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Philosophy for Children and its Critics: A Mendham Dialogue

MAUGHN GREGORY

As conceived by founders Matthew Lipman and Ann Margaret Sharp, Philosophy for Children is a humanistic practice with roots in the Hellenistic tradition of philosophy as a way of life given to the search for meaning, in American pragmatism with its emphasis on qualitative experience, collaborative inquiry and democratic society, and in American and Soviet social learning theory. The programme has attracted overlapping and conflicting criticism from religious and social conservatives who don't want children to question traditional values, from educational psychologists who believe certain kinds of thinking are beyond children of certain ages, from philosophers who define their discipline as theoretical and exegetical, from critical theorists who see the programme as politically compliant, and from postmodernists who see it as scientistic and imperialist. The paper is written as a dialogue in order to illustrate the complex interactions among these normative positions. Rather than respond to particular criticisms in depth, I indicate the general nature of my position regarding them and provide references to published material where they have been made and responded to over the past 40 years.

INTRODUCTION

The dialogue that follows was inspired by one that took place in May 2008 at a convent in Mendham New Jersey, during an eight-day seminar of the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children (IAPC). The theme for that seminar was 'Philosophy as a Way of Life',[1] and the dialogue followed a presentation made by our late colleague, and IAPC co-founder, Ann Margaret Sharp. Some of what follows comes from the transcript of that dialogue; some comes from my recollection of other conversations, with Ann and others; some is a report of internal dialogues with authors I have read. I have condensed the number of participants to five, organised ideas thematically, put words in people's mouths, and rounded out some of the arguments with ideas taken from published

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material. What follows bears little resemblance to the original dialogue that inspired it, and the characters here should not be taken to represent the original participants.

The purposes of this reconstructed dialogue are: to present a particular, normative account of the work of Philosophy for Children (P4C),[2] to situate that account in relation to a number of different kinds of criticism the programme has attracted, to illustrate the complex interactions among these normative positions, and to indicate where these positions have been taken up in the literature over the past 40 years. Rather than respond to particular criticisms in depth, I indicate the general nature of my position regarding them and provide references to published material where they have been made and responded to. In that regard, this paper is more a review of the literature of P4C advocacy and criticism than a defence of the programme against any particular criticism.

THE DIALOGUE

Rosario: Ann, I met you some years ago when you spoke about how philosophy can help children develop critical and creative thinking, and a kind of ethical awareness you called 'caring thinking'. But this week, at this seminar, we've been discussing philosophy as a way of life—as the study and practice of how to live well, to live wisely—as opposed to 'academic philosophy', which most of us have experienced as learning a history of ideas, and learning to become 'intellectual' in ways that have little to do with how we live. So my question is: do you see Philosophy for Children as having moved away from a focus on thinking, toward a more practical or applied approach to philosophy?

Ann: No, I think the emphasis on wisdom has always been there. That's what Mat [Lipman] had in mind from the very beginning. You know, he comes out of the pragmatic tradition, that pays close attention to everyday experience and the art of making judgments that might improve that experience.[3] When I first met Mat in 1974 and asked him what he was trying to do, he said something like, 'I want to introduce children to philosophy because I think that's the way to improve their judgment.'[4] And when I asked him, 'What is philosophy, to you?' he said, 'Philosophy is the search for wisdom'. Mat saw the whole conversation of philosophy, going back to Socrates, as a quest to help us to lead qualitatively better lives.[5]

Rosario: Better, how?

Ann: Well, if we're talking about Western philosophy, then we're going to focus on aspects of our experience that have ethical, or aesthetic, or political, or logical or even metaphysical meaning. And when we learn to become more conscious of those kinds of meaning, you see, we have the opportunity to inquire into them, and to make judgments that, hopefully, can make our experiences more just, more free, more beautiful, or what have you. Mat's idea was to use philosophy to help children learn to do

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that. It's very explicit, for example, in *Suki*, which he wrote in 1978—over 30 years ago. *Suki* is an attempt to help children become conscious of the aesthetic dimension of their experience, and to make judgments that enhance or stabilise, or diversify the aesthetic qualities they value in their experience—and also to avoid what is petty, or mediocre, or downright ugly or offensive. But also, of course, to problematise what it means to *find* something attractive or repulsive, and hopefully to be more careful about making judgments like that. As I say, it's very explicit in *Suki*, but this emphasis on the meaning of experience is just as strong in *Pixie*, and in fact, it runs throughout the IAPC curriculum.[6]

Joe: But Rosario is right, isn't she, that P4C has always emphasised thinking and thinking skills?

Ann: Well, yes. I would say that in the early days, especially, my friend [Lipman] had a reputation of being very fascinated with the logical component of the programme, and he probably had more to say about critical thinking than about its other aspects. Remember, he started working on Philosophy for Children in the 1960s, after his experiences teaching philosophy to college students and adult education students at Columbia, and the political upheaval he saw there and on other university campuses around the country convinced him that learning to think critically, to inquire about philosophical questions and to form reasonable judgments should begin much earlier in life.[7] But then, even in those days, all you had to do was to open the curriculum and you would see it there—the search for wisdom. Mat didn't separate the skills—the thinking and concept-forming and inquiry skills, the creative and caring skills, and the dialogical skills—from that project of living a meaningful life. Do you see? Because to do that you've got to be awake, or sensitive to all these kinds of meaning; to know how they feel. But you've also got to see them as full of ambiguities and problems and opportunities. You've got to be curious and questioning about them, and know how to think about them carefully, and to dialogue about them with others who think and feel differently. And you've got to live with them and experiment with them, to see what you can make of them.

Maughn: I suspect that P4C's emphasis on meaning, experience and judgment is one reason that parents and teachers haven't been afraid of it—because they don't think of it as 'Teaching Children Plato'—but then that's the same reason that philosophers haven't been enthusiastic about it, until recently. I think it's significant that the way we practice philosophy with children—with self-examination, a certain ethics of dialogue, communal caring, and a focus on how to live—is in some ways a return to the philosophical practices of some of the ancient schools.[8]

Megan: Actually, a number of educational theorists, like Noddings (2005), Nussbaum (1997 and 2010), Rose (2009) and Sternberg (2003), have been drawing attention to the moral and political danger of education that aims exclusively at socio-economic advancement, and not also at

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living well, or wisdom. A student might be very successful in terms of getting the disciplinary knowledge, the intellectual, social and technological skills, and the cultural capital she needs to compete in the economic market, without having considered whether her life has any meaning or purpose beyond that, and without knowing how to cultivate personal or collective wellbeing. In fact, Sternberg (2003, p. 163) and Nussbaum (2010, pp. 73–6) have recommended Philosophy for Children precisely because it prioritises critical, emotional, political and ethical know-how over getting ahead. Of course, that distinction goes back to Socrates.[9]

Ann: We've even been accused of 'corrupting the youth'. I remember the bumper-stickers that one mid-western school district had printed up, saying 'Get *Harry Stottlemeier*[10] out of our schools!'

Joe: They were afraid it would inoculate their children against their own indoctrination. It's like a parent once said to me, 'No one should talk to my children about right and wrong, or about death, but me'. Some parents and educators don't trust children to be 'the guardians of their own virtue', as you and Mat wrote (Lipman and Sharp, 1980, p. 181).

Megan: That's one kind of criticism the programme has attracted, from the political right; and what Maughn just said about academic philosophers not taking it seriously is another.

Ann: That one, I think, has to do with lingering institutional chauvinism about the intellectual work of teachers—who are mostly women—and of children.[11]

Maughn: It also comes from the 'pure versus applied' distinction,[12] that still haunts some of the disciplines. Real philosophy is supposed to be the discourse (the thinking and talking and writing) of professional philosophers; and anything we do to put that discourse to work—in our friendships or our politics, say—isn't, unless it results in more professional discourse.[13] But of course that distinction has been challenged for some time now, by pragmatism, feminism and continental philosophy. They put the work of philosophy on par with the work of other disciplines, as caught up in all kinds of political, economic and cultural agendas.

Megan: It's not just philosophers, though, who have said that children's discourse can't be philosophical. We've heard that from developmental psychologists—the ones who read Piaget as ruling out certain kinds of cognitive functioning at certain ages.

Joe: I'd say that line of criticism has been mostly deflected by social learning theorists. I just finished reading Mat's *Natasha: Vygotskian Dialogues* (1996a), and it made me realise how formative social learning theory was to P4C. I knew the pragmatist genealogy of 'community of inquiry', from Dewey and Peirce,[14] but I hadn't paid much attention to this

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strand of educational psychology in Lipman's theory, from Vygotsky and Davydov. It helped me to understand what's at stake in the Piaget versusVygotsky debate,[15] and it made me look at our work in the schools in a whole new way: as a pedagogy of 'cognitive cooperation with . . . peers and mentors' (Lipman 1996a, p. 45).

Ann: Mat developed a strong interest in 20th-century Soviet psychology, partly because of parallels he found with the pragmatist social psychology of Mead, Dewey and Buchler.[16] He was something of a pioneer in the way he implemented that theory in a practice of classroom dialogue.[17] Today, of course, Vygotsky's 'zone of proximal development' and Davydov's 'ascent to the concrete', are more influential in educational theory than when Mat was working.[18]

Rosario: As a matter of fact, some of the strongest proponents of P4C these days are educational researchers, who have shown how the programme can be instrumental in achieving educational objectives like critical thinking and reading comprehension.[19] But then that very instrumentalism is the target of some of the harshest criticism the programme faces today, from the political left—from critical and cultural theory and postmodernism.

Ann: Say more.

Rosario: Well, of course critical theory, coming out of Marxism, the Frankfurt School and feminist philosophy, has to do with human oppression and liberation. Critical theorists are concerned with how cultural practices that presume to be morally and politically neutral, are in fact oppressive. A lot of their work focuses on race- class- and gender-based oppression, especially as these are integral to the institutions and ideological frameworks of Western culture. Critical theorists of education look at how education often perpetuates, but can also subvert those kinds of oppression. So, for example, today we have colleges of education offering courses in cultural responsiveness, race consciousness and social justice, to prepare teachers to use 'critical pedagogy'.[20]

Joe: The faculty in our college has debated 'critical thinking versus critical pedagogy'. Some who defend critical thinking say that education should be politically and even morally neutral; that it shouldn't take sides. They say critical thinking is about *how* to think, and they worry that critical pedagogy teaches children *what* to think. In fact, the thinking skills component of P4C is something that some conservative parents and some professional philosophers have supported: the parents, because it's content-neutral—it doesn't impose any particular ideas or values on the children that might compete with what they get at home—and the philosophers because informal logic is a recognisable philosophical practice.

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Rosario: But for a critical theorist there's no such thing as value-neutral education—or any other kind of cultural production. And since education that pretends to be neutral winds up being oppressive, they say education should be deliberately emancipatory. It should be explicitly anti-racists and anti-sexist and anti-heteronormative and even anti-capitalist. It should wake students up to the oppression they participate in, and give them tools to intervene against it. So, from that perspective, teaching critical thinking, without also doing some kind of consciousness-raising with them, is politically suspect.

Ann: What's the suspicion?

Rosario: Well, it's that if our consciousness hasn't been raised to recognise the systems of oppression we live with, critical thinking could end up being just a tool we use to chase after desires that have been manipulated by our patriarchal home lives and the capitalist media and so on. Or worse: if we get some power we might use our critical thinking to oppress others. Also, I think many people outside of P4C think of critical thinking as an individual thing—something we do alone, inside our own heads, whereas consciousness-raising typically involves understanding our connections to others, and aims at solidarity. I think these are well-founded suspicions.

Maughn: But philosophy has always been culturally critical and even subversive, going back to Socrates. Think of Nietzsche's call to do philosophy with a hammer. Think of Jane Addams' work in Hull House. And this element has been emphasised by many of our colleagues, who see P4C as a way of getting children, not merely to think critically, but to be critical of the world.[21]

Ann: That's just what I was saying: you have to be awake to the ethical and political meaning of your experience—emotionally as well as conceptually—before you can sense, and then articulate that there's something wrong with it. That's why the philosophical content of the programme is so important. It's not incidental; it's not just something we use to practice thinking; it's chosen deliberately to help children recognise those kinds of meaning. That's an indispensable part of the search for wisdom.

Joe: There is also the method. A lot of work has been done by feminists and others who see the community of inquiry in P4C as a method of critical pedagogy, because of how it distributes power and brackets the teacher's content expertise; and also how it nurtures timid voices and brings traditionally marginalised voices forward; how it makes adults take children's ideas and perspectives seriously, and how it works by collaboration.[22] Wasn't there an exchange between Mat and Paulo Freire, and didn't the two of them see their work sharing a kind of liberatory agenda?

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Rosario: I can see that, but there is still an ongoing debate about whether getting children to pay attention to ethical and political meaning, inviting them to criticise the world as they experience it, and giving them practice in reasoning and egalitarian dialogue is enough, without also teaching them about racism and class oppression—teaching them to 'read the world' in those terms. How else can we prevent those philosophical practices from being co-opted by oppressive systems? That's especially of concern to critical theorists who suspect that rationality itself is a practice of domination.

Megan: But that's a problem for critical theory, isn't it? The theory needs a grounding conception of human flourishing on which to base its diagnosis of oppression; but the suspicion that all theory is ideology undermines the attempt to find such a conception, doesn't it? Even the Frankfurt school ran into that cul-de-sac. The part of critical theory that points to a more enlightened society or a more self-determined human subject is in tension with the part that sees rational autonomy as a liberal contrivance. Also, inasmuch as the method of critical theory involves empirical observation and means-end rationality, it becomes another science, in need of political deconstruction. So then, 'critical pedagogy' is just as much in need of 'a pedagogy of interruption'[23] as is 'Socratic pedagogy'.[24]

Rosario: Yes, and that's why people like Terry Eagleton have argued for cultural theorists to pay more attention to suffering, objectivity and human nature: to maintain the relevance of their work to real-world struggles.[25]

Ann: I want to step back a bit. I have my doubts about some of these distinctions, like individual versus community, and critical thinking versus critical consciousness. I'm thinking about Dewey's recommendation that education in each subject explain the processes of inquiry that produced the 'textbook knowledge' in that subject, including all the failures and reconstructions along the way, rather than presenting it as a finished product that came out of nowhere and is above critique.[26] I don't see why concepts like tolerance and equality and diversity can't be shared with children as products of inquiry into sexism and racism and etc.—as concepts that have taken on certain meanings and been shaped in certain ways, in response to certain problems. To do that, you see, is to invite children into the ongoing conversation about the meaning of those ideas, and to bring their own experiences to bear on them. It's no different from having them focus on concepts like person, friendship and fairness, that they use every day in a conventional way, but in philosophy they discover that these concepts have a wide range of meanings they may not have considered, some of which might help them make more sense of their experience, and find ways to enhance it. Coming up with a new understanding about what fairness means—let's say, in relation to race, class or gender—could have profound, immediate consequences in the life of a child.

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Joe: I wonder if that approach makes P4C less vulnerable to conservative critics who say that values like 'social justice', 'feminism', 'social democracy', 'environmentalism', or even 'tolerance' are too partisan, too leftist to be taught in schools.[27] They say they want schools to be left out of the American culture wars.

Rosario: I notice they don't mind involving schools in culture wars over school prayer, or teaching creationism and nationalism.

Maughn: The kind of thing Joe is talking about—parents who don't want schools teaching their children what to believe about certain religious or moral or political issues—hasn't been a problem for P4C. Parents who investigate the programme can see we don't have that kind of agenda.[28] But Rosario is pointing to something quite different and not so easy to deal with: that some parents don't want their children to question, or even to think critically about the religious or political beliefs the parents teach them. They believe in their own exclusive right to shape their children's beliefs.[29]

Rosario: But can P4C really be value-neutral, in the way that Ann was suggesting? Did I understand you correctly, Ann? How can it be value-neutral, and at the same time be a normative practice in so many ways?

Ann: No, you're right, it's not value-neutral, or, I should say, not entirely. We are committed to procedures of inquiry, and practices of political and ethical interdependence that we take to be normative; and, as I said, to the aim of practical wisdom, or better ways to live. But these commitments aren't dogmas. If someone wants to challenge them, we should give that challenge a fair hearing. But there's a presumption, let's say, in favour of these aims and these procedural norms, based on how well they have served us in the past. We don't pretend to be neutral about them, and we don't pretend they are compatible with every idea we might discuss. But of course, they *are* neutral with regard to all kinds of other questions. So I guess I'd say our practice is *relatively* value-neutral[30]—if that makes sense.

Joe: It's really a priority of commitments, isn't it? Aren't you just saying that our commitment to these practices is prior to, or more solid than our commitment to the outcomes? In the way that we would find it easier, in most cases, to question the outcome of a science experiment or a trial by jury, than to question the norms of experimental research or the rules of evidence? I mean, we would ask ourselves if we followed the method carefully enough before we asked if there were something wrong with the method.

Maughn: That puts me in mind of what some of the philosophers we've been reading at this seminar have written about what it means to be a

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philosopher, or to live philosophically. There seems to be a norm or an ideal of a kind of personhood at work here, and I'm now wondering if that ideal isn't integral to the practice of P4C.

Ann: What kind of ideal are you thinking of?

Maughn: Well, it has the same kind of priority of commitments Joe just described. I would say the most basic commitment is to continually seek out the true, the beautiful and the good as categories of existential meaning—the kind of meaning that can be lived. I don't think it actually matters very much whether we talk about them as universal, essential or evolutionary, non-transcendent categories of meaning. In any case, the philosophical person yearns for, and works for those *kinds* of meaning. The secondary commitment is to the methods we've evolved for doing that—including analytic thinking and cultural criticism and hermeneutic dialogue and contemplative exercises.[31] The next level would be a lesser commitment to whatever ideas and values and ways of life we've found to be meaningful. And Joe's right: to say we prioritise the last one least is just to say that we are more fallibilistic or humble about specific beliefs or values than we are about the methods we used to get to them, or than we are about our self-understanding as meaning-seeking creatures. That's close to what Rorty meant by being an 'ironist',[32] about our beliefs, and it's close to what Ann often says about learning to hold our beliefs more tentatively.[33]

Megan: Yes, I think something like that is the 'hidden curriculum' of P4C, and it also has to do with what you were saying earlier, Ann, about the ethical, the aesthetic, the political, and so on, as the aspects of experience that we find, or ought to find, to be most meaningful.

Ann: Why, or how do you think it's been hidden? It seems pretty overt, to me. That kind of 'existential meaning', as Maughn calls it, was what Mat thought philosophy could bring to education, with his understanding that many children find school quite meaningless.[34]

Megan: Maybe what I mean is that there is a kind of humanism assumed here, an idea of what it means to live well, or to be a full-fledged person. But, then, that idea is the target of the most recent theoretical critique of P4C, from postmodernists and posthumanists.

Ann: What does that mean—'posthumanist'?

Megan: Well, as I see it, postmodernists, poststructuralists and post-humanists mistrust the very attempt to find objective or trans-cultural foundations for knowledge or for values, or for what it means to be a human being.[35] The possibility of such foundations has been undercut by anti-realist and anti-rationalist theories of the fragmented subject, the slipperiness of meaning, the inescapability of discourse, and the ubiquity

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of power. So there have been postmodern critics of P4C who have noticed this hidden curriculum of the 'reasonable' or 'philosophical' child, and critiqued it as just one normative model of human subjectivity among many, without any objective or foundational reasons to privilege it over others.[36]

Ann: Yes, I know that line of critique. People have been raising it against our work almost from the beginning, and there have been a number of responses.[37] In fact, you know, some have analysed P4C as a post-colonial, postmodern practice.[38] I wonder if 'posthumanism' is just a new vocabulary for the very old—in fact, maybe the oldest—philosophical problem of scepticism. In any case, I would say that yes, there is some kind of ideal of personhood at work in P4C, though it would be wrong to accuse Mat or me of claiming any kind of absolutist foundations for it. Mat, after all, sided with Dewey's (1997 [1910]) Darwinian arguments against the idea of a fixed human nature, and my dissertation was on Nietzsche's view of the teacher as liberator! And while, on the one hand, I think it's good to be sceptical—to remember to hold our theories lightly and be willing to give up our favourite certainties—scepticism alone doesn't give us a method for deciding what to believe or how to live. It just isn't sufficient to the project of human flourishing.

Joe: I think it's important to distinguish different kinds of scepticism. Ann, you're describing what I would call a Socratic scepticism,[39] which is just ordinary fallibilism, as Maughn mentioned before: not taking our beliefs or values to be final; being willing to self-correct.[40] That's quite different from the more radical scepticism I think Megan is referring to, that is not just cautious but actually *anti*-foundational, which, I think, can become paralyzing.

Maughn: That depends on whether the claim that there aren't foundational reasons to choose a certain belief or a way of life over others is meant to imply that, therefore, there's no way to choose—that foundational reasons are the only kinds of reasons we could use. For me, that would be a false dichotomy: to say that either we know for certain or we don't know at all. Just because we know enough to be sceptical, ironic, tentative about our beliefs, doesn't mean we have reasons to stop believing them. For one thing, how do we know which ones need to be reconstructed before they get us into trouble? And in the mean time, it seems to me we can have plenty of non-foundational reasons for preferring certain ways of life over others.

Megan: Like what?

Joe: How about, for instance, that I have made myself accountable to a community of my peers, who have challenged my ideas; that I have double-checked my reasons for believing—the methods of inquiry or the authorities I've relied on; that I've been willing to self-correct; that my current beliefs help me cope with experience—help me understand it in ways that enable me to act intelligibly; and that I have no other reasons for

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doubting them now, though I'm open to finding reasons to doubt them later. What more is there to knowing, or even to being certain, than that?

Maughn: Just one thing I would add: we know, on the level of qualitative experience, what it means to live with a political culture of civil rights, to participate in collective decision-making, to do the kind of self-work that moves us from avarice and animosity toward humility and compassion.[41] Even if we can't justify this way of life on absolutist grounds, we *can* say why we prefer it to certain other ways we know of. I agree with Ann: we need to be fallibilistic, but it's only our positive beliefs, values and practices—our vision of what it might mean to be human, even just for here and now—that constitute meaning and make life worth living. Education is just as much about sharing that kind of vision with the next generation, as it is about equipping them to escape it or take hammers to it.[42] I'd say it's every bit as risky *not* to socialise our children in the ways of life that we have found most ennobling and enchanting as it to socialise them so completely that they can't see their way out.[43] The fact that our vision isn't transcendent doesn't mean that it must be naïve or politically sinister.

Megan: But then, as you say, we have to worry that educating children into the humanistic ideal behind P4C might make them resistant to alternative ideals. For instance, many postmodernists mistrust the attempt to distinguish inquiry as a type of discourse that aims at certain kinds of objectivity, from other types of discourse like interest-group politics or consciousness-raising.[44] So there have been critics of P4C who have said that its criteria for 'reasonableness'—like maintaining relevance, uncovering assumptions, . . .

Joe: . . . identifying fallacies, evaluating evidence . . .

Megan: . . . right, and making valid inferences—thanks, Joe—that all of that is just another way of exercising power—the Eurocentric, or even the Anglo-American way. They see argumentative inquiry, with its scientific forms of reason and its drive toward even provisional concords of perspective, as another machinery of dominance,[45] and they worry that by imposing these structures on children, P4C will colonise their thinking and their desires, and make it next to impossible for them to offer radical alternatives—which, some say, is what is most precious about childhood, and about philosophy.[46]

Joe: But that construal of rationality misses the point of all those philosophers of politics and science and ethics who have shown us that what's important and efficacious about rationality is not, or not only certain logical structures, but a family of social and ethical practices like curiosity about alternative views, freedom of expression, accountability to peers, non-dogmatism and self-correction, that sometimes result in 'unforced agreement.'[47] Certainly the practice of community of inquiry makes us aware that there are many points of view, and different kinds of thinking going on, even in communities that seems heterogeneous.

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Ann: And also, isn't the argument that learning one way of thinking—like learning one language, or one tradition of music, or one method of agriculture—makes it difficult to learn alternative ways, at least contestable? I mean, is it a theoretical argument or something we can observe? I don't see why, on the contrary, the more ways of thinking you learn, shouldn't make it easier to learn others.

Maughn: Of course we can't step outside our own beliefs and values to get a glimpse of Truth Itself—but that doesn't mean we're trapped inside our own perspectives, either. As long as we're able to read widely, and travel some, and get into hermeneutical circles with people who see and feel things differently, there's every chance we will find reasons to alter our beliefs, adopt new values, learn to practice different kinds of subjectivity, and otherwise change our vision of human flourishing.

Rosario: But let's be careful. There's a difference between 'going visiting', in Arendt's sense (1978, p. 257), and going shopping.[48] The postmodernist emphasis on novelty, uniqueness, heterogeneity and radical otherness—the categorical mistrust of the collective and the normative—seems to me like a dangerous (and typically capitalist) distraction from political struggle and solidarity.

Ann: And also, what's the alternative? To act as if children are born outside of culture? Give them nothing to try out, build on or rebel against? Talk about oppressive! If children don't grow up with some kind of language and rationality, and with minimal nutrition and hygiene and literacy and human relationship, they aren't going to be fit to articulate the ugliness or injustice they experience, much less a new vision of the kind of life they want to live. I mean, it's one thing to want to treat children as ends in themselves, and not just as means to our own cultural imperatives;[49] but I can't make any sense of what that would mean—to treat children as ends—if I didn't take them to be capable of thinking and speaking for themselves and taking intelligent action. And those capabilities don't happen in a vacuum.

Maughn: Besides that, I think to find your own voice you have to have something to struggle against.[50] Or, as Dewey put it more positively, human individuality and uniqueness does not precede socialisation, but is actually a result of certain kinds of association.[51] He thought a process of social inquiry—in which multiple voices are heard, meanings are clarified, sympathies are formed, traditions are reinterpreted, compromises are considered, and new accommodations are created—was as necessary for meaningful individuality as for political solidarity.

Rosario: I wouldn't go that far, but I agree that we can't afford *not* to educate children to be literate and critical, because people—including children—who aren't capable of problematising and critically analysing what they are told and what happens to them and all the media they

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consume are so easily victimised. They are far more likely to become 'true believers' of other people's political agendas, or else completely diverted and neutralised from serious thought—in either case they have suffered a loss of agency. That's why I lose patience with deconstructionists who act like their work has no political consequences. If postmodernism undermines education for critical rationality, or norms of human liberation that come from the experiences of the underprivileged, we know who will benefit and who will suffer as a consequence!

Joe: So the attempt to distinguish inquiry from negotiation, truth from ideology, right from wrong, and being treated as an end from being treated as a means, has political and moral consequences.

Megan: Still, that's not to say that Western culture has a corner on any of those ideals. Another criticism of P4C has been its lack of multiculturalism, even just philosophically speaking. For one thing, the nearly exclusive focus on dialogue eclipses other kinds of philosophical practice, like exegetical and contemplative. And as for content, many people have pointed out the lack in the IAPC curriculum of ideas from continental or Asian philosophy, and all the American colloquialisms and cultural norms portrayed in the novels—which, after all, were written for US schools.[52] I believe P4C has to work harder to incorporate more philosophical traditions, especially non-Western traditions; otherwise all the talk about broadening our perspectives and being open to challenge are empty platitudes.

Ann: I've been saying that for a long time now, and I'll give you three reasons. One is what we've just been saying: we need radical alternatives to be shocked out of our habitual ways of seeing, so that we can appreciate an idea or a practice that is more beautiful than anything we might have—and also sometimes just to re-discover the meaning of our own ways. Second, if philosophy is a way of life, as many of us here believe, then these alternatives are actually 'existential options', in Hadot's sense.[53] And third, we have to do our best to sympathise with options we don't take ourselves, in order to avoid violent conflict and to become citizens of the world.[54]

Joe: But there's a big difference in multiculturalism as a more thorough, more open-minded search for greater truth, beauty and goodness—that's what I hear Ann describing—and multiculturalism as a postmodern playground of ideas and arts and kinds of government, with no normative comparison, which is actually the repudiation of those regulative ideals for meaningful life.[55]

Maughn: And let's not lose sight of how the globalisation of P4C, almost from the beginning, has changed the programme. There have been many, very successful cultural adaptations of the novels. And people from many different parts of the world have adapted the programme to blend

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with local methods,[56] have written new curriculum that draws on local cultural themes or incorporates regional children's literature, and have brought the work of a wide range of philosophers to bear on P4C practice.[57] The early emphasis on critical thinking has been transformed by theorists who see the community of philosophical inquiry as a political laboratory,[58] a method of wisdom training,[59] an operational application of social learning theory,[60] a means of raising philosophical questions across the school subjects,[61] a method of religious exegetics and education,[62] and even a contemplative or spiritual practice.[63] I'd say the programme has had little chance of being culturally or theoretically insulated.

Ann: In fact, all these criticisms we've been discussing today have been discussed for most of P4C's 40-year history—a fact that often goes unnoticed. Thousands of academic books, articles, and doctoral dissertations contending with P4C have been published, from scores of countries. Pre-college philosophy is the topic of dozens of academic conferences and special conference sessions every year, in every part of the world. It's been the primary focus of four academic journals, and a frequent focus of other leading journals in philosophy and education. The published literature includes both philosophical and empirical research on myriad aspects of engaging children and adolescents in different kinds of philosophical practice. I find it very troubling that so many new pre-college philosophy programmes and new rounds of critique against ours lack an honest review of this literature.

Joe: I think the nuns are about to ring the lunch bell, and before we stop I'd like to try to summarise what we've been saying. First, we've been uncovering—some of us, and others I guess are just reiterating—that P4C, as conceived by Mat and Ann, is a practice or a set of practices that derive from, and re-inscribe a particular norm of what it means to be human. That norm has roots in the Hellenistic tradition of philosophy as a way of life given to the search for, and the experience of certain kinds of meaning, and also in American pragmatism—especially its emphasis on qualitative experience and its theory of inquiry—and in American and Soviet social learning theory. This normative account of P4C attracts at least five kinds of overlapping and conflicting criticism that we've identified: from religious and social conservatives who don't want their children to question traditional values; from educational psychologists who believe certain kinds of thinking are out of reach for children of certain ages; from philosophers who say it's not real philosophy because it focuses on meaning and how to live, rather than on theory and exegesis; from critical theorists who think it's too value neutral and politically compliant; and from postmodernists who worry that it's imperialistic and hegemonic: training the minds of children on the trellises of scientistic, bourgeois Western liberalism. Is that about right?

Ann: As Pixie would say, that's the story of how the story happened!

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NOTES

1. The seminar included sessions discussing chapters from Dewey, 1989; Hadot, 1995 and 2002; Shusterman, 1997 and 2000; Sharp, 1998; and Lipman, 1978 and 1980.
2. Those not familiar with the program may consult the IAPC website at www.montclair.edu/iapc (accessed 11 January 2011) and Gregory, 2008.
3. John Dewey wrote, e.g., that '[P]hilosophy is love of wisdom; wisdom being not knowledge but knowledge-plus; knowledge turned to account in the instruction and guidance it may convey in piloting life through the storms and the shoals that beset life-experience as well as into such havens of consummatory experience as enrich our human life from time to time' (1991, p. 389). Similarly, Shusterman sees pragmatism as a contemporary revival of the ancient Hellenistic 'idea of philosophy as a deliberative life-practice that brings lives of beauty and happiness to its practitioners[;]' of philosophy having the 'crucial, existential task: to help us lead better lives by bettering ourselves through self-knowledge, self-criticism and self-mastery' (1997, pp. 3 and 21).
4. Lipman describes the aim of philosophical inquiry as 'ethical, social, political, and aesthetic judgments ... applied directly to life situations' (2003, p. 279).
5. Lipman *et al*., recommended 'philosophical inquiry—not as an end in itself but as a means for leading a qualitatively better life', (1980, p. 84).
6. Lipman wrote a series of philosophical novels for children and adolescents, including *Elfie* (1987), *Kio & Gus* (1982), *Pixie* (1981), *Nous* (1996b) and *Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery* (1969), for elementary school, *Lisa* (1976) and *Suki* (1978) for middle school, and *Mark* (1980) for high school. Each novel, titled for a principle character, shows young people exploring philosophical dimensions of their experience—especially logical, ethical and aesthetic dimensions—and dialoguing about them with and without adults. In Philosophy for Children, these novels are used to help students recognise and problematise philosophical dimensions of their own experiences, and to dialogue about these together as a 'community of inquiry', facilitated by an adult with philosophical training.
7. See Lipman's autobiography, *A Life Teaching Thinking* (2008).
8. See Hadot, 2002, pp. 29, 33-6, 71-3, 124, and 138; and 1995, pp. 92-3, 163, and 274.
9. Socrates famously critiqued education that focused on materialistic and mundane objectives to the detriment of wisdom. See Hadot, 2002, p. 59, and Gregory and Laverty, 2010.
10. Referring to *Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery* (see Note 6).
11. See Sharp, 1989.
12. See Shusterman, 1997, pp. 4–5.
13. George Pollack, for instance, writes that 'to apply philosophy is not thereby to do it. Application of philosophy is exogenous to philosophical activity itself; it comes after the fact' (2007, p. 246).
14. See Lipman, 2004 and Gregory, 2002a.
15. Lipman drew on Piaget's ideas of active learning and constructivism, but also on Vygotsky's social construal of those ideas. See Arkady A. Margolis' afterward to Lipman, 1996a, p. 124; Lipman, 1991; and Lim, 2004.
16. 'The conclusions I found in Vygotsky ... showed me how to apply, specifically to the relationship between teaching and mental development, the views I had arrived at earlier as a result of repeatedly dipping into Peirce and Dewey, as well as more sustained examinations of Buchler ... .'(Lipman, 1996a, p. xiii).
17. As Nussbaum observes, Dewey 'never addressed systematically the question of how Socratic critical reasoning might be taught to children of various ages ... But teachers who want to teach Socratically ... can find very useful and yet nondictatorial advice about Socratic pedagogy in ... Philosophy for Children developed at the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children ...' (2010, p. 73).
18. See Reznitskaya *et al*., 2008.
19. See e.g. Topping and Trickey, 2007 and Soter *et al*., 2008.
20. See e.g. The Paulo and Nita Freire International Project for Critical Pedagogy, http://freireproject.org, accessed 18 November 2010.

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21. See e.g. Morehouse, 1994; Vigliante, 2006; and Sharp, 2009.
22. See e.g. Reed, 1992; Daniel, 1994; Glaser, 1994; Lone, 1997; Gregory, 2004; Turgeon, 2004; and Laverty, 2009.
23. See Biesta, 2007, p. 790.
24. See 'Socratic Pedagogy', chapter 4 of Nussbaum, 2010.
25. See 'The Politics of Amnesia', chapter 1 of Eagleton, 2003.
26. See 'The Child and the Curriculum', in Dewey, 1990a, pp. 181–209.
27. See, e.g. Caleb Warnock: 'BYU Drops Controversial Education Program', *The Daily Herald* article posted 2 July, 2010, and Erik Eckholm's article, 'In School Efforts to End Bullying, Some See Agenda', *TheNew York Times*, 7 November, 2010, p. A-16.
28. 'No course in philosophical thinking ... can succeed if used as a means for implanting the teacher's values in the vulnerable minds of the children in the classroom .... One goal of education is the liberation of students from unquestioning, uncritical mental habits, in order that they may better develop the ability to think for themselves .... There is no study that can more effectively prepare children to combat indoctrination than philosophy' (Lipman *et al*., 1980, p. 85).
29. See 'On Philosophy, Children and Taboo Topics', in Gregory, 2008, pp. 35–36; and Law, 2008.
30. See Gregory, 2000a.
31. On the latter see Hadot, 1995 and Zajonc, 2008.
32. See Rorty, 1989, especially essays 3 & 4. Rorty's notion of philosophical irony, of course, derives from Socrates and other Hellenistic philosophers, for whom, as Hadot observes, '"irony" ... is a kind of humor which refuses to take oneself or other people entirely seriously; for everything human, and everything philosophical, is highly uncertain, and we have no right to be proud of it' (2002, p. 26).
33. See Sharp, 1987. Elsewhere I have explained that, 'The attitude toward our knowledge that follows from the pragmatist model of inquiry is not skepticism but fallibilism .... It does not follow from the expectation that we will need to revise our beliefs at some point, that we can or ought to make ourselves doubt them in the meantime, before we discover what's wrong with them by implementing them. In fact, it is only by trusting our beliefs enough to use them that we can find out their errors and limitations' (Gregory, 2000b, p. 47).
34. '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 .... Philosophy might be indispensable for the redesign of education, but to make this happen it would itself have to be redesigned' (Lipman, 1996a, p. xv). Judith Suissa (2008, p. 139) argues similarly that for adolescents in particular, their 'struggle to find meaning is a struggle not just to understand the concrete aspects of experience with which they are confronted in their everyday lives, but to make sense of the human knowledge, ideas and concepts reflected in ... social knowledge and cultural meanings.' Howard Gardner (1993, pp. 203–4) recommends Philosophy for Children for introducing what he calls 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 ...'.
35. 'Humanism specifies what the child, student, or newcomer should become, before giving them an opportunity to show who they are and who they will be. Humanism thus seems to be unable to open to the possibility that newcomers might radically alter our understandings of what it means to be human' (Biesta, 2007, p. 795).
36. See e.g. D'Angelo, 1978; Murris, 1994; Wilks, 1995; Coppens, 1998; and Yorshansky, 2007.
37. See Lardner, 1991; Benjamin and Echeverria, 1992; Weinstein, 1994; and Kennedy, 2002.
38. Fabian Gimenez (1997), for instance, argues that P4C's practice of the community of philosophical inquiry is a postmodern approach to alterity. See also Sharp, 2008.
39. 'American students whose parents are affluent enough to send them to reasonably good colleges find themselves in the hands of teachers [who] do their best to ... make them a little more conscious of the cruelty built into our institutions; of the need for reform, of the need to be sceptical of the current consensus .... [O]ur hope that colleges will be more than vocational schools is largely a hope that they will encourage such Socratic scepticism' (Rorty, 1999, p. 116).

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40. 'Communal philosophical dialogue is the discursive space where the subject's fundamental assumptions about self, world, knowledge, belief, beauty, right action and normative ideals enter a dialectical process of confrontation, mediation, and reconstruction' (Kennedy, 2004, p. 203).
41. See Gregory, 2006.
42. '[T]he word "education" covers two entirely distinct, and equally necessary processes—socialization and individualization' (Rorty, 1999, p. 117). 'It would be well for the colleges to remind us that 19 is an age when young people should have finished absorbing the best that has been thought and said and should have started becoming suspicious of it' (ibid., p. 124). Compare Biesta's argument (2007, p. 789) that 'good education should always consist in a balanced combination' of three functions: qualification, socialisation and interruption, and my own similar arguments in Gregory, 2001 and 2000b. Roger Scruton (2007, p. 20) argues, in fact, that one of the purposes of education is to preserve cultural knowledge: 'True teachers do not provide knowledge as a benefit to their pupils; they treat their pupils as a benefit to knowledge'.
43. I make this argument in greater detail in Gregory, 2002a and 2002b.
44. For more on the distinctive characteristics of inquiry discourse, see Walton, 1998 and Robertson, 1999.
45. Nancy Vansieleghem (2006, p. 179) argues, for instance, drawing on Bakhtin, that 'The community of inquiry turns the dialogue into an argumentative game in which every movement is being converted into a specific code system[; and] this concept of dialogue can't listen to the voice of the other because it operates in function of the reproduction of a certain communication system'. She argues, in fact (p. 180), that 'The attempt to understand everything is exactly what leads to totalitarianism and oppression'.
46. See e.g. Kohan, 1999 and 2002. In response to the latter, see also Guin, 2004.
47. The phrase is from Rorty (1991), p. 38. He argues (p. 37) that 'Another meaning for "rational" is . . . something like "sane" or "reasonable" rather than "methodical." It names a set of moral virtues: tolerance, respect for the opinions of those around one, willingness to listen, reliance on persuasion rather than force . . . . On this construction, to be rational is simply to discuss any topic—religious, literary, or scientific—in a way which eschews dogmatism, defensiveness, and righteous indignation.' Others who construe rationality in this way are Eagleton (2003, ch. 5); Appleby *et al*. (1995, pp. 271–309); Longino (1990, pp. 62–82); Dewey (1986 [1938]) and Peirce (1878).
48. See also Sharp, 2007a.
49. See Cassidy, 2004.
50. '[I]t is as necessary to be immersed in existing knowledge as it is to be open and capable of producing something that does not yet exist' (Freire, 1998, p. 35). Compare Rorty (1999, p. 118): 'Socialization has to come before individualization, and education for freedom cannot begin before some constraints have been imposed.'
51. 'Liberty is that secure release and fulfillment of personal potentialities which take place only in rich and manifold association with others: the power to be an individualized self making a distinctive contribution and enjoying in its own way the fruits of association' (Dewey, 1990b, p. 150).
52. See e.g. Reed, 1991; Jesperson, 1993; and Rainville, 2000.
53. See note 8.
54. See Sharp, 1995; Slade, 1997; and Nussbaum, 2010, pp. 79–94.
55. '[T]his postmodern world . . . is a playground world, in which all are equally entitled to their culture, their lifestyles, and their opinions' (Scruton, 2007, p. 83).
56. See e.g. Palsson, 1988; Zelman, 2004; and Martens, 2008.
57. See e.g. Curtis, 1985; de la Garza, 1990; Martens, 1990; Kohan, 1996; Glaser, 1998; and Lim, 2003.
58. See Johnson, 1997; Cevallos-Estrellas and Sigurdardottir, 2000; and de la Garza, 2006.
59. See De Puig, 1994; Gregory and Laverty, 2009; and Sternberg, 2003.
60. See note 15.
61. See Weinstein, 1986, and Knight and Collins, 2000.
62. See Du Puis, 1979, and Deitcher and Glaser, 2004.
63. See Vallone, 1987; Sharp, 1994a, 1994b, and 2007b; and Mendoca, 1996.

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