature in Aristotle is his incessant discussion of problems. Almost every important assertion is an answer to a question put in a certain way, and is valid only as an answer to this particular question.” (During 1964, pp.97-98, cited in Hadot 1995, p.105) Aristotle’s method was to continuously problematize and approach each problem from different angles, each problem receiving contemplation specific to it. Socrates and other ancient philosophers were also adherents to this practice. “Such a method, consisting not in setting forth a system, but in giving precise responses to precisely limited questions, is the heritage—lasting throughout antiquity—of the dialectical method, that is to say the dialectical exercise” (Hadot 1995, p.106). Many contemporary philosophers, such as Bergson, also give importance to problematizing and the way one responds to each problem raised: “It is true that philosophy then will demand a new effort for each new problem. No solution will be geometrically deduced from another. No important truth will be achieved by the prolongation of an already acquired truth” (Bergson 1948, p.20). G. Deleuze, who was heavily influenced by Bergson, points out that philosophy consists in a three-dimensional activity: a) setting forth a plane of immanence; b) bringing a problem into this plane; c) creating a concept for that problem (Deleuze, Guattari 1994, pp.15-34). So, even though there was no prescriptive method to our philosophizing practice in Caxias, it was guided by the principle of problematizing.

In addition, all of the spiritual exercises in Caxias shared certain elements. Each began with the engagement of a text which had the ability to call the students into thought by provoking questions, which were discussed and ruminated on. Text, questions, and dialogue—three of the key elements present in all of the philosophical exercises in Caxias—were not meant to transmit pre-determined knowledge or guide the interlocutors to arrive at pre-determined epistemological objectives or goals. Rather, they were meant to cultivate an individual and shared thinking experience in which questions were more valued than answers, and doubts and uncertainties were expected to be more transformative than scholastic expertise. A brief inquiry into each of these elements follows.

**The Text (Texting and Self-Texting)**

Is it possible to work with texts in a class of students that cannot read or write? It is if we re-consider what we mean by “text”. A text is anything that calls for interpretation or reflection. It can be a drawing, a picture, a photograph, a conversation, or a life situation that is reflected upon. Texts are signs that need to be interpreted and put into question in order to be more deeply understood. Moreover, the world and our individual and social experience of the world is, as Paulo Freire clearly demonstrated, a text that needs to be interpreted. In *A Importância do Ato de Ler*, Freire states: “The reading of the world precedes the reading of the word” (1992, p.11). The world is a text and a critical reading of it enlarges our perception. Ontologically and epistemologically speaking, the reading of the world comes first: there is no way to give sense to a word without giving sense to a context that nurtures that word. At the same time, however, the reading of words continues and develops the interpretation of the world (Freire 1992, p.20).

In our course of adult students the stories and experiences that the group problematized were very much a product of the world that they had “read,” and that they wanted to discuss and question with others. Following Freire, we might also speculate (we have no empirical evidence to support this) that this “reading” of the world, this problematizing of the world, and philosophically discussing the “world as text” with others, eventually leads to a more profound relationship with literacy, which, in turn, leads to a more profound relationship with the world. The world and words are read in a deeper way. One might say that our perception becomes more insightful after having had the chance to philosophize over the “world as text.”

This type of “reading” has political implications. Freire states that the critical reading of reality, as part of a process of learning to read, associated with political mobilization practices, could make up a part of what Gramsci would consider counter-hegemonic actions (Freire 1992, p.21). Thus, philosophy as an exercise of critically reading reality opposes itself to other forms of education that foster conformity and maintenance of the status quo. It is a practice that empowers the subjects of this practice to have a much more complex and active relation to reality.

The act of reading the world as text is a singular experience of thinking, impossible to repeat exactly. When practiced with illiterate groups this is even more so the case. The oral nature of the texts and discussions make each experience with philosophy a new experience because the “text” changes as the participants in the experience change. As their reading of the world changes, their reading of the “words” also changes.

As such, the subjective dimension of the philosophical experience is reinforced. Philosophy re-enters its Socratic path as a living conversation directly addressed to a limited audience in an oral way. In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates points out some advantages of orality in contrast to writing. The subject can choose to whom he talks, while the author of a written text loses control over who has contact with the text—it is the reader who chooses the text she reads. Another advantage pointed out by Socrates is that oral discourse can be revised and corrected, while written text is fixed and impossible to alter. A third advantage is that oral conversation preserves
memory while written text weakens it. All of these dimensions of oral texts could be experienced in our dialogues in Caxias. With these students, philosophy was an on-going process, a shifting back and forth, and hence a process of always recreating texts, thinking, and ways of living. Unknowingly, our group of students was revitalizing an ancient form of oral philosophizing.

In Caxias the “texts” that instigated our philosophical experiences were often the life experiences of the students themselves. Similar to oral communities that share wisdom and knowledge through story-telling, our dialogues often involved students relating paintings, photos and songs to their personal life experiences and then problematizing them individually and as a group. Individual life experiences became the “texts” that created communal philosophical experiences.

The word “text” has the root meaning “to weave” and it is, Walter Ong tells us, “more compatible etymologically with oral utterance than is ‘literature’ which refers to letters (etymologically/literae) of the alphabet” (Ong 2002, p.13). Oral discourse is a form of weaving or stitching—rhapsodizing—which basically means stitching songs together (ibid). Adult literacy courses that foster dialogue as a means of learning and sharing wisdom have something in common with the ancient Greek concept of rhapsodizing. The human experiences that are stitched together and “sung” in oral communities become texts that are capable of provoking questions that call the community into thought and that put them on the way to philosophizing. Thus, it is possible to say that the creation, interpretation and discussion of such texts are practices that can be considered spiritual exercises. According to the Italian philosopher Giuseppe Ferraro, these exercises do not simply mean procuring a meaning that is present in a text; they also involve the reader finding her own voice in the text (Ferraro 1990). Our practice of oral philosophizing in Caxias therefore involved exercises of self-texting: encountering one’s voice in the text that the world offers.

**Questions (Questioning and Self-questioning)**

If philosophy means, as Karl Jaspers has claimed, to be “on the way” then we must ask what puts us “on the way” (Jaspers 1959, p.12). Or if we associate philosophy with a kind of thinking that puts us “on the way,” we might ask “what is it that calls us into thought?” In the ancient Greek tradition, we are put “on the way” by philosophical questions. Our being in the world needs to be questioned if we are to have a thoughtful and meaningful existence. Philosophical questioning concerns itself with this being, with the way we interact with the world and our experiences in the world. Every experience becomes a potentially boundless experience when it is put into doubt, but is de-limited by the philosophical question. Thus our experiences with the world, with ourselves, and others are completely changed by the act of asking philosophical questions. We begin to see and interact with the world, ourselves, and others differently only after we have questioned them. According to Foucault, Socrates’ task of making others question themselves was a way of provoking them to care for themselves (Foucault 2009, p. 83). We could also say that questioning the world around us makes us break with our habitual way of inhabiting the world, and opens the possibility for caring for the world. Finally, questioning other people and our relations with them makes us re-think how we relate to them. In short we can say that putting our lived experience and our being under question is a spiritual exercise that is a potentially transformative experience.

It is of great importance to note that the journey of questioning/problematicizing, is of greater importance than arriving at a final destination. What matters, according to Hadot, “is not the solution of a particular problem, but the road travelled to reach it” (Hadot 1995, p.92). Hadot argues that this emphasis of journeying with questions is clear in Plato’s dialogues. One “spends a long time in the company of these questions and expands great effort, in which one “rubs names, definitions, visions and sensations against one another” (Hadot 1995, p.92, referencing *Letters VII*, 344b; 341c-d). This relationship with questions is exemplified in Plato’s so-called Socratic Dialogues and also in some of the later dialogues like the *Statesmen* (285c-d). Socrates affirms that he has nothing to teach, no knowledge or content (mathema) to transmit (*Apology* 33a-b). Nevertheless, he is committed to continuous questioning and dialogue with others, the purpose of which is not arrival at a pre-determined answer but the therapeutic practice of dialogue itself.

Ruminating on philosophical questions within the context of our work in Caxias we can expand upon what it means to be “on the way” in philosophy. Very often external observers have asked us: “are these questions that the students are asking philosophical? What is a philosophical question then?” In response we affirm that if philosophy is a spiritual exercise, then it is not the questions themselves that are philosophical or not philosophical. Rather, what we tried to cultivate in Caxias was a philosophical relationship to questions, a certain spirit that would allow questions to question our being in the world, to let ourselves be questioned and eventually transformed by journeying with the questions themselves. We fostered questioning and self-questioning. More than the act of asking philosophical questions, what the spiritual exercise of questioning cultivates is a state of “being in question.” In this sense, the art of self-questioning (not questioning something external, but putting oneself in question while questioning) is the core of our practice.

By far the greatest challenge of the Caxias project was the difficulty students had in forming questions which would provoke this kind of self-questioning and, at the same time, sustain philosophical dialogue. Asked to form questions about a text, or to each other, students often responded by making declarative statements. At the beginning of the course many students could not even clearly distinguish assertions from questions. Influenced by an educational system that focuses mainly on “functionalism/production/training,” and by
religious and political institutions that nurture sets of dogmas and not forms of inquiry, some of the students in the class remarked that they were being asked and encouraged to form questions for the first time in their lives. In the beginning of the course, when, on rare occasions, students did create questions, the questions were typically of two types: questions that only demanded affirmation or negation (yes/no answers) or questions that sought to flush out details or immediately resolve doubts on a particular text. It was nearly five months into the course when students began to create questions that would provoke and maintain real challenges to their experience, questions that would “break open” their experience. It was only then that we could say a philosophical relationship to questions and a deep experience of thinking was underway.

There is no methodology or formula that can be applied to teach someone how to ask philosophical questions, or that can be used to provoke someone to enter into a philosophical relationship with questions. Philosophy begins with wonder, in both senses of the word—awe and doubt—because it is wonder that inspires us to ask and to ponder. In Caxias we simply tried to nurture wonder. But how does one nurture wonder? Wonder is nurtured by cultivating attention (prosöche), by allowing students to dwell in thinking. Attention, according to Hadot, is key to spiritual exercise. It is continuous vigilance and presence of mind, a constant tension of the spirit (Hadot 1995, p.84). Attentive to the infinite value of each moment, we respond “immediately to events, as if they were questions asked of us all of a sudden” (Hadot 1995, p.85). We found that after months of attentively dwelling with paintings, music, conversation, and poetry shared by teachers, questions had to be asked. The call to thinking was too strong, the wonder too great. And so the students asked, and asked, and did not stop asking.

To live comfortably with uncertainty, mystery and doubt, without irritable reaching after fact and reason, establishes what Susan Wolfson has called a “questioning presence” (1986, passim). The English Romantic poet John Keats (1795-1821) called this disposition negative capability (Keats 2001, p. 492), and it is this trait that distinguishes the great poets like Shakespeare, Goethe and Milton, and the great philosophers like Socrates, Nietzsche and Foucault from their colleagues. This questioning disposition is as fundamental to experiencing philosophy as it is to experiencing poetry, and the teachers and students in Caxias were asked from the first to the last moments of their philosophy course to nurture negative capability. A year-long experience of constant questioning rather than receiving answers, of living with doubts rather than certainties, of looking at reality as something mysterious rather than as something fixed and anesthetic, transformed the dispositions of the teacher and student participants in the project. It might explain why so many of our moments were poetic as much as they were philosophical.

During a moment of reflection on the course, Dona Andrezza, age 54, shared with the class that she “felt empty after our encounters, philosophy was emptying me out.” This was a striking observation that captures the profundity of the dialogues that occurred throughout the course. It also recalls many of Socrates’ dialogues in which, rather than “fill” his interlocutors with knowledge, Socrates makes them question many of their beliefs and then discard them. This suggests that philosophical dialogue is often an experience of emptying ourselves out rather than filling ourselves up. Those who dialogue with Socrates do not learn something they did not know before; they learn that they do not know what they thought they knew. In a sense, like Dona Andrezza, they are “emptied”.

Contemporary Brazilian poet Manoel de Barros expresses this nicely: “Unlearning eight hours a day teaches the principles [of] a didactics of invention” (De Barros 2000, p.9). In our teacher education courses this was a constant testimony of the teachers: the more they became engaged in philosophy the more clearly they could understand their journey with philosophy as an unlearning process. This experience of unlearning was complemented by, and related to, the spiritual exercise of “becoming a child,” presented in de Barros’ book Exercises of being a child (1999). de Barros shows how we can learn from practicing a childish way of being in the world, in that children are accustomed to being less “full,” “fresher,” less prejudiced, and more open to freely put themselves into question. Engaged in this exercise of “being a child,” students in Caxias were asked to try to do some activities—painting, drawing, making questions—as a child does them, as if they had never done these things before, as if they were doing them for the first time, as if anything were possible. Vinicius, age 57, captured the essence of this exercise nicely in one of our sessions when he told us that he was forming questions for the first time and that he felt as if he hadn’t asked any questions in his life before.

This Socratic approach to the practice of philosophy has eminent pedagogical consequences. As Foucault stressed in his last course at the Collège de France, Le courage de la vérité (1984), devoted to the death of Socrates, the Athenian radically re-positioned the scope and sense of being a teacher. Where the traditional teacher said to the student: “You do not know and I know. Therefore, I will teach you so that you learn what you do not know,” Socrates says: “You do not know, but I do not know either. So I will help you to take care of what you do not care about” (Foucault 2009, pp. 131-143). When Socrates’ interlocutors think they know what they really do not know, Socrates’ teaching consists in de-constructing this pseudo-knowledge. In his final Apology before the Athenian tribunal, Socrates deemed the judgment against him as a judgment against a philosophical life. He explained that his wisdom did not consist of any positive knowledge but of a singular relationship to knowledge that demanded he not delude himself regarding the impossibility of human beings having any certain knowledge. He reasoned that if, as the oracle had proclaimed,
he were truly the wisest man in Athens, it was because he was the only one who did not believe he knew anything for certain, aside from his own lack of knowledge.

To be sure, the majority of our students, particularly at the beginning of the course, were expecting to be “filled” with information and beliefs. Accustomed to being told what to think and believe by their churches, political figures, bosses at work, teachers at school and others, the process of participating in “emptying” rather than “filling” was at first painful and frustrating for many of the students. On more than one occasion students complained of “not learning anything,” of having teachers that “don’t teach.” But dialogue as spiritual exercise “guides the interlocutor towards conversion” (Hadot 1995, p.93) and eventually our dialogues as “emptying” experiences began to provoke a transformation in the students of the course.

To put it in Socratic terms, this transformation has to do with that which we care for. This also implies a transformation of the function of the teacher. As Foucault pointed out in the case of Socrates, the teacher of philosophy occupies a paradoxical position in terms of care. Socrates dialogued with everyone so that they would stop caring about the exterior—richness, fame, honors, etc.—and would be moved to care for what is interior—the soul, the truth, the good. One might interpret care for the self as an egocentric or individualistic movement, but Socrates’ intention was quite the contrary. He wanted people to give importance to that which is most important in the individual and collective dimensions of life. In fact, Socrates materialized this project in his own life: he was the only one who did not care about himself ipsus literae because he was continuously concerned with others caring about themselves. Yet, in another sense, he took care of himself in the deepest way possible: as a teacher, as a spiritual leader, as a philosopher—someone who helps others to take care themselves.

Our communal experiences of dialogue in school led to another spiritual exercise concerning the care of self and others: meditation as dialogue with oneself. There is, argues Hadot, an “intimate connection between dialogue with others and dialogue with oneself. Only he who is capable of a genuine encounter with the other is capable of an authentic encounter with himself, and the converse is equally true” (Hadot 1995, p.91). Self-dialogue is not merely an encounter, but a confrontation with oneself. Hadot describes it as a “battle,” amicable, but real. Though not eristic, every spiritual exercise is dialogical in this self-confrontational sense.

In Caxias we were able to see that dialogue with oneself and with others makes us unlearn what we have learned in a traditional way. Participants in our course came to question the relationship they had with knowledge, as something settled that they needed to receive. This kind of relationship had to be unlearned in order to build a new one: a questioning and dialogical relationship with knowledge. The same could be said in relation to thinking. What the students in Caxias had to learn was to unlearn a relationship with their own thinking as something they could not create or sustain by themselves.

Dialogue allowed the students to actively think about, and put into doubt the circumstances that made them live the way they were living. They began to think in new ways and created a new relationship with thinking. The significance of such an experience is apparent in another statement made by Vinicius, who told one of his teachers: “For the first time in my life I am pondering the stars, what is beyond, rather than being constantly weighed down by my everyday concerns of money, work, family problems, and health.” Emptied and lighter, Vinicius, like Cynic and Stoic philosophers before him, was able to “take flight” and begin pondering the cosmos.

One of the most obvious impacts our project had on the adult participants is that it led them to see, think about, and be in the world in a different manner. The Stoics distinguished three branches of philosophy: logic, physics, ethics—each concerned with an aspect of one’s being in the world. Typically, spiritual exercises are placed in ethics, but this is too limiting (Davidson in Hadot 1995, p. 24). Hadot has demonstrated that within the Stoic tradition logic and physics were never merely areas of discourse, but were disciplines of the well-lived life (ibid). Incidentally, this is one of Hadot’s critiques of Foucault: that Foucault placed spiritual exercises firmly in the ethical realm, but didn’t explore their place in the realms of physics or logic (Hadot 1995, pp.206-215 and Davidson in Hadot, p.24).

Hadot states that philosophical physics contains three levels of exercises:

- Contemplation as an end in itself. Serenity of soul, liberation from day to day worries.
- A transcending of individuality to come into contact with the cosmos.
- Contemplation of nature (the world) tears us away from everyday life. It makes us question received ideas (Hadot 1995, pp.103-104).

At each of these three levels it is possible to hear Vinicius talking! He could—for the first time!—liberate himself from day to day worries (level 1), he could ponder the stars (level 2) and could tear himself away from, and question daily reality (level 3). Vinicius had fully engaged in the spiritual exercises of the realm of physics.

Political Impacts of Philosophy as a Way of Life in Duque de Caxias

Spiritual exercises are part of a philosophical way of living that provokes a radical transformation of being. We cannot say with certainty that the students and teachers that participated in the “Em Caxias a Filosofia En-caixa?!?” project now live philosophically. But we can say that through philosophical exercises the majority of students and teachers involved in the project had a radical opportunity to transform themselves. At the end of the course, when asked the question: “What does philosophy mean to you?” several students responded that philosophy had “taught them a lot.” When pressed to expand
on and clarify the response it became clear that the students lacked words to express their experiences with philosophy. Their experiences of sharing life experiences, of weaving oral texts, of questioning and dialoging as a group and individually, and of developing a doubting disposition that revealed a world full of mystery and intrigue, had produced individual and group experiences that were extremely intense and perhaps beyond words. These examples constitute evidence that philosophy cannot merely be discussed, written, or read about; it must be lived and felt.

Though all impacts of the project in Caxias may not be immediately apparent, upon reflecting on the project it is evident that it had certain political effects. Before discussing these impacts a clarification is needed: our practice was not designed to produce any particular political outcome. We invited students to think, but we did not demand that they think in a certain way or toward certain ideas, much less that their thoughts correspond to our thoughts.

Two examples might help us express the political dimension of the project. During one class Luiza told a story about how, because of philosophy and our discussions in class, she felt more strength to question her husband and demand that he justify some of his demands on her. On another occasion, Valerio gave an emotional account of how he now felt more power to question his bosses and people on the street who didn’t treat him respectfully. He also appealed to other students in the class to do the same, exclaiming that because of philosophy they should feel the self-confidence to “speak to power.” Putting these statements into different words we might say that what these students came to realize was that they were more powerful than they had always been told, and that they might have more power over the way that they live, more power to live as they desire—if not in all aspects of their lives, at least in some of them.

Reading the work of Hadot one comes across a passage from G. Friedman’s La Puissance de la sagesse:

Take flight each day! At least for a moment, however brief, as long as it is intense. Every day a “spiritual exercise,” alone or in the company of a man who also wishes to better himself.... Leave ordinary time behind. Make an effort to rid yourself of your own passions…. Become eternal by surpassing yourself. This inner effort is necessary, this ambition, just. Many are those who are entirely absorbed in militant politics, in the preparation for the social revolution. Rare, very rare, are those who, in order to prepare for the revolution, wish to become worthy of it. (Emphasis added.)

Is our course in Caxias part of the preparation for social/political revolution? Does philosophy as we practice it have this role? Should it play this role? Is spiritual exercise in philosophy the preparation needed to bring about true social/political revolution? Though the political outcomes we documented in our project tended toward liberatory experiences, if we are really committed to self-questioning then we cannot settle these questions with one particular response. We must, rather, keep them alive as a way of constantly putting into question the meaning and sense of bringing philosophical spiritual exercises to public schools in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

References

Ferraro, Giuseppe. (1990) I giardini di Armida o della solitudine del filosofo. (Napoli: Athena)
Introduction

Our lives and identities are swept up from time to time in moral undertows that can overwhelm us: moments of shame, remorse and guilt that force us to question the meaning of our commitments. Alternatively, we can be buoyed up by prideful convictions that, like a wave, threaten to sweep away everything that gets in their way. Although metaphorical, this brief description speaks to one of the most telling, if not more complicated, features of moral life; namely, that we experience our obligations as something larger than ourselves, and so much of our commitments are not always at our immediate disposal to rectify or remedy. This observation is nothing new, and has appeared in manifold forms, in countless moral theories over the last 2500 years. The analysis I wish to pursue here locates an important element of this complexity in the dialectical interaction between what have come to be called “emotions of self-assessment” (the moral emotions of shame, guilt and pride) and the way these emotions relate to what it means to have a conscience. It is clear that much of our sense of moral well-being depends on our ability to responsibly contend with emotions like shame, guilt and pride, and that many moral agents are undone by an inability to respond to, and appropriate the manifold sources that root their own moral identity. My goal in this essay is to unpack the inter-relationship between emotions of self-assessment and the development of an ethical conscience with the aim of elucidating two key points: first, how this development specifies what it means to ‘care for the self’ and, second, what implications my view of conscience has on the practice of moral education.

Although it may appear obvious that contending responsibly with one’s emotions will be one way of caring for the self—is this not how Aristotle construes moral virtue?—specifying what this involves is tricky, and much will turn on how one understands emotion, and at least for my purposes, how one grasps what it means to ‘have’ a conscience. On the account I develop here, emotions are sophisticated interpretive frameworks, or what Martha Nussbaum, echoing Sartre, calls ‘ways of seeing the world’ that circumscribe one’s needs and motivation in essential ways. Consequently, emotions are far from the traditional view that treats them as “biologically primitive” or purely instinctual responses. The same can be said for the view of conscience that forms the backbone of my argument, which stands in direct contrast to the traditional view of conscience that sees it as an innate faculty or internal moral sense.

According to the traditional view, conscience is an inherent and distinct power or capacity that governs our sense of moral obligation, with this power being understood in largely three ways: a) a power of the mind (Kant), b) a power of inner perception or moral sense (Butler and Fichte), or c) a power of moral sentiment or feeling (Rousseau, Hume and Mill). These views agree in treating conscience as a distinct human faculty, if not a kind of entity in its own right. Against these views, I argue that we are best to see conscience as a dialectical narrative of introspection, self-interrogation and self-interpretation that remains perpetually incomplete. One of the major assumptions of my position is that conscience does not refer to a state of consciousness or a single faculty, but a constellation of experiences that center on integrating emotions of self-assessment with degrees of introspection that also serve to motivate changes in behavior. Following in the footsteps of Hegel, and more recently Ricoeur, we can say conscience is “the voice of the Other.”

My main reason for adopting this position is that the traditional faculty model outlined above, under whatever view one propounds, makes the relationship between moral education and accountability inexplicable. Echoing Douglas Langston, once we assume conscience is a distinct capacity of sorts it becomes impossible to grasp how it might develop in response to experience and learning. Given what I want to accomplish here, my arguments for why the traditional faculty model of conscience is so unhelpful in understanding the development of moral accountability will be truncated and incomplete. Instead, I focus on an alternative dialectical reading of conscience with a view to demonstrating how this interpretation relates to ‘caring for the self’ and the development of an ethical conscience. If my analysis is correct, then one of the greatest challenges
of moral education will be helping students contend with the power of their moral convictions, which I go on to argue is best achieved through creating a community of philosophical inquiry in the classroom.

**Moral Emotions**

Recent research on the emotions, both in philosophy and psychology, demonstrates that emotions are far from simple and static affective responses—mere physiological phenomena—but complex interpretive schemes that develop along with our sense of selfhood. Two key questions that such a view raises are, What distinguishes those interpretive frameworks that govern our “emotions of self-assessment,” such as shame, guilt and pride, from other emotions, such as anger or fear? and What distinguishes these emotions of self-assessment as “mine” and makes them amenable to responsible correction? The argument I advance here is that one cannot successfully account for the appropriation of emotions of self-assessment into a critical sense of moral accountability without appealing to some conception of conscience. Moreover, because the interpretive sets that make up our emotions of self-assessment are not simply physiological responses but also normative schemes which include reason-giving, the role that reasoning can play in clarifying, justifying and shaping these emotions is considerably more robust than, say, what Freud typically allows.

Robert Solomon argues that emotions should not be seen as something the agent merely “undergoes,” but rather as “urgent judgments” or “non-deliberate judgments” that are purposive (intentional) in the way they give personal meaning to experience and action. Despite recent headway in research on emotion, the traditional view of emotion continues to dog much philosophical debate, in which the relationship between reason and emotion is depicted in a rather bifurcated way that amounts to either disowning the emotions (Kant) or becoming their slave (Hume). Just as this traditional bifurcation has confused the interplay between reason-giving and emotions, so too it continues to seriously restrict how we approach the phenomenon of conscience.

My interest here is not with all emotions, but specifically with emotions of self-assessment, or what are often called the moral emotions. More specifically, I am interested in the extent to which guilt, shame and pride shape the way that conscience arises and develops. As Gabriele Taylor explains, emotions of self-assessment are distinctive in that their reasonableness is typically assessed by the agent undergoing them. Like other emotions such as anger or fear, we expect reasons to be associated with emotions of self-assessment—I feel guilty because I cheated on my wife—and that these reasons refer to standards that transcend one’s own individual idiosyncrasies. What distinguishes emotions of self-assessment from other emotions is that they alter one’s moral status. As Taylor puts it, in experiencing emotions of self-assessment, “the person concerned believes of herself that she has deviated from some norm and that in doing so she has altered her standing in the world. The self is the ‘object’ of these emotions, and what is believed amounts to an assessment of that self.” The crucial point here is that shame, guilt and pride involve self-evaluations, and that such evaluations condition how we understand the interplay between self-worth and moral imputation.

The differences between shame and guilt in particular are subtle and important, and much quality scholarship has addressed their distinct qualities and their interaction. Following the research of Gabriele Taylor, Bernard Williams, and Helen Block Lewis, shame refers to our status as worthwhile persons, while guilt always refers to specific acts or thoughts. As Williams explains, although one can feel both guilt and shame for one and the same action, they remain phenomenologically distinguishable in that “What I have done points in one direction towards what has happened to others”—this is the experience of guilt—and “in another direction to what I am”—this is the experience of shame. Pride operates along a similar axis of self-evaluation insofar as what one has pride in concerns what one regards as desirable, and the reasons that make up the desirability for this object as opposed to that are inseparable from how one values oneself.

**Conscience**

Rather than chart the trajectory of each of these emotions of self-assessment, which would take us too far afield, I want to explain how, together, they shape a sense of conscience. My approach builds on an interpretation developed by Thomas F. Green, which sees conscience as intricately tied to the way we approach emotions of self-assessment. The kind of things one is ‘ashamed of,’ ‘proud of,’ or ‘guilty of’ is initially conditioned by norms operative in the family and larger society. “Normation gives content to these emotions [of self-assessment] inasmuch as it provides their object. It tells us what things are going to provoke such emotions.” These norms are irreducibly social: they map and prioritize one’s standing in the world of others in specific ways. However, the extent to which one makes this process of normation explicit, and so realizes that the reasons for one’s shame, guilt or pride are distinguishable from the moral emotions themselves, brings us to the field of conscience. Emotions of self-assessment influence our relationships and commitments to others, as well as how we see ourselves. Yet, although emotions of self-assessment encapsulate
our most elemental commitments, they do not themselves constitute “having a conscience,” which requires that we participate in their formation, by making these emotions and the social norms that anchor them transparent and by connecting them with a larger sense of moral obligation.

Consequently, we need to recognize that conscience has two components, the confusion of which continues to get us into problems. First, conscience designates a continuum of self-awareness which signifies the extent to which the relationship between one’s moral emotions of shame, guilt and pride and one’s larger sense of moral accountability has become explicit. Second (the more common view), conscience ‘names’ a position within this continuum, such as acting with a ‘clear’ conscience, having a ‘guilty’ conscience, following a ‘good’ conscience, and so on. In order to fully appreciate what it means to ‘have’ a conscience one must distinguish the two levels, which we can designate, respectively, as formational and attitudinal. The view of conscience advanced here is ‘dialectical’ in that it not only distinguishes these two levels, but accounts for their interaction and mutual formation. The traditional faculty view sticks to the second, attitudinal level, missing how experience and one’s sense of self-worth can alter the way conscience comes to be expressed, and so likewise missing the potential havoc that moral emotions can create when it comes to assessing one’s moral accountability. Much of my analysis, therefore, is concerned with the first, formational level, since how we see the role of shame, guilt and pride in shaping our sense of moral accountability conditions the way we interpret what our conscience is, its degree of reliability, its relation to reason-giving, and whether we see it as ‘other-worldly’ or not. Hence, it is also at this formational level that coming to have a conscience relates most directly to caring for oneself.

More than anything else, conscience expresses the existential truth that my sense of personal integrity is always implicated in expectations that are never simply reducible to my personal needs or interests. To be a moral self means that one’s sense of self-worth is always in negotiation with others, for better or worse. If this were not the case, there would be no conscience. Consequently, the expansion or contraction of one’s sense of personal accountability vis-à-vis others is the formational field of conscience. Conscience originally emerges from the ‘gap’ in our own moral identities—that so much of our sense of self-worth and dignity requires self-interpretation and recognition from others to be complete—and not from moral certitude. Once this is recognized, it should significantly alter both how we see the role of conscience and how we cultivate an ethical conscience.

As Richard Wollheim perceptively notes, in contrast to thinkers like Nietzsche and Freud, moral emotions need not hold us to internalized standards that remain “repressed” or unacknowledged. However, the extent to which such emotions can become “autonomous,” and so open to a higher standard of evaluation than one’s personal interests or history, is not determined by the emotions themselves, but requires effort on our part. Guilt and shame refer to a “radical heteronomy” that stems not simply from the fact that these emotions enact standards initially external and beyond our power to comprehend, but also from the complicated way these standards “morph to become our own viewpoints.” The very fact that we have moral emotions means we are involved inextricably in a world of others whose norms become the key to deciphering the contours of our own interiority. These norms anchor what actions, omissions, desires and beliefs give rise to shame, guilt and pride. In forming a conscience one comes to appropriate this elemental anchorage; it is the means whereby these emotions become deliberately and self-consciously “mine.” What is more, this capacity to conscientiously engage our most elemental moral sources goes beyond the ability for general self-reflection, to a complex process of self-interpretation that carries with it its own boundaries and pressures, its own phenomenological contours and narrative structuring. It also requires the interrogation and potential reconstruction of relevant social norms, which necessitates dialogue and, sometimes, political work.

The way our sense of accountability is constructed in the formational field of conscience can vary from healthy introspection and self-correction to unhealthy self-doubt. To act with conscience can mean to act with a heightened sense of ‘conscientiousness’ or self- and other-awareness, but it can also mean to act with crippling self-consciousness and insecurity, or with rash self-confidence and self-aggrandizement. It is notable that both unhealthy alternatives involve self-absorption. Consequently, the issue is not just whether we stop and justify the objects of our moral emotions—is the shame I feel ‘justifiable’ or is it perhaps misplaced? —in which case we could say we have consulted our conscience. Rather, conscience may also be active in those cases in which I bypass the need for critical introspection altogether, for it is precisely my felt sense of good conscience that obviates a felt need for further justification. This ‘duplicity’ of conscience is something the traditional ‘faculty’ interpretation has had little success explaining.

The construction of accountability is inseparable from one’s sense of self-worth and can be conditioned by multiple factors and in multiple ways, not all of which are beneficial to responsible self-development. It is precisely because conscience emerges, as it were, entangled in the visceral certitude of emotional self-assessments, that the intensity of emotions can also deform the critical shape of conscience. This is part of what we mean by saying that conscience is the voice of the Other. Our moral emotions can become so
fused with external authorities and objects—it is shameful to speak of one’s sexuality or it is a matter of pride to be pro-choice—that the voice of conscience becomes largely synonymous with the object of those emotions, whether it be the national party or God. If one is not careful, the heightened sense of esteem and purpose one gets from defending one’s convictions can become disengaged from any critical component to become a motivator in its own right.

If the account outlined so far is correct, what makes conscience so morally indispensible is that it is by cultivating one’s conscience that emotions of self-assessment are integrated with a broader framework of moral accountability, involving moral obligation and self-worth. Without this integration, the social sources of guilt, shame and pride would not only remain inexplicit and potentially confused, but the experience of moral individuation they engender would be confined to specific affective episodes and objects, and could never be sufficiently generalized to serve as an independent motivator or moral ideal. Conscience is never fully separable from these core evaluative emotions, but constitutes another, meta-level of integration where the relationship between self-respect and personal culpability becomes explicit to varying degrees. As T. F. Green observes, conscience is “particular” in that it governs my sense of accountability, “reflective” in that it brings to mind what this accountability encompasses, and is tied to “emotions of self-assessment.”18 Most importantly, conscience involves the construction of a concept of accountability that is neither solely cognitive nor emotive and yet can be developed in such a way that it becomes “habitually critical.” Echoing the wisdom of A. Campbell Garnett, conscience need not remain under the Freudian banner of childhood or even larger social experiences, but can also speak to the confidence we have in our own ethical responsiveness and reasoning.19

To reiterate, conscience does not refer to a state of consciousness, nor to a single faculty, but to a constellation of experiences that center on integrating emotions of self-assessment with degrees of introspection and social critique that also serve to motivate changes in behavior. Conscience, then, designates a trajectory of self-interpretation and self-regulated development that can take on a momentum of its own. We could follow moral psychologists and call conscience an “ego-ideal,” so long as we keep in mind that this ideal is not something static, is an indispensible determinant in shaping our proclivity for moral reasoning, is not reducible to personal history, and is something that we both have power over, and yet also has power over us. Psychologists like Freud and Robert Sears are certainly on the right track in arguing that conscience begins as the internalization of parental authority, but it can also expand as our sensitivity to the lives of others deepens and we are forced to negotiate our moral projects amongst those with whom we may disagree.20 One of the crucial implications of this dialectical approach is that conscience need not be explicit or self-conscious for it to be active and influential, which pits the account advanced here against interpretations like that of Gilbert Ryle who believed that conscience is operative only in times of moral indecision, and is best seen as a disposition to have certain moral convictions at appropriate occasions.21 More recently, Jonathon Jacobs reiterates a similar position, stressing that conscience is largely inactive when it comes to virtuous agents who do no wrong, and thus have no need for the guidance of conscience.22

Such approaches are overly simplistic, taking conscience as a defense-mechanism of sorts, its formative role ending as either good character or good judgment takes over. We can agree that the operation of conscience is often most apparent during times of moral confusion, but to infer from this that it is inoperative in mature moral agents is to reduce
we appropriate moral commitments and make them our own. In short, 'having a conscience' directs our attention to how our moral orientations and the nature of the obligations that would lead me to view moral agency in one way, while taking it to be a critical yet fallible habit of moral feeling and reasoning would lead me to view moral agency in another, very different way. Consequently, if we deny conscience as a form of self-interpretation in which elements of our own moral allegiances are open to re-interpretation and revision, we also overlook the duplicitous role that conscience can play in maligning our sense of moral accountability. The dialectical, formational / attitudinal approach both accounts for this duplicity and shows how it can be mitigated.

The experience of conscience is a particular mode of moral agency, a complex dialectic in which our moral commitments seem to speak through us. In the words of T. F. Green, the authority that governs conscience appears to come from elsewhere, “as though from a distant, impartial, disinterested perspective.” It is this experience of passivity—that no one simply decides to have a conscience, but that it emerges as if an ontological force in its own right—that underscores both the indispensability of conscience and its equivocalness. Conscience speaks to that peculiar form of participation in which an agent’s sense of self-worth both constructs, and is constructed by, a developing sense of accountability. Appreciating this phenomenon can help us better understand the formation of our moral orientations and the nature of the obligations that anchor them. If conscience is a mode of agency, then its value is in the way it contributes to our existential struggle for moral integration and self-recognition, not in whether it supplies our actions with an incorruptible seal of approval. In short, ‘having a conscience’ directs our attention to how we appropriate moral commitments and make them our own. To demand that these commitments also be inherently or self-evidently justifiable and immune to criticism is to demand too much.

Conscience and the Care of the Self

The dialectical view of conscience advanced here has a number of implications for what it means to care for the self, and my interest here is to make that meaning explicit as a kind of moral formation. Given the complexity of our emotional life—especially when it comes to guilt, shame and pride—and that the genealogy of these emotions remains problematic, we can expect the construction of our moral self-identity to be fraught with uncertainty and vulnerability. More than anything else, caring for oneself means coming to terms with the otherness—both within us and outside of us—that co-constitutes who we are. Consequently, such a mode of self-concern indicates a way of becoming familiar with ourselves while admitting that we can never fully disclose who we are. To help illustrate this I turn to shame, which I take as emblematic of what I call the porosity of moral identity and the struggle for self-awareness that constantly draws us outside of ourselves. Unfortunately, the strategy of many thinkers, including Aristotle, is to deny shame any positive moral significance in shaping our sense of identity, and it is easy to see why: experiences of shame indicate moral failings, and virtuous agents ought never to do anything shameful. Likewise with Kant, the feeling of shame is merely a negative sign that one has not lived up to one’s moral duty. As Nussbaum remarks, though representing quite different traditions, both Aristotle and Kant take self-mastery as their model and encourage a hyper-sensitive state of rational surveillance over anything that might compromise one’s integrity, leaving us with a standpoint “excessively violent toward human complexity and frailty.”

Such stoical responses to emotions like shame miss a vital feature of being human, which points to the incompleteness of our interior lives. Shame shows the vulnerability and fragility of our moral standing in the world, not because we’re unclear about what our obligations are, but because so much of who we are is shaped at the deepest levels by our relations and interactions with others. Shame is an indication of our indebtedness to others for our moral orientation, self-respect and moral priorities. Thus, shame forces us to admit the world of others into our moral considerations. As Michael Morgan clarifies, re-iterating the wisdom of Bernard Williams, Martha Nussbaum, and Emmanuel Levinas, shame involves self-criticism and self-transformation, and so it would be a serious mistake to promote a moral regimen in which the goal would be to rise above the disarming influence of shame and other moral emotions. Indeed, it is hard to imagine how sympathy and empathy would be possible without a sense of shame that reflects how others see us and judge us. It is a further mark of the profundity of shame that the other in whose eyes we judge ourselves need not be personified in our neighbors, comrades, family or fellow nationals. We can be just as ashamed about the person we’ve become without having disappointed any particular person, as we can, knowing that we have let down our coach, parents or spouse. Shame is emblematic of the openness of human identity and the struggle for recognition that draws us out of ourselves to take...
on the multiple responsibilities of moral personhood. And so, far from signaling the deterioration of our independence, shame can remind us of the need to take a personal stance on our life, as a measure of self-care.

Given what has been argued about the porosity of our moral identities, caring for oneself, at least in terms of cultivating an ethical conscience, is best seen from a relational standpoint that depends on others for its fulfillment, and which emphasizes humility, patience, empathy, self-love, and solidarity. The moral stances taken by Martin Luther King, Jr. and Mahatma Gandhi involved not only moral courage, but herculean efforts at non-violent moral persuasion and consensus building. The moral confidence was inseparable from their willingness to make themselves morally accountable to others, which is an inescapable part of having a conscience. Such an approach shares in common the feminist wisdom of an ethics of caring, as expressed by thinkers like Nel Noddings, as well as the wisdom of thinkers like Ricoeur and Levinas, in largely rejecting the rationalist ideal of autonomy along with its assumption of self-transparency and self-mastery. From this standpoint, no agents of conscience are ever so virtuous they cannot be undone, nor so autonomous their dignity cannot be compromised, despite one’s best efforts to the contrary. As Amélie Rorty reminds us, the moral agent of independent, autonomous, self-legislative rationality is a myth of moral theory, and the more we keep this in mind, the more likely we are to achieve some degree of moral maturity.

The upshot of this is that the more one subscribes to pre-determined ideals of self-regulation and self-perfection, the more likely one will develop a totalizing conscience that tends to de-emphasize complexity, context and difference. Once complete self-transparency and self-control become the overriding norms of conscience, or at least its guiding assumptions, what is one to make of experiences like shame that irremediably resist such intellection? Will they be seen as illusionary or trivial, and if so, where will the fault lie? A degree of self-reliance and self-reckoning are no doubt needed to cultivate one’s conscience in a responsible way, but the demand for such dispositions comes from the complexity of moral relationships, from a discernment of what is required of us to do justice to the reality of other people, rather than from an ideal of rational self-mastery.

Emotions like shame, guilt and pride are productively incorporated into our moral judgments and actions as they are mediated by conscience, which is the integrative pressure that guides reliable self-interpretation. To have an ethical conscience, as opposed to an authoritative one, is to recognize the power that our convictions can have over us, the vulnerability our moral emotions impose upon us, and a habituated discernment for the complexity of moral life. From a functional point of view, having an ethical conscience strives after something akin to Aristotle’s ideal of practical wisdom, or *phronesis*—knowing how to respond appropriately—except that it is not predicated on the pursuit of moral perfection, but on a growing sensitivity for the way accountability is constructed and evaluated.

The most compelling reason that caring for the self should not be modeled on such ideals of rational self-perfection, then, is the gloss they force on the complexity of moral identity. Both Levinas and Ricoeur make it abundantly clear, albeit in different ways, that conscience evolves as “the welcoming of the Other.” I cannot impose my view of what is morally right for others without simplifying my view of who these others are at the same time. In this regard, as Levinas observed, conscience occurs “where my freedom is called into question;” it is not a discovery of moral certitude, but, on the contrary, an unraveling of any such certitude, and an invitation to live with and for the other. Caring for oneself, therefore, involves making ourselves available to others and becoming sensitive to their and our emotional and psychological distress. The more we recognize ourselves as active participants in the lives of others, the more that caring for ourselves becomes about responding to the fragility of the human condition, both our own and that of others.

**Moral Education**

How we implicitly and explicitly view conscience, model it, talk about it, and encourage others to do so, has a profound impact on the confidence we come to expect in its oracular utterances. The belief in an innate moral compass that can unerringly distinguish right from wrong, if only we take the time to listen, is a popular assumption with multiple religious and philosophical sources. As Dewey explained, we remain victims of the search for certainty at many levels, but perhaps none are more subtle and potentially counter-productive than the search for moral certainty. This “quest for certainty” stems from a deep metaphysical insecurity which is nowhere greater than in the domain of moral judgments. This belief in the sanctity of conscience as an unfailing moral compass distracts us from forming a much richer notion of moral reasoning and moral life. We take pride in our moral certitude, so much so that we risk freeing ourselves of any obligation to reasonably and respectfully persuade others of its legitimacy, to hear the concerns of moral dissenters, or even to pay attention to the consequences of our moral actions. Paradoxically, it is often those who uncritically believe in the voice of their own good conscience and follow their moral certitude at the expense of everything else, who reflect least on their actions.

Given the pervasiveness of the belief in an unerring ‘faculty’ of conscience, and the manifold cultural sources
that buttress this belief, I submit that one of the greatest challenges of moral education is to develop a healthy, ethical conscience. Because we often experience our conscience as a voice or demand made from afar (understandably, given the external, social sources of moral norms), it is easy to assume it has an other-worldly and incontrovertible source. Experientially, the passivity of conscience is understood as a mark of its certainty. Since conscience often speaks as if it were another level of agency—a deeper law of the heart or of supernatural wisdom—we assume the intensity of its prodding is synonymous with its reliability. This experience of subjective certitude is ranked as more important than any other competing interests, since no other source of obligation can match the visceral force of conscience. Once this passivity becomes interpreted as a manifestation of a specific source of moral authority, say the voice of God, the need for transparency can become neglected. And so the experience of passivity characteristic of conscience is often taken as the expression of a higher principle, which intensifies one’s moral motivation but often at the expense of exaggerating the reliability of one’s judgments. To be sure, nothing can sabotage one’s efforts to lead a healthy and fulfilling moral life more subtly, and more extensively, than submitting to an unrealistic image of conscience.

Since one’s conscience is formed so early and through complex social and psychological processes, and plays such a crucial role in the struggle for recognition that shapes one’s moral identity, encouraging students to see conscience as more than an internal, inerrant law of the heart is not an easy task. It requires parents and educators not only to provide alternative models of moral reasoning—including new ways of drawing on and discussing moral emotions, a re-assessment of creativity and imagination, and a robust respect for others—but also the enactment of an actual community wherein such negotiation and experimentation can take place. For these reasons, more than any other aspect of the Philosophy for Children (P4C) program, I believe its approach to moral education remains its most distinctive and promising feature. The program’s holistic, experiential and inquiry-based approach to moral education yields robust pedagogical possibilities. As Splitter and Sharp discuss in their *Teaching for Better Thinking*, the way that values education is traditionally approached rests on “false dichotomies of outer versus inner …other versus self,” and reason versus passion—dichotomies which have the unfortunate consequence of presenting educators with only two viable options: either “[impose] on children a predetermined set of moral rules,” or leave them to follow their own opinions. The result is moral confusion in either case.33

Although moral education should aim to transcend such dichotomous thinking, we should recognize that it is nevertheless an important stage in developing an informed conscience. Kennedy takes up aspects of this dichotomous thinking as it relates to childhood in his insightful book, *The Well of Being*. Kennedy argues that the schooling system ends up as a complicated extension of the adult-child relationship, which focuses on self-regulation as the key to unlocking the potential of children, overlooking their own capacities and interests in the process.

The developmental discourse of self-regulation is constructed on binaries like habit versus impulse or instinct, internal versus external locus of control, and autonomy versus heteronomy, which in turn evoke the social binaries of anarchy versus … hierarchy, self-governance versus external rule, and, at a deeper level, order versus disorder.34

It is impossible to fully avoid such binary thinking, which is a direct result of the initial narrowness of affective life. Conscience develops from this initial narrowness, where emotion is largely reactive. Because social acceptance is so crucial in the early developmental stages of childhood, our sense of accountability is informed by a certain literalness or immediacy. As capacities grow, and emotions become gradually differentiated and grounded in cognitive appraisals, emotive life opens up.

Much of what it means to lead a healthy moral life turns on the flexibility we can bring to our emotions. Research on emotional states and traits in children demonstrates that affections like shame and guilt are highly dependent on how children appraise situations. Repeated patterns of certain kinds of self-appraisal can harden into overriding affective self-interpretations, which can be psychologically and morally disempowering.35 In such instances our conscience becomes largely synonymous with our affective states, confusing feelings for convictions. Unable to take on the voice of a critical other, our conscience never ends up requiring more from us than simply passive assent.

Insofar as much of the pedagogy that informs the way ethical inquiry is modeled and practiced in P4C deliberately cultivates a “decentering of the self,” and this at multiple levels and in multiple ways, it offers a responsible, as well as realistic, approach to the cultivation of ethical conscience. With its emphasis on dialogue, empathy, reciprocity, inquiry, self-correction and thoughtful introspection, all within, as Splitter and Sharp put it, “a ‘lived experience’ of community wherein such capacities can be nurtured and practiced,” P4C provides a plausible antidote to the narcissism that haunts our convictions.36 Most importantly, P4C recognizes that emotions can be productively integrated within larger interpretive schemes to the extent they can be openly identified, discussed, and re-channeled through practice and modeling. Whatever else researchers on emotion in...
psychology and philosophy may disagree on, there is wide and informed consensus that emotions, especially emotions of self-assessment, are not only much more malleable, but also more positive stabilizing forces, than previously thought.37 It is also clear that one’s ability to recognize the self-transformative potential of moral emotions is highly dependent on one’s environment; hence the educational and moral imperative to provide children with that environment most conducive to self-disclosure.

In taking this approach, P4C sees moral education as not only the acquisition of a definable skill set but also the development of disposition and attitude. These capacities are cultivated through building on the student’s own experience, as well as through works of fiction, rather than simply imposing pre-arranged moral dilemmas for the students to consider and evaluate. Moreover, these capacities are understood and exercised as social as well as individual practices. The P4C approach slowly draws students into the world of dialogue, where their own core moral assumptions and ideals can be explored, openly evaluated and made accountable to the community of their peers. From a structural point of view this process establishes a field of moral convictions and points of view through which students can see the manifold ways in which moral obligations naturally arise, identify their own moral orientations and relate those orientations to those of their peers and of the larger community.38

Conclusion

Whatever view of self-care one espouses, it must take into account the existential reality of selfhood and the lived experience of moral obligations. I have attempted to read the experience of caring for oneself through the lens of having a conscience. The self that emerges from this reading is a relational self, formed through a dialectical process of mutual recognition at the deepest affective and cognitive levels, in which agents are slowly drawn out of themselves through moral sources they initially do not understand, yet must come to claim as their own if their sense of integrity is to have any fulfilling integration with moral accountability.

In the words of Ricoeur, “Conscience is, in truth, that place par excellence in which illusions about oneself are intimately bound up with the veracity of attestation.”39 In the end there is no way to guarantee that what we attest of ourselves in the moral projects we undertake and the promises we make will not be broken, dissolved, or devolve into self-aggrandizement, other than by realizing that they can. This realization makes us aware of the participatory character of our moral obligations, and recommends a practice of fidelity to one’s convictions more demanding than mere re-affirmation.

If it is true that conscience is that process of inquiry in which agents participate in constructing what it means to be morally accountable, and to whom, and this in the most visceral way, then at least one plausible model of caring for the self will be caring for one’s conscience.40 Insofar as conscience is not an inerrant internal faculty, but a process of appropriation and integration of external norms, we should attempt to improve our ability to deal with the alterity that defines us, rather than remain its unknowing captives. And so we would do well to remember that the role of conscience is not to provide timeless moral principles, but to engender self-interpretation and self-transformation. To the extent that much of the pedagogy that informs P4C attempts to operationalize this truth, it remains the most sensible and viable form of moral education on offer.

Endnotes

1 I would like to thank Viterbo University and the D.B. Reinhart Institute for Ethics in Leadership for the generous fellowship I received in support of the research for this article. I am especially thankful to Richard Kyte, Megan Laverty and Maughn Gregory for their helpful criticism of earlier versions of this paper.


3 As James Averill explains, the idea that emotions are “biologically primitive” is based on a value judgment about what we think emotions do, which is more of a cultural prejudice than anything else. See James Averill, “Emotion and Anxiety: Sociocultural, Biological, and Psychological Determinants,” in Explaining Emotions ed. Amélie Rorty (California: University of California Press, 1980): 37-72, 46.


10 Ibid., 1.


12 Williams 2008, 93.

13 Taylor 1985, 32


15 Ibid., 41.

16 Both Nietzsche and Freud see conscience largely in terms of a defense mechanism. For Nietzsche it is the ‘guilty conscience,’ which is the internalization of Christian values and ideology that ends in self-deprecation. For Freud, it is the ‘super-ego’ which is the internalization of parental authority. See Nietzsche, The Genealogy of Morals, translated by Walter Kauffmann and R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Random House, 1969); and Freud, Civilization and its Discontents, translated and edited by James Strachey (New York: W&W Norton and Co., 1989).

17 Richard Wollheim, On the Emotions (Great Britain: Yale University Press, 1999), 153.


21 Ryle draws attention to this issue when he states that we experience matters of conscience only when conflicting dispositions are present, and where such conflict is absent we are best to refer to the experience by some other name, say discretion or caution, but not conscience. See Ryle, “Conscience and Moral Convictions,” in Conscience, 26-34, 30.


23 Thomas F. Green, Voices: The Educational Formation of Conscience, 22.


29 Levinas 2007, 100.

30 Ibid., 100.


36 Splitter and Sharp 2003, 165.


40 Heidegger talks at length about how care is related to conscience, distinguishing its authentic from inauthentic expressions, but he does so in such a way that he removes any authentic voice of conscience completely from the realm of moral obligations to others. As a consequence, I find Heidegger’s account, although phenomenological, of limited help in understanding the “call of conscience.” See Martin Heidegger, Being and Time, translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), esp. Section II of Division Two on Resoluteness, 312-348.
Caring for the “Self as One Among Others”

Laurance Splitter

Introduction

In this paper, I explore some underpinnings of the community of inquiry (CoI), viewed as the primary mode of classroom organization in Philosophy for Children but also as a pedagogic, personal and inter-personal framework for teaching and learning in any subject area. I will argue that the CoI provides a model of both personal and intellectual development which exemplifies how classroom teaching and learning may be seen both as forms of care and of self-care.

Care

It is hard to disagree with the notion that such affirming and nurturing attributes as care, respect, trust, dignity, and empathy are essential ingredients in any learning environment. Still, as with most concepts, once we start to “dig a little deeper,” several points of tension emerge. While it is not easy to separate out one attribute from another, I will nevertheless do precisely this in relation to care, since it is a key focus of the paper.

I endorse a conception of care or caring that neatly reflects the three key dimensions of the classroom as an environment for teaching and learning. These dimensions may be summarized as follows:

D1: The nature of the classroom environment in affective/personal and moral/social terms (what kind of place it is)
D2: The activity of the classroom in terms of process (who says and does what)
D3: The activity of the classroom in terms of content (what is taught, learned, assessed).

These dimensions of caring are inter-dependent in a CoI. For example, an overly-zealous commitment to 2. and/or 3. might come at the expense of 1. (as those of us who cut our philosophical teeth in the “alpha-male” environment of the traditional philosophy seminar can well remember!). Conversely, too great a sensitivity in regard to personal and interpersonal care can inhibit the inquiry process (witness the “brain-storming” discussion or therapy group in which no one is allowed to disagree with or challenge any one else). Still, I am inclined to agree with Noddings and other writers (many, although not all, of whom are writing in the modern Feminist tradition) who put the personal and inter-personal care...
characterized in 1. as the *sine qua non* of all the other aspects of caring. Indeed, paying attention to one’s own thinking and behavior, and to the kind of person one is continually becoming – in short, taking care of oneself – is an indispensable aspect of each of these dimensions. Unless and until we are able to see ourselves in both a caring relationship to ourselves, and a relation of mutual care with others, we will be unable to undertake the kind of dialogue and inquiry that make 2. and 3. possible. In Noddings’ terms (speaking specifically about conversation between adults and children), it must be the case that “…The adults have loving regard and respect for their child-partners…For both parties, in the conversation under consideration, the partner is more important than the topic, the conclusion or the argument.” (Noddings 2002, 129).

Taking the inter-personal dimension of caring as primary is in accord with what I want now to move to discuss, namely: the mutuality and interdependence of thinking and communication, the individual self and other selves (including other communities of selves), and the three-way relationship of self, other, and the world. In all the ways in which I regard myself as living in the world as one among others, my role and status as both carer and cared-for are crucial. Nowhere is this more significant than in the classroom where, according to my admittedly idealized conception of CoI, each child is, literally, in the process of *becoming a person*. Children who practice these kinds of care in the CoI will internalize the procedures and patterns of social interaction, and the feelings of well-being that are associated with their practice. They will also become increasingly self-conscious of their own development and agency as persons. This kind of self-awareness is the fundamental component of what ancient Greek and Roman philosophers called ‘caring for the self’ and what we often refer to as ethical and moral self-correction or self-directed growth.

**Thought and Talk**

We sometimes admonish children to think before they speak (or act), as though there could be speech in the absence of thought. The key term in this admonition is “before” which implies that good speech should be preceded by careful thought. While this may be sound advice in certain contexts – and for certain types of people – it is, generally speaking, too restrictive. Better, then, to rephrase the original advice: “Don’t speak in the absence of thought” or, simply, “Don’t speak thoughtlessly”. But what, precisely, does this mean?

One thing it does *not* mean is that speech acts, if they are to count as meaningful or significant, must be accompanied by thoughts *qua* separate entities, like invisible or shadow-like apparitions of some kind. I prefer to take a Deweyan perspective – one which also stands up well in a contemporary semantics context – reflecting the idea that meaning has to do with *connections* or *relations*, so that the thoughtful – as opposed to the thoughtless – speech act is one that is appropriately connected to other actual or potential thoughts or speech acts. Appropriateness here depends on the context: what we say should be related to the subject under discussion, and/or to what has just been said, and/or to accepted conventions of logic and grammar, and/or to what is taken to be socially or morally acceptable. So, for example, a student who speaks out without thinking (as we would say) might be committing an error of induction, or failing to consider something that was said a few moments before, or simply uttering nonsense, i.e. saying something which cannot meaningfully be related to anything else that makes sense, etc. But she might also be disruptive or domineering, or failing to consider the likely implications of her comment for someone else’s feelings, in which case her thoughtlessness takes on a social or ethical character rather than a linguistic or semantic one. Assuming that what we say, not just what we do, counts as intentional behavior (action), for which we are responsible, the morally thoughtless comment may cause real harm to others, even though this consequence – or connection – is unintended (of course, it may be intended, in which case the comment is not so much thoughtless as malicious, mischievous, etc.).

If this analysis of the difference between thoughtfulness and thoughtlessness is on the right track, it suggests that the further difference between what we think and what we say should not be over-blown. Indeed, as I have articulated elsewhere, what we see in a community of dialogical inquiry is a clear sense of connectedness between the two, to the point where it makes sense to say both that thinking is a form of internalized dialogue (*a là* Vygotsky), and that dialogue is a form of thinking out loud (we might say that dialogue shows the community itself thinking) (Splitter 2009). But notice that an additional dimension of connectedness is involved here: the essence of talking lies in *connecting with* others. Accepting that such connections are both reflective and productive of thought in the case of all who are thereby connected, it is easy to see the importance of engaging in dialogue within a community of fellow thinkers.

The thesis of the interdependence of thought and talk is not committed to any kind of reductionism between the two. The philosopher Donald Davidson (on whose views I comment more fully below) has written extensively on this point. He writes:

I find no plausibility in the idea that thoughts can be nomologically identified with, or correlated with, phenomena characterized in physical or neurological terms. Nor do I see any reason to maintain that what we can’t say we can’t think. My thesis is not, then, that each thought depends for its existence on a sentence that expresses that thought. My thesis is rather that a creature cannot have a thought unless it has language. (Davidson 1982, 100; also 1975).

**Dialogue and Inquiry**

I share the commonly-held view that dialogue is not “mere conversation” (Gardner, 1995). Dialogue may be characterized
as reflective communication (typically, but not necessarily, via speech), driven by something puzzling or intriguing, directed toward truth, structured by its own internal logic, and egalitarian. Some elucidation of these terms is required.

By reflective, I mean that those engaged in dialogue are self-consciously aware, and in control of, what they (think and) say; in particular, they are willing both to commit to it and to modify or revise it, where appropriate.

By driven by something puzzling or intriguing, I mean not only that dialogue – like all thoughtful activity – must be about something, but that its subject matter is both not initially known and/or understood by those engaged in the dialogue, and of sufficient interest to motivate them to find such knowledge or understanding. Borrowing a term from A.N. Whitehead, subject matter which is inert from the perspective of students, either because it is already familiar or mundane, or because it does not excite their curiosity (or both), will not generate dialogue (Whitehead 1929).

The requirement that dialogue be directed toward truth is more difficult to articulate, partly because of the metaphysical, semantic, and epistemological quagmires surrounding the concept of truth, and partly because the concept itself conjures the idea of an end-point which, if not fixed in advance, threatens the dialogical process as something which always seeks to continue. Still – and without stepping too far into the quagmire – truth directs our dialogical inquiries. In doing philosophy with children, we encourage them to ask questions at all stages of the inquiry: their questions provide an agenda for consideration, call attention at different stages to what is puzzling right now, and (though this needs considerable modeling by the teacher) probe what is said and provoke all involved to think harder. But given that we are not inviting them to ask questions just for the sake of it, there is a presumption that the person asking is, indeed, seeking an answer – that is, a true answer. Children often claim that they relish the freedom provided by philosophy to say what they like because there are no right or wrong answers, but press them on this and they will acknowledge that such crude relativism vitiates the point of asking in the first place. Participation in inquiry that is rigorous and open-ended leads us to trust that truth will not abandon us if we stick to the path of inquiry and dialogue, even as it teaches us to be wary of proclaiming the truth in any given case, since what we assume to be true often turns out to be mistaken.

Socrates, that relentless exemplar of the seeker after truth, can consistently hold both that his inquiries are directed toward truth and that he, like his interlocutors, does not know what it is in any particular case. Further, as Davidson explains, both of these claims are consistent with the assumption that when interpreting the claims of others, we have to assume that they are, generally speaking, true:

...any particular belief or set of beliefs about the world around us may be false. What cannot be the case is that our general picture of the world and our place in it is mistaken, for it is this picture which informs the rest of our beliefs and makes them intelligible, whether they be true or false. (Davidson 1991, 213; see also 1994, 431).

Such a “principle of charity,” as one commentator puts it (Avramidis 1999, 146) might be applied to children as well. Even as they play with ideas, testing the limits of what makes sense to them, they may plausibly be said to operate within a general framework of truth.

I claimed above that in the context of the CoI, procedural and substantive care must be supported by interpersonal care. We may sympathize with those of Socrates’ youthful co-inquirers (Meno and Alcibiades, for examples) who would protest that his form of “care” is almost unbearable, but the question of his loving regard (borrowing the term from Noddings) for them, as persons, is surely not in doubt. Indeed, such is the extent of his care that he insists that they free themselves from the shackles of careless, false and ego-driven thinking, and pursue only that which is true. Tough care – like “tough love” – is still the genuine article.

The idea that dialogue is structured by its own internal logic may also appear at odds with an idealized conception because of the advice, offered by C.S. Peirce, that those engaged in dialogue or inquiry should follow it where it leads. But such following is not random or arbitrary, and participants may justifiably be called to account if what they say appears irrelevant, unreasonable, or in other ways not connected to the dialogue. Like inquiries in science or criminal investigation, the direction of a given dialogue is not and ought not to be entirely predictable; still, upon reflection (supposing the entire dialogue were recorded, for example), an observer ought to be able to identify its general shape and direction, if only retrospectively. This characteristic is linked to those previously noted: the participants in the dialogue should be able to reflect on its general structure and, while remaining open to new twists and turns, expect it to move toward some kind of resolution – or, at least, clarity – of the question or puzzle which sparked it in the first place. Here, again, the more we care for the inquiry and care for our own growth into personhood, the more we are able to follow the inquiry toward the most reasonable outcomes, rather than manipulate it for self-serving ends.

I should emphasize that the condition of being logically structured is not intended to exclude the conversations that people – including children – might actually have. Dialogue, in this sense, is not the same as Habermas’ idealized conversation which, while offering a welcome alternative to the “monologic” of most classroom teaching and learning, has been criticized by several writers as being too far removed from the issues confronting us in daily life. As Noddings remarks, in support of comments by Benhabib, Bernstein and others: “We are not well prepared in discourse ethics to meet and respond to real people with all their needs and foibles” (Noddings 2002, 120).

Balancing these characteristics – one pulling the dialogue
rigorously in a certain direction, the other urging openness to new possibilities and “moves” – is a skill to be learned, under the guidance and modeling of a more experienced facilitator (usually the teacher). In the special case of philosophy, though we have the classic dialogues of Plato and others as models, the intrinsic open-endedness of its questions calls for careful attention to be paid to such procedural questions as: “So where are we now?”; “What progress have we made?”, etc. It is one thing to insist that coming up with “the answers” is not the only measure of success or progress; but quite another to imagine that no such measures are required. Aside from an intellectual repugnance of interactions which “go nowhere,” contemporary educators in many countries are faced with the pragmatic requirements of Outcomes-Based Learning (OBL), which render it obligatory to specify, in advance, the aims and objectives of our syllabi and lessons. By thinking carefully about how to formulate and teach toward such outcomes in philosophy, we can contribute to the broader debate concerning all subjects.

The final characteristic of dialogue is that it be egalitarian. The exact meaning of “egalitarian” is unclear; as a variant on “equal,” it is difficult to define precisely. Nevertheless, in asking those engaged in dialogue to be reflective with respect to their own participation, we are referring to its moral and social dimensions, not just its cognitive ones. A conversation in which one or two speakers dominate, or in which one or more participants feel alienated or otherwise disconnected, is not a dialogue, even if all involved are thinking dialogically in some sense.

When thinking of classroom dialogue, it may reasonably be asked if genuine equality is either possible or desirable, once we assume that the teacher has specific responsibilities to model and guide the inquiry. There are two responses to this point. First, we should distinguish between a Col in formation and a mature Col (which may be a kind of ideal); as the former proceeds toward the latter, there is a gradual equalizing of roles: students take on greater pedagogic and procedural responsibility, while the teacher becomes more of a co-inquirer (Splitter and Sharp 1995, 149). Secondly, even in the early stages of formation, the teacher who models and guides the emergent inquiry sees herself as an inquirer, open to new ideas even when she may feel (initially) certain of the answers.

Accepting that thought and talk, generally, are closely inter-related leads me to propose that the same is true for inquiry (as a mode of thinking) and dialogue (as a mode of talking). Both activities may be characterized in the terms I have suggested, viz. as reflective, driven by something unknown or not understood, directed toward truth, structured by an internal logic, and egalitarian.

Including reflectivity, qua mode of “higher-order” thinking, among the characteristics of both dialogue and inquiry points the way to resolving an objection to the notion that thought and talk are necessarily inter-related. This objection runs as follows. Not all thought is linguistic and there are those who appear, at least, to be effective but “not-very” linguistic thinkers. The sculptor and the football player may be said to think with their hands and their bodies, and the outcomes of such thinking manifest themselves both in their actions and in the products of their actions. I shall assume here that these claims are, in fact, correct. However, it does not follow that language and linguistic communication do not play a privileged role with respect both to thinking and to what I like to term the life of the mind. Consider concepts, for example. Concepts are crucial ingredients of thought, particularly of “higher-order thinking.” Helping students identify and work with concepts (all of which are abstract to some extent) is a – if not the – key to helping them to reflect, deliberate, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate, i.e. to engage in higher-order thinking. But concepts, regarded as semantic rather than mental constructs, cannot be separated from the language used to define and identify them; hence they are as much “dialogical objects” as they are objects of thought or introspection. In short, allowing that various forms of thinking are not linguistic, it seems reasonable to insist that the higher levels of thinking which are regarded as important in just about every curriculum area, are linguistic. When the sculptor and football player reflect on and evaluate their work, they revert, inevitably, to the familiar linguistic activities of speaking, listening, reading and writing.

**Self and Other**

The interdependence of thought and talk, as articulated above, gives rise to an ontological thesis of great significance: that our very identity or personhood is inextricably linked to our place in a framework of dialogical relationships with others. This claim has been articulated by writers and theorists in several disciplines and coming from several distinct perspectives. It is a recurring theme in the pragmatists C. S. Peirce, G. H. Mead and, of course, Dewey; no less so in the work of writers such as Mikhail Bakhtin, Charles Taylor, Jürgen Habermas and Hans-Georg Gadamer; and again, in the theoretical and applied research of Lev Vygotsky and Jerome Bruner. Taylor is a prominent proponent of the dialogical view, with his claim that human life has a fundamentally dialogical character in virtue of the status of human persons as, essentially, reason-making creatures. In Taylor (who duly acknowledges the work of Bakhtin on our “inner dialogicality”, Taylor 1991, 127), we find a line of thought which offers a genuine alternative to the familiar dichotomy of the subjective or monological view of the self versus some kind of externalized or objectified conception. A dialogical perspective reconciles the intuitive notion that my very existence as a person points to something of central importance to and about me, with the idea that I am a person in the world, whose sense of self must be grounded in (but not smothered by) something beyond my own subjectivity.

Philosophy for Children, originally conceived by Matthew Lipman but developed in a variety of ways, subject to cultural and other contextual factors, also incorporates the idea that personal development, in its cognitive, affective, personal
and interpersonal dimensions, requires giving a special place to the cultivation of dialogue and dialogical relationships. However, it is not just philosophy which benefits from taking a dialogical perspective. In the normal course of life, each of us interacts with countless others (although some of these others – and our interactions with them – are more significant than others). Accepting that the values, beliefs, events and people which help to shape us and the roles we play both affect and are affected by these interactions, it follows that becoming a person is a life-long project. Of course not all such interactions are constructive ones. Children whose dominant interactions are with those who love and care for them (and for themselves) are likely to grow, affectively and ethically, quite differently from those who find themselves in hostile or uncaring environments. The same may be said for children who are encouraged, from a young age, to ask questions and think for themselves, as compared with those whose lives – in terms of what they think and say, as well as what they do – are more rigidly controlled. Further, the CoI is intended to make young people conscious of the felt qualities of these kinds of interactions and of their consequences for the kind of persons they are becoming. Through self-awareness, children cultivate the moral agency to choose more reasonable and caring kinds of interactions, in furtherance of their own cognitive, social and moral growth.

Needless to say, teachers are among those who influence and interact with children (so are other children). Whatever children bring with them to the classroom, the quality of their experiences and interactions thence is bound to be influenced by our attitudes and actions. Providing students with a rich and varied range of experiences is essential, but it is not enough. We must also guide them in reflecting on these experiences and utilizing them to form good judgments that will impact on their own lives and those of others. Such guidance aims at the cultivation of both skills and dispositions (attitudes); knowing how to exercise good judgment, make wise decisions, and solve problems comes to little if those in possession of such knowledge are not inclined to use it.

In any community, the individuals who belong to it must know where they stand, in terms of their relative position, power, role, etc. Even the most autocratic or authoritarian community requires its members to understand their subservient status. The democratic nature of a Col neutralizes the power dynamic – at least in its idealized form – but its members still understand their position and role vis-à-vis those of their fellow members. Indeed, aside from the relationships constituted by its members, a Col is nothing at all. It is, as I like to say, “no greater than the sum of its parts,” which amounts to saying that it has no inherent value or worth beyond that of its members. It serves as a vital means to an end, and that end is the personal development of those members. It might be tempting to see this move as smuggling a pernicious form of individualism into an allegedly communal environment, but it is really no more than a reiteration of the relational nature of the community, as expressed above. After all, throughout schooling and beyond, children belong to a variety of communities which come and go in their turn. Among these transient collectives will be those inquiring communities that they belong to from time to time. It is the job of education to enable students to grow as persons, even as these various communities fall by the wayside.

From the perspective of each member of the community, their relational sense of self may be expressed in terms of seeing themselves as “one among others.” To see myself as one among others is to understand that my identity, value and place in the group are bound up with the identity, value and place of other members – and vice versa. This is a version of what, in psychological and ethical terms, is known as the reciprocity principle: I want/need to be valued by you, therefore I want/need to value you, and conversely.

**Self, Other and the World**

In my discussion so far, the idea that I see myself in relation to others – and thereby to how they see me, and to how, in turn, they see themselves – has been prominent. In this final section, I want to broach an issue that challenges the very idea that communities of inquiry are adequate to the task of “transmitting” knowledge, i.e. of teaching children about the world “out there.” Actually, there are two challenges. First, it could be claimed that no amount of caring dialogue within a student Col will guarantee that the findings of the community are actually true or correct. Secondly, it could be claimed that neither (subjective) thought – which occurs, if anywhere, within a single individual – nor (inter-subjective) dialogue – which operates between and among individuals – connects with the objective world at all. In both cases, we have the picture of arrows of communication and understanding flying to and fro within and among individuals, but no arrows reaching out to, or coming in from, the world of objects – including other (sometimes foreign) communities. Since it is with the knowledge of this world that schooling is supposed to deal, we would have to conclude that dialogue and the CoI are entirely ill-suited to the task.

The first challenge assumes that the only input to the inquiry process comes from within the community itself, where by “from within” is meant “from the ideas, thoughts and beliefs of the student participants.” Since a student community is unlikely to have ready access to, or appreciation of, the current state of knowledge and procedures which constitute a particular discipline such as mathematics or history, the challenge asks what guarantee there is that either the findings or the procedures of the community will correspond to what experts in the field have come up with.

However, the underlying assumption here is not true. There is no reason why a student Col must restrict itself to input from within its own ranks, as long as what is presented from outside the community is not imposed on it. The crucial player here is, of course, the teacher. She is charged with the responsibility to:
• Model and, where necessary, instruct students in the correct use of the (sometimes domain-specific) procedures of collaborative inquiry, including those that safeguard and nurture the community, those that encourage students to take responsibility for their own thinking, and those that ensure that progress is made toward the goal associated with the inquiry in question
• Bring to students’ awareness the most up-to-date expert opinion(s) in relation to the subject matter.

The first point is familiar, but the second requires some elaboration. It captures the appropriate role of the teacher in a constructivist learning context, which assumes that students bring to the classroom a variety of prior knowledge and understandings which can be used to generate a deeper, more accurate knowledge of the subject in question. Notwithstanding the deep and bitter political schisms wrought by issues relating to constructivism, it is hard to see how this assumption – which is basically an empirical truth – can be denied. The key question is how the teacher ought to respond to students’ naïve and/or partial understandings. The traditional didactic response calls for her to transmit the “correct” view, and to point out, if necessary, that other views held by students are incomplete or mistaken. However, this transmission model manifests a lack of care for the learner (whose own ideas and interests are ignored or over-ridden), the teacher (who, in functioning merely as a transmitter, is denied the right – indeed, the responsibility – to show care either for her students or for her discipline), and the subject matter (whose own dynamic procedures – that which keep it alive – are bypassed).

An alternative response – one which reflects a deeper commitment to care for all concerned – would allow the teacher to introduce the best currently available understanding (procedural and substantive) of the disciplines, preferably by linking it to problematic aspects of students’ experiences. There is no question that students should be aware of this understanding – should, indeed, understand it – but using the term “introduce”, instead of “transmit” implies that it becomes part of the input for further deliberation by the community, along with their own views and others to which they may be exposed. Dewey reminds us that we should not confuse the output of inquiry with its input, and this is a case in point. In practice, there is little “danger” that students will ignore or under-value the received perspective; after all, it comes with its own powerful credentials and students seeking to reject it will be challenged to find reasons for doing so.

Turning to the second challenge – that within the framework of inter-subjective dialogue as practiced within an inquiring community, there is no room, conceptually speaking, for objectivity (because the latter lies necessarily outside the framework of the community) – I turn, once more, to the work of Donald Davidson. I do not know of anything written by Davidson which deals specifically with education, but his systematic views on mind and language stand as exemplars of a holistic, conceptual approach to theorizing in these areas. I shall not attempt to describe or even summarize them here, but draw attention to a line of thought which appears in his later writing. I referred earlier to Davidson’s views on the mind, in the context of arguing for a conceptual link between “thought” and “talk”. Here and elsewhere (for instance, his celebrated argument for the thesis of Anomalous Monism), Davidson argues that the linguistic and conceptual structure of much of our thought – including such propositional attitudes as belief, desire, and intention – entails that making sense of what we think and say carries various kinds of objective, or ontological, commitments. In this context Davidson adheres to a Kantian tradition of a priori or transcendental reasoning.

Davidson proposes a triangular view of knowledge in which each of three basic forms of knowledge – knowledge of one’s own mind, knowledge of other minds (i.e. of what goes on in the minds of others) and knowledge of the world – is conceptually linked to the other two (Davidson 1998, 1997, 1991). That is, no one form of knowledge is possible – or even makes sense – without accepting at least the possibility of the other two forms. According to one interpretation of his views, Davidson is not so much responding to the traditional skeptic – because he does not question the existence of each kind of knowledge – but, rather, is attempting to show how these forms of knowledge, which appear so different from each other, deal with the same reality (Avramides 1999). Here, Davidson’s concern is not specifically with the nature of this reality – he argues elsewhere that all real entities, including each one of us, are physical ones – but with a continuity to be found within the forms of knowledge in virtue of the language we use to describe them. In other words, according to Davidson, claims to self knowledge, to knowledge of others’ minds and to knowledge of the world are bound together in a single framework; and this framework is fundamentally linguistic.

Elsewhere, Davidson points to a corresponding triangularity using the concept of belief which, traditionally, is represented in our claims to knowledge as the subjective component. He argues that “having a belief involves” both “having the concept of belief” (1982, 102) and “knowing the difference between true and false belief”; these, in turn, involve possessing the concept of objective truth (Davidson 1982, 102; also his 1998, 1997, 1991). The triangle comes full circle (so to speak) in his further claim that “the source of the concept of objective truth is interpersonal communication” (1991, 209). As Avramides puts it, “So, while we find that our knowledge of the world depends on the communication between persons, we also find that the communication between persons depends on our recognition that we occupy a shared world.” (Avramides 1999, 148).

While all three arms of Davidson’s epistemic triangles are conceptually equivalent, he maintains that from our earliest remembered uses of language to refer to the world, we do so via communication with others. In fact, he initially introduces the notion of triangulation to explain how it is possible for thought – which, from the time we are first aware of it, does not come item by item but holistically – to develop. Again,
the crucial link is three-fold: I perceive a real-world object, and learn from you that this object is, say, a bird of a certain kind. More generally, as Davidson puts it, “the basic situation is one that involves two or more creatures simultaneously in interaction with each other and with the world they share” (1997, 128).

Regardless of whether we make our epistemological focus belief, knowledge, or warranted assertability, the element of conceptual self-awareness hinted at in the previous paragraphs reveals a dimension of care which, in turn, reflects our key theme. I perceive the world through my relationships with other perceivers and, most of the time, I do so willingly, as an agent in search of the truth of things. My concern – my care – for this truth requires that I care for all the ingredients involved in discovering or constructing it, including the accuracy of my perceptual and concept-making apparatus, and of my skill in interpreting the words and gestures of others. It also requires my second-order care that those with whom I am engaged in this quest for knowledge and truth also care for those same ingredients. The dialogue of the CoI acknowledges these dimensions of care by requiring both self-correction and the (caring!) correction – challenge might be a better term – of others.

One further move is warranted here. It may be that the base of Davidson’s triangle – viz. the link between myself and others – requires merely the existence of one other speaker with whom I can communicate. But a more reliable base for objective knowledge involves a larger number of such speakers. In practice, we play off a range of assertions and beliefs as we work out which ones stand up to standards of reason and evidence, etc. Needless to say, such a range is provided within a caring community of thinkers, all of whom are inquiring after the truth by way of determining, interpreting, and evaluating what is presented to them. Interestingly, while it is not clear that he intended to make the shift from a single interlocutor to a community, Davidson writes: “A community of minds is the basis of knowledge; it provides the measure of all things”. (1991, 218).

Davidson is aware of the role that dialogue can play in expanding what we claim to know. Having rejected the common-place and perhaps common-sense Cartesian idea that the subjective is epistemologically prior to the objective, in favor of the triangular view outlined above, he endorses R. G. Collingwood’s insightful remark that “the child’s discovery of itself is also a discovery of itself as a member of a world of persons” (1991, 219). It seems to me that this comes very close to the view I am endorsing: that in a CoI, each member sees herself as one among others. Davidson continues this theme by acknowledging that in the general world which all speakers and interpreters inhabit, there are some significant personal and cultural differences; but, he insists, these differences do not rule out coming to understand and appreciate those who occupy different parts of our world:

What is certain is that the clarity and effectiveness of our concepts grows with the growth of our understanding of others. There are no definite limits to how far dialogue can or will take us. (1991, 219).

References


I’m now in the car on my way to a place called Mendham to participate to a seminar on Philosophy for Children (P4C). I’ve never been to Mendham, but I imagine it is a wonderful place, from what other people have told me about it.

I don’t know why I have decided to make this trip. It is not really a tourist or a business trip, neither a pure academic trip. It is something more like a pilgrimage or a retreat. I feel strange to use religious words to describe my philosophical experience. Philosophy and religion have not been in a good relationship in the last centuries. Maybe I’m using this religious language because I’m going to a convent. Going to a convent to do philosophy: it sounds a bit like I were traveling back to pre-modern philosophy, where philosophy was naturally linked to religion. I’m not sure of what I’m trying to say, as I’m unsure what I’m looking for in this travel, in this pilgrimage. People who used to go on pilgrimage didn’t start their travel with an answer. If they already had the answer, what would be the use to start a journey? It was then, as it is still today, a problem that puts humans in movement. But I don’t know exactly what problem is working in me. Yet, perhaps that, in itself, is a very good reason to start a pilgrimage: a vague desire to find something, but a vague desire that is so strong that it forces you to embark on the path.

Olivier Michaud is a native of Quebec, where he studied Philosophy for Children at Université Laval. He did his masters thesis on Tocqueville and the issue of authority in democracy. He also studied philosophy for one year at the masters level at the Universidad Veracruzana, in Xalapa, Mexico. He began his doctoral studies at Montclair State University in 2008 and has been practicing philosophy with elementary school children under the auspices of the IAPC for over a year. His research interest is political philosophy and its implications for democratic education.
Thinking: The Journal of Philosophy for Children, Volume 19, Number 4

whatever this first quest is. I should not say that publicly. I surely appreciate studying philosophy, but, with time, I have become less sure if I love it. Part of the problem is that I still don’t know what ‘doing philosophy’ means. Now I feel like the strangest being on Earth: I have been doing an activity for ten years and I don’t know what it is! That is embarrassing; I should really keep that to myself.

Ten years ago was the first time I encountered philosophy. My travel in space to this retreat is now a travel in time. When you put your body in movement, your mind follows. Or when you put your mind in movement, your body follows. Or, to be pre- or post-modern, there is no dichotomy between the mind and the body. Any of these positions on the mind-body issue leads, in any case, to the idea of what a pilgrimage is: the unity of mind and body in movement. Was my first encounter with philosophy lucky break or a misfortune? Was I then affected by an illness or a medicine? It is possible that I was in reality touched by those two realities. This is why the animal that represents the best philosophy is the serpent, because its venom can kill or cure.

When the lightning enlightens the sky, you can’t miss the truth. I believe this was the effect of my first rendezvous with philosophy at the age of 18. I don’t remember, however, if I wanted to marry her. Nevertheless, it was a strong experience: philosophy changed my view of the world and, to be more exact, my whole being. Since then I have followed the bewitching voice of the serpent. I think it whispered in my ears a promise, but I can’t remember what this promise was about. The memory of the lightning is still there, but it is now very distant and I almost don’t hear it anymore ….

I’m born in a strange time. There is something rotten in the human kingdom. I think that anyone can be convinced of that by looking around. We are surrounded by crises: economic crisis, environmental crisis, humanitarian crisis, military crisis and so on. But those crises are not disconnected from our lives. I even tend to believe that the outside world reflects the world within. There is something rotten in the human kingdom because there is something rotten in the human heart, in our own hearts. I admit that I can only make such a statement for myself, as mine is the only heart I have access to. It is the condition of my heart that prompts the decision to embark on this pilgrimage.

What I said above explains why what follows is extraordinary. What a coincidence that one of the main aspects of the seminar is the idea that philosophy is a way of living! Those words, that “that philosophy is a way of living” resonate in me like the sound of a gong. I think this is the promise that I heard ten years ago and that I now vaguely remember. I saw philosophy then as something that I didn’t completely understand. Nevertheless, it appeared to me that it would improve my life; that my life would be better by living philosophically. Time passed and I almost forgot the sound of the thunder. I lost myself, like most people, in the new scholastic that is academic philosophy, where learning is disconnected from living; where a good student is evaluated by his grades, where the good philosopher is the one who publishes more than the others or receives more grants. I just forgot that those goals, even if I recognize their importance, are not the only ones, and surely not the principal ones. I forgot that philosophy was an infinite research on how to live well in this world, a research that engages all of our self; a quest not to survive, but to live—to live a life worth living. Isn’t it extraordinary that what I first saw as the secondary reason for my travel is now the same as what I called my first quest?! That my deep quest to improve my life is essentially linked to this activity or this mode of being that we call philosophy, an activity that I have practiced mechanically and like a hobby in the last several years?! Philosophy is not essentially an end to reach in the future, distant from us; it is instead an activity in which the end is reached at each moment. If philosophy is the end at the same time that it is the means to reach the end, it means that the path to the end and the end of the path are the same.

From what precedes, it follows that we cannot only be students or teachers in philosophy, but that we have to be philosophers. It’s maybe one of the biggest paradoxes in the history of philosophy that there have never been so many students and teachers in philosophy and so few philosophers. Philosophy is more than knowledge, it is even more than activity: it is a mode of being. That mode is always partially interrogative, as I live the question: what does my life mean? I chose this understanding of philosophy, not for a pure
fantasy, but because of an existential need. It is not a blind gamble, but something closer to the Pascalian gamble: if the end is unsure, the path is worth taking. We should value our journey on this path, instead of only looking for the end. The journey is as important as the goal of the journey. And there is no end to the journey of those who embrace philosophy.

* * *

Now I am reading these reflections aloud, to the retreat community. I should maybe begin to feel strange with all these people looking at me. They must be thinking that I haven’t accomplished the assignment – now that they know me, they are surely not surprised at that. Anyway, this is just an illusion, because I’m following the assignment, in my way, in a radical way. I’m asking aloud the question that has haunted a lot of us during this seminar: what do we mean by living philosophically?

I don’t have the answer to this question. This must not be seen as a passive statement, but instead as an invitation to inquire into what philosophy means. I have the intuition that we will never have a final answer to it. This lack of a definitive result should not disappointed us, as we have to value eternal problems instead of looking only for solutions, because it is the eternal problems that offer us an infinite field to inquire. Easy and simple problems lead us to simple and easy solutions that are not really connected to our life and that we forget very quickly. Philosophy is a living problem, a problem that will gain and not loose meaning with time.

Whatever may be the answer of the people present here to what philosophy is, I think that we should all take our answers (and the question that came before the answers) with us and live with them for a time – in our personal lives and in our philosophy classrooms. Whatever the pedagogical tools that we employ in our classrooms, we should never forget that we, ourselves, are the principal and the most important pedagogical tools. Our presence in the classroom is informed by the meaning we give to philosophy and how we understand its place in our life and our world. To cultivate the meaning of philosophy is to cultivate our presence in the classroom. What a surprise for those who are now awaiting the end of this text, when I tell them that I have only to offer them a beginning.

* * *

Seven months after the retreat I shared these reflections at the American Philosophical Association conference, where Joe Oyler asked the panel of presenters, “How has your practice as a P4C practitioner been influenced by your presentation today?” I didn’t answer Joe’s question; however, it has stayed with me and I may now say something about it. In making a connection between the purely academic practice of philosophy and philosophy as the study and practice of living well, my reflection was more personal than pedagogical. However, my claim was that we are the principal instruments of our teaching and that we have to philosophize in the latter sense to cultivate and improve this instrument. I assume that by doing this our presence in the classroom and our teaching will become better. As philosophers and teachers, the presence we bring to the classroom depends on who we are, on our being.

I also agree with the other conference presenters who suggested that the community of philosophical inquiry (CI) can be undertaken as a spiritual exercise. As P4C practitioners, our first level of experience of CI as spiritual practice is our participation in philosophical seminars like the one I described at Mendham. Those seminars generate new meaning at the intersection of disciplined practice, disciplinary knowledge and personal experience. We don’t mainly theorize about philosophy, we engage in philosophy as a potentially self-transformative practice. CI is not the only way to do philosophy, but it is an important genre of philosophical practice in the tradition of spiritual exercise. It is essential that adults experience this practice if we are to bring philosophy into the classroom. How could we bring something if we have no idea of what it is we bring?

Our second level of CI as a spiritual exercise happens in our classrooms. Here too, I see CI as a practice that aims to improve our being and our lives. The question now is, how do I intend to practice in the CI I facilitate? P4C pedagogy gives us some helpful guidelines, but these may never be complete, as the path of philosophy may be unique for each practitioner. Nor, as Jason and Walter have suggested, can we impose an ultimate definition of what is a philosophical discussion. One thing we can do is pay attention to the way philosophical meanings surface, for us and for our students. I do not enter CI only to teach, but also to learn, to practice a philosophical activity that matters as much for myself as for my students. My assumption, again, is that the philosophical experience of the students will improve if I am able to sustain this attitude. But assumption brings with it the question, how will my vision of CI as a spiritual exercise affect the philosophical experiences of the children who practice with me? This is a question I must take with me into my practice.
Mark Freakley, Gilbert Burgh and Lyne Tilt MacSporran have written a resource book for those interested in engaging in shared inquiry into basic questions of value that would be appropriate for high school students. Following the recommendations of Australia’s Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), they invite readers to explore nine basic values identified as important for values education in MCEETYA’s *National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools*. (Canberra: Department of Education, Science and Training. Copyright Australian Commonwealth, 2005).

The nine basic values are:

- Care and compassion (care for self and others)
- Doing your best (pursuing what is worthy, admirable, even excellent)
- Fair go (pursuing the common good and treating one another fairly)
- Freedom (enjoyment and protection of the rights and privileges of all)
- Honesty and trustworthiness (including seeking the truth)
- Integrity (acting on principle, striving for consistency between words and deeds)
- Respect for others (treating them with consideration and regard)
- Responsibility (personal and civic responsibility, and caring for the environment)
- Understanding, tolerance, and inclusion within a democratic society)

After its introductory chapter, *Values Education in Schools* features each of these values sequentially in individual chapters. The introductory chapter outlines the approach to inquiry and discussion that will be encouraged in the subsequent chapters. It characterizes the overall objective of the book to be to stimulate the philosophical exploration of value concerns ranging from basic questions that seek meaning in one’s life to more specific questions about everyday values issues that arise for students both inside and outside the school environment. Eschewing efforts to indoctrinate values, the authors assume that students are capable of thinking for themselves, but with others—advancing their thinking through critical discussion, and accepting the burden of seeking and giving reasons for what they think.

The basic framework for inquiry presented by the authors is five-part:

1. Introduce a problematic situation (through fictional vignettes).
2. Identify the problem (generate questions, identify underlying themes and key concepts)
3. Offer suggestions (possible answers, solutions, explanations)
4. Analyze concepts and present arguments (developing and using skills of argumentation)
5. Evaluate and draw conclusions (perhaps discovering new problems as a result)

Each chapter begins with a set of lively and engaging vignettes related to the theme of the chapter (e.g., care
and compassion). Then ideas that should prove useful in discussing both the particular vignettes and their general, underlying themes are introduced and briefly clarified. Beginning with terms that are familiar to the reader (e.g., ‘care’ and ‘caring’), the focus shifts to a set of exercises that pose questions calling for further clarification and consideration of the key ideas. (E.g., is caring a matter of nurturing, or is it more like being concerned about the consequences of your behavior for others or the environment?) Because of the importance notions of caring have in our everyday thinking, the authors suggest that they deserve philosophical attention of this sort.

Although frequent references are made to what philosophers think about some of these issues, this is not done in a heavy-handed, or didactic manner. For the most part, it is left to the readers to pursue these philosophical leads on their own; and often this is sufficient—but not always. For example, in Chapter 1 (on care and compassion) the authors say:

Some philosophers believe that too much emphasis has been placed on rights, or rules and principles, while sidestepping the importance of care to ethical conduct. Some philosophers distinguish between an ethic of justice—guided by ideas about rights, rules and principles—and an ethic of responsibility. While an ethic of justice starts from the premise that everyone should be treated equally, an ethic of care rests on the premise of non-violence—that no one should be hurt. (17)

As students begin to reflect on this, they may think of further questions to ask, or may come up with ideas that seek either to develop or critique these very sketchy thoughts. But where might they turn if they would actually like to see these philosophers had in mind? No references are provided—no mention of Carol Gilligan, Nel Noddings, or others whose writings might be accessible to the inquiring high school student. Teachers, too, may be caught up short, unless they have come across (and remember) helpful sources.

With the exception of a set of specific references at the end of the introduction, *Values Education in Schools* bears the burden of serving as the only resource for readers. (Those references are concerned primarily with questions of pedagogy rather than philosophical traditions themselves.) This means that there are times when readers must rest content with probes too thin to offer them much assistance in advancing their philosophical thinking. Reference to other sources would be helpful at such junctures. This could be done without overloading readers with what could easily turn out to be an unwieldy text if the authors were themselves to elaborate on those sources.

Chapter 2 (on doing your best) does a nice job of concisely presenting Aristotelian ideas of intrinsic and extrinsic rewards, virtues, and the pursuit of excellence. However, although Aristotle is mentioned by name and he is credited with being an influential historical figure (teacher of Alexander the Great), no explicit references to Aristotelian texts are provided.

In Chapter 3 (on “fair go”) the absence of follow-up references seems a more serious shortcoming. After providing a list of ideas commonly associated with fairness (e.g., treating everyone equally, providing equal opportunity) that illustrate the need for clarification and reasoned support, the authors add:

Apart from the problem of working out what we might mean by fairness, there is the further issue of working out the status of these ideas about fairness. Many philosophers hold one of three different points of view; that theories about what fairness is are:

1. *subjective*, that is, there is no way of objectively assessing competing individual views on fairness.
2. *culturally relative*, that is, they are dependent upon a cultural viewpoint and there is no way of objectively assessing different cultural viewpoints.
3. *objective*, that is, grounded in the reality of our common humanity. (43-44)

This passage is followed, without further discussion, by student exercises, none of which seem designed to tease out either the implications of these three viewpoints or their plausibility. Again, there are no references for the reader—not even to the final discussion section of the book, 9.4 Relativism and Absolutism. That final discussion itself offers little basis for evaluating the respective views, but the following two sets of exercises (118) do ask questions that invite readers to take a critical look at them. Still, as before, there are no references to literature that might be helpful to the reader (whether teacher or student).

Ch. 4 (on freedom) presents vignettes and discussions that take the reader into the realm of social and political freedom—rights, privileges, duties, and the like. Mixed in with this, but without explanation of why, are two paragraphs on the traditional free will/determinism debate in philosophy. This debate is important and fascinating in its own right, but it is not made clear either in these two paragraphs or in the follow-up exercises, why it belongs here. This is not to say that connections cannot be made. It is only to suggest that something more needs saying—and, again, outside references would be useful to the reader who wants more.
Of course, there are risks in saying more—especially if one wishes to avoid getting bogged down. The authors illustrate this danger when they try to distinguish ‘duty’, ‘obligation’, and ‘privilege’ (section 4.3). ‘Duty’ is said to involve moral commitment on the part of someone. ‘Obligation’ is grounded in rules and roles that are imposed by others. Obligations, the authors say, can vary from person to person; but so can duties, it seems. So, readers may be puzzled by the authors’ emphasis on the former only. A privilege, say the authors, “is an advantage or favour that involves freedom to act in certain ways, or freedom from particular kinds of burden that is granted to or enjoyed by select persons.” (57) What about the relationship between privilege and duty or obligation? If Smith has a privilege to do X, do others have a duty or obligation not to interfere with Smith’s exercise of that privilege? The authors are silent on this, suggesting that these three notions are less interconnected than the literature on these topics typically indicates. Furthermore, in providing examples of privileges (57), no distinction is made between legal and moral privileges. They are listed simply as “privileges of Australian citizenship,” suggesting their legal grounding but leaving their moral status unexplored.

Ch. 5 (on honesty and trustworthiness) is perhaps the least satisfying chapter in the book. After the usual, stimulating set of vignettes, the discussion begins with Aesop’s fable, *The Boy Who Cried Wolf*. The moral of the story, according to Aesop, is that liars won’t be believed even if they speak the truth. This is a fair observation (assuming they are known to be liars). The authors then say that the fable “demonstrates the importance of telling the truth”. It seems more appropriate to say that it demonstrates part of the importance of telling the truth. What the fable emphasizes is what happens to the liar, not what happens to those taken in by the lie. For some indication of what the latter typically involves, one might turn to Immanuel Kant’s concerns about lying. The authors do mention Kant—but only two chapters later, when discussing the importance of respect for persons as ends in themselves, not merely means to the ends of others. There are no cross-references to these two chapters. Also, Ch. 8 (on responsibility) mentions the Golden Rule in the context of truth-telling (103)—but this is neither anticipated in Ch. 5 nor referred back to in Ch. 8. As a result, the discussion of truth-telling and its importance is seriously shortchanged in Ch. 5.

Instead, the authors move directly to a discussion of virtue, an important concern when talking about honesty and trustworthiness. Here, however, the authors may expect too much of the virtue of honesty. Someone who has this virtue “is not honest simply because he or she is moved to action by honest impulses, such as the desire to speak the truth.” (64) What else is required? “The fully honest person does what he or she should without any inner conflict; he or she acts gladly.” The authors rightly go on to emphasize the depth of concern the honest person has with honesty (it “goes all the way down”). However, they seem to have gone well beyond Aristotle in characterizing the virtue of honesty as requiring a lack of inner conflict. First, this assumes that honesty never conflicts with other moral values that one may take seriously (e.g., compassion, not hurting others, or not placing them in harm’s way by revealing their whereabouts to an assailant). Second, other Aristotelian virtues, such as courage, do not require the absence of conflict (e.g., fear)—only the virtue prevailing even in the face of such conflict (e.g., courage prevailing over fear).

Despite the sorts of shortcomings mentioned above, *Values Education in Schools* should prove to be a valuable resource for helping high school students thoughtfully explore the values that MCEETYA and others agree should be fundamental educational concerns in the schools. As it stands now, it perhaps should not stand alone. But a second edition could readily remedy the problem of leaving readers at a loss regarding resources that might help their philosophical inquiries go even further.
I have taught courses in philosophy for children for a number of years now. Many of my students are practicing teachers who approach the topic gingerly, concerned about the “philosophy” component yet enthusiastic about their mission to work with children. As our course progresses, they frequently become excited about philosophy and at some point usually comment that they have just realized that they have been doing philosophy all along. By this they mean that they encourage talking in class, welcome questions, are open to different viewpoints, care deeply about their students, and seek to promote a caring community within their classrooms. Above all they connect their encouragement of different viewpoints and their respect for the opinions of their students to the idea that in philosophy “there are no right or wrong answers.”

Such comments worry me deeply and they appear to concern Catherine McCall as well. Is philosophy merely the airing of people’s different beliefs? Are all questions philosophical if we disagree on the answers? Is philosophical practice ultimately a sharing of ideas and feelings within a community that accepts any and all claims in the name of open-mindedness and personal affirmation? In Transforming Thinking McCall offers a much-needed articulation of the nature of philosophical inquiry and how it can be meaningfully implemented in the pre-college classroom. In her opening chapter she details the origins of the concept of a “community of philosophical inquiry” (CoPI) and how her own approach developed from a university discussion experience. This text is clearly an apology for doing philosophy with children and young people that carefully details both the methodology of the philosophical community and the nature of philosophy. For McCall, philosophical inquiry with children is genuine inquiry and genuine philosophy. The challenge lies in developing the skills to nurture both aspects of this educative experience within the classroom setting.

Beginning with her own graduate school experiences of working through philosophical texts and problems, McCall recounts how she developed a method of using the classic dialogic form to help her better understand the issue at hand. Within the structure of a Metaphysical Society she and other participants honed skills of reasoning and argument construction. In doing so, they found themselves reclaiming the experience of philosophical wonderment. As she began to expand her audience for these types of engagements, she sought ways to “enable people to philosophise without having to learn the discipline of philosophy.”

McCall’s model utilizes the key ingredients of philosophical content, contrasting philosophical ideas, argumentation and the movement of ideas. She details a careful interchange wherein participants clearly mark points of agreement and disagreement and always reference the previous speaker’s comments to keep the dialogue focused and integrated. McCall’s paradigm is not a free flowing conversation but a highly-structured exploration of a problematic topic chosen by the participants which is shaped and controlled in some ways by the facilitator.

McCall devotes considerable attention to three key aspects of philosophy with children: debates over whether children can think philosophically, the range of models that currently exist to encourage it, and distinctive aspects of her model. Chapter three offers McCall’s response to the claim of some developmental psychologists that formal operational thinking occurs generally in later childhood and to the deep skepticism of professional philosophers over whether children can do philosophy. After detailing the classic Piagetian stage theory of cognitive development, she offers an extended, concrete example of five-year-old children using abstract reasoning and logic to analyze the nature of a person. Their language is that of ordinary five-year-olds but the thinking underlying their comments is clearly informed by sophisticated logical constructs. What becomes evident—and is reiterated throughout the book—is the critical role of the facilitator in recognizing logical, and illogical, thinking and nurturing better thinking among the participants.

Chapter four focuses on the facilitator’s role in creating “the conditions for philosophical dialogue to emerge,” with an emphasis on two key tasks:

She or he must balance the requirements for the discussion to follow philosophical lines with...
providing opportunities for everyone to participate. She or he uses the CoPI reasoning structure to help ensure that different arguments are presented.³

McCall illustrates these tasks with another dialogue by five-year-olds. The children’s discussion of the nature of personhood and of whether a robot might count as a moral being is interspersed with McCall’s detailed observations of the kinds of thinking the children are using and the social and emotional dimensions of their community. She notes their use of abstract analysis and hypothetical reasoning, as well as their demonstration of careful listening, willingness to change their minds when more convincing evidence or reasons are offered, and respect for one another.

McCall stresses, however, that this degree of careful thinking is not spontaneous and that facilitators thoroughly trained in logic and philosophical problems are necessary if children’s thinking is to be so nurtured. She writes:

There is an art to chairing CoPI which cannot be closely defined. It involves imagination as well as critical analysis; it involves a sense of rhythm and pace like music and poetry; it involves the free flow of wonderment simultaneously with the discipline of a reasoning structure. And finally there is a measure of talent that needs to be present to be successful in chairing PI.⁴

To develop that point further, McCall explains her concept of philosophy. She holds the realist position that the world exists independent of our beliefs, and that we can therefore be wrong about it. Likewise, ideas that have been crafted by individuals and social institutions have an objective existence about which we can also be mistaken. Philosophical progress implies this notion of realism and, consequently, the fallible nature of human knowing. This is a courageous position to take, but I would argue with McCall that it is the only one that offers meaning for philosophical dialogue. Otherwise, we are simply exchanging ideas, with no sense of movement toward more complete, comprehensive, and rich understandings.

In chapter five McCall focuses on the nature of the philosophical community and reviews 18 steps to running a CoPI session. For novices this level of detail may be immensely helpful, but for more seasoned practitioners of philosophy with children it may seem overly controlling and scripted. Nevertheless, it can serve as a standard against which to measure one’s own approach to philosophical dialogue in the classroom or group setting. Chapter six offers some helpful points of comparison between McCall’s method and other well-known practices of philosophical inquiry: Nelson’s Socratic method, Lipman’s P4C, the SAPERE approach, and Guided Socratic discussions. With the exception of Lipman’s P4C, these programs are British or European. Although Lipman’s program originated in the US, it is not widespread and what often counts as philosophy in U.S. schools is either teaching the ideas of the great philosophers (worthy in its own right but not philosophical inquiry) or unstructured conversations about ‘big ideas.’ In summarizing the major points of difference between these methodologies and her own, McCall places the onus for developing and maintaining the philosophical richness of the discussion on the facilitator rather than on the stimulus materials (such as a story or a carefully structured textbook). Although the participants need not have an extensive background in philosophy, the facilitator must.

Chapters seven and eight focus on the preparation of CoPI facilitators. McCall reviews the skills and knowledge a successful facilitator must cultivate, including familiarity with the major positions within philosophical problems in epistemology, metaphysics, aesthetics, and philosophy of politics and science. This level of knowledge might seem quite daunting to a teacher with no philosophical background. Yet that position appears non-negotiable with McCall. Again using transcripts with commentary, she illustrates how the teacher/facilitator uses such knowledge to shape, correct and nurture children’s philosophical thinking. Chapter eight is comprised of two long dialogues which employ McCall’s methods, one in an elementary school and one among middle school/early high school students. Teachers will find this chapter particularly helpful, as McCall explores how particular social concerns that emerge with different age groups can affect a discussion. And her commentary allows the reader to “listen along” to what the facilitator does to maintain relevance and ensure dialogic development. These chapters could serve as models for teachers and philosophers in their own learning of the practice of philosophy for children.

McCall next turns her attention to justifying the inclusion of such dialogues within the educational system. Chapter nine connects her method to calls for citizenship education, the cultivation of moral virtue and the enhancement of academic performance - key mission goals in schools in UK and the USA. How does CoPI benefit the individual child and society as a whole? McCall argues persuasively that the implementation of focused and developed philosophical inquiry has a transformative effect on children through the cultivation of the intellectual virtues of critical and communal thinking. A child is empowered as she finds her own voice, even as that voice is challenged respectfully within the community. Children develop genuine self esteem as they begin to own their ideas and to experience knowing as an outward and inward adventure. The social nature of the experience prepares children to participate in
a democracy that requires critical thinking and involved action, even as it acknowledges plural ways of thinking and acting in the world. McCall contrasts her approach to courses in critical thinking which may help young people acquire the tools of logical analysis but may neglect the fallibility of knowing and the need to think with others. She argues for the importance of cultivating reasonableness rather than simply rationality.

In her final chapter, McCall offers anecdotal accounts of the transformative effect—for adults and children—of participating in a CoPI. She recounts how CoPI has helped women and children in situations of poverty to move beyond felt helplessness and take charge of their lives, giving persuasive testimonies to her methods. She acknowledges the inspiration of earlier models of this sort of inquiry in eighteenth-century organizations during the Scottish Enlightenment. These clubs, including a notable women’s club, remind us of the powerful role that philosophy has played in people’s personal and communal lives.

Catherine McCall’s book is a welcome theoretical and practical contribution to the global discussion of the vitality of philosophical inquiry outside the professional academy and its potential to transform education from a rote accruement of data to a personal appropriation of knowledge, and as a means of enriching one’s presence in the world. Her justifications for such inquiry, its impact on self and society, and the presuppositions that underlie the enterprise of philosophy in this context are essential to a theoretical reflection on the why of philosophy with children and young people. Her inclusion of transcripts of children’s dialogue along and her analysis those transcripts, her persuasive pleas for extensive facilitator preparation and her carefully crafted outlines for implementation strategies have wide practical use for the teacher-facilitator. Clearly, more is going on in McCall’s philosophy sessions than simply sharing ideas and letting everyone express his or her opinion! Her standards are daunting at times and even trained philosophers might find her ability to think on her feet awe-inspiring, if not intimidating. There is a broad divide between presenting philosophy as a technical discipline to which few can aspire and equating it with asking questions and sharing opinions. The danger could be that interested readers might despair of achieving this degree of dialogic competence and abandon the enterprise. The community of philosophy with/for children practitioners needs to keep McCall’s stipulations in mind as we continue to explore philosophy’s role in the classroom. How can we continue to render it both accessible and genuine?

Endnotes

1 McCall 2009, p. 11.
Guidelines for Submission

Articles should normally be around 6000 words. Shorter articles are welcome and longer articles may be considered.

Authors are encouraged to submit their articles in Word format, by e-mail as attachments or on disks. Text should be double spaced, font type Times New Roman 12 and margins 1” all around. Every part of each article needs to be compatible with a two-column format, including any charts or tables. They should be sent via email to the Editor, Felix García Moriyón, felix.garcia@uam.es

Contributors should include in the heading a short autobiographical statement, an email address and a summary of 100 words or less, containing key words and phrases that could be used to index the article. They should also include a photo of the author to be inserted at the beginning of the article. Submission of an article will be held to imply that it contains original, unpublished work. Authors will not be permitted to substantively add to or change their articles after they are submitted, so they must be submitted in final form. Articles accepted become the copyright of Thinking, unless otherwise specifically agreed upon. Rejected manuscripts will not normally be returned to contributors.

Thinking is a peer-reviewed journal, and all articles are sent to two members of the Editorial Board for reviewing.

The Editor reserves the right to make changes to manuscripts where necessary, in order to bring them into conformity with the stylistic and bibliographic conventions of Thinking.

References should be indicated by giving the author’s name, with the year of publication in parentheses. If several papers by the same author and from the same year are cited, a, b, c, etc. should be put after the year of publication. The references should be listed in full at the end of the paper in the following standard form:


Titles of journals should not be abbreviated.

Figures: please supply one complete set of figures in a finished form, suitable for reproduction. If this is not possible, figures will be redrawn by the publisher

Pdf proofs will be sent to the authors if there is sufficient time to do so. They should be collected and returned to the Editor within three days. These proofs are for corrections only; additions or changes (except very incidental ones) will not be accepted.

Offprints: A pdf offprint will be supplied to first-named contributors. Copies may be purchased and should be ordered when the proofs are returned

Photos: A photograph of the author of the article is required. Other photos that could be used in the journal are welcome. JPEG, Tiff and EPS are usually the best type of files. Photos should have a resolution of 300 pp for color and of 200 pp for grey scale (black and white). All permissions are the responsibility of the author. Source references need to be included

Book reviews. Thinking welcomes reviews of books - whether recent or not – that are related to philosophy and childhood. Reviews should be roughly 2000-3000 words, and be send via email to the Book Review Editor, Ann Margaret Sharp, at sharpa@mail.montclair.edu

Permissions


Pages 5, 13, 27; All the images were retrieved from Wikimedia Commons. These images are public domain.

Subscription

The IAPC is currently not accepting any new subscriptions to THINKING