Book Review

Intentional Disruption: Expanding Access to Philosophy

Edited by Stephen Kekoa Miller
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As you read this book, which you should, you will be tempted to stand up and clap in celebration of the energy, dedication, and passion that these extraordinary people—the authors in this edited collection—infuse into their determination to bring the potential life-transforming influence of philosophy to the general public. While all signal an awareness of Philosophy for Children as it was first envisioned by Matthew Lipman, the route that these authors take is different. Though they all incorporate the "dialogical mode of learning" that is central to the Community of Philosophical Inquiry (CPI), the facilitators that most of these programs use are undergraduate and graduate philosophy students rather than school teachers. In so doing, they short circuit the worry of "inquiry failure" due to the lack of philosophical sensitivity on the part of non-philosophically trained teachers, and they reinvigorate the discipline itself, as these university students witness firsthand the benefits that accrue to those with whom they have the opportunity to philosophically engage.

The generosity exhibited by these authors is also quite breath-taking. Though each article only gives a rough outline of the program that each inspired, many also give URL addresses to websites that give readers access to the material that they have road-tested in their various programs. For those of us who believe, like these authors, that dialogical philosophical interchange can be a life-transforming experience, for those who are convinced that humanity has taken a detour in the wrong direction by focusing our educational energies too exclusively toward the neoliberal "productivist" vision, for those who would like to see philosophy students brimming with pride over the service-learning that their department offers the community, buying this book as a celebratory gift for anyone who might think likewise would be a way to "pass it forward."

The collection begins with Stephen Miller, the editor of the collection, who offers invaluable advice for answering frequently asked questions from those considering starting a pre-college philosophy program. To begin with, he implicitly suggests flexibility in implementation by noting that

one might decide to employ the Socratic Method which is more teacher-centered than the more traditional Community of Philosophical Inquiry, but that in either case, an unknown destination is optimal (p. 4). Following Socrates, Miller suggests that the biggest virtues of this approach "lies in disabusing us of false belief" and learning that "learning is social" (p. 4). Among the aims that might be adopted by any practitioner are helping participants recognize the difference between an empirical claim and a moral claim, nurturing conceptual clarity (p. 5), and cultivating the habit of questioning one's own presuppositions (p. 9). Miller thus reiterates the importance of "unlearning" (p. 10). He emphasizes that all of us believe things that are untrue and argues that Socrates has shown us how believing something false might cause us to live diminished lives (p. 11). He interestingly warns us, though, that if delivered badly, a program that enhanced thinking skills "can make students become more biased, selfish and confirmed in their previous understanding" (p. 8). He warns us too that, since philosophy is messy and inefficient, if a school's mission is about information delivery, philosophy classes may well be seen as threatening (p. 11). With regard to the question of whether or not philosophy can teach students how to live a good life, he reminds us, quoting Laverty, that philosophy is not about *imparting* wisdom, but rather about promoting the kind of philosophical self-reflection that prompts individuals to reflect on how their actions give expression to the kind of individual that they are becoming. As a final note he says that, though philosophy's reputation as being a troublemaker is well-founded, "if inquisitive, thoughtful and engaged students are what a school is seeking, pre-college philosophy may be just the right thing (p. 14).

Chapter 2 focuses on the Iowa Lyceum which is a week-long philosophy summer camp hosted at the University of Iowa, organized and run entirely by philosophy graduate students for campers aged thirteen to eighteen. Lectures are given by graduate students and professors, but the primary format is *doing* philosophy in the form of dialogue and interactive activities (p. 28). Participants themselves have the opportunity to create their own presentations that they give to the group at the end of the week. The authors (Danielle Colburn, Cassie Finley, and Joe Glover) stress that the overall aim is for participants to develop what they refer to as the intellectual virtues of being curious, open-minded, intellectually courageous, interested in truth for its own sake and being eager to engage in effective inquiry (p. 30) so that ultimately participants "develop a new approach to life" (p. 30). The authors also stress that a major benefit that accrues from the camp being run by graduate students is the personal and professional development of the graduate students themselves. They not only learn to express complicated philosophical ideas in a way that is accessible to non-philosophers (p. 25), they also often discover a passion for teaching pre-college philosophy. They note, as well, that it is no small benefit that this experience can set a graduate student apart from their peers when moving through a highly competitive field going forward (p. 26).

In Chapter 3, Erik Kenyon describes a P4C program that he developed for Rollins College, a small liberal arts college near Orlando Florida using Tom Wartenberg's *Big Ideas for Little Kids*. Initially, the program was designed to send undergraduate philosophy students to teach P4C to a gifted class in a nearby elementary school. The program then morphed into teaching 3- and 4-year-olds in lab school at the College. For the younger ones, the format was altered so that each lesson opened with a game, which was followed by mini-discussions throughout the reading of a picture book, and at the end, children were invited to translate some of their thoughts into art (p. 39). So, a lesson on bravery might open with a blind-fold game, followed by discussions about Frog and Toad in *Dragons*

and Giants, and end with children being invited to draw an image of when they thought they were brave. Speaking of bravery, Keyon provides a number of helpful references for those brave enough to explore doing philosophy at the Pre-K level. Keyon also describes a completely different program, one in which he tweaked his first-year course to help the Office of Career and Life Planning to create an internship that was genuinely exciting for interested graduates. Since internships are becoming increasingly necessary for graduation in the US (p. 41), this was a particularly innovative undertaking. As well, since studies have found that undergraduates tend to be "unengaged," or "dabblers," or "unrealistic dreamers" or "motivated but directionless" (p. 43), engaging undergraduates in this sort of service learning so that they can do their part in rectifying the decline of civic discourse (p. 37, p. 46) would seem to be the prefect medicine for reinvigorating university education.

In Chapter 4, Marisa Diaz-Waian describes her passion for doing public philosophy through her institute called "Merlin," in her native Montana. Merlin's many atypical forms include Street Philosophy (51), Field Philosophy, Popular Philosophy, Activist Philosophy (64), Philosophy Walks (p. 73), Hayride-Philosophy (p. 77), Philosophy Night School (80) and Think and Drinks (80). All of these varying formats are anchored in philosophical dialogue which Diaz-Waian likens to a horticultural tool: it is "central to the cultivation and development of ideas, ourselves, and others" (p. 60). She warns us, though, that "what is often disguised as dialogue may actually be a monologue that excludes and dehumanizes others, blocks knowledge production, promotes self-interests, and normalizes inaction" (p 60). She argues that philosophical dialogue that is worthy of the name requires humility, openness, courage and a certain kind of relinquishment wherein all parties experience the "deconstructive and transformative power of the question itself" (p. 60). In underscoring the importance of public philosophy, Diaz-Waian speaks to the relevance of this entire collection, by quoting Jules Evans who writes that: "Without street philosophy, academic philosophy becomes irrelevant. Without academic philosophy, street philosophy becomes incoherent" (pp.6-3). She emphasizes, however, that though academic philosophy is critical for public philosophy, unlike academic philosophy, public philosophy is not about expanding the knowledge of the history of philosophy. It is rather about "Finding Your Way with Philosophy" in the sense that we each are required to figure out how to be in this messy world of ours (p. 83). In a lovely complex analogy, she writes that philosophy can be considered "a trusty steed, a light house in the storm, and a thing which can inspire, and 'lead out' what is beautiful in all of us" (p. 84).

Memphis, Tennessee is the Blackest city in the US with a P4wC program. Since this is the location of Christian Kronsted and Jonathon Wurtz' program called Philosophy Horizons (PH), these authors speak with authority when they suggest (in Chapter 5) that we may err if we try to Socratize as usual when inquiring with students who come face to face with racism on a daily basis. They argue, nonetheless, that this kind of dialogical pedagogy is particularly important for these students in order to help mitigate the pedagogical deficits of the public school system (p. 93) since such programs help develop critical thinking and analytic skills that allow them to formulate positions with clarity, precision, and depth and to critically and respectfully evaluate the positions offered by others (pp. 93-4). As well, these sorts of programs can help underrepresented youth enroll in college by offering philosophy classes for college credits. It is of note that, in three years after instituting their program, the graduation rate of the high school they serve jumped from 55% to 82% (p. 94). With regard to the specific topic of racism, some comments are contentious, e.g., that the racist views of Kant, Hegel, and

Heidegger ought to be taken into account when considering the merits of their philosophy (p. 97). As well, some may find that they are too quick to jump on the bandwagon of accusing Western Philosophy in general, and Lipman in particular, of "white-washing" philosophy. They criticize, for instance, the "color-blind" impartiality approach of a CPI since it can quickly "lead to the most precarious of our students having to put their life experiences on display for all to scrutinize" (p. 98). While few would doubt the truth of this claim, it is not clear that this, in and of itself, is a fault. In my own practice of running CPIs in university philosophy classes, I have found that there are very few topics that don't ultimately lead to the most precarious of the participants (with respect to the topic at hand) "having to put their life experiences on display for all to scrutinize." Take the topic of rape, for instance—some students have been raped; or the topic of immigration—some students are first generation immigrants; or a topic that focuses on attitudes towards China—some students come from mainland China; or the topic of abortion—some students have had abortions; or even the topic of death—some students have recently lost loved ones. While CPIs around these topics usually begin with an exchange of impersonal abstract reasoning, e.g., Kant would view rape as wrong because it is an assault on a person's right to autonomy, as the dialogue moves to, say, comparisons to other forms of assault, e.g., one man punching another, it is rare for an inquiry not to circulate to deeper levels when individuals recount (often with tears) their own personal experiences of sexual assault "for all to scrutinize" in defence of the claim that rape is worse than non-sexual assault. Yes, these topics are intricately tricky, but, more often than not, a genuine sense of solidarity emerges as participants bring themselves and their personal experiences to the table. And speaking of solidarity, here too Kronsted and Wurtz, in trying to see the "whitewashed" Emperor's clothes in P4C, fault Lipman whom they claim assumes that all CPIs are characterized by solidarity (p. 96, p. 98), something they say that is clearly missing if participants are of diverse races. It seems to me, though, that a more generous and realistic interpretation of Lipman's work is that with luck, sensitivity and skill, a CPI *may result* in a sense of solidarity, which is precisely what Kronsted and Wurtz themselves seek (p. 99). Nonetheless Kronsted and Wurtz bring up an important point when they suggest that, with regard to difference, the gap may be so wide amongst participants, that one ought to at least pause before attempting to engage in a CPI. As an example, they relate an instance in which a young black woman asked: "Why do Black people believe in Christianity when Christianity was used to enslave Black people?" (p. 104). The resulting dialogue was productive for this all-Black group, but one can only imagine that it would have been anything but productive had the participants been of diverse races.

In Chapter 6, Sarah Vitale describes a Philosophy Outreach Project (founded in 2015) in which university students engage in philosophical dialogue with high school students across Indiana. Vitale's particular concern is that the educational system in general follows what she refers to as a "productivist logic" which "values practices that increase productivity and profits and devalues practices that fail to do so. It converts all practices to economic ones and prioritizes market exchange over all other human interactions" (p. 114). She notes that while school passes itself off as neutral, nonetheless "it works to support the capitalist economy, preparing students for their respective roles in the economy and then 'ejecting' them into the workforce at the appropriate level of preparation" (p. 120). It is not surprising then that the space to do philosophy is crowded out when every moment must be accounted for and when every activity is subjected to a cost/benefit analysis (pp. 114-5). To emphasize the dire situation, she notes that the number of academic positions in philosophy is decreasing, and not only are whole philosophy departments shuttering but entire humanities

departments are closing down (p. 115). Vitale is fighting back against this productivist tsunami by supporting her university, Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana, in their effort to provide grants to support students engaged in community-based philosophy projects, which they call immersive learning or high-impact experiences (p. 123). One particularly innovative event that Outreach puts on is a Conference for pre-college Philosophy Engagement (CPPE), a one-day interactive conference for high school students held at the end of the spring semester that has numerous breakout sessions including "Speed Philosophy." In "Speed Philosophy," 5 or 6 high school students are given 5 minutes to discuss a question pertaining to a presentation later in the day. Since 5 minutes is never enough to address the question, students become energized for future discussions. All in all, Vitale urges us to find ways in which university philosophy students can philosophically engage with high school students since it is a win-win that will help in the struggle against the impact of productivism on the greater public (p. 128).

Philosophy for the Young (P4Y), a program that was initiated by the University of Pennsylvania, is the focus of Chapter 7. In it the authors (Dustin Webster, Stephen Esser and Karen Detlefsen) describe the many formats that their project has embodied. In one format, high school students are invited to come to campus on Saturdays to engage in philosophical dialogue with undergraduate philosophy students. Aside from igniting an interest in philosophy, this has had the added benefit of familiarizing high school students with college life (p. 132). In another format, philosophy classes and clubs were initiated in schools in Philadelphia (p. 135). Yet another format was the initiation of lunchtime, after school and early morning philosophy clubs call Think and Talk clubs. Running Middle school Film and Philosophy clubs is yet another format. An intriguing and unusual format was P4Y's collaboration with Mighty Writers which offered students practice in philosophical writing which, as it turned out, offered those who might have more trouble with dialogue a chance to shine (p. 137). A more formal format was an 8-week course offered to high school students entitled "The Philosophy and Ethics of Science" (P. 137) with the view to nurturing literate consumers of scientific information. One important point that they stress is that it is essential for everyone to understand the difference between empirical and non-empirical claims along with the different kinds of reasoning that supports each (pp. 137-8). P4Y is also heavily involved in the Ethics Bowls, an event that, importantly, differs from debating in that, rather than being adversarial, the teams are assessed on the degree to which they can learn from one another (p. 139). With regard to this format, not only are undergraduates trained to be Ethics Bowl coaches, but several weekend workshops are also offered at the university campus for any teams or students who want extra preparation and coaching (p. 140). This has the added advantage of building strong connections between area high schools and the university. P4Y is even in the early stages of creating an Ethics Bowl Coaching manual. And finally, yet another intriguing initiative is the establishment of a Graduate Certificate in Public Philosophy that creates a formal path for students to develop their capabilities as they engage members of the community (p. 143). This certificate reflects P4Y's belief that philosophical tools and knowledge can contribute to improving civic dialogue about contentious issues. Indeed, it reflects the belief that all of us who have philosophical training have a moral obligation to help cultivate the knowledge and skills needed to effectively engage the public in *doing* philosophy (p. 143).

In the final chapter, Joseph Murphy describes a full year course in an independent high school in New Jersey in which the History of Philosophy is taken in Spanish by those who are philosophically

and linguistically fluent. "How odd," was my first thought as I began to read. And then, to my surprise, I learn that there is such a thing as the International Philosophy Olympiad (IPO), for which students must write a philosophy essay in one of four languages, but *not* in their native tongue. So, for US students, the essays must be written in German, French, or Spanish, hence the motivation for combining Spanish and Philosophy in one course (p. 163). And since Murphy has a degree in philosophy from Montclair State University and worked with Mathew Lipman, it is hardly surprising that his mode of teaching is dialogical and hence is the perfect format for students to enhance their Spanish proficiency while diving into the intricacies of philosophy (Murphy also has a degree in Hispanic Studies from a university in Spain). Though preparing students for the IPO has genuine power to motivate school administrators to include philosophy in the general curriculum, it is evident, when reading this chapter, that Murphy's prime motivation is not to prepare students for the contest—amazing though it is, given the opportunities to travel to, among other countries, Norway, Estonia, and Italy. His prime motivation seems to be to push back against the rampant idiocy that has infected society all the way up to the highest reaches, e.g., alternative facts (p. 157). How is it possible, one wonders, that relatively intelligent students believe that everyone has a right to their own opinion and that if you believe something, that is equivalent to it being true (159)? How is it possible, one wonders, that most schools include critical thinking as one of their most important goals and yet, in terms of actualizing that objective, do little except for sending out the implicit message that critical thinking is nothing more than deep reading and careful listening to the teacher to make sure that what the teacher is saying is well understood (p. 156)? How is it possible, one wonders, that we live in a world in which there are serious issues such as racism and sexism that "scream out for the kind of clarification that philosophical and ethical analysis can provide" (pp. 156-7), and yet stand-alone philosophy and ethical classes are close to non-existent in high school? How is it possible, one wonders, that educators consistently tell our young people that they are the future leaders and yet, at the same time, consistently deny them the sort of education that would equip them with the skills necessary to make the sort of sound ethical decisions that are integral to any leadership position (p. 157)? All in all, then, this chapter is about subterfuge: how to get philosophy to young people without too much notice. Murphy even suggests that, if getting philosophy into schools continues to be such a hard sell, young philosophy graduates ought to consider getting certified in a subject that offers them a surreptitious route, e.g., English, History or one of the IPO languages, so that they can remain true to their passion for bringing philosophy and critical thinking to school age youngsters (p. 165).

It is fitting that this remarkable collection that focuses on expanding access to philosophy should end with this explosion of passion, something that clearly drives all these practitioners. And each, in their own way, have offered a roadmap. This extraordinary collection might just be the catalyst to popularize *doing philosophy* with those outside the academy—a movement that would surely make this world a significantly better place.

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