

# Philosophy for children

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A well-orchestrated public relations campaign led primarily by educational charity The Philosophy Shop has helped raise the profile of the philosophy for children movement in the UK significantly over the last few years. Whilst The Philosophy Shop has been promoting its 'Four Rs' campaign to make 'Reasoning' a central feature of the National Curriculum since 2009, the publication of founder Peter Worley's teaching guide *The If Machine* this March and the 'Roundtable on Philosophy for Children' hosted by the Forum for European Philosophy in June suggest there is now confidence in the broad intellectual support of educational practitioners and philosophers alongside the political will necessary to achieve the aspirations of this project.<sup>1</sup> An interview with Worley appears in the May/June issue of *Philosophy Now* magazine, alongside a special section on 'doing philosophy with children' dedicated to Matthew Lipman. Lipman, who pioneered the philosophy for children and communities ('P4C') movement in the USA during the 1970s, died at the end of last year. It was his work that inspired the foundation of the educational charity SAPERE (Society for Advancing Philosophy Enquiry and Reflection in Education) in 1992, which also held its own 'Introduction to Philosophy for Children' event in July.

It is significant that this joint push for basic philosophical teaching for children coincides with the growing popularity of philosophy at A-level. In contrast, applications to study the subject at degree level have dropped in the last year (along with less vocational humanities subjects in general, a trend we might expect to continue with the trebling of tuition fees), whilst philosophy programmes in higher education seem to have been bearing the particular brunt of hasty and often brutal attempts to rationalize resources and cut costs. Over the last year protests against the announced closures of philosophy at Liverpool and Keele have forced managerial reversals, whilst the purging of philosophy courses at Middlesex, Greenwich, London

Met and, most recently, Northampton continues. It is the context of this broader crisis that demands our attention here, not least because a popular drive towards philosophy may be a symptom either of a revitalization that could spread into higher education or of its regression and eventual expiration.

The origins of the philosophy for children movement lie, like that of *Radical Philosophy* itself, in the social and political unrest of the late 1960s. Apparently dismayed by the lack of critical thought and poor quality of argumentation exhibited in debates around the Vietnam War, Lipman concluded that practice in philosophical and critical thinking skills should form an integral part of schooling beginning at the earliest stages. In 1969 he circulated his philosophical novel for 11–12 year olds, *Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery*, in 1974 founded the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children (IAPC), and by the late 1970s his ideas was beginning to have an influence on teachers working in the UK.

In contrast, *Radical Philosophy's* interest in philosophy for children emerged not out of the USA but from the student uprising of May '68; from a critical attentiveness to the ideological function of education demonstrated in the work of Antonio Gramsci, Louis Althusser and Jacques Rancière, and specifically the empirical research undertaken by the Groupe de Recherches sur l'Enseignement Philosophiques (GREPH), established by Jacques Derrida in 1974. An early 'Philosophy in Schools' group was formed during a *Radical Philosophy* festival in Bristol in April 1977 and their inaugural meeting held at the Institute of Education in London on 29 October of that year.

This interest can be traced back to a critique of prevailing academic philosophy in *Radical Philosophy's* founding statement from 1972, which expresses the aim not only of expanding the narrow content of the academic curriculum but also of challenging the institutional divisions that it saw contributing to the formal impoverishment of philosophical pedagogy

(*RP* 1, Frontispiece). These divisions concerned (i) the disciplinary ones separating philosophy from other subjects and compartmentalizing it into distinct areas of inquiry (ethics, epistemology, metaphysics, political theory, aesthetics, etc.); (ii) the hierarchical ones established between teachers and their students; and (iii) the social, economic and political ones isolating academic philosophy from the outside world.

As student Nick Jenkins suggested, in a special supplement on 'Philosophy from Below' in *RP* 15, academic philosophy tends to reverse the normal relation of philosophizing to the world: the oddness of starting with theory or canonical texts and subsequently using concrete events to help exemplify the difficult parts or make them relevant belies the notion that philosophizing *begins* in wonder or disappointment. To 'start with the Notting Hill Gate riots and analyse the role of the police and the power of the state, Hobbes and Plato' gives meaning and purpose to philosophy, Jenkins argues, 'against the background of the situation in which they exist, the environment that moves them to philosophize as they do' (*RP* 15, Supplement, p. iii). Against this, hierarchical divisions between the teacher and student are produced and maintained through pedagogical practices tied to the *disciplinary* expertise and knowledge of the teacher and the *disciplining* of the student's inquiry to remain within the contours of inherited problems.

From the beginning these distinct aims of the journal came into conflict with each other. Because the issue of academic content was relatively easy to reconcile with the research expertise and publication demands of a professional career, those involved in *Radical Philosophy* have been able to claim some success in helping establish an expanded philosophical field. This should also be related to the rise in interdisciplinary teaching and research, conditioned in large part by the 'massification' of higher education over the last two decades: initially, in the distinct pedagogical context of teaching working-class students in adult education programmes and polytechnic colleges, then in the 'new universities' that were created through the 1992 Education Act, and within which the majority of *RP*'s current editorial collective are still based.<sup>2</sup> The interdisciplinary impulse that emerged from such institutions has been critically extended, for example, in *Radical Philosophy*'s recent dossiers on transdisciplinarity.<sup>3</sup> The reversal of this expansion of higher education (in terms of the size and demographic of the student population, and the range of subjects available) thus inaugurates a new period of change, which could see a retrenchment of traditional subjects

in the elite universities and a merging of the humanities into 'liberal arts degrees' elsewhere.

Conversely, formal pedagogical concerns relating to the institutionalization of the subject (*how* philosophy is taught and *to whom*) became harder to pursue as the forums in which these issues could be addressed were either subsumed within the institutions themselves or disappeared entirely. This accompanied a broader engagement of political attention away from the institutions and towards politics per se. The supplement from 1976 mentioned above, for example, laments how 'early issues ... devoted much space to the institutional practice of philosophy' but unfortunately, 'as the magazine became more established, we turned our eyes away from this function' (*RP* 15, Supplement, p. i). Such pedagogical issues only tend to resurface, therefore, during times of crisis. With the recent wave of protests over the privatization of higher education and cuts to public services, we may see them being taken up again by students returning to their universities in the autumn.<sup>4</sup>

### Philosophizing beyond philosophy?

Returning to the aspirations of the current philosophy for children movement with this in mind, there is an awareness, raised by both Worley at the LSE roundtable and Michael Lacewing at the SAPERE event, that by necessity what they teach doesn't resemble existing academic philosophy as it is taught and practised in institutions of higher education. Rebutting the implicit assumption that what passes for 'philosophy' must be prescribed by what goes on in 'academic philosophy', Lacewing insisted on a distinction between *philosophizing*, as a certain practice of inquiry, and (academic) *philosophy* as learning and research informed by a study of the canonical thinkers. Since all genuine philosophy starts from philosophizing, he argued, when done well philosophy for children accords with philosophizing in this spirit, and when done badly academic philosophy falls short of this standard as merely a technical familiarity with the right moves and argumentative options.

We might add (returning to the earlier connection between discipline and pedagogy) that the radical edge of this proselytizing extends not merely to how philosophical thinking is taught and carried out but to what constitutes its identity as a subject. One way of understanding such a radical transformation would be to evoke that characterization of Walter Benjamin's philosophical practice as a 'philosophy directed against philosophy' or a 'philosophizing beyond philosophy'.<sup>5</sup> (Such a claim might be justified here by the recognition

that the speculative concept of experience that entails ‘philosophizing need no longer be confined to “philosophy” ... could move beyond classical philosophical problems and texts into the critical reflection upon literature, art and culture in the broadest sense’ is itself partially constituted by an attentiveness to the child’s experience of colour, language and play in Benjamin’s work, a point I will return to later).<sup>6</sup>

Although we are entitled to remain sceptical about how such ‘philosophizing’ ties into a more general infantilization within recent moves to popularize philosophy for adults, it is nonetheless important to recognize a radical pedagogical agenda implicit within the work of those advocating philosophy for children; one that might be placed in conjunction with the crisis in higher education; that might be understood in the light of such institutional critique, and consequently that deserves our support.

Lipman, for example, stresses how philosophical inquiry begins ‘because what has been encountered – some aberration, some discrepancy, something that defies being taken for granted – captures our interest and demands our reflection and investigation’: the child ‘is surrounded by a world that is problematic through and through’ and this ‘uncanniness is evocative; it draws speech and thought out of the child’.<sup>7</sup> Steve Bramall, a P4C practitioner who spoke at the SAPERE event, described this conception of philosophy for children as one that is practical and life-world embedded, and gave examples of how philosophizing arises out of the situations and problems of concern to those involved. Like most people, children are worried not about imaginary moral abstractions but about concrete social problems, connected to their relationships to parents and friends.

Such discussion ‘attempts to follow the inquiry where it leads rather than be penned in by the boundary lines of existing disciplines’, Lipman suggests.<sup>8</sup> Disciplines are assumed to be ‘neither non-overlapping nor exhaustive’ and the task of learning identified with developing fluency in analogical reasoning ‘to construct bridges from one knowledge domain to another’.<sup>9</sup> Lacewing also insisted during his presentation that whilst philosophizing is central to the task of making sense of ourselves and our situation, this demands knowledge that belongs to history, anthropology, evolutionary psychology, psychology and social science.

As a consequence, learning is led by the interests of the students, and to help facilitate such inquiry the teacher also becomes a learner. There is an inherently democratic and non-authoritarian impulse to such practice that Lipman defines as a ‘community of inquiry’;

this interchange of experience is not the adult *domination* of the child but a mediation *between* the culture and the child.<sup>10</sup> Worley’s *The If Machine* expresses this in its more typical Socratic form, rethinking the role of the teacher as that of a ‘curious facilitator’, ‘as interested in the ideas being discussed as the children’, helping the children to explore ideas but not expressing their own views.<sup>11</sup> In practice, Bramall insists more radically, this kind of community often ends up problematizing that very distinction between adult and child.

### Return to the public?

The critical and collaborative community of inquiry encouraged by both The Philosophy Shop and SAPERE requires an engagement not only with the radical pedagogical impetus underlying the philosophy for children movement, but also its potential limitations. Whilst advocates of the philosophy for children movement might not be immediately concerned with such a self-critical task, interventions into education policy and practice are, by virtue of their object, always political and the model of criticality that motivates their own pedagogical practice might encourage them to consider the political function of their own proposals.

As I mentioned in my review of Martha Nussbaum’s *Not for Profit* (RP 167), it is useful to contextualize this in relation to a broader recuperation of the public role and civic importance of philosophy, alongside diverse initiatives such as UNESCO’s 2005 Intersectoral Strategy on Philosophy and its subsequent promotion of World Philosophy Day, Alain de Botton’s founding of the School of Life in 2008, and the University of Warwick’s appointment of Angela Hobbs as the UK’s first Senior Fellow in the Public Understanding of Philosophy in 2009. Hobbs, one of the speakers at the LSE roundtable, reports attending a workshop on ‘Public Engagement in the Arts and Humanities’ and meeting with David Willetts, the minister for universities and science, responsible for overseeing the privatization of higher education, to discuss ‘philosophy’s civic potential and the public role of academics’.<sup>12</sup> Despite the diversity of these initiatives, they are united by a conception of ‘the public’ that is, on the one hand, conditioned by specific economic imperatives but, on the other, tend only to criticize such imperatives within the constraining framework of a classical liberalism. To the extent that the philosophy for children movement shares this framework, the implicit radicality of its conception of philosophizing is assimilated within, rather than challenging, the prevailing neoliberal ideology it opposes.

Why should philosophers in the UK be increasingly concerned with the public? Disregarding, for the moment, any ethical and political considerations, the changes in education funding over the last decade or so might provide a partial explanation. Within higher education, research funding has been in the process of shifting towards a conception of ‘impact’ that evaluates not merely the academic importance of a piece of research but also its ‘reach and significance’ in relation to the economy, society and wider culture. This is part of the same general shift towards marketization that informs the cutting of funding to non-STEM subjects and underwrites much of the way universities in the UK are currently being transformed. Although couched in an attractive vision of public engagement, the difficulty of assessing such ‘reach’ entails that, at bottom, it boils down to academics going out into the ‘marketplace’. Whilst the British Philosophy Association (BPA), which represents professional philosophers in the UK, oppose this criterion for the evaluation of philosophy, its recent briefing paper on ‘Philosophy in Schools’ (August 2011) notes how ‘University departments are in a position to describe some of their teaching or research to a wider audience’, including ‘a wider public based in schools’, and that these ‘links between departments and schools are possible channels for “impact”’.<sup>13</sup>

On the other hand, as John White, Emeritus Professor of Education at the Institute of Education, pointed out at the LSE event, the success of enterprises such as philosophy for children is conditioned on similar changes to school funding over the last twenty years, which has produced a market for private educational providers such as The Philosophy Shop (the trading name of the community interest company registered to educational charity The Philosophy Foundation). This is, it must be recognized, a structural necessity for those attempting to intervene in governmental policy from the outside. One of the curiosities of the movement, however, is the way in which its abundance of abbreviations and acronyms (‘P4C’, ‘4Cs Thinking’, ‘3Cs Concepts’, ‘CoPI’) creates an impression of the commercial sale of branded techniques and methods. For example, the claim that Worley has ‘developed the method of Philosophical Enquiry (PhiE) that is at the heart of The Philosophy Shop’s work’ is problematic given the absence of any notably distinct methodological approach to ‘PhiE’ in his book *The If Machine*.<sup>14</sup>

Despite arousing some hostility in the room, White’s concerns over the potential opportunism of such providers were shared by other speakers and must be considered. Mary Healey, primary school teacher

and now senior lecturer in education at Roehampton University, raised a concern about the financial limitations of school budgets that was given a more direct political context by the chair of the session Anthony Seldon, himself Master of fee-charging Wellington College. Seldon worried that the gulf between the state and independent sector, with regard to the former’s need to maximize time and resources towards examination results, might preclude the possibility of supplementary philosophy sessions to children from less privileged backgrounds. This charge was denied when raised again at the SAPERE event, and both organizations insisted the majority of schools they worked with belonged to the state sector.

If Seldon was a little ‘off-message’ here, however, the problem wasn’t helped by having the majority of representatives from schools at the event coming from a private sector which provides only 7 per cent of the schooling in the country (as well as Seldon there was John Taylor from Rugby School, and Jonathan Douglas, director of the National Literacy Trust and governor of St William of York Primary School in Lewisham). An expectation that such an industry for educational provision will continue to expand does raise future questions about the occasionally symbiotic relationship between private schools and educational companies, especially given the prominent role many involved seek to play in influencing issues of educational policy that will benefit them.

### Liberal ideology

Bill Readings’s prescient *The University in Ruins* identifies such a tendency with a globalized neoliberal shift in the function of education away from the task of producing a unifying, national culture. This is substituted for the pursuit of ‘excellence’; a concept ambiguous enough, he argues, that it can encompass the disparate academic and economic interests of the university and technological capitalism (it is worth noting that Lipman himself speaks of creating a society ‘in which excellence flourishes’).<sup>15</sup> For reasons that I would suggest are partly conceptual and partly historical, Readings tends to misconceive this shift as ‘non-ideological’, but I would counter that it is one from a classical liberal to a neoliberal ideology.<sup>16</sup>

If these neoliberal tendencies in part condition philosophy’s recent concern with the public, the intellectual framework drawn on by many (but by no means exclusively, nor by all) in the philosophy for children movement to oppose these tendencies might be characterized by what Nussbaum calls the ‘classical defence of reform in liberal education’.<sup>17</sup> Indeed,



in *Not For Profit*, Nussbaum cites Lipman's philosophy for children curriculum as an example of the Socratic pedagogy she advocates.<sup>18</sup> As noted earlier, this neoclassicism stems in part from dissatisfaction with the narrow way contemporary philosophy has typically been taught and practised by many academic Anglo-American philosophers, one that responds by returning to the classical tradition in order to reclaim the civic and public function of an 'engaged' conception of philosophizing. This classical liberalism (in Nussbaum's sense) typically draws on the philosophy of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and the Roman Stoics to appeal to an ethics of individual flourishing and a democratic conception of active citizenship, both founded on dialogue and critical reasoning. Consequently, philosophers find themselves in the 'marketplace' again, though in this context motivated by the Socratic desire to engage with a public from which they have become academically estranged.

A significant factor here may prove to be the Conservative Party's introduction of Free Schools, whose independence from the national curriculum (as well as, controversially, from teaching unions, but not from public funding) provides an opportunity to place philosophy on the school timetable. The Tories have championed Free Schools as part of the 'Big Society' agenda; unlike current Academies, they don't require financial sponsorship from existing educational charities.<sup>19</sup> The most prominent – for example, the West London Free School set up by Toby Young – will provide courses on philosophy for its Key Stage 3 students (11–14 olds).<sup>20</sup> For Young, this is part of offering what he calls a 'classical liberal education', of the kind he sees defined in John Henry Newman's *The Idea of a University*.<sup>21</sup> 'We want all the pupils at our school to become acquainted with the best that's been thought and written', Young continues: 'Matthew Arnold's definition of culture'.

This return to the public therefore reduplicates the ideological function attributed to the university and analysed by Readings according to the nineteenth-century paradigm of 'culture'. Whilst for Readings the rise of an interdisciplinary subject such as cultural studies signifies precisely the *absence* of a unifying culture and hence its current ideological emptiness (culture is reduced to the same level as an object of study as all others), political events in the twenty-first century have resuscitated the necessity of ideological apparatus in the globalized context of Western military and financial interests in the Middle East and fears about so-called 'home-grown' terrorism. In this way, a set of ideological values, recognized by those in

the West and to be aspired to by those elsewhere, is being resuscitated, to identify the common principles shared by those involved: democracy, enlightenment and secular rationality versus tyranny, fanaticism, and religious and political irrationality. To be clear, the point here is not to disparage democracy, enlightenment and reason per se, nor the commitment and hard work of those involved in promoting philosophy for children, but to consider how this ideological function (i.e. at moments that might otherwise appear undemocratic, unenlightened and irrational) could account for the rhetorical attractiveness of philosophy for children at this time, and to consider how we might remain equally attentive to what is problematic about them.

One attractive feature is a focus on the classical notion of ethical flourishing, based on the capacity for individuals to think, feel and act for themselves. The classical ideal permits a recuperation of ethics without recourse to an explicitly religious standpoint. This renders it *critical* in the liberal sense of refusing to



accept arguments on the basis of authority or dogma, but limits its capacity to critique other functions of authority and power. To this extent it is concordant with the ideological recuperation of the secular Enlightenment by those concerned with opposing the religious (Islamic) and political (Marxist) versions of 'fanaticism', whose irrationality is constituted by a refusal to identify with capitalist 'reasonableness' as the inevitability of the way things are.

For example, in *The War for Children's Minds* (a title so alarmist I assume the claim within that cultural theorists critical of the Enlightenment often 'write books with panicky titles' is meant as ironic),

Stephen Law carefully distinguishes between *liberal* and *authoritarian* education on the basis of whether students are permitted to 'question and think critically and independently rather than defer more-or-less uncritically to external authority'.<sup>22</sup> 'The danger of failing to raise new citizens to think critically and independently – and the perils of getting them to defer uncritically to religious Authority instead – have', Law argues, 'recently been brought home by the rise of Britain's homegrown Muslim terrorists.'<sup>23</sup> It might be interesting to reflect on whether it is the case that Muslim terrorists are simply deferring to religious authority or actually engaging in critical reinterpretation; what is noteworthy is how the criticality of this liberalism can be directed with ease at the dogma of holy books, but possesses an intransigence when it comes to other forms of domination and power.

Another feature is the restoration of a humanism rooted in the intrinsic and non-instrumental values of certain human activities, often in avowed opposition to the perceived relativism (and anti-humanism) of certain strands of postmodernism. Nussbaum speaks of liberal education as an education for the 'soul', neither insisting on nor rejecting the religious connotations of the word but retaining the uniqueness and individuality connoted by it.<sup>24</sup> This appeal to the soul (as a kind of non-corruptible residue of humanity) helps justify the civic demands made of the individual, whilst remaining silent – beyond the claims of education – about what the individual might demand of society.

To give another example from Law, he claims that a 'good moral education, on this liberal view, involves making sure new citizens have the skills they need to discharge that responsibility properly'.<sup>25</sup> Much of this resonates with a 'Big Society' vision of active citizenship and civic responsibility, often devoid of any consideration of the economic basis on which such citizenship might be founded. Thus Philip Blond, director of right-wing think-tank ResPublica and advocate of the Red Toryism that has been influential in this regard, spoke at the LSE roundtable on the absence of tradition, community and truth from contemporary society, and how philosophy for children might encourage a return to these shared ideas (to 'culture' in Readings's sense).

Seldon, author of the 2010 education manifesto for the Thatcherite think-tank the Centre for Policy Studies (which calls for teaching philosophy to children from primary school upwards) and chair of the session on policy at which Blond spoke, similarly defends the 'Big Society' as the 'society of the future ... built up on personal responsibility rather than on the

abnegation of it'.<sup>26</sup> David Cameron, in a recent speech at the Free School Norwich, claimed that the coalition government's 'revolution in education' aims to 'create an education system based on real excellence', one necessary 'to produce a new generation of good citizens' with 'the character to live a good life, to be good citizens' (thus managing to conflate together the distinct principles Readings identifies as 'Excellence' and 'Culture').<sup>27</sup> The gimmick that Cameron throws to the press to illustrate such an education? Cutting benefits for the parents of persistent truants. What has become apparent in the year and a half that the coalition government has been in office is that education has been targeted as the key ideological battleground on which to pursue their 'Big Society' agenda.

### **Towards a radical pedagogy**

Not all of those involved in these events could be characterized by such an intellectual framework, and the LSE roundtable featured interesting – albeit heavily condensed given the time constraint – presentations by Katerina Deligiorgi on Kant and Rousseau, and Vivienne Orchard on Derrida, and useful contextualizing comments by chair Simon Glendinning. But, in general, without recourse to a more radical materialist understanding of political power, the historical and philosophical limitations of Socratic pedagogy and 'classical' liberalism render it more difficult to conceptualize our present socio-economic order, resulting in the desire to promote individual political equality whilst remaining inattentive to the economic inequalities that contribute to this situation.<sup>28</sup>

For the same reasons, it lacks any conception of the ideological function of education in relation to the reproduction of the existing social order. This is a key issue the philosophy for children movement needs to consider: the travesty of a situation in which the achievement of democratic classrooms based on critical reasoning and education for freedom, humanity, and equality would stand in contrast to the undemocratic and frequently irrational, inhumane, unequal and unfree working world into which the young adult steps.

At a time of acute crisis in higher education, attempts to popularize and democratize philosophy should – with critical reservations – be encouraged and supported, in particular the movement to campaign for a space within the curriculum for collaborative and non-standardized discussion and argument for children of all ages and backgrounds. As I have suggested, the form in which such thinking takes place when contrasted to academic philosophy demands its own justification that often requires those involved to

defend a more radical understanding of philosophizing, one that contains an implicit critique of much that exemplifies philosophy in university departments, academic monographs and conferences.

It would be surprising if there were not some degree of rivalry between the two educational charities, The Philosophy Shop and SAPERE, not least because they are competitors in the educational market, providing training for practitioners and promoting the services of their affiliates to schools. In their presentations, Worley seemed as keen to point out how philosophy for children satisfies the conditions of academic philosophy (excluding its canon, which substitutes stories for textbooks) as Bramall and Lacewing were to distance and defend philosophizing from academic philosophy. This in part reflects the differing priorities of the two charities. For SAPERE, which focuses on training teachers to philosophize, it is predominantly Lipman's own work on education, which tends to pick up on philosophical ideas merely as advocating his own claims, that provides the theoretical backdrop for their practical suggestions. Because its founders have studied philosophy at university and a degree in philosophy is a requirement for training with them, those associated with The Philosophy Shop tend in contrast to draw more heavily on established philosophical thinkers. This difference also informs a differing emphasis on *reasonableness* (Lipman advocates 'multi-dimensional' thinking that values *critical*, *creative* and *caring* thinking) and *reasoning* (modelled on different philosophical conceptions of rationality, but predominantly associated with logical and critical thinking).

Perhaps it also explains how, in practice, the kind of philosophizing described by SAPERE practitioner Bramall seems less constrained by canonical problems and more comfortable in confronting and addressing the social and political problems raised by children. Consequently, the radicality of what SAPERE teachers such as Bramall *do* could, if desired, be given theoretical depths beyond the work of Lipman and those he references; whilst I wonder if what some of The Philosophy Shop teachers *think* might be expanded beyond the framework of 'classical' liberalism by reflecting on their own practice. The invitation extended to Orchard to speak about Derrida at the LSE event suggests the possibilities of opening up the movement to more radical pedagogical ideas; starting points could, for example, be Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* or Jacques Rancière's *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* (two books fundamentally opposed to each other theoretically, although united in their attentiveness to issues of pedagogical oppression); another might be a meta-

physical and historical deepening of the pragmatism evoked in Lipman's use of Dewey and C.S. Peirce, beyond the confines of a specifically liberal kind of conservatism.

### **Personality: how to win friends and ingratiate people**

By way of conclusion, it is necessary to confront one of the central preoccupations of the philosophy for children movement: *education for democratic citizenship*. It is here that many of the justifications of the value of philosophizing in primary and secondary schooling reiterate those invoked by defenders of philosophy and the humanities in higher education. The problem of such a defence is that it not only utilizes an outmoded rhetoric either ignorable or assimilable by those in power (depending on its usefulness to them), but may provide the resources for further attacks on other aspects of education. Nonetheless, unless we wish to embrace a pessimistic despair with regard to the forces that threaten to dismantle the humanities, it is necessary to provide some kind of positive defence of the research and teaching being done by philosophers and others in the humanities.

The concluding chapters of Readings's book insist that professional philosophers must recognize the contemporary university as a ruined structure, but nonetheless must learn to dwell within these ruins. This, for the time being at least, is the institutional and economic situation out of which our thinking emerges. Of significance here is Readings's insistence that we must understand this situation 'without recourse either to nostalgia for national culture or to the discourse of consumerism'.<sup>29</sup> It is the pedagogical goal of autonomy that seems to unite both these dead ends, understood as the revelation of an inherent autonomy and the production of sovereign subjects, good for democratic citizenship. In the absence of a more robust understanding of what citizenship might practically involve (are protests and occupations by high school and university students to be counted, or excluded as irrational, immature, and non-dialogic?), there is the threat it becomes identified with consumption (George Bush famously exhorted patriotic Americans after 9/11 to do their duty and keep on spending; Aaron Porter, the much-derided ex-president of the National Union of Students (NUS), demanded a 'consumer revolution' in higher education).

The formation of 'personality' that is evoked in the conclusion to Lipman's *Thinking in Education* encapsulates this pedagogical goal. Guided by regulative ideas of democracy and reasonableness, Lipman

insists the goal of education should be the practice of good judgement, as an indispensable component of freedom and the expression of ‘personhood’. If ‘there is anywhere that *the style that is the person* gets to be expressed, it is in that person’s judgements’, Lipman claims. Each ‘new judgement is projected upon and added to a composite image formed of all previous judicative projections’: ‘We are *cumulative* beings’.<sup>30</sup> It is in this spirit that Seldon has recently lined up to defend Toby Young’s insistence on the importance of the education of *character*, understood as determination and resilience apparently best instilled through competitive sports and cadet training.<sup>31</sup>

Simone Weil’s mystical rebuttal of this position, cited by Lipman (‘If a child is doing a sum and does it wrong, the mistake bears the stamp of his personality. If he does the sum exactly right, his personality does not enter into it at all... Our personality is the part of us that belongs to error and sin’),<sup>32</sup> is attractive in part because it appears so startlingly counter-intuitive against this background talk of moral education, character formation, autonomy, responsibility and good citizenship. Against this rubric of cumulative progress (children as deficient adults), Readings develops what he calls the pedagogical scene of teaching, and, whilst his appeal to Lyotard and Levinas is philosophically problematic, his isolation of this ideological nexus of autonomy offers a starting point for an attempt to think – for pragmatic reasons – beyond the ideological limitations of prevailing pedagogical theory.

The assumption of equality that motivates Rancière’s *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* tackles a distinct but comparable ideological problem from the perspective of the mastery of knowledge. For Rancière, equality must be the *starting point* of pedagogy and not its outcome. In the context of questioning a recuperation of moral and civic education, might we start with a similar assumption of equality regarding the sufficiency of the uneducated child? Readings goes some way towards this thought-experiment, in a sense radicalizing Lipman’s Peircean ‘community of inquiry’ by emphasis on pedagogical and communicative obligation and dependency, the goal of which is *not* to be liberated from such bonds through consensus or mastery.

As I’ve intimated earlier and will develop in more detail elsewhere, Benjamin’s philosophizing is informed throughout by a similar critical pedagogical agenda, one that might provide an alternative, positive philosophy of education.<sup>33</sup> Adorno claims that Benjamin developed a ‘philosophy directed against philosophy’ that is best described in terms of the categories it eschews, categories which ‘comprise the essential ideology of society’:

‘A conception of them emerges if one examines his idiosyncratic distaste for words like “personality”’.<sup>34</sup> As Benjamin wrote in 1929, bourgeois education theory is directed at harmonizing a hypostatized psychological concept of childhood and an absolute political concept of adulthood and citizenship.<sup>35</sup> In rejecting the poles of this schema as undialectical, Benjamin demands a radical refunctioning of the apparatus of bourgeois pedagogy.

A starting point for an alternative philosophy of education could be the claim, in *One-Way Street*, that the purpose of education is not the ‘mastery of children’ but ‘the indispensable ordering of the relationship between generations and therefore mastery (if we are to use this term) of that relationship’.<sup>36</sup> One of the most fascinating consequences of this demand – and one that brings us back to the importance of the philosophy for children movement for philosophy and radical philosophy alike – is a rethinking of the traditional academic relationship between teaching and research:

[S]ubjects that have long been investigated and appropriated by scholars need to be emancipated from the forms in which such scholarly acquisition took place, if they are still to have any value and any defined character today. ... In these areas, in short, we should not look to research to lead a revival in teaching; instead it is more important to strive with a certain intransigence for an – albeit very indirect – improvement in research to emerge from the teaching. ... in principle teaching is capable of adapting to new strata of students in such a way that a rearrangement of the subject matter would give rise to entirely new forms of knowledge.<sup>37</sup>

For a practical substantiation of such a task, we might look to Mike Neary and the University of Lincoln’s ‘Student as Producer’ project.<sup>38</sup>

Under such conditions, we are compelled to think how teaching and research within subjects such as philosophy under threat in higher education might be revitalized through a closer engagement with the work that goes on in schools, how issues such as the scrapping of the EMA and changes to pensions require points of contact and solidarity between the different sectors of education, and how both the *form* and *content* of education – as both Plato and the early issues of *Radical Philosophy* so readily recognized – are battlegrounds at the intersection of politics, philosophy and economics.

## Notes

1. The Philosophy Shop’s recent ‘whitepaper’, *Plato Not Playdoh: Philosophy In Our Classrooms – The Time is Right*, cites the recommendations of the 2009



- Cambridge Primary Review concerning the promotion of thinking skills, making Citizenship and Ethics mandatory, and the adoption of empowerment, autonomy and dialogue as key aims for primary education; see [www.thephilosophyshop.co.uk/asset/169/Whitepaper\\_final.pdf](http://www.thephilosophyshop.co.uk/asset/169/Whitepaper_final.pdf).
2. See Peter Osborne, *Philosophy and Cultural Theory*, Routledge, London and New York, 2000; and *Reclamations* 3, [http://reclamationsjournal.org/issue03\\_peter\\_osborne.htm](http://reclamationsjournal.org/issue03_peter_osborne.htm).
  3. The dossiers on transdisciplinarity are part of the Centre for Research in Modern European Philosophy's HEFC-funded project on Transdisciplinarity in the Humanities.
  4. The danger, of course, is that these demands may be co-opted into the rhetoric of the student as consumer. Indeed, the *reality* of the student as a consumer will become the most effective threat to neutralize campus dissent this year (especially in the context of the extreme punitive measures currently being meted out to any associated with civil unrest): being expelled from a degree has new consequences in the last year of relatively low-cost education.
  5. Theodor W. Adorno, 'A Portrait of Walter Benjamin', in *Prisms*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1983, p. 235; Howard Caygill, *Walter Benjamin: The Colour of Experience*, Routledge, London and New York, 1998, p. 119.
  6. Caygill, *Walter Benjamin: The Colour of Experience*, p. 23.
  7. Matthew Lipman, *Thinking in Education*, 2nd edn, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003, pp. 21, 12–13.
  8. *Ibid.*, p. 20.
  9. *Ibid.*, p. 55.
  10. *Ibid.*, p. 67.
  11. Peter Worley, *The If Machine: Philosophical Enquiry in the Classroom*, Continuum, London and New York, 2011, p. 4.
  12. [www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/philosophy/people/faculty/hobbs/publicfellow/](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/philosophy/people/faculty/hobbs/publicfellow/).
  13. Tom Sorell (BPA Executive Committee and Schools Officer), 'Schools Briefing Paper', August 2011; see also 'Philosophy in Schools', BPA Newsletter, November 2011, [www.bpa.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/BPA-Newsletter-2011.pdf](http://www.bpa.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/BPA-Newsletter-2011.pdf).
  14. [www.thephilosophyshop.co.uk/about-us/who-we-are/senior-leadership-team](http://www.thephilosophyshop.co.uk/about-us/who-we-are/senior-leadership-team).
  15. Bill Readings, *The University in Ruins*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA and London, 1996; Lipman, *Thinking in Education*, p. 3.
  16. Readings (who died in an air traffic accident before the book was completed) supposed that the 'posthistorical' university is non-ideological in part because his narrative is ambivalently tied to the *succession* (rather than critique) of an Althusserian concept of ideology (one criticized by Rancière in *RP* 7), and in part because he was not in a position to grasp how, *historically*, 'post-history' (as the postmodern version of the 'End of History') now appears as the brief interregnum between the ideologies of the Cold War and the War on Terror. The contradictions of globalized capitalism necessitate their own ideological apparatus, which takes form as the 'enlightened' West's war on fanaticism.
  17. See Martha C. Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA and London, 1997; and *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*, Princeton University Press, Princeton NJ and Oxford, 2010. The profiles of The Philosophy Shop's senior leadership team, for example, note several members pursuing postgraduate research on Plato, and others citing a background and continuing interest in Ancient Greek philosophy. The punning title of Lipman's first children's novel, *Harry Stottlemeir*, encapsulates this contemporizing of the classical tradition. Like Nussbaum, both organizations place a premium on Socratic irony as a non-authoritarian pedagogical method, and both tend to conceive 'dialectic' in a Socratic–Platonic sense of a collaborative dialogic movement towards consensus and truth (a blog post by thephilosophyshop, entitled 'The Classroom in One Voice', opposes the Sophistic *eristic* and Socratic *dialectic* as combative versus collaborative). I would suggest that the key principles underlying their shared conception and justification of philosophizing are those of ethical flourishing and democratic citizenship, both founded on the capacity for autonomous reasoning that is critical in the sense of a non-reliance on any arguments from authority or dogma.
  18. Nussbaum, *Not for Profit*, pp. 73–7.
  19. ARK, for example, runs eight Academies in the UK and was set up to channel philanthropic investment by a pair of hedge-fund financiers.
  20. [www.westlondonfreeschool.co.uk/overview/curriculum.html](http://www.westlondonfreeschool.co.uk/overview/curriculum.html).
  21. [www.catholicherald.co.uk/commentandblogs/2011/09/07/newman-would-have-loved-our-new-free-school/](http://www.catholicherald.co.uk/commentandblogs/2011/09/07/newman-would-have-loved-our-new-free-school/).
  22. Stephen Law, *The War for Children's Minds*, Routledge, London and New York, 2006, p. 14. Law is the author of a series of philosophy books for children.
  23. *Ibid.*, p. 49.
  24. See Nussbaum, *Not for Profit*, p. 6.
  25. Law, *The War for Children's Minds*, p. 2.
  26. Anthony Seldon, 'An End to Factory Schools: An Education Manifesto 2010–2020', Centre for Policy Studies, London, 2010, p. 41, [www.cps.org.uk/cps\\_catalog/an%20end%20to%20factory%20schools.pdf](http://www.cps.org.uk/cps_catalog/an%20end%20to%20factory%20schools.pdf); Anthony Seldon, 'Time to Take the Big Society Seriously', *Guardian*, 15 February 2011, [www.guardian.co.uk/comment-isfree/2011/feb/15/take-big-society-seriously](http://www.guardian.co.uk/comment-isfree/2011/feb/15/take-big-society-seriously).
  27. [www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-14849832](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-14849832).
  28. To give one example, whilst Plato's *Republic* – a central text for consideration of classical pedagogical theory – demonstrates a keen awareness of how socio-economic relations of production are intimately related to the psycho-social health of each individual, sometimes glossed over by later interpreters, the problematic hermeneutical circularity that results from this (a just individual requires a just city-state; a just city-state requires just individuals) is ultimately resolved at the level of historical *idealism*. This is demonstrated by the aporia in Plato's political theory, whereby the first decree of philosophy rulers would be to banish all adult citizens over the age of ten (Book VII). It is not the banishment itself that interests me here (nor whether Plato, who puts these words into the mouth of the character Socrates, genuinely intended it), but the way in which this act, rather than the political programme detailed in the text, constitutes the properly *utopian* moment of the *Republic*: utopian because it constitutes a historical *not-good-place* in which only through the *repression* of the material basis of both the original production (the

repressive apparatus that would perform the expulsion of the citizens) and the continued reproduction (the producer class that would care for the remaining children and work to satisfy the needs of the children and rulers) of this society is historical progress via the uncorrupted knowledge and ideas of the remaining citizens possible. Any assumption of a reliance on slave labour here deepens rather than resolves this aporia. Something akin to this historical idealism could be said to underwrite the *political* but *non-materialist* conception of education within ‘classical’ liberalism.

29. Readings, *The University in Ruins*, p. 19.
30. Lipman, *Thinking in Education*, p. 292.
31. www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/sep/02/public-schools-toby-young; see also Anthony Seldon, ‘An End to Factory Schools: An Education Manifesto 2010–2020’, pp. 7, 41.
32. Simone Weil, ‘Human Personality’, in *Selected Writings, 1934–1943*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1962, p. 14, quoted in Lipman, *Thinking in Education*, p. 292.
33. Such a claim is substantiated by Benjamin’s lifelong engagement with pedagogical issues, from his early political involvement in the Youth Movement, his research into his son’s acquisition of language (detailed in *Walter Benjamin’s Archive*) and the child’s view of colour, his notes on children’s books, toys and mimetic play, his interest in a kind of Communist pedagogy being put

into practice by Asja Lacin, and his own Brecht-inspired radio plays for children.

34. Adorno, *Prisms*, pp. 235–6.
35. Walter Benjamin, ‘A Communist Pedagogy’, in *Selected Writings*, Volume 2: 1927–1934, Belknap Press, Cambridge MA and London, 1999, p. 273.
36. Walter Benjamin, ‘One-Way Street’, in *Selected Writings*, Volume 1: 1913–1926, Belknap Press, Cambridge MA and London, 1996, p. 487. Benjamin continues: ‘And likewise technology is the mastery of not nature but of the relation between nature and man.’ This understanding of technology as a kind of collective education informs Benjamin’s materialist philosophy of history and becomes the basis for his distinction between *first* and *second* technology in his theory of mechanical reproducibility.
37. Walter Benjamin, ‘We Ought to Reexamine the Link between Teaching and Research’, in *Selected Writings*, Volume 2, pp. 419–20.
38. ‘Student as Producer restates the meaning and purpose of higher education by reconnecting the core activities of universities, i.e., research and teaching, in a way that consolidates and substantiates the values of academic life ... Student as Producer emphasises the role of the student as collaborators in the production of knowledge’ (‘Student as Producer’ website, <http://studentasproducer.lincoln.ac.uk>).

## Pedagogy in Radical Philosophy 1972–1992

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