

Toward Engaging a Broader Public

Children and Public Philosophy

Michael D. Burroughs

Desiree Valentine

In recent years, what many refer to as “public philosophy” has gained increasing attention.¹ Public philosophy takes many forms—from “applied ethics/philosophy” and “field philosophy” to “philosophy outreach” and “service learning.” In section I, we discuss, first, why public philosophy has been a topic of increased interest in professional philosophy and, second, what public philosophy is (both conceptually and in regard to some of its representative forms in practice). With this framework in hand, in section II we discuss both what counts as public philosophy and, further, who is included (and excluded) from the “public” that public philosophers seek to engage. As philosophers committed to public-facing work, we are encouraged by the advance of public philosophy. However, we also wish to draw attention to additional forms of and possibilities for public philosophy, including those that engage a broader public. To this end, in sections III and IV we discuss “philosophy with children” as an additional form of public philosophy that can expand this domain of philosophical work to be inclusive of and influenced by children, a social group that, we contend, is often dismissed or overlooked in our discipline and as a component of the ‘public’ we seek to engage.

Section I. What is Public Philosophy?

In a special issue of *Essays in Philosophy* (2014) devoted to public philosophy, Jack Russell Weinstein notes prominent attitudes toward this philosophical approach within the discipline of philosophy:

Many consider the very name ‘public philosophy’ to be an oxymoron. It is said that only philosophers can do philosophy and that the most that the general public can be are students. Furthermore, whatever a philosopher chooses to do with his or her time, public philosophy should not count as research. It might be teaching, it might even be service, but it is most definitely not scholarship, or so many pre-tenured philosophers are told.²

A related critique centers on the lack of “established standards” in public philosophy such that “there is no community agreement as to what public philosophy should look like, let alone, what criteria it ought to privilege.”³ Taken together, public philosophy has and continues to face skepticism regarding its legitimacy as a subarea of philosophy and, further, confusion regarding its scope and standards.

In response to these confusions and critiques several proposals for public philosophy have emerged. In what follows, we outline three of these proposals—the method of “field philosophy” offered and practiced by Robert Frodeman and Adam Briggie; the continuing development of “popular philosophy,” such as books, blogs, and social media that seek to engage the public with philosophical ideas; and what we refer to as “activist philosophy,” or the practice of philosophy in the service of social and political aims.

Surely, there are methods and conceptions of public philosophy that do not precisely fit into these three categories and there are significant areas of overlap between these forms of public philosophy. Our analytic separation of these categories is intended to identify three basic and, in many cases, mu-

1. For example, see Adam Hosein, “Taking Public Philosophy Seriously,” *Daily Nous*, April 17, 2017, <http://dailynous.com/2017/04/17/taking-public-philosophy-seriously-guest-post-adam-hosein/>. Hosein’s guest blog post includes illustrative examples of some contemporary public philosophy efforts. See also the recent “APA Statement on Valuing Public Philosophy,” *Blog of the APA*, May 18, 2017, <https://blog.apaonline.org/2017/05/18/apa-statement-on-valuing-public-philosophy/>, which argues on behalf of public philosophy.

2. Jack Russell Weinstein, “Public Philosophy: Introduction,” *Essays in Philosophy* 15, no. 1 (2014), 2.

3. Weinstein, “Public Philosophy,” 2.

tually supporting, orientations to public philosophy. In all of the forms public philosophy takes, a primary goal is to practice philosophy with a broader community beyond isolated and exclusive work in the discipline of philosophy. However, the ways in which public philosophy does this (or the priorities espoused by public philosophers) can be analytically distinguished by their points of emphasis. Field philosophy involves the interaction of philosophers with interdisciplinary communities and pressing concerns *outside* of traditional institutional norms and locations, while popular philosophy seeks to make philosophical ideas accessible to a broader public in a user-friendly and accessible form. In addition, activist philosophy includes philosophical work in the service of political and social aims, intended to respond to or reform features of public life.

Field Philosophy: A focus on practicing philosophy in an interdisciplinary and highly interactional manner

Popular Philosophy: A focus on creating more accessible channels for the public to engage in or be exposed to philosophy

Activist Philosophy: A focus on creating and deploying philosophical methods that brings philosophy to bear on pressing societal and political concerns

While each of these approaches to public philosophy creatively expands possibilities for philosophical practice, we argue that they maintain a well-worn tradition in the discipline: namely, public philosophy, in its current articulations, conforms to an adult-centric tradition of overlooking children as members of the public we seek to engage and as valuable participants in philosophy. As professional philosophers and practitioners of philosophy with children, we aim to reevaluate the conception of the public that public philosophy serves and, further, consider the benefits of this reevaluation, including possibilities for transforming philosophy into a more inclusive discipline and practice.

a. Field Philosophy

Writing in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Adam Briggie and Robert Frodeman comment on a crisis facing the discipline of philosophy, namely, philosophy's declining relevance in education and for the broader public. The evidence for this decline is manifold, ranging from "declining budgets, soaring debts, antipathy to tax increases, and new technologies such as distance education" to a "politically and economically unsustainable" model of scholarship resulting in lower enrollment in philosophy courses and a general lack of public interest.⁴ In the face of this crisis, Briggie and Frodeman argue, we must "reclaim the public role of philosophy."⁵ Elsewhere, Briggie and Frodeman suggest that we do this, in part, by practicing "field philosophy," a "context driven, problem focused, and inter- and transdisciplinary" approach that leads philosophers to work with a variety of audiences and stakeholders.⁶ In essence, they are calling for an engaged approach to philosophy, one that is responsive to community needs and pressing cultural conversations. This engaged approach also avoids two central problems plaguing the discipline: the *institutionalization* and *narrow specialization* of philosophy, which, taken together, continue to support the production of philosophical work that is both isolated within the university (to a subset of members of a given philosophy department) and from the broader public (such that the only philosophical work that "counts" are articles and presentations that speak to fellow professional philosophers).⁷

As examples of field philosophy, Briggie and Frodeman cite their own engagement with the US Geological Survey on problems relating to acid mine drainage and fracking, as well as their work with the European Commis-

4. Adam Briggie and Robert Frodeman, "A New Philosophy for the 21st Century," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, December 11, 2011, <https://www.chronicle.com/article/A-New-Philosophy-for-the-21st/130025>.

5. Briggie and Frodeman, "New Philosophy."

6. Adam Briggie and Robert Frodeman. "The Institution of Philosophy: Escaping Disciplinary Capture," *Metaphilosophy* 47, no. 1 (2016), 35.

7. For additional discussion on the need to move beyond strict disciplinary boundaries and expand avenues of valued and institutionally supported philosophical work see Briggie and Frodeman, "Institution of Philosophy"; Frodeman and Briggie, *Socrates Tenured: The Institutions of 21st-Century Philosophy* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016); Christopher Meyers, "Public Philosophy and Tenure/Promotion: Rethinking 'Teaching, Scholarship, and Service,'" *Essays in Philosophy* 15, no. 1 (2014): 58-76; and Linda Martin Alcoff, "Does the Public Intellectual Have Intellectual Integrity?" *Metaphilosophy* 33, no. 5 (2002): 522-34.

sion to devise new standards for peer review of research grants.⁸ Relatedly, as co-founder Christopher Long explains, the work of the *Public Philosophy Journal* aims to facilitate “collaborative activity in which philosophers engage dialogically with activists, professionals, scientists, policymakers, and affected parties whose work and lives are bound up with issues of public concern.”⁹ Like Briggie and Frodeman, Long characterizes public philosophy as a movement to develop collaborations with diverse experts, stakeholders, and community members on a wide range of issues in order to take action and effect change. In diverse ways, the examples cited by Briggie, Frodeman, and Long, illustrate a field philosophy that engages with issues that impact one’s community and culminates in socially impactful products.

A corresponding goal for field philosophy is reform of the current discipline of philosophy and philosophical norms. First, we need to reconsider dominant norms as to what counts as *real* philosophy and revise forms of disciplinary and specialization that confine philosophical practice to a select subset of academics. Second, and related to the first, we need to support new types of philosophers, those who possess the skills to do interdisciplinary and interactional work with persons beyond the discipline of philosophy. Third, we need to devote more attention to ways in which philosophy can remain relevant and respond to broader social concerns, whether through activism or collaborative work with policy makers, community members, and other stakeholders outside of the discipline.

b. Popular Philosophy

In “The Value of Public Philosophy to Philosophers,” Massimo Pigliucci and Leonard Finkelman define public philosophy as “a conscious attempt on the part of (some) professional (usually, but not only, academic) philosophers to engage the public at large.”¹⁰ While arguing that public philosophy is a worthwhile pursuit in its own right, Pigliucci and Leonard point to a particular import of public philosophy: its potential to create more accessible channels for the public to engage in or be exposed to philosophy. In doing so, they articulate the focus of what we refer to as popular philosophy.

Pigliucci and Finkelman primarily focus on the manner in which philosophy is communicated to the greater public beyond the academy. They highlight the creation of philosophy texts written for the general public and the use of social media. They note several publishing houses and book series that “[exploit] elements of popular culture to introduce new audiences to philosophizing”¹¹ as well as online mediums like blogs and videos and social networks such as Facebook and Twitter that allow for quick dispersal of philosophical ideas and resources.¹²

The upshot of these efforts has been to allow broader access to philosophy for non-professional philosophers and the creation of forums for additional, valuable philosophical discourse. The emphasis in this form of public philosophy, as we define it, is not on advancing *philosophical analysis* as practiced within the academy, but rather, on a *public practice* aimed at impacting broader understanding and uptake of philosophy and its benefits. Some differences between these points of emphasis lie in the intended audience and the guiding aims of the work. For one, whereas the professional philosopher (influenced by disciplinary norms, years of training, and pressures relating to assessment, tenure, and/or promotion requirements) writes for her peers and incorporates norms of discourse within the academy, the philosopher writing for a public audience aims precisely to move beyond norms of discourse that are, by and large, alienating to the broader public. The result is often an intentional effort to write in an accessible manner that illustrates, in practice, the insights and import of philosophical thinking across a range of

8. See Briggie and Frodeman, “New Philosophy.”

9. Christopher Long, “What is Public Philosophy?” *Blogging a Philosophical Life*, February 20, 2013, http://cplong.org/2013/02/what_is_public_philosophy.

10. Massimo Pigliucci and Leonard Finkelman, “The Value of Public Philosophy to Philosophers,” *Essays in Philosophy* 15, no. 1 (2014), 87.

11. Pigliucci and Finkelman, “Value of Public Philosophy,” 91.

12. Examples of what Pigliucci and Finkelman have in mind include book series such as Open Court’s “Popular Culture and Philosophy” Series and magazines such as *Philosophy Now* and *New Philosopher*. Popular philosophy also includes blogs (such as [Wandering Aloud: Philosophy with Young People](#)) and podcasts (such as [Hi-Phi Nation](#) and [Philosophy Bakes Bread](#)), and philosophy videos (such as [Wireless Philosophy](#)), among other mediums.

topics (e.g., the ways in which philosophical questioning can help us to better understand the complexity of a political event or socio-ethical dilemma). Second, the goal of much of this work, in its most basic form, is simply to raise awareness of philosophy in those who have never had the opportunity to study or read it, or, what is more, who don't know at all what philosophy is. While philosophy podcasts and popular culture book series generally do not resolve or advance longstanding debates within the discipline of philosophy (nor is it their aim to do so), they do a great deal to engage the interests of the general public which, in turn, raises awareness of the importance of philosophy more generally.

c. Activist Philosophy

A third area of public philosophy is activist philosophy. In this general grouping, we include forms of publicly relevant philosophizing aimed at addressing and catalyzing social and political reforms. Activist philosophy envisions a close connection between theory and practice and works to impact broader social change. Subfields of the discipline such as feminist philosophy, queer theory, and philosophy of race and racism include examples of activist philosophizing.

Historically, as just one example, we can place the work of Jane Addams (1910/1990) in this category. Addams worked in and through a philosophical vein in order to address pressing social problems. Addams was pioneering in respect to the combination of philosophical ideas and activism. Her work on the creation of Hull House and her social and political philosophy intertwined to form a publicly engaged, philosophically rigorous program for improving the lives of marginalized members of society.

Consider also the work of W. E. B. Du Bois (1903/1994) who offered a grounded philosophical approach to issues of race and racism at the dawn of the twentieth century. His work aimed for social reform and a sense of political cohesion and uplift for the African American community. Additionally, we can consider the work of Kwame Ture and Charles Hamilton in *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation* (1967) in the vein of activist philosophy given their explicit attention to developing an infrastructure for understanding institutionalized racism and a method for challenging it.

Activist philosophy is not just a historical phenomenon, but also an increasingly relevant contemporary philosophical practice. For examples, we can turn to Lisa Guenther's critiques of solitary confinement of prison inmates,¹³ John Corvino's response to arguments in the public domain on same-sex marriage,¹⁴ and Myisha Cherry's work on anger and oppression.¹⁵ These examples (which are by no means exhaustive) take seriously the use of philosophical thinking in addressing social, political, and ethical problems. They unite activism with theory and in this way can be conceptualized as a type of public philosophy.

While not all work within subfields of philosophy such as feminist philosophy, critical philosophies of race, and queer theory would be classified as activist philosophy, what generally distinguishes this type of work as activist philosophy is its normative movement toward altering oppressive social structures and practices (e.g., racism, prejudice toward LGBTQIA populations, or the prison-industrial complex) as well as attention to marginalized populations. Activist philosophy is distinguished in the way it engages in knowledge-production, taking seriously as interlocutors those outside the discipline—particularly those engaged in direct political action and/or those who live within conditions of structural oppression.

13. See Lisa Guenther, *Solitary Confinement: Social Death and Its Afterlives* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).

14. See John Corvino, *What's Wrong with Homosexuality?* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013).

15. See Myisha Cherry, "Anger is Not a Bad Word," filmed May 2015 in Chicago, IL, TEDx video, 17:45, <https://youtu.be/uysTk2E1otw>.

Section II. Whose Public Philosophy?

Our discussion of field philosophy, popular philosophy, and activist philosophy does not exhaust possibilities for public philosophy. There are other histories and forms of public philosophy—such as service learning, applied ethics/philosophy, and public outreach programs. Each of these forms of public philosophy has unique aims, ranging from service to one’s community and applying philosophical work to ethical, social, and cultural concerns to revealing the structure, function, and impacts of social realities such as gender, race, and prejudice. However, each of these forms of public philosophy incorporates aspects of what we are referring to as central methods and goals of public philosophy as described above.

Each of these forms of public philosophy presents unique benefits and contributes useful strategies for reforming the profession and discipline of philosophy. Philosophy is in need of demonstrating greater public relevance through more effective communication and engagement with stakeholders, community members, and experts on pressing issues of social and political concern. We support the efforts of those working to initiate and carry out these reforms whether in terms of a direct impact in one’s community, the communication and production of better scholarship and knowledge, or in terms of performing interdisciplinary and interactional work with a broad range of professionals, stakeholders, and community members.

But, in addition to discussing the what and why of public philosophy, we want to address who composes the public referenced in public philosophy and, in turn, who is in a position to benefit from this movement. We regard these as important, if often overlooked, considerations, as the public we intend to engage—along with their interests, needs, capabilities, and social location—will influence and shape a responsive, public philosophical practice. With this in mind, it is striking to us that many of the prominent manifestations of public philosophy tend to assume a thoroughly adult public. That is, if we consider discussions of public philosophy as increasing the quality of published scholarship, developing interdisciplinary research collaborations, or reshaping the discipline of professional philosophy itself it seems that—although not explicitly mentioned—adults are the primary audience and beneficiaries of this work. Seen in this light, public philosophy is “by adults and for adults.”

For example, none of the publicly-minded philosophers mentioned above (aside from Jane Addams) substantively discusses children or focuses on child-centered initiatives directly, and the examples of public philosophy they provide assume an adult audience. As a primary antidote to the continuing isolation of philosophy as an academic discipline, Briggie and Frode-man¹⁶ focus on best practices for applied philosophers to deploy in order to engage more effectively with (adult) policy and STEM professionals. Pigliucci and Finkelman¹⁷ argue for the value of engaging in philosophical practice with the public through mediums (philosophy blogs and book chapters, for example) that seem to be best suited for adult populations. Further, in their consideration of these and other examples, these authors often overlook the decades of public-facing work already done by teachers, graduate, and undergraduate students, and professional philosophers dedicated to introducing philosophy in K-12 schools. This oversight would be less problematic if these efforts were not so extensive, well established,¹⁸ and part of an overall pattern in philosophy of overlooking issues relating to childhood.

Our aim here is not to castigate fellow public philosophers. We support the forms of public philosophy under consideration in this article and applaud those philosophers willing to do extensive work to practice and create av-

16. Briggie and Frode-man, “Institution of Philosophy.”

17. Pigliucci and Finkelman, “Value of Public Philosophy.”

18. For example, public philosophy initiatives in K-12 schools have been longstanding at the [Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children](#) (established in 1974) and have increased with the growing influence of the [Philosophy Learning and Teaching Organization](#) (established in 2009), a national non-profit organization devoted to supporting the introduction of philosophy in K-12 education. Frode-man and Briggie briefly acknowledge the Philosophy Learning and Teaching Organization in *Socrates Tenured*, 127.

enes for public-facing philosophy. Rather, we point to these instances of overlooking children (and the lack of discussion of already existing child-focused public philosophy initiatives) to illustrate an extant, problematic pattern in philosophical treatment of children more generally.

To see this pattern, consider prominent examples of the public in Western philosophy. As used in central works of political philosophy, it has been common for children to be excluded from the public domain. For example, in Aristotle's *Politics* children are "incomplete" citizens;¹⁹ they possess the potential for full citizenship but, until reaching adulthood, are not members of the public realm. We find a similar distinction in Kant's *Doctrine of Right* where children are *passive* (not *active*) citizens, and, thus, are excluded from general consideration in public matters.²⁰ Or we can turn to Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* in which, as with liberal philosophers before him, children seem not to exist in the public realm.²¹ In the *Theory*, children are not parties to the Original Position. Although principles of justice that are "universal in application" result from this position, the universe under consideration is ostensibly limited to ideally rational and moral adults.²² Children are subject to these principles of justice insofar as they have the potential to become adults and insofar as they are the wards of these full agents. This well-established exclusion of children from the public is not limited to philosophy. We find a similar elision of the views and preferences of this population in many polls of public preference and beliefs (e.g., 50% of the American public prefers or believes *x* to *y*), where it is assumed that *the public* just is an *adult* public.

But in addition to being ignored, or overlooked—such that the boundaries of the public in public philosophy are incompletely drawn, excluding a substantial segment of the human population—there is a more direct manner in which children can trouble public boundaries. Consider Hannah Arendt's "The Crisis in Education" (1954/1977) in which she characterizes children as new to the world. At birth, Arendt argues, children do not carry with them the traditions of the public realm. Children's existence is always unprecedented; they have new ideas, interests, and desires that possess the potential to radically change the political realm. For this reason, Arendt notes that educational and political movements often attempt to subvert the child's newness, making the new resemble the old (adult) traditions (e.g. think of Plato's structured regime to control child development in the *Republic* and *Laws*, or, for that matter, the use of children in the Hitler Youth and Khmer Rouge, or the contemporary use of child soldiers in territorial and political conflicts). Here, childhood represents the trouble of novelty and change and, in turn, we see responses aimed at controlling what is new for the sake of maintaining adult traditions and/or political aims.

One way in which philosophers (whether publicly engaged or not) avoid the trouble inherent in childhood is by largely ignoring its existence and relevance, instead discussing children and their interests in terms of the considerations and obligations they will merit once they are adults. Doing so effectively avoids the difficulty of considering the concerns and interests (and the corresponding need to respond to these concerns and interests) as experienced by children right now. For example, as the legal theorist Annette Appell notes, the presence of children raises troubling questions for a liberal democracy as they are constituted by law and society as "categorically unequal" in relation to the "able-bodied, able-minded adult male" (the measure of equality in liberal political theory).²³ The adult/child distinction both places children, categorically, as vulnerable beings in need of care and, by opposition, solidifies the social position of the adult as powerful, autonomous, and independent. In addition to children's categorical inequality in liberal society, children's agency (whether political, moral, or epistemic) is understood comparatively in relation to adults'. To acknowledge the many ways in which children, from a young age, do demonstrate robust forms of agency trou-

19. Aristotle, *Politics*, translated by C. D. C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1998), 1275a15-21; 1278a3-5.

20. Immanuel Kant, *The Doctrine of Right* in *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant: Practical Philosophy*, edited by Mary J. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996), Part I, 6: 314.

21. See John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2009).

22. Rawls, *Theory of Justice*, 132.

23. Annette Appell, "The Child Question," *Michigan State Law Review* (2014), 1139-40.

bles the adult/child distinction and, what is more, children's subordinate role in our society. Thus, we are continually presented—both in philosophy and popular culture—with conceptions of the child as lacking agency, animalistic, or irrational, which, in turn, avoids the trouble presented by earnest consideration of the depth of and possibilities for child agency.

Taken together, this brief discussion points to (1) ways in which children are simply excluded from philosophical discussions of the public and (2) ways in which children are not taken seriously as agents in a way that would call into question norms of child subordination and exclusion from domains of social life and action. If philosophy and the public are both shaped at their core by conceptions of adult capacities, expectations, and interests, then children will not be included, or will, at best, be an afterthought or add-on to these adult realities.

So, we now ask: what would it mean to engage more deeply with the trouble that children raise? Because the public of public philosophy makes explicit aims of inclusion and engaging an increasingly broader public, it is imperative that we interrogate the norms of inclusion as well. What would it mean to rethink public philosophy such that children are part of the public under consideration and such that public philosophy is responsive to and informed by this population? As we see it, public philosophy can play an important role in exploring these questions and engaging and learning with marginalized populations in philosophy, including, but not limited to, children. The work of public philosophy can be importantly normative in this sense, including attention to marginalized populations (children and others) and the consideration of alternative paths for knowledge production and philosophical practice.

Section III. Children and Public Philosophy

To understand what a public philosophy inclusive of children would look like we turn to a philosophical tradition known as philosophy with children.²⁴ This work takes many forms but, at its core, is a philosophical and pedagogical practice aimed at exploring philosophy with children and adolescents, primarily in K-12 classrooms. In the context of public philosophy, philosophy with children is important to consider for several reasons. First, philosophy with children is a well-established tradition that engages the broader public in philosophy, focusing on introducing and practicing philosophy with non-traditional populations (namely, children and adolescents). As such, even though it is underrepresented in current discussions of public philosophy, it advances many of the aims currently motivating public philosophers. Second, philosophy with children is a form of public philosophy that, by working with children—across gender, race, class, age, and sexual orientation classifications—is inclusive of diverse populations that greatly expand our conception of the public in public philosophy.

Philosophy with children has origins in the work of philosophers such as Matthew Lipman, Ann Margaret Sharp, and Frederick S. Oscanyan,²⁵ as well as Gareth Matthews²⁶ and continues to develop today through the work of contemporary philosophers such as Jana Mohr Lone²⁷ and Karin Murris,²⁸ among others. From its origins, philosophy with children has engaged with issues of public concern, including education reform and advocating for young students to receive an education that includes important philosophical skill sets and critical engagement with social concerns. A key aspect of understanding philosophy with children hinges on a distinction mentioned above between *philosophical analysis* and philosophy as a *public practice*. In the former approach to philosophy (analysis), teacher and students are primarily concerned with studying particular philosophers, problems, and traditional

24. This tradition is also sometimes referred to as “philosophy for children” or “pre-college philosophy.”

25. See Matthew Lipman, Ann Margaret Sharp, and Frederick S. Oscanyan, *Philosophy in the Classroom* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1980).

26. See Gareth Matthews, *Dialogues with Children* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1984) and *The Philosophy of Childhood* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1994).

27. See Jana Mohr Lone, *The Philosophical Child*, (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2012).

28. See Karin Murris, “The Epistemic Challenge of Hearing Child’s Voice,” *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, 32, no. 3 (2013): 245-59.

arguments as developed in the philosophical canon. The emphasis here is, by and large, on understanding the history of philosophy and central arguments developed during the course of that history (e.g. Descartes's cogito and Plato's allegory). In the latter (public practice), teacher and students seek to engage directly in the exploration of philosophical questions, problems, and concepts, often without reference to specific philosophers and texts. While these approaches to philosophy can overlap, the primary focus in philosophy with children is to engage in the fundamental experience(s)—wonder, dialogue, and questioning—that catalyze philosophical questioning in the first place, including the curiosity and desire for understanding that informs basic existential, ethical, metaphysical, and epistemological questions.

How philosophy with children as a public practice—collaborating with young philosophers in the experience of philosophical questioning and exploration—gets carried out in schools varies depending on the population with which one is working (see section IV below).²⁹ In each case, however, the development of a community of philosophical inquiry is essential. Characterizing such a community, Matthew Lipman writes:

Students listen to one another with respect, build on one another's ideas, challenge one another to supply reasons for otherwise unsupported opinions, assist each other in drawing inferences from what has been said, and seek to identify one another's assumptions. A community of inquiry attempts to follow the inquiry where it leads rather than be penned in by the boundary lines of existing disciplines. A dialogue that tries to conform to logic, it moves forward indirectly like a boat tacking into the wind, but in the process its progress comes to resemble that of thinking itself.³⁰

A community of philosophical inquiry fosters open dialogue that centers on bringing children's insights and experiences to bear on philosophical concepts and questions. This is often catalyzed through the introduction of an accessible discussion prompt (e.g., a work of literature, a work of art, a game, a question, etc.) and the subsequent development of questions and discussion by the class or group, as facilitated by the teacher or facilitator. This process is intended to be student-centered; the direction and content of the dialogue is primarily determined by student participants. In turn, and when facilitated well, this provides for a vital educational experience as students are learning in a community devoted to collective examination of concerns and questions germane to their own lives and interests. The focus on these concerns and questions allows for an accessibility and inclusivity that is often lacking in this era of standardized education and mandated testing, where there is little space and time for dialogue and collaborative philosophical investigation.

Practiced in this way, philosophy with children helps us to see what a broader public philosophy could look like. We mentioned above the ways in which children can trouble the boundaries of public philosophy and the discipline more generally. Philosophy with children is, in part, a practice that embraces this trouble. That is, rather than continuing the tradition of excluding children from philosophical consideration or maintaining a conception of philosophy that is exclusively adult-centric and inaccessible to children and adolescents (such that they are then seen as lacking philosophical ability or interest), this practice approaches philosophy as a means for learning from and with this population. In the process, we also learn about new possibilities for philosophical practice. For example, philosophy with children practitioners must learn a great deal about practicing philosophy in diverse contexts, including different methodologies to be effective in these contexts. In the professional discipline, philosophical practice generally centers on teaching, participating in conferences, and developing publications. While valuable in their own right, these activities are limited in the K-12 school setting. For this reason,

29. For a detailed discussion of philosophy with children methodology and classroom practice, see Jana Mohr Lone and Michael D. Burroughs, *Philosophy in Education: Questioning and Dialogue in Schools* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016).

30. Matthew Lipman, *Thinking in Education* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003), 20-21.

philosophy with children practitioners must, with children, find new ways to conceptualize and practice philosophy. Instead of delivering a lecture on Plato's *Republic* or Aristotle's *Ethics* we present core philosophical issues through alternative child-centered mediums such as artwork, games, and children's literature. Practiced this way, children of all ages will have much to say that can inspire and inform our own philosophical thinking. This is a small example of how work with a non-traditional population (children) can lead us to discover new ways to present and practice philosophy. An area of broader significance of this work is that we as professional philosophers and students have the opportunity to interrogate philosophical norms regarding the nature of philosophy, prevailing conceptions of the philosopher, and the broader value of philosophical practice for our communities and schools.

IV. Philosophy with Children: An Example from the Field

Taken together, there is good reason for philosophers to practice, or at least to acknowledge, philosophical practice that is informed by a broader conception of the public. Public philosophy can grow and become richer by no longer assuming a thoroughly adult public. Especially with young children, public philosophers must think of creative new possibilities for introducing and motivating philosophy and, in turn, ways in which our practices can be informed and improved by this population.

Let us now turn to a brief example from our own work with children in order to make this discussion more concrete. We have engaged in philosophy with children in the form of weekly philosophy discussions with kindergarteners at an elementary school in Central Pennsylvania. When discussing this field-work with others it is not uncommon for people to express doubt, or at least surprise, regarding possibilities for philosophical interactions with young children. Part of this surprise, we think, stems from common conceptions of philosophy (as an abstract, adult-centered practice) and the philosopher (as an adult employed by an institution of higher learning). An essential aspect of the success of our work lies in moving beyond these conceptions. For example, if when interacting with our kindergarten students we deliver philosophy lectures and uncritically adopt philosophical jargon then our sessions would fail miserably. However, if we are willing to learn from our young students and think deeply about what philosophy can be when practiced beyond professional conferences and university classrooms and with students of all ages, extensive possibilities for productive philosophical work emerge.

For example, we have found productive possibilities for philosophical work with children through the use of children's literature, artwork, games, and group discussions in classroom settings. This work centers on a set of interconnected abilities, including the ability to communicate in a language readily understandable for children and the ability to facilitate a group discussion that is open to student responses, interests, and concerns. This facilitation also includes the ability to actively listen to children, using philosophical prompts (from hands-on activities to stories), encouraging language, and a willingness to adapt discussions based on the questions and interests of students.

In one activity, we aimed to illustrate and explore the problem of fairness with young children. We challenged ourselves to find a novel way to make the problem of fairness concrete and accessible for five- and six-year-old children. Ultimately, we organized the children in groups of four and presented them with a problem: having three cookies to share between four group members. We presented this as an accident on our part and asked the students to consider how we should solve the problem together. Faced with

this practical and ethical challenge, each of the groups came up with different solutions. Importantly, as practitioners, we did not provide our own solutions in advance or advocate for a “best” solution from the start. Rather, we facilitated a dialogue in each group, asking questions such as: What should we do with the cookies? How should we split the cookies? Who should get a cookie? What is a fair solution? How does everyone feel about this solution? Are there other ways we can solve the problem? In response, we witnessed a diversity of solutions offered by the groups as well as each group’s ability to come up with an accepted solution together. None of the groups separated the cookies exactly evenly; rather, students focused on communicating with one another about their interests. Some students, for example, did not want a cookie, or did not want a significant part of a cookie. Some students took the lead in the discussion, while others held back. It seemed as though, ultimately, each group began with the assumption that everyone should get some piece of cookie and, from this premise, they engaged in broader conversation on what would be fair. We can read their discussions as articulating, in part, a conception of fairness as *equity*, or providing what each student needed in a given context, rather than a notion of fairness as *equality*, or providing all students the same amount. Surely, there were some problematic aspects of the decision-making process that deserved attention (e.g. when an older, more vocal student articulated fairness as allocating one cookie for themselves and splitting the other two among three children). Still, this activity was engaging for young children and also pushed us to consider novel approaches to a classic philosophical problem (fairness and distributive justice).

While many assume that this activity would lead to disputes among the students or hurt feelings, we instead witnessed a process of reasoning and decision-making in action. This process implicitly involved questions of ethics, empathy, and emotional awareness, as well as the identification and negotiation of group members’ interests. This is but one example. Over the course of our time with students, and as practitioners of philosophy with children, we were continually challenged to ask better questions, questions that would allow for a range of student responses that could then be discussed. This empowered us as facilitators and as philosophers, and practicing this way of learning and teaching encouraged students to ask more questions, as well—of us, of themselves, and each other. Learning these skills as academic philosophers is part of what makes working with kindergarteners so valuable. From the first day, our classes are full of curiosity and active participation, with students eager to hear a story or interact with their classmates. Our learning begins as we attempt to address the philosophical questions and concerns with which the children are already wrestling (such as friendship, identity, exclusion, and fairness, among many others) and discover what philosophy can offer these children as they consider these questions, develop, and attempt to understand their world.

Conclusion

As a society, we often do not think of children (or even most adults) as philosophers. But in our work with kindergarteners it is clear that these five and six year olds have philosophical interests and abilities. Additionally, our students are capable of articulating these conceptions when engaged with child-centered questions and discussion prompts. Over our many shared years of philosophical work with children we continue to learn the significance of a relational conception of philosophical practice and capability. Children are quite capable of participating in philosophical discussion when we begin with and affirm their concerns and utilize child-centered pedagogy. The key lies not only in the bare abilities of young people, but even more importantly, in our own ability to think creatively about diverse forms of philosophical

practice that can benefit children and connect with their experiences of the world around them. More generally, we have argued in this article that public philosophy, too, can benefit by considering a broader public that includes children, among other populations. Doing philosophy with children is one example of public philosophy that brings forth novel possibilities for philosophical practice and, in turn, helps us to develop as better philosophers.

*California State University Bakersfield
Marquette University*

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Michael D. Burroughs, PhD, is director of the Kegley Institute of Ethics and assistant professor of Philosophy at California State University, Bakersfield. He also serves as founding editor of *Precollege Philosophy and Public Practice* and as president of the Philosophy Learning and Teaching Organization, a national nonprofit organization that supports the introduction of philosophy in K-12 schools. Michael's research focuses on philosophy of education, ethics, social and feminist epistemology, and philosophy with children. He is currently working on several projects related to better understanding and supporting public philosophy in higher education.

Desiree Valentine is an assistant professor of Philosophy at Marquette University. She works in critical philosophy of race, feminist philosophy, queer theory, and ethics. Her current research project explores and critiques the concept of mixed race in the United States.

Toward Engaging a Broader Public

A Public Holistic Response

Andrea Walsh

What I appreciate most about this essay is how, throughout surveying what they pull apart to be three prominent modes of public philosophical practice and sharing one of their own experiences in practicing philosophy with children, the composers strongly gesture toward the need to problematize many standards and habits that continue to shape academic philosophy and scholarship more widely. I read Burroughs and Valentine to be interested in not only clarifying what public philosophy is and, particularly, who it is for, but in how deeply these questions resonate with the still more expansive endeavor of thinking critically about the normative frameworks in which scholarship is conventionally practiced. I also read them to intimate, justifiably, that perhaps the greatest promise of public philosophy is its capacity for demonstrating that a new scholarly culture, one built by and for empathy and solidarity, is possible.

By examining how philosophy with children “advances many of the aims currently motivating public philosophers,” Burroughs and Valentine challenged me to refine my understanding that public philosophy is at its best when we have put inclusivity, imaginativeness, and openness to experience at the medians of our moral horizons, in turn making the practice well-positioned to take a guiding role in denormalizing disciplinarity and specialization, the commodifying standards structuring institutional academia today.¹ Constrained by these standards, scholarship can too often reflect a resistance to the basic human experiences that drive pursuits of truth and justice: uninhibited curiosity, yearning to explore difficult or unfamiliar questions in dialogue with others, and an abiding willingness to embrace change, above all. These standards similarly tend to discourage an understanding of scholarship, and education, as holistic practices through which the critical faculties and virtues of the entire person, rather than just a certain skill or area of knowledge, can be enriched.

Public philosophy and especially, as Burroughs and Valentine convincingly propose, philosophy with children embody this sense of scholarship and education. For, first, it seems to me, public philosophy is defined foremost by its refusal to accept being issued an absolute definition. Its ever emerging forms of practice attest to its always being an experiment, a risk, in motion, in a state of renewal. It demands a delicate receptivity to new and often unpredictable and unpredictable experiences; that we meet children and adults alike with unconditional empathy, humility, and respect; that we be sensitive to what connects us as much as to how each of our experiences, perspectives, and styles of communicating may differ; and that we be willing to let spontaneity and imaginativeness, as opposed to inflexible beliefs and expectations, steer our conversations. When we commit to opening ourselves up to others in new ways, we value potentiality over actuality, or what can be possible over what is a moment’s reality. We expose room for mutual growth.

Following Burroughs and Valentine’s lead, it is important to continue broadening our understanding of who public philosophy is done not merely “for,” but *with*. We may want to reject the idea (as I take them to do) that Public Philosophy is but only something occupational philosophers undertake “for” others who do not occupy professionalized academic spaces, as this implies imbalances of both power and gain. As a holistic model of scholarship and education, public philosophy in K-12 settings has proven of major benefit to

children, most for whom the typical school day is otherwise compartmentalized into discrete disciplines. When we place greater value in it as a practice *with* children, however, we are more inclined to recognize and reap the benefits it confers on—that children confer on—us as adults. Looking to Hannah Arendt, Burroughs and Valentine note that “childhood represents the trouble of novelty and change”; it symbolically opposes adult fixations on “controlling what is new,” particularly when “what is new” threatens the preservation of traditional social orders.² Their interest in this dynamic is largely for the sake of accentuating the need for adults to recognize children’s agency, and for philosophers to cease “ignoring [childhood’s] existence and relevance” to instead appreciate children’s philosophical interests and abilities and to welcome “the ways in which children can trouble the boundaries of public philosophy and the discipline more generally.”³

Here the work of Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin also comes to mind, specifically where it concerns connecting standardized academic practices with the wider modern world’s repression of “instinctual life.” In *Minima Moralia*, for instance, Adorno explores how rational thought and emotional impulse or desire are increasingly perceived to be at odds with each other.⁴ In *Negative Dialectics*, he laments modernity’s effacing of the inherently “playful element” in philosophy through its adopting unyielding rules of method.⁵ In “On the Mimetic Faculty,” Benjamin speaks of children’s play as an echo of receptive, human qualities that have been routed throughout the history of modern institutionalization; “the child,” he writes in allusion to what is otherwise the child’s internalization of specialization as a rule, “plays at being not only a shopkeeper or teacher but also windmill and a train.”⁶

Yet to be altogether inculcated by the norms that structure today’s institutions—standardization, alienation, reification, as they manifest in an “impoverishment of relations to others” and an antagonism toward social change—children are prone to be more organically and keenly in tune with the basic human experiences (referenced above) that inspire philosophical wonder.⁷ For that reason, philosophy with children can help to reorient occupational philosophers toward the meaning of genuine philosophical engagement as it is grounded in experiential openness, spontaneity and imaginativeness, and inclusive, collaborative thinking. In turn, children and practicing philosophy with children can “play” an important role in restructuring the value systems of academia today.

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Andrea Walsh is a PhD candidate in Philosophy at Michigan State University. Her dissertation, “In Search of Non-Identity: Adorno’s Critique of Heidegger,” examines Theodor Adorno’s career-long polemic against Martin Heidegger’s *Fundamental Ontology* as a way of more broadly proposing to issues concerning ontology, ethics, and social justice a philosophical approach that integrates the foundations of the Phenomenological and First Generation Critical Theory traditions. She is currently managing community director of the *Public Philosophy Journal*.

1. Michael Burroughs and Desiree Valentine, “Toward Engaging a Broader Public: Children and Public Philosophy,” *Public Philosophy Journal* 1, no. 1 (2018), 7.

2. *Ibid.*, 6.

3. *Ibid.*, 8.

4. Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia* (London: Verso, 2006), 122-23.

5. Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1990), 13-15.

6. Walter Benjamin, “On the Mimetic Faculty,” in *Selected Writings, 1931-1934* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1999), 720.

7. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 79.