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The Philosopher as Teacher

PHILOSOPHICAL SENSITIVITY

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Abstract: Although much has been written about the nature of philosophy and how the discipline can be defined, little attention has been paid to the ways we develop the facility to reflect philosophically or why cultivating this ability is valuable. This article develops a conception of "philosophical sensitivity," a perceptual capacity that facilitates our awareness of the philosophical dimension of experience. Based in part on Aristotle's notion of a moral perceptual capacity, philosophical sensitivity starts with most people's natural inclinations as children to reflect about life's fundamental mysteries; when this capacity is cultivated with training over time, our attentiveness to the philosophical features of ordinary life becomes almost second nature. In much the same way an aesthetically sensitive person notices certain qualities of experience not readily perceptible by others, philosophical sensitivity involves the development of a particular way of seeing the world.

Keywords: philosophical self, philosophical sensitivity, precollege philosophy, teaching philosophy.

> [T]he problem about philosophy, and about life, is how to relate large impressive illuminating general conceptions to the mundane ("messing about") details of ordinary personal private existence. (Murdoch 1992, 146)

1. Introduction

Much has been written about the nature of philosophy and how to define the discipline. There has been scant examination, however, of the capacity to appreciate philosophical questions and make philosophical judgments, how this capacity can be cultivated, and why developing it is important. Working to introduce philosophy to precollege students has illuminated for me the ways in which philosophical thinking often emerges at early ages, and has led me to begin thinking about the nature of this ability and how it can best be nurtured.

This issue is particularly important in light of growing interest in the movement to introduce philosophy into primary and secondary schools. Philosophy faculty and graduate students at a dozen or so institutions around the country are forming philosophy outreach programs, running

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precollege philosophy clubs and summer programs, facilitating philosophy classes in elementary, middle, and high schools, and organizing workshops to train K–12 teachers to teach philosophy to their students.

It is not clear, however, what one needs in order to teach philosophy and do it well. In general, at the college level teaching philosophy requires a Ph.D. or enrollment in the institution's doctoral program, and teaching philosophy in community colleges requires an M.A. in philosophy. No such certification requirements currently exist for secondary and primary school philosophy teachers, and whether any certification structure should be established for precollege philosophy teachers is an open question. A full treatment of what teachers at various levels need in order to teach philosophy competently is beyond the scope of this article. What I am interested in exploring here is what I think is a foundational facility for teaching philosophy at all levels. This is the development of a general capacity to engage in questioning and reflection about the unsettled questions underlying the human condition and the world in which we live. I call this capacity "philosophical sensitivity."[1]

Philosophical sensitivity starts with the natural inclinations most children have to reflect about the fundamental mysteries underlying experience and behavior. Many children care deeply about what Gareth Matthews called "the naïvely profound questions of philosophy" (Matthews 1992, 3). In order successfully to nurture this inclination in children, those of us engaged in this enterprise must, at a minimum, cultivate some degree of philosophical sensitivity.

In this article I first sketch the groundwork for a conception of this capacity. I then describe some of the ways that teachers and others can develop it and discuss the practical skills that teachers require to lead precollege philosophy sessions. I conclude by considering the reasons both philosophers and precollege educators should care about philosophical sensitivity and the introduction of philosophy into the lives of young people.

2. Philosophical Sensitivity: A Theoretical Conception

In general, my conception of philosophical sensitivity understands it as a kind of perceptual capacity, in the Aristotelian sense of a natural faculty that can be developed over time and with training. For Aristotle, it is the development of our facility for moral perception that eventually can lead to the intuitive recognition of the salient aspects of complex ethical problems.[2] This perceptual capacity, fostered through experience, cultivates in

[1] I have written about some of the ideas explored here in my book *The Philosophical Child* (Lone 2012a) and in my essay "Teaching Pre-College Philosophy: The Cultivation of Philosophical Sensitivity" (Lone 2012b).

[2] This conception of "moral perception" does not refer specifically to sensory perception; it refers to the conscious awareness of particular aspects of a moral situation. Likewise, what I mean by "philosophical sensitivity" also involves sentience—awareness of the puzzles underlying human experience.

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us a more nuanced ability to observe with ease the morally important features of our experiences ("Because they have an eye, formed from experience, they see correctly," we read in *Nicomachean Ethics* [Aristotle 2002, 1143a25–b14]). The more deeply we've developed this moral awareness, the more easily we see clearly what matters and what doesn't in any ethical situation.

Likewise, philosophical sensitivity involves awareness of the abstract, general questions that permeate human existence. This capacity, when cultivated, allows one to discern the philosophically significant aspects of situations or issues by selecting out certain facets and assigning them particular connections to one another, in this way giving philosophical shape to what is perceived. Like Aristotle's moral perceptual capacity, the development and exercise of philosophical sensitivity occurs over time and requires work; it is cultivated through education, experience, and interest. I take up the cultivation of this capacity later in the article.

Aristotle maintains in his *Metaphysics* that "all human beings by nature reach out for understanding" (1960, 980a21). Most young children are naturally moved to sort out and try to comprehend the strangeness of the world. Almost as soon as they can formulate them, children start asking questions about human existence and the nature of reality. This is the beginning of what I characterize as the philosophical self: the part of us that recognizes as deeply puzzling many of the basic facets of our own existence.[3] Why are we here? What is the meaning of life? What is essential to identity? How did it all begin? How do we know we're not dreaming? Ask a philosopher why he or she became a philosopher, and many of us will point to a time in our youth when we began thinking deeply about these kinds of questions.

The philosophical self emerges from the human capacity to wonder about our own experiences and the thoughts we have about them. This aspect of the self is fascinated by the perplexities at the heart of everyday life and the deeper meaning of the ordinary concepts we use, and is manifested by the propensity to ask searching questions about them. We traditionally recognize as important the development of children's physical selves, intellectual selves, moral selves, and social and emotional selves, but we pay little attention to the cultivation of the *philosophical* self. Consequently, the philosophical selves of most children remain undeveloped. Children absorb the message that the concrete details of life are more important than intellectual abstractions and that there is no time for philosophical thinking, that these kinds of questions are trivial (or too difficult) and will get us nowhere, or that religion can answer them all for

[3] Although I refer to the part of us that seeks to comprehend the larger questions of human life and the world as "the philosophical self," I do not intend by using this phrase to posit the existence of multiple selves; by the philosophical self I simply mean the philosophical aspect of the self, in much the same way we might refer to the "artistic self."

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us. This is a loss. The opportunity to engage in speculative reflection at young ages encourages children to acquire a habit of questioning their own beliefs and ideas, and fosters independent thinking.

Development of the philosophical self entails cultivating our capacity for philosophical sensitivity. While there is some aspect of a philosophical self in all or at least most children, not all of us will end up with the same proficiency for philosophical thinking. This will vary depending on individual levels of interest in exploring the philosophical dimension of experience and on the training and education we've received. In most cases, we tend to have a greater proclivity for developing the capacities for which we seem to have some natural skill, and those of us drawn to a philosophical approach to life will be more likely to develop a facility for engaging in philosophical inquiry.

Philosophical sensitivity begins with an interest in the unresolved questions that haunt virtually every aspect of our lives. Thinking about such questions heightens our awareness that the way things appear to us doesn't necessarily correlate with the way things are, and generally leads to recognizing other, related questions. The more we examine this dimension of existence, the more philosophical questions regularly leap out at us. Nurtured over time, philosophical sensitivity strengthens our facilities for noticing the background perplexities just beneath the surface. In the way Aristotle's moral perception involves learning to identify the important moral aspects of a particular state of affairs, development of philosophical sensitivity results in an ability to distinguish more and more effortlessly the philosophical aspects of particular situations, so that this capacity becomes almost second nature. Like other nonmoral perceptual capacities (I discuss aesthetic and naturalist sensitivities below), the development of this kind of sensitivity results in a heightened awareness of certain features of our experience that would not be noticeable otherwise.

In some ways, what I am calling philosophical sensitivity is related to educator Howard Gardner's conception of existential intelligence, which he defines as exhibiting "the proclivity to pose and ponder questions about life, death, and ultimate realities" (Gardner 1999, 60–64).[4] Gardner defines existential intelligence as "the capacity to locate oneself with respect to the furthest reaches of the cosmos—the infinite and the infinitesimal—and the related capacity to locate oneself with respect to such existential features of the human condition as the significance of life, the meaning of death, the ultimate fate of the physical and the psychological worlds, and such profound experiences as love of another person or total immersion in a

[4] The theory of multiple intelligences is Gardner's attempt to account for the wide range of human cognitive abilities. Although the theory has met with a mixed critical reception, it has proven useful for many educators. Gardner has not yet endorsed existential intelligence as one of the multiple intelligences.

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work of art" (60). Philosophical sensitivity entails an awareness of what Gardner calls existential questions (related to life, death and reality) as well as other philosophical issues such as morality, knowledge, art and beauty, justice and freedom, and so on. These questions emerge from reflection about human existence and the world in which we live. Although many of them are not likely to be resolved in any final way, they nonetheless play an essential role in reflection about the meaning of the human condition.

What, then, makes a question philosophical? Unsurprisingly, philosophers disagree about the answer to this question. It's difficult to define the boundaries of philosophical questions—no finite list of philosophical questions exists. What characterizes philosophical inquiry is not the content of a particular question but the approach with which the question is explored. Although some questions are more likely to lead to philosophical inquiry than others, philosophical questions can be asked about almost every facet of life; they are not restricted to any particular subject matter. Fundamentally, there are no limits to the questions that can inspire philosophical exploration. In many ways, it is our responses to questions and not the questions themselves that determine whether a philosophical exchange will ensue. A philosophical discussion can be inspired by the simplest of questions—those that might not, at superficial hearing, seem philosophically promising. Fundamental to philosophical sensitivity is the ability to recognize and distinguish the deeper issues that underlie many questions and comments, and to see philosophical potential when it might not be obvious.

I often tell my undergraduate students to keep asking questions of increasingly greater abstraction about the subject under examination (for example, friendship: Why is she your friend? What makes someone a friend? What is friendship?); this can often lead you to an interesting philosophical conversation. For example, a student might ask a question about the fairness of the law that children under the age of eighteen are not permitted to vote. Philosophical sensitivity leads one to notice that many philosophical threads underlie this question: What is fairness? What does fairness require? Is it always unfair to discriminate against particular groups? What is a child? What kinds of capacities are necessary to make good choices? And so forth.

There are, of course, paradigmatic examples of philosophical questions, as well as questions that are not likely to lead to philosophical exploration. One way to identify at least roughly when something, at least on the surface, is *not* a question of philosophy is to ask if it's possible to settle it by reference to empirical facts. If so, it's not a philosophical question, no matter how difficult it may be to answer. For example, the question "How many grains of sand were on Rethymno Beach in Crete in 1645?" is not a philosophical question, though there may never be a settled answer. By contrast, questions like "How can we know anything?" and

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"What makes an action the right thing to do?" are emblematic philosophical questions.[5]

Many philosophical problems implicate several disciplines. For example, hybrid questions such as "What is the mind?" and "What does it mean to be alive?" involve both philosophy and science, with no clear way to delineate the borders for what is philosophical and what is empirical. There is often continuity between philosophical and empirical questions that makes the latter challenging to identify in many instances. Moreover, many philosophical questions cannot be explored in any meaningful way without reference to empirical facts (for example, an exploration of whether the death penalty is morally permissible requires some knowledge of its practical consequences).

Philosophical problems are those that are unlikely to be answered in any final way. This does not mean, of course, that they are questions without answers. Teachers and students will sometimes initially believe that philosophy involves "questions that have no answers," and they will suppose that philosophy discussions simply involve students stating their opinions, with every possible answer to a philosophical problem being equally good. There is a distinction, however, between a question that is *unanswerable* and a question that is *contestable*. An unanswerable question is one that has no answers—What does a married bachelor look like? Philosophical questions are unsettled but not unanswerable. There are answers to philosophical problems, but they are neither final nor incontestable (once they become so, the problem ceases to be philosophical).

That philosophical questions are unsettled does not mean that possible answers to these questions cannot be evaluated. Some answers are better than others, depending on the reasoning given to support them. The more we think and talk about an issue, the clearer it becomes which resolutions are less persuasive and which are more promising and might be at least tentatively acceptable. As we discuss and analyze a philosophical problem, we make progress by ruling out some answers as insufficiently supportable and accepting others as provisionally correct, without being very likely to reach a definitive conclusion. As Bertrand Russell once observed, "[T]he value of philosophy is, in fact, to be sought largely in its very uncertainty" (Russell 1997, 156).

Although philosophical sensitivity entails reflection about general and often abstract questions, typically it is in the particular features of our lives that these questions are raised. Our unique vantage points lead to each of us noticing in the philosophical universe the issues our individual perspectives generate. The capacity to identify abstract questions in the most ordinary aspects of everyday experience, to see (as Russell put it) "familiar things in an unfamiliar aspect" (Russell 1997, 157), is central to philo-

[5] Thanks to Mitchell Green at University of Virginia for suggesting many of the examples in this paragraph.

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sophical sensitivity. This involves a keen attentiveness to the specific details of situations and the way these details shape philosophical content.

Likewise, in reading literature, philosophical sensitivity is manifested in an ability to draw out the questions of philosophy that are intimated by the particulars of various texts. Children's literature, for example, is rich with philosophical suggestiveness. Once you become aware of the philosophical questions and puzzles that underlie a great deal of children's literature, you are able to more easily recognize such questions and puzzles when you read children's books. Likewise, as you begin to identify the perplexities inherent in everyday experience, they begin to be evident everywhere. Philosophical sensitivity is the capacity to notice and draw out these questions and contemplate them.

In a marvelous passage about reading in *Swann's Way*, the first volume of Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*, Marcel, the narrator, describes sitting outside:

> When I saw an external object, my awareness that I was seeing it would remain between me and it, lining it with a thin spiritual border that prevented me from ever directly touching its substance; it would volatize in some way before I could make contact with it, just as an incandescent body brought near a wet object never touches its moisture because it is always preceded by a zone of evaporation. In a sort of screen dappled with different states of mind which my consciousness would simultaneously unfold while I read, and which ranged from the aspirations hidden deepest within me to the completely exterior vision of the horizon which I had, at the bottom of the garden, before my eyes, what was first in me, innermost, the constantly moving handle that controlled the rest, was my belief in the philosophical richness and the beauty of the book I was reading, and my desire to appropriate them for myself, whatever that book might be. . . .
>
> A real human being, however profoundly we sympathize with him, is in large part perceived by our senses, that is to say, remains opaque to us, presents a dead weight which our sensibility cannot lift. If a calamity should strike him, it is only in a small part of the total notion we have of him that we will be able to be moved by this; even more, it is only in a part of the total notion he has of himself that he will be able to be moved himself. The novelist's happy discovery was to have the idea of replacing these parts, impenetrable to the soul, by an equal quantity of immaterial parts, that is to say, parts which our soul can assimilate. What does it matter thenceforth if the actions, and the emotions, of this new order of creatures seem to us true, since we have made them ours. . . . (Proust 2002, 86)

Marcel demonstrates philosophical sensitivity. Sitting in a garden and reading a novel, he looks around and, as he perceives the objects around him, contemplates the way in which his perception of them distorts what the objects really are. He wonders about the relationship between appearance and reality. Considering the book he is reading, and the act of

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reading it, he analyzes the distinction between how we understand other people through novels and the way we understand the people we know in the world. He notes that we are only marginally able to understand the other human beings in our lives as, again, our perceptions of other people distort who they really are, and he thinks about how limited are our abilities to understand even ourselves. He then speculates about fiction and the way in which novels can help us to understand behavior and emotion in ways that our relationships with real people cannot.

Marcel's approach to what he sees is philosophical. From concrete experience (sitting outside, reading a book), he generalizes to more fundamental and abstract issues about existence, perception, knowledge, understanding of other minds, and aesthetics. What is the relationship between the way the world appears to us and the way the world really is? What is the relationship between our understanding of other people and the people they are? What is the purpose of reading literature? These questions seek to examine our ordinary understanding of the world and to penetrate the assumptions underlying that understanding.

Philosophical sensitivity, like Aristotle's conception of moral perception, is shaped by one's particular concerns and perspective: a philosophically sensitive person perceives the world in a way that is shaped by this awareness (akin to Gardner's existential intelligence, if you will). This perceptual capacity is not necessarily connected to one's moral character in the way that moral perception is, but philosophical sensitivity resembles moral perception in that it reflects the person's individual skills and way of understanding the world. Philosophical sensitivity, then, spans a broad array of perspectives; that is, it is not necessarily the case that two philosophically sensitive people will see the same issues in a particular situation. A given situation may yield multiple viewpoints on the part of equally philosophically sensitive individuals who have developed this sensitivity differently as a result of their distinct histories. Both, however, will possess the same general capacity to recognize the philosophical assumptions and perspectives behind what we say and do, and to be open to inquiry about their own philosophical insights and assumptions.

There are other sensitivities that constitute nonmoral perceptual capacities analogous to philosophical sensitivity. To take two examples, one can develop particular sensitivities to the natural world ("naturalist sensitivity") and to the aesthetic dimension of life ("aesthetic sensitivity"). Naturalist sensitivity involves an awareness of the multilayered distinctions among living things and the ability to see relationships, details, and changes in the natural world that many of us miss. For example, a naturalist will notice subtle differences among plants, rocks, insects, and flowers that will elude those of us not so habituated. He or she will "see" a complex web of interconnected organisms, not easily observable by people who have not cultivated this capacity. Likewise, someone who possesses aesthetic sensitivity is attuned to the aesthetic dimension of life,

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and able to apprehend features of music, visual art, dance, or other artistic media that those of us not so trained don't perceive. Listening to music, for example, a musician will pick out particular features that the rest of us miss. Similarly, the training and experience of an art critic allows him or her to recognize a painting's characteristics and the connections between its elements and the composition as a whole that will not be apparent to others.

These kinds of perceptual capacities (philosophical, naturalist, aesthetic) are constituted by an ability to apprehend features of experience that are not obvious without training. It's a distinctive way of seeing the world. As we acquire philosophical sensitivity, we become aware of the philosophical dimensions of what people say and do in ways others fail to observe, noticing the differences in philosophical orientation at the core of much speech and behavior. For example, the discussion above of a naturalist sensitivity makes reference to "the natural world," a phrase that is intended to reference plants, animals, and various features of nature. But what does the word "natural" really mean? People tend to use this term to refer to parts of the world not created by human beings. But don't human beings count as "natural"? What about food or flowers grown by human beings: do they count as natural? And so on.

Aristotle pointed out that as we attain virtue, we become more virtuous—that is, virtue builds on itself (2002, 1104a27–b4, for example). In the same way, someone developing naturalist or aesthetic sensitivity expands that sensitivity as he or she observes the natural world or listens to and plays music (or looks at and creates visual art, and so forth). Similarly, the more philosophically aware we become, the broader the scope of what we notice and can explore. As we work to expand this capacity through wondering about our experiences and the nature of reality, discussions with others, reading, and thinking, our philosophical sensitivity deepens. Like naturalists, artists, and musicians, and art and music critics, we are then able to help others to notice the philosophical aspects of given situations.

3. How Do You Cultivate Philosophical Sensitivity?

For Aristotle, essential for developing our moral perceptual capacities is habituation through both practice and example: experience is required to grasp the moral significance of particular situations and greater skill at doing so is generated as a result. So too are practice and training necessary to cultivate our facilities for apprehending the philosophical dimension of experience, and the more we consider the deeper questions raised by everyday life, the more skilled we become at doing so. Practice and training can occur in multiple ways: for example, engaging in structured philosophical conversations, reading philosophy, listening to philosophical lectures, and observing others facilitating philosophy discussions.

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Essential to this process are models (in the form of philosophers, both historical and contemporary, and other philosophy teachers) and some basic conceptual tools.

Developing philosophical sensitivity does not mean learning a set of rules for when a philosophical question arises and how to address it. In another parallel with Aristotle's conception of moral perception, no decision procedure governs how to identify and grapple with philosophical questions (see, e.g., McDowell 1996, 23, and Nussbaum 1990, 54–105). There is no blueprint for when and how to spot philosophical problems and no list of all possible philosophical questions. Instead, philosophical sensitivity, like moral perception for Aristotle, involves the development of a way of seeing. Like the habituation of moral perception, cultivating philosophical sensitivity involves training our perceptual capacities. We gradually come to understand the world differently, as our education and experience in philosophical questioning and reflection enable us to notice and draw out aspects of our experiences that would otherwise elude us.

Although most of us wondered about philosophical questions early in our lives, in the United States people are generally not introduced to philosophy in any formal way unless they take a philosophy class in college. Precollege teachers interested in teaching philosophy in their classrooms, therefore, often have had very little exposure to philosophy. Even those who have had some exposure typically have had little experience thinking seriously about philosophical questions themselves, as opposed to studying the arguments of historical or contemporary philosophers. Although many K–12 teachers have an interest in and some talent for philosophical sensitivity, most have not had the training, education, or experience necessary to cultivate this capacity.

Probably the best way for teachers to begin developing philosophical sensitivity is to gain experience participating in a community of philosophical inquiry, in which philosophical topics are explored in a collaborative group (I say more about communities of philosophical inquiry in section 4 below). Intensive exposure over a weekend, for example, to the kinds of materials, discussions, and conceptual methods that precollege philosophy can involve is a valuable experience for aspiring precollege philosophy teachers. Teachers can then begin trying out philosophy sessions in their classrooms and, in ideal situations, participate in ongoing local philosophy classes or groups.[6]

Another way to cultivate philosophical sensitivity is, of course, to read and think about philosophy or take philosophy classes at a nearby

[6] Helpful here would be the construction of a sample teacher workshop format, along with a core group of facilitators trained both to lead such workshops and to support ongoing communities of philosophical inquiry among teachers. Involvement in a community of people who are developing their philosophical skills is a powerful and effective way for teachers to start to cultivate philosophical sensitivity.

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university or college.[7] There are many accessible adult philosophical works, such as *The Mind's I: Fantasies and Reflections on the Self and Soul* by Daniel C. Dennett and Douglas R. Hofstadter, Bertrand Russell's *The Problems of Philosophy*, Robert Nozick's *The Examined Life*, and Thomas Nagel's *What Does It All Mean?* Teachers can read *Philosophy Now*, a magazine aimed at members of the general public interested in philosophy. There are also many children's books and literature for teenagers that raise philosophical issues in interesting ways.[8]

Observation of others leading philosophy sessions and engaging in identifying philosophical questions and thinking about philosophical issues is an important element of the development of philosophical sensitivity. Of course, we do not have widespread examples of such sessions at the precollege level for teachers to observe. If, however, there is a nearby university, teachers can seek out small introductory college philosophy classes to observe. There is also more and more material accessible online. For example, twelve segments from Michael Sandel's course at Harvard University on justice, which involves a series of discussions about justice and morality, are now available online. Many lectures by contemporary philosophers can also be accessed online. *Philosophy Talk*, the one-hour radio series geared to the larger public, is another source for philosophically interesting discussions to which teachers can listen online.

Like the development of responsiveness to and appreciation of great literature, music, or visual art, the nurturing of philosophical sensitivity takes time and commitment. Experience, education, and practice with philosophical texts and discussions cultivate an appreciation for the philosophical dimension of the natural and human world and the skills essential to helping others develop this awareness.

4. Teaching Philosophy in K–12 Classrooms

Most precollege philosophy teachers, especially those teaching elementary and middle school students, approach classroom philosophy sessions as arenas for discussions about the ideas and questions of philosophy, as opposed to education about what historical and contemporary philosophers have to say about these ideas and questions. That is, we engage

[7] While extensive exposure to philosophy texts can be valuable, it seems to me that such intensive study is not essential for precollege philosophy teachers, at least not for those introducing philosophy in grades K–8. Teachers with sufficient experience participating in communities of philosophical inquiry or similar structured philosophy programs can, with strong skills in facilitating student discussions (more about that in section 4) and a high-quality curriculum, successfully facilitate philosophy discussions among younger students.

[8] Discussing the philosophical topics raised by picture books and other books for younger readers can be a rich way for teachers, parents, and other adults working with children to develop philosophical sensitivity. For a longer discussion of this as well as a bibliography of philosophically suggestive children's books, see *The Philosophical Child* (Lone 2012a).

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young people in *doing* philosophy, rather than in studying it. Instead of (or along with) reading Descartes and analyzing his arguments, for example, young people explore sorts of questions that intrigued Descartes in structured, collaborative classroom discussions. Teachers who do not have degrees or years of study in philosophy can successfully facilitate such precollege philosophy discussions. What they do need, requiring some degree of philosophical sensitivity, is the ability initially to motivate a philosophical discussion and a facility for paying attention to and shaping its progress.

What makes a discussion philosophical? In my view, a philosophical discussion involves the following three elements: (1) the exploration of abstract, unsettled questions; (2) arguments that are constructed to support particular ways of understanding or resolving these questions; and (3) arguments in which the objective is to make progress in developing the meaning of the ideas explored or to further the participants' understanding of a concept or concepts (see Lipman, Sharp, and Oscanyan 1980, 102–28).

To be able to inspire a philosophical discussion, a teacher must be able to recognize the philosophical potential of students' comments and questions, which requires at least some familiarity with the most fundamental areas of philosophy (epistemology, ethics, metaphysics, and so on), and be able to elicit from the students the questions that most engage them. One method for doing this is to construct what is called a community of philosophical inquiry (CPI). Here the teacher's role is to facilitate dialogue about philosophical issues generated and explored by the students, but not to control the content of the discussion. This entails a delicate balance between supporting students' attainment of philosophical clarity and depth, while refraining from imposing on the conversation the teacher's own preferences for subject matter and the direction of the discussion.[9]

There has been a great deal written about the formation of a CPI, most of which is beyond the scope of this article (see, e.g., McCall 2009, esp. 80–92, and Lipman, Sharp, and Oscanyan 1980, esp. 82–101). I would like to describe briefly what I think are the four central elements of a CPI:

1. The group is engaged in a structured, collaborative inquiry aimed at constructing meaning and acquiring understanding through the examination of philosophical questions or concepts of interest to the participants.
2. There is acceptance of what historically has been called "epistemological modesty," an acknowledgment that all members of the group, including the teacher, are fallible, and therefore hold views that could end up being mistaken.

[9] This can be particularly challenging for teachers operating within systems that emphasize "content delivery," where the model is the teacher as the expert and repository of wisdom who provides information that students are expected to digest.

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3. The teacher demonstrates a reticence about advocating his or her own philosophical views, and models a comfort with uncertainty, with there being no final and agreed-upon answers to most of the questions being explored by the CPI.
4. Participants refrain from using much technical philosophical language or from often referring to the work of professional philosophers to construct their arguments. This encourages the group to focus on exploring the questions themselves and not the past or current history of the subject among philosophers.

Of course, not every precollege philosophy class will be run as a CPI. Especially in high school, it can often be valuable to provide an introduction to the history of philosophy and to some of the more famous philosophical arguments made in various areas of philosophy. To inspire philosophical conversations *among* students, however, the creation of a CPI is a powerful method, in part because of its emphasis on the content of the conversation being decided upon by the students.

There is no lesson blueprint in a CPI session that determines exactly what will happen next. As I discussed in section 3 above, the process of identifying and analyzing philosophical questions is not governed by a set of rules. What comes next in a precollege philosophy session will depend on the students' interests, the way in which the conversation develops, and the particular participants. To some extent, then, the teacher gives up having much control over where the session is going; unperturbed by this, he or she is able to demonstrate a kind of flexibility about and responsiveness to where the participants are taking the conversation. What is important is that the teacher should possess a measure of acuteness with regard to which approaches are likely to deepen the philosophical inquiry. This kind of sensitivity is crucial to ensuring the philosophical integrity of the CPI; that is, to ensuing that it principally engenders *philosophical* conversations.

Of course, in any precollege (or college, for that matter) philosophy class there will be periods of time when the conversation makes a turn out of the philosophical (into science, say, or stories from personal experience). The point is not to prohibit such examples or stories, as they can be useful in the context of exploring particular issues of philosophy, but to limit them to those relevant to the conversation. The aim is to ensure that the discussion is primarily philosophical, as opposed to an opinion-sharing, group-therapy, or other kind of enterprise. It is crucial, therefore, that philosophy teachers be skilled at recognizing when a conversation has philosophical potential and when it risks veering off into side issues irrelevant to the discussion.

A philosophical conversation should ultimately proceed in a forward movement. This doesn't mean that the discussion won't loop back and forth, analyzing various conceptual issues and then returning to

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earlier questions, rather than developing in a straight line. There should, however, be some forward movement—a deeper understanding of various student perspectives and the connections between different points of view, a developing appreciation of the complexity of a topic, and a recognition of alternative ways of approaching a subject. This requires listening carefully to, and being able to recognize assumptions in, what is being said. The teacher, and ultimately the students, should articulate connections and distinctions among the views offered in the discussion.

Progress in a philosophical conversation does not mean that the discussion ends in agreement. Many, if not most, philosophical discussions conclude with open issues and contrasting views. It's important to be able to be content with disagreement. After all, philosophers have explored for a long time most of the issues being considered, and almost never reach agreement on the resolution of a given question. Despite our not being able to resolve an issue in any final way, progress can nevertheless be made in the form of greater clarity about a particular concept, a fuller awareness of the range of different ways of looking at a question, and/or a deeper recognition of the assumptions we make and the reasons we make them.

5. Why Should Philosophers and K–12 Educators Care About Philosophical Sensitivity?

There are, in my view, three main reasons that philosophers and precollege educators should care about the development of philosophical sensitivity: (1) the significance of the philosophical self; (2) the importance of students cultivating awareness of multiple perspectives; and (3) fostering strong reasoning and analytic skills.

First, although the United States is one of the few countries in the West that do not include philosophy as a required subject even for high school students, it is nevertheless the case that, as I noted early in the article, philosophical reflection starts early. Young people's curiosity about some of the basic facets of human life—why we're alive, what it means to be good, what obligations we have to others, the puzzles of identity—involves exploring fundamental aspects of what it means to be human. Life *is* perplexing, and children know it. Supporting cultivation of their philosophical selves helps young people sustain their sense of wonder and deepens their awareness of the multidimensionality of human life. Moreover, understanding philosophical sensitivity as an important capacity worth fostering can help lift philosophy from the margins of societal discourse and raise awareness of what a philosophical approach can offer to our collective thinking about ethics, social and political problems, and so forth. Instead of being what many people think of as an esoteric subject that belongs only in the academy, philosophy should belong to everyone, in much the same way art and science do.

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Second, our skill at encouraging young people to think philosophically in classroom communities helps them to appreciate the wide variety of perspectives from which the world can be viewed. By definition, a philosophical problem does not have one *settled* answer. The experience of becoming aware that there are many ways to see the same thing—all of them unique and valuable—is a powerful one. Philosophy teaches us that any view must be taken seriously, no matter how outlandish it seems, if there are good reasons offered for it. Especially at this time in human history, where greater and greater presumed certainty about knowledge, identity, moral beliefs, and the conditions for a good life lead people to extreme acts of violence and oppression, it's imperative that our students grasp that there is a multitude of ways to understand the world.

Finally, there is no better discipline than philosophy for the development of strong analytic reasoning skills. The development of the philosophical self fosters the emergence of a critical and inquiring attitude to the world. Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel once proposed that we should understand philosophy as "the art of asking the right questions" (Heschel 1950, 4). One of the core skills developed through philosophical inquiry is the ability to ask good questions. When I was in school, I was afraid to ask questions. Along the way I had learned that having a question meant that there was something I should know but didn't. I see this in many of my students. But, of course, having the skill and confidence to ask good questions is crucial for successfully navigating contemporary life. Philosophy helps students learn to evaluate information by asking critical questions and making judgments based on well-reasoned analysis rather than on fixed beliefs and prejudice.

Cultivating philosophical sensitivity helps preserve our awareness that we live in a world that is amazing and mysterious. We grow up and work hard to create lives of accomplishment, emotional richness, and physical security. Cultivating philosophical sensitivity pushes us to remain alive to the strangeness of our experience and all of the unresolved questions that underlie most of what we do, say, and think. Our skill at encouraging young people to pay attention to the philosophical dimension of life supports their development of the analytic and imaginative skills necessary to construct an intentional, rich, and authentic understanding of the world.

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